

Religion and Capitalism in the United States

Lincoln Mullen <lmullen@gmu.edu>

George Mason University, HIST 615-005, Spring 2015

N.B. The only authoritative version of this syllabus is available online. Please refer to the version at <http://lincolnmullen.com/courses/religion-capitalism.2015/>.

The relationship between religion and capitalism has long exercised historians of the United States, and before them it concerned the people whom historians study. In this class, you will meet many people whose religion led them to interact with capitalism in incredibly diverse ways. You will meet the Puritans whose work ethic supposedly created capitalism, but who insisted on resting on the Sabbath; Moravian missionaries who made converts and money; slaves, slaveowners, and abolitionists who all claimed the Bible when reckoning with the capitalist system of slavery; a Protestant writer who insisted that Jesus was a businessman, and Catholics who believed Jesus called them to a kind of socialism; African American preachers who marketed their recorded sermons; Jews who mass-manufactured matzah and created Yiddish socialism; an industrialist who wrote *The Gospel of Wealth*, and laborers who created churches for the working class; nineteenth-century consumers who turned gift-giving into a ritual, and a twenty-first-century television personality who turned consumption into therapy; converts who thought religion required poverty, and Prosperity Gospelers who thought it promised wealth. You will read primary sources from American history, secondary works in both religious history and the new history of capitalism, and excerpts from theorists of religion and capitalism. Through these readings and your own research project, you are invited make sense of this perpetual historical puzzle.

How to Do Well in This Seminar

This seminar will be a shared investigation into the history of religion and capitalism that will require you both to read broadly and to research with

focus. In preparation for our meetings read broadly in the fields of both American religion and the history of capitalism. You will have to work to make connections between those two fields and to find shared themes across time, space, and religions. As we read in both fields, you will have to grasp the concepts borrowed from thinkers like Weber, Mauss, and Marx, and see whether they are useful for your own research. You should select a topic for research that is manageable within the scope of a semester but that sheds light on the broader themes we are discussing. I suggest that you settle on a general topic early in the seminar and devise a plan to scaffold your critical review assignments in service of your final project. Come talk to me as often as is helpful to you. I am also glad to meet in person. I am often in my office and we can make appointments to discuss the course.

Required Books

You should bring a copy of the readings for each week to our meetings. See the [schedule](#) for full citations. Any work not listed below will be made available as a scanned PDF.

I suggest that you purchase the following books:

- Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom* (ISBN: 9780252072833).
- Bowler, *Blessed* (ISBN: 9780199827695).
- Davenport, *Friends of the Unrighteous Mammon* (ISBN: 9780226137063).
- Engel, *Religion and Profit* (ISBN: 9780812221855).
- Giggie, *After Redemption* (ISBN: 9780195304039).
- Heineman, *Catholic New Deal* (ISBN: 9780271028866).
- Hudnut-Beumler, *In Pursuit of the Almighty's Dollar* (ISBN: 9781469614755).
- Kobrin, *Chosen Capital* (ISBN: 9780813553085).
- McDannell, *Material Christianity* (ISBN: 9780300074994).
- Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart* (ISBN: 9780674057401).
- Noll, *God and Mammon* (ISBN: 9780195148015).
- Phillips, *Kingdom on Earth* (ISBN: 9780271030463).
- Schmidt, *Consumer Rites* (ISBN: 9780691017211).
- Valeri, *Heavenly Merchandize* (ISBN: 9780691162171).

We will read large portions of the following books. You can find these for free online, but these editions are suggested if you wish to purchase them in print.

- Weber, *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, ed. and trans. Peter Baehner and Gordon C. Wells (ISBN: 9780140439212). Online version [translated by Talcott Parsons](#).
- Mauss, *The Gift*, trans. W. D. Halls (ISBN: 9780393320435). Online version [translated by Ian Cunnison](#).
- Marx, *Capital*, volume 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (ISBN: 9780140445688). Online version [translated by Samuel Moore, Edward Aveling, and edited by Frederick Engels](#).

Assignments

Readings and Discussion

This is a graduate seminar. I take it for granted that as a member of the seminar you will thoroughly complete all of the required readings in advance of our meetings and contribute thoughtfully and collegially to the discussion each week. It wouldn't hurt to read or skim or read reviews of at least some of the suggested readings as well. Before the start of class each week, you should respond substantively (at least a paragraph) to the critical reviews and discussion questions posted that week.

Critical Reviews

At the first seminar meeting, you will sign up for two critical reviews during the semester. Your task for the critical reviews is to set the main book for the week in its historical and historiographical context. To prepare you should carefully read the book and its reviews. Also read related works from the suggested readings or that you find on your own, especially if they are cited in the main book for each week. You will then publish a post of no more than 1,000 words on the [course blog](#) which briefly summarizes the book, explains its position in the fields of American religion and the history of capitalism, explicates the theories or methodologies that underpin the book, and assesses the book's research and argumentation. The blog post should be published no later than ~~Saturday evening~~ noon on Sunday before the seminar meets.

