

## HTS 3018 -- NEW RELIGIONS AND CULTS IN AMERICA

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Spring 2018  
M, W, F, 12:20-1:10 p.m.  
Office "Half Hours":  
MWF 1:10-1:40 p.m.,  
2:45-3:15 p.m.

The United States has always provided fertile soil for new, unorthodox, and persecuted religious groups. Particularly during crisis periods in American life, many individuals have turned to new religions or have sought to return to their roots by revitalizing older faiths. The past several decades have witnessed one such period of religious turmoil and ferment. Beginning as something of a fringe counter-cultural phenomenon in the 1960s and 1970s, new religious ideas and practices have spread today into many "mainstream" religious organizations as well. At the same time, tragic excesses of certain groups such as the People's Temple in Guyana, the Branch Davidians in Waco, and Heaven's Gate in California also have highlighted the potential dangers of new religious and cultic movements.

This course will focus on four of the most interesting and controversial new religious movements that have been especially important during the past several decades:

- (1) The neo-Pentecostal movement or Charismatic Revival, both in mainline Protestant and in Catholic churches, has brought ecstatic phenomena and spiritual healing into the lives of middle class Americans, much to the surprise of some scholars who thought that such phenomena were only appealing to the poor, downtrodden, and uneducated.
- (2) The Nation of Islam, or "black Muslims"--developing among poor African Americans and being controversial for many Americans because of the group's original philosophy of hostility toward whites as literal "devils"--has been transformed into several groups, the largest of which has moved away from its early stridency to become an increasingly respectable and orthodox Muslim organization.
- (3) The Mormons--once viewed as anathema because of their unorthodox religious beliefs and their now-discarded practice of polygamy--have achieved remarkable success, increasing their membership twelve-fold since 1945 and becoming the fourth largest religious denomination in the United States.
- (4) And numerous religious groups influenced by Metaphysical, New Age, and Eastern Wisdom religious traditions--while still viewed with great suspicion by many Americans--have nevertheless proliferated and attracted widespread attention.

Each of these groups, appealing to different types of people and needs, suggests aspects of the current sense of crisis and ferment in America.

Evaluation in the course will be based on three exams covering specific topical areas (indicated below in the "outline"), on class participation, on a book review or special project, and on a final comprehensive exam. The exams will be based both on the readings and on the class lecture/discussions.

In addition to the handouts and items on library reserve, the following books are required reading:

Harvey Cox, Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century  
 Malcolm X, with Alex Haley, The Autobiography of Malcolm X  
 Lawrence Foster, Religion and Sexuality: The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community  
 Susan Jean Palmer, Moon Sisters, Krishna Mothers, Rajneesh Lovers: Women's Roles in New Religions

The class sessions will combine lectures and discussion, as well as films and possible outside speakers.

Since the required readings provide only a taste of the extensive literature on these movements, each student will be expected to choose a book on a topic related to the course that interests them and write a 6-to-10-page review of it. The student's book choice *must* be approved *in advance*, in consultation with the professor. More detailed instructions about the book reviews will be provided in class.

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***Please Take Careful Note of the Following:***

*Students are expected to attend class regularly, come on time at the scheduled beginning of class (no later than 12:20 p.m.), and be ready to participate actively in class discussions on the assigned readings. *Exceptions will be made for students coming from courses across campus.**

*Class roll will be taken after the first week. More than six (6) unexcused absences from class (the equivalent of 2 full weeks of class) may be grounds for reducing the student's overall course grade by as much as one full grade level (10 points).*

Throughout this course, all students are expected to follow the Georgia Tech Honor Code.

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**Area E Approved Learning Outcome:**

Students will demonstrate the ability to describe the social, political, and economic forces that influence social behavior.

**Explain how the course satisfies the learning outcome:**

To demonstrate that they have met the Area E learning outcome, students will be able to *describe* some of the most influential and controversial new religious movements that have become active in the United States since the late 1960s, *compare* their differing origins, belief systems, social practices, and basis of appeal, *analyze* the ways such groups have influenced and been influenced by the larger American religious, social, and political environment, and *explain* some of the ways these groups may highlight broader changes and concerns in recent American social and life.

**Course Learning Outcomes:**

1. Students will *describe* the social, political, and economic factors that have influenced the origin, development, and public response to controversial new religious movements or "cults" in the United States, primarily since World War II.
  2. Students will *explain*--fairly and accurately--the belief systems and practices of some of the most influential new religious movements that have challenged aspects of American social, political, and economic practices in recent years.
  3. Students will *analyze* the types of individuals who are most likely to become attracted to new religious movements, as well as the social and psychological impact that such groups may have on the lives of individuals who join them.
  4. Students will *compare* the ways in which interest in new religious movements in the United States has been related to different periods of social, political, and economic crisis and change throughout American history.
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**OVERVIEW OF CLASS SESSIONS, ASSIGNMENTS, AND EXAMS:**

*(For specific reading assignments, consult the class-by-class reading assignment sheet)*

*I. Introduction to the Study of New Religious Movements and Cults in America*

January 8, 10, 12, 17, 19, 22, 24, 26

Readings: Articles on the Branch Davidian Tragedy in Waco

Newsweek and Time articles on Jim Jones and related topics

Toby Lester, "Oh, Gods!

Anthony F. C. Wallace, "Revitalization Movements"

Albert K. Bates, "What Really Happened at Waco? 'Cult' or Set-up?"

