

The Bible in America

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Course Description

Antiquity, English republicanism, enlightenment philosophy, and the Bible all influenced the founding and culture of the United States. But what role does the Bible play in American culture and politics and how does it relate to the other strands of cultural influence? Are there different roles played by the Hebrew Bible and the Christian testaments? What role *should* the Bible and religion play in American public life? Should we think of the 1st Amendment as enshrining freedom of, from, or for religion?

This course examines these questions by studying foundational texts in American history as well as important philosophical works that influenced the culture of the founding. Readings include the Tanach, New Testament, John Locke, Puritan Writings, Thomas Paine, George Washington, James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Martin Luther King Jr. Students will also be introduced to First Amendment law by reading Supreme Court Cases dealing with the establishment and free exercise clauses of the Constitution.

Texts

The majority of the readings can be found online or will be distributed by me. You may wish to purchase the following books:

- John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (Hackett: 1983)

Other Helpful Texts

- PBS Movie Series “God in America”
- Wilson Carey McWilliams, “The Bible in the American Political Tradition”

- Mark Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford, 2005) and *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Eerdmans, 1992).
- Eric Nelson, *The Hebrew Republic: Jewish Sources and the Transformation of European Political Thought* (Harvard, 2011).
- Michael Zuckert, *Protestantism and the American Founding* (Notre Dame: 2004)

Papers

Paper 1: Summary of Locke's Argument (2 pages), due **Sunday Feb. 22**.

This first paper will largely be an exercise in careful reading, asking you to summarize and critique one of Locke's arguments.

Paper 2: Midterm (5 pages), due **March 3**.

This paper will be a response to a prompt that will ask you to reflect more deeply on a theme from the course, requiring you to do careful textual analysis.

Paper 3: Final (9-10 pages) due on Date of the Final Exam **May 19**.

The final paper will be a research paper that will require you to work with primary and secondary literature.

Grades

You grade is calculated as follows:

Paper 1: 20%

Paper 2: 30%

Paper 3: 40%

Participation: 10%

Late paper policy: $\frac{1}{3}$ letter grade for every 24 hour period it is late. The first hour after the due date counts as late.

A Few Other Things

Readings: Do them.

Laptops: Allowed only with permission.

Class attendance: It's important.

Honor Code: Plagiarism is unacceptable. Please refer to university policies for more specific guidance.

Disabilities: Students with disabilities who will be requesting disability-related accommodations should make an appointment with the Office of Disability Services, rkohn1@yu.edu, (646) 592-4132, during the first week of class. Once you have been approved for accommodations, please contact me to ensure the successful implementation of those accommodations

Week of January 20 and 26th Introduction, Tanach v. The New Testament

- Deuteronomy
 - 5:12 compared to Exodus 20
 - Deuteronomy 8
 - Deuteronomy (Devarim) 17:15-20
- Gospel of Matthew (Jesus Narrative)
- Paul
 - Romans, 12-13 (On Christian Love and Submission to Government)
 - Ephesians, 2-3 (Christian Universalism)
- 1 Corinthians 7: 1-9, 25-35 (On Celibacy and the Impending Return of Jesus)

Week of Feb 2: : Protestantism in Europe and the Hebraic Revival

- Luther, Calvin and the Protestant Reformation (texts to be distributed)
- Canons of Dort (1619), First Main Point of Doctrine (On Election)
- Westminster Confession (1646) of Faith, XX (of Christian liberty) and XXIII (Of the Civil Magistrate)
- George Buchanon, Theodore Beze and the Monarchomachs (text to be distributed)

Feb 9: John Locke and the European Enlightenment

- Locke, *Letter Concerning Toleration*

Week of Feb. 16th: John Locke and the European Enlightenment

- Locke, *Reasonableness of Christianity*

Week of Feb. 16th: The First Founding: The Puritan Colonies

- Winthrop, *A Model of Christian Charity* (Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28, Deuteronomy 30, Micah 6)
- Mayflower Compact
- Edwards, *The Latter Day Glory Is Probably to Begin in America*
 - Isaiah 60, Deuteronomy 33, Genesis 49, Exodus 20, Jeremiah 31
- Hawthorne, Maypole and Merrymount
- Optional: PBS God in America: A New Adam

Week of Feb: 23: The Second Founding: Revolution

- Prayers
 - Prayer Opening Continental Congress, Letter from John Adams to Abigail Adams, September 16, 1774
 - Prayer at the Constitutional Convention
 - Congressional and Presidential order for thanksgiving and repentance
 - Proposal for a Seal of the United States
- Thomas Paine, selections from

- *Common Sense*
- *Age of Reason*
- Washington
 - Letter to Hebrew Congregation at Newport (Aug 18, 1790)
 - Farewell Address (1796)
- Optional: PBS God in America: A New Eden

Week of March 2: The Second Founding: Revolution

- James Madison
 - Memorial and Remonstrance (1785)
- Thomas Jefferson
 - Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom (1777, 1789)
 - First (1801) and Second (1805) Inaugural Address
 - Jeremiah 18:6, Joshua 24:5-13, Kings I 8:54-58

Week of March 9: The Great Awakening and Mormonism

- Beecher, *A Plea for the West* (1835)
 - Isaiah 66, Nehemiah 4
- Lincoln, *Temperance Address* (1842)
- Mormonism
 - Book of Nephi, Chapter 18
 - Jonah 1
 - Excerpts from the Journals of Brigham Young
 - Optional reading: *Under the Banner of Heaven*, Krakauer

Week of March 16: Slavery and the Bible

- Movie: Twelve Years a Slave
- Slave Spirituals
- Dr. M.J. Raphall (1798-1868) Congregation B’Nai Jeshrun New York, 1861, The Bible View of Slavery
- Abraham Lincoln “Speech On The Dred Scott Decision”, (1857)
- Frederick Douglass “An Appeal to the British People” Finsbury Chapel, Moorfields, England (1846)

Week of March 23: Lincoln and the Civil War

- Lyceum Address (1838)
 - Exodus 24: 1-8
- Gettysburg Address (1863)
 - Luke 1: 31
- Second Inaugural (1865)

- Genesis 3:19, Psalm 19
- Battle Hymn of the Republic
- Optional: *In the Valley of Dry Bones, Lincoln's Biblical Oratory and the Coming of the Civil War*, Holbreich and Petranovich

Week of March 30: Civil Rights Movement

- Martin Luther King Jr.
 - I have a Dream (1963)
 - Where Do we Go From Here (1967)
 - I've been to the Mountaintop (1968)

PASSOVER

Week of April 13: Bible Left and Right: Social Gospel, Gospel of Wealth, Social Conservatism

- Walter Rauschenbusch and the Social Gospel Movement
- Josiah Strong, *Our Country* (selections)
- Rorty, *Achieving Our Country* (selections)
- Pat Robertson (selections)

Week of April 20: The Establishment Clause

- First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States
- Lee v. Weisman, 505 U.S. 577 (1992)
- Lynch v. Donnelly, 465 U.S. 668 (1984)
- School Prayer Cases (to be distributed)

Week of April 27: The Free Exercise Clause

- Sherbert v. Verner, 374 U.S. 398 (1963)
- Employment Division v. Smith, 494 U.S. 872 (1990)
- Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores, 573 U.S. (2013)

May 2: Wrapping up