During the week that you write your review, you will co-lead the seminar. In your blog post, include at least three questions to prompt class discussion. These questions do not count toward the word limit.

Research Project

You will complete a research project—either a digital project or an essay—on a question of your choice relating to religion and capitalism. If the project takes the form of a research paper, it should be the length of a journal article, i.e., roughly 8,000 to 10,000 words. Whatever form this project takes, it should contain at least the following elements:

- a clearly stated research question and explanation of significance,
- analysis of secondary and theoretical work related to your question,
- evidence and argumentation from primary and secondary sources, and
- citations appropriate to the form of the project.

You will be expected to complete the following steps for your project:

- Discussion (no later than week 3): Arrange to meet me to discuss the possible form and topic for your project.
- Proposal (due week 5): Write a proposal of no more than three double-spaced pages describing your question, your sources, your method, and the form of your project.
- Preliminary bibliography (due week 7): Contribute a list of secondary sources to the seminar's [Zotero group library](#).
- Project draft (week 12): Circulate a draft of your project by e-mail or on the blog. Seminar members will offer their critiques within a week.
- Final project (May 11, 5 p.m.): Submit your final project by e-mail or on the blog.

Be prepared to discuss your research for the project each week.

Peer Review

You will contribute substantive comments (at least three paragraphs) on at least the project drafts of at least two seminar members. These comments should be submitted by week 13 (i.e., a week after the drafts are posted).

Evaluation

Your work will receive the following weights:

assignment	points
critical review 1	20
critical review 2	20
proposal	10
bibliography	2
draft	5
final project	40
peer review	3

Schedule

See the [assignments](#) for due dates. See the [Zotero group](#) for access to the readings.

Week 1 / Jan. 26: Moravians

- Katherine Carte Engel, *Religion and Profit: Moravians in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).
- Sven Beckert, "History of American Capitalism," in *American History Now*, ed. Eric Foner and Lisa McGirr (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 314–35.

Suggested:

- Seth Rockman, "What Makes the History of Capitalism Newsworthy?," *Journal of the Early Republic* 34, no. 3 (2014): 439–66.
- Jeremy Adelman and Jonathan Levy, "[The Fall and Rise of Economic History](#)," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 1, 2014.
- Sven Beckert et al., "[Interchange: The History of Capitalism](#)," *Journal of American History* 101, no. 2 (2014): 503–36, doi:10.1093/jahist/jau357.

Week 2 / Feb. 2: Puritans

- Mark Valeri, *Heavenly Merchandize: How Religion Shaped Commerce in Puritan America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).

- Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, ed. Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells (New York: Penguin Classics, 2002), 1–95 (i.e., chs. 1-3 and ch. 4's sections on Calvinism and Pietism).

Suggested:

- Bernard Bailyn, *The Apologia of Robert Keayne: Self-Portrait of a Puritan Merchant* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964), 45–60.
- Stephen Innes, *Creating the Commonwealth: The Economic Culture of Puritan New England* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995).
- Mark Peterson, *The Price of Redemption: The Spiritual Economy of Puritan New England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).
- Kristen Block, *Ordinary Lives in the Early Caribbean: Religion, Colonial Competition, and the Politics of Profit* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012).
- Marcy Norton, *Sacred Gifts, Profane Pleasures: A History of Tobacco and Chocolate in the Atlantic World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).

Week 3 / Feb. 9: Antebellum Protestants

- Mark A. Noll, ed., *God and Mammon: Protestants, Money, and the Market, 1790–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).
- Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, ed. Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells (New York: Penguin Classics, 2002), 95–203.

Suggested:

- Charles G. Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815–1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), ch. 7.
- E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), [ch. 11](#)
- Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815–1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1991).

- David Paul Nord, *Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of Mass Media in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre: The Transformation of Evangelical Architecture and Worship in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Week 4 / Feb. 16: Commodities

- Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).
- Lerone A. Martin, *Preaching on Wax: The Phonograph and the Shaping of Modern African American Religion* (New York: NYU Press, 2014), ch. 3.
- Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, ch. 1.

Suggested:

- David Morgan and Sally M. Promey, *The Visual Culture of American Religions* (University of California Press, 2001).
- Moishe Postone and Timothy Brennan, "Labor and the Logic of Abstraction: An Interview," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 108, no. 2 (April 1, 2009): 305–30, doi:10.1215/00382876-2008-035.
- David Harvey, *A Companion to Marx's Capital*, 2nd ed. (New York: Verso, 2010).