Films: "Holy Ghost People"

"Waco: A New Revelation"

NO CLASS: Monday, January 20--Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday celebrated

*II. The Neo-Pentecostal Movement in Mainline Protestant and Catholic Churches*

January 29, 31; February 2, 5, 7, 9

Readings: Harvey Cox, Fire From Heaven, selected chapters

Erling Jorstad, ed., The Holy Spirit in Today's Church,  
selected chapters

Videos or speakers on the charismatic revival

EXAM #1 on Topics I and II -- Monday, February 12

*III. The Nation of Islam and its Transformation toward World Islam*

February 14, 16, 19, 21, 23, 26, 28

Reading: Autobiography of Malcolm X, entire

Articles on Library on-line reserve

Videos or speakers on the Nation of Islam and its transformation

EXAM #2 on Topic III -- Monday, March 5

*IV. The Mormons: Yesterday and Today*

March 7, 9, 12, 14, 16, 24, 26, 28

Readings: Lawrence Foster, Religion and Sexuality: The Shakers, the Mormons and the Oneida Community, chapters 1, 4, 5, 6

Articles on Mormonism on Library on-line reserve

Videos or speakers on the Mormons

NO CLASS: March 19-23--Spring Break!

EXAM #3 on Topic IV-- Friday, March 30

*V. Metaphysical, New Age, and Eastern Wisdom Movements since the 1960s*

April 2, 4, 6, 9, 11, 13, 16, 18, 20, 23

Readings: Susan Jean Palmer, Moon Sisters, Krishna Mothers, Rajneesh Lovers: Women's Roles in New Religious Movements, selected chapters

Other articles on Library on-line reserve

Videos or speakers on New Age and Eastern religious movements

BOOK REVIEWS due -- Wednesday, April 16

FINAL EXAM -- Wednesday, May 2, 11:30 a.m.-2:40 p.m.

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Lawrence Foster -- Spring 2018  
READING ASSIGNMENTS

January 8/10--begin Waco packet  
January 12--begin Jonestown packet

NO CLASS -- January 15--Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday Celebrated

January 17--begin Toby Lester, "Oh, Gods!"  
January 19--begin Anthony Wallace, "Revitalization Movements"  
January 21--begin Bates, "What Really Happened at Waco?"  
January 24--begin Harvey Cox, Fire From Heaven, introduction (pp. 1-17) & ch. 2 (pp. 45-65)  
January 26--begin Fire From Heaven, chs. 3 & 4 (pp. 67-97)  
January 29--begin Erling Jorstad, ed., The Holy Spirit in Today's Church, pp. 9-28, 58-99  
January 31--begin Holy Spirit, pp. 100-118, AND Fire From Heaven, chs. 4 & 6 (pp. 99-122)  
February 2--begin Holy Spirit, pp. 135-153, AND Fire From Heaven, chs. 7 & 8 (pp. 123-156)  
February 5--begin Fire from Heaven, ch. 9 (pp. 161-184) AND ch. 12 (pp. 243-262)  
February 7--begin Fire from Heaven, chs. 13 & 14 (pp. 263-297)  
February 9--review for Exam #1

EXAM #1 -- Monday, February 12

\*February 12--begin Autobiography of Malcolm X, introduction and chs. 1-3 (pp. 1-55)  
February 14--begin Malcolm X's Autobiography, chs. 4-6 (pp. 56-107)  
February 16--begin Malcolm X's Autobiography, chs. 7-9 (pp. 108-150)  
February 19--begin Malcolm X's Autobiography, chs. 10-12 (pp. 151-210)  
February 21--begin Malcolm X's Autobiography, chs. 13-15 (pp. 211-287)  
February 23--begin Malcolm X's Autobiography, chs. 16-17 (pp. 288-342)  
February 26--begin Malcolm X's Autobiography, chs. 18-19 (pp. 343-382)  
February 28--begin Malcolm X's Autobiography, Epilogue (pp. 383-460)  
March 2--review for Exam #2

EXAM #2 -- Monday, March 5

\*March 5--begin Foster, Religion and Sexuality, ch. 1 (pp.1-20)

March 7--begin "Introduction" A New World Faith" (pp. xv-xxvi) AND "The Gold Bible" (pp. 259-277) in Richard & Joan Ostling, Mormon America: The Power and the Promise

March 9--begin Religion and Sexuality, ch. 4a (pp. 123-159)

March 12--begin Religion and Sexuality, ch. 4b (pp. 159-180)

March 14--begin Foster, "The Psychology of Religious Genius: Joseph Smith and the Origins of New Religious Movements"

March 16--begin Religion and Sexuality, ch. 5 (pp. 181-225) AND ch. 6 (pp. 226-247)

NO CLASS -- March 19-23 -- Spring Break!

March 26--begin "Cults in Conflict: New Religious Movements and the Mainstream Religious Tradition in America" AND "From Activism to Domesticity: The Changing Role of Mormon Women in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries"

March 28--Review for Exam #3

EXAM #3 -- Friday, March 30

\*March 30--begin Susan J. Palmer, Moon Sisters, Krishna Mothers, Rajneesh Lovers: Women's Roles in New Religions, ch. 1 (pp. 1-12)

April 2--begin Moon Sisters, ch. 2 (pp. 15-43)

April 4--begin Moon Sisters, ch. 3 (pp. 44-72)

April 6/9--work on book reviews

BOOK REVIEWS DUE -- Wednesday, April 11

\*April 11--begin reading book review of Selling Satan (2 pages) AND Martin Gardner, "The Tragedy of False Memories" (7 pages)

April 16--begin Marybeth Ayella, introduction to Insane Psychotherapy: Portrait of a Psychotherapy Cult, pp. 1-14, AND Edward J. Moody, "Magical Therapy: An Anthropological Investigation of Contemporary Satanism"

April 18--begin Moon Sisters, ch. 7 (pp. 147-187)

April 20--begin Moon Sisters, ch. 4 (pp. 75-104)

April 23--review for FINAL EXAM

FINAL EXAM -- Wednesday, May 2, 11:30 a.m.-2:20 p.m.