Week 5 / Feb. 23: Markets

- Stewart Davenport, *Friends of the Unrighteous Mammon: Northern Christians and Market Capitalism, 1815–1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).
- Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, chs. 2–3.

Suggested:

- Kathryn Teresa Long, *The Revival of 1857–58: Interpreting an American Religious Awakening* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), ch. 2.
- Jonathan Levy, *Freaks of Fortune: The Emerging World of Capitalism and Risk in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

- John Corrigan, *Business of the Heart: Religion and Emotion in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
- Moore, R. Laurence. *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Catherine A. Brekus, "The Perils of Prosperity: Some Historical Reflections on Christianity, Capitalism, and Consumerism in the United States," in *American Christianities: A History of Dominance and Diversity*, ed. Catherine A. Brekus and W. Clark Gilpin (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 279–306.
- Jeffrey P. Sklansky, *The Soul's Economy: Market Society and Selfhood in American Thought, 1820-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

Week 6 / Mar. 2: Gifts and Holidays

- Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Consumer Rites: The Buying and Selling of American Holidays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).
- Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W. D. Halls (W. W. Norton, 2000).

Suggested:

- Leigh Eric Schmidt, "Practices of Exchange: From Market Culture to Gift Economy in the Interpretation of American Religion," in *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*, ed. David D. Hall (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 69–91.
- Alexis McCrossen, *Holy Day, Holiday: The American Sunday* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), ch. 7.
- Leigh Eric Schmidt, "The Easter Parade: Piety, Fashion, and Display," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 4, no. 2 (1994): 135–64, doi:10.2307/1123847.

Week 7 / Mar. 16: Money

- James Hudnut-Beumler, *In Pursuit of the Almighty's Dollar: A History of Money and American Protestantism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

- David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*, reprint ed. (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2012), ch. 11.

Suggested:

- Andrew Carnegie, *The Gospel of Wealth* (New York: Century, 1901), 1–46. [Google Books](#)
- Michael O'Malley, *Face Value: The Entwined Histories of Money and Race in America* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2012).

Week 8 / Mar. 23: African Americans

- John M. Giggie, *After Redemption: Jim Crow and the Transformation of African American Religion in the Delta, 1875-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- James Forman, "The Black Manifesto" (1969) and related documents. [Episcopal Archives](#)

Suggested:

- John M. Giggie, "Buying and Selling with God: African American Religion, Race Records, and the Emerging Culture of Mass Consumption," in Fitz Brundage, ed., *Beyond Blackface* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011).
- Robert S. Lecky and Elliott Wright, eds., *Black Manifesto; Religion, Racism, and Reparations* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969).
- Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).

Week 9 / Mar. 30: Mormons

- Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-Day Saints, 1830-1900*, new edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), excerpts TBA.
- David Charles Gore, "Profits of a Prophet: Toward Joseph Smith's Political Economy," in *New Perspectives in Mormon Studies: Creating and Crossing Boundaries*, ed. Eric Farrel Mason and Quincy D. Newell (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 19–40.

Suggested:

- Joseph Smith, *Views on the Powers and Policy of the Government of the United States* (Salt Lake City: Jos. Hyrum Parry, 1886), 5–22. [Internet Archive](#)
- Matthew Godfrey, *Religion, Politics, and Sugar: The Mormon Church, the Federal Government, and the Utah-Idaho Sugar Company, 1907-1921* (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 2007).
- Greg Umbach, "Learning to Shop in Zion: The Consumer Revolution in Great Basin Mormon Culture, 1847-1910," *Journal of Social History* 38, no. 1 (October 1, 2004): 29–61. [JSTOR](#)

Week 10 / Apr. 6: Jews

- Rebecca Kobrin, ed., *Chosen Capital: The Jewish Encounter with American Capitalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012).
- Jenna Weissman Joselit, *The Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture 1880-1950* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), ch. 5.

Suggested:

- Jonathan D. Sarna, "'A Sort of Paradise for the Hebrews': The Lofty Vision of Cincinnati Jews," in *Ethnic Diversity and Civic Identity: Patterns of Conflict and Cohesion in Cincinnati since 1820*, ed. Henry D. Shapiro and Jonathan D. Sarna (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 131–64.
- Andrew R. Heinze, *Adapting to Abundance: Jewish Immigrants, Mass Consumption, and the Search for American Identity*, reprint edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).
- Tony Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).
- Eli Lederhendler, *Jewish Immigrants and American Capitalism, 1880-1920: From Caste to Class* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Week 11 / Apr. 13: Social Gospel

- Paul T. Phillips, *A Kingdom on Earth: Anglo-American Social Christianity, 1880-1940* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006).
- Ralph E. Luker, *The Social Gospel in Black and White: American Racial Reform, 1885-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), ch. 10.

Suggested:

- Charles Sheldon, *In His Steps* (Chicago: Advance Publishing, 1899). [Google Books](#).
- Susan Curtis, *A Consuming Faith: The Social Gospel and Modern American Culture* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001).
- William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).
- Douglas Carl Abrams, *Selling the Old-Time Religion: American Fundamentalists and Mass Culture, 1920-1940* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001).
- Henry May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America* (New York: Harper, 1949).
- Bowman, Matthew. "Sin, Spirituality, and Privitism: The Theologies of the American Social Gospel, 1885-1917." *Religion and American Culture* 17, no. 1 (2007): 95-126.
- Michael Bourgeois, *All Things Human: Henry Codman Potter and the Social Gospel in the Episcopal Church* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

Week 12 / Apr. 20: Catholic Workers

- Kenneth J. Heineman, *A Catholic New Deal: Religion and Reform in Depression Pittsburgh* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005).
- Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, chs. 7, 10.

Suggested:

- Mel Piehl, *Breaking Bread: The Catholic Worker and the Origin of Catholic Radicalism in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), esp. ch. 4.
- Jon Gjerde, *Catholicism and the Shaping of Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. S. Deborah Kang (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), ch. 7.
- Dan Mckanan, *Prophetic Encounters: Religion and the American Radical Tradition* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011).
- Ken Fones-Wolf, *Trade Union Gospel: Christianity and Labor in Industrial Philadelphia, 1865-1915* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989).
- David Burns, *The Life and Death of the Radical Historical Jesus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- Jarod Roll, *Spirit of Rebellion: Labor and Religion in the New Cotton South* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010).
- Selections from Dorothy Day, *House of Hospitality* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1939), foreword, chs. 7, 8, 10. [Dorothy Day Collection](#)

Week 13 / Apr. 27: Prosperity Gospel

- Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- Kathryn Lofton, *Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), ch. 1.

Week 14 / May 4: Corporate Capitalism

- Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).
- Darren Grem, "The Marketplace Missions of S. Truett Cathy, Chick-Fil-A, and the Sunbelt South," in *Sunbelt Rising: The Politics of Place, Space, and Region*, ed. Michelle M. Nickerson and Darren Dochuk, *Politics and Culture in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 293–315.

Suggested:

- Bruce Barton, *The Man Nobody Knows* (Indianapolis: Bobs-Merrill, 1925).
- David W. Miller, *God at Work: The History and Promise of the Faith at Work Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
- David R. Swartz, *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism*, Politics and Culture in Modern America (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).
- Timothy Gloege, *Guaranteed Pure: The Moody Bible Institute, Business, and the Making of Modern Evangelicalism* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

Fine Print

General policies

See the [George Mason University catalog](#) for general policies, as well as the university [statement on diversity](#). You are expected to know and follow George Mason's policies on [academic integrity](#) and the [honor code](#). Please ask me if you have any questions about how these policies apply to this course. Please note the dates for dropping and adding this course from the [academic calendar](#).

Accommodations

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services at 703-993-2474 or <http://ods.gmu.edu>. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

Assignments

Please plan on doing all the readings, working through all exercises, completing any assignments, and installing necessary software before the start of each class.

I may change due dates or assignments. I will always give you plenty of notice of changes, which will always be intended for your benefit. Students must satisfactorily complete all assignments (including participation assignments) in order to pass this course.

Attendance

Your attendance is expected at every seminar meeting. If you must be absent, I request that you notify me by e-mail in advance of class meeting.

Communications

I am always glad to meet with you in person. You can make an appointment for office hours by [e-mailing me](#). For most communications I prefer e-mail. I will reply to your messages within 24 hours (but never on a Sunday). I will send official course communications to your George Mason e-mail address, which you should check regularly. I will discuss grades only in person.

Privacy

You will be required to make some of your work publicly available. If you wish, you may do so under a pseudonym to keep your identity private from the public, though I and the other students in the course will have access to your work.

Late work

I am willing to grant extensions for cause, but you must request an extension before the assignment's due date. For every day or part of a day that an assignment is late without an extension, I may reduce your grade. No work (other than final exams) will be accepted later than the last day that the class meets unless I have agreed otherwise.

License

This syllabus is copyrighted © 2015 Lincoln Mullen. This syllabus is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#). You are free to use or modify this syllabus for any purpose, provided that you attribute it to the author, preferably at the course website.

Acknowledgments

This syllabus borrows ideas, inspiration, readings, or assignments from syllabi or comments by [Sharon Leon](#) (especially for the assignments) and the readers of the [Religion in American History](#) blog (especially Judith Weisenfeld, Charlie McCrary, Christopher Jones, and others who suggested readings).