

# Capitalism and American Religion (Fall 2020)

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**Course:** HIST 615-DL7 ([https://historyarthistory.gmu.edu/courses/hist615/course\\_sections/52511](https://historyarthistory.gmu.edu/courses/hist615/course_sections/52511)). Fall 2020. Department of History and Art History, George Mason University. 3 credits. Meets Mondays, 7:20pm to 10:00pm in Zoom.

**Instructor:** Lincoln Mullen (<https://lincolnmullen.com>) <[lmullen@gmu.edu](mailto:lmullen@gmu.edu) (<mailto:lmullen@gmu.edu>)>. Office: Research Hall 484. Office hours: By appointment, Mondays through Wednesdays. [Book an appointment. \(/page/office-hours/\)](#)

## Course description

The relationship between religion and capitalism has long occupied 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 unexpected and unusual 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 twenty-first-century television personalities who turned consumption into therapy; Christians whose faith turned them into environmentalists, and Christians who drilled for crude oil; 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 American religious history, and excerpts from theorists of religion and capitalism. Through these readings and your own writing, you are invited to make sense of this perpetual historical puzzle.

## Essential information

You are always welcome to talk with me during office hours via Zoom. My [office hours page \(/page/office-hours/\)](#) has instructions on how to book an appointment.

All communication for this course will happen in [our Slack group \(https://mason-dh-grad.slack.com/signup\)](https://mason-dh-grad.slack.com/signup). Please sign up and join the #capitalism-2020 channel. Read this [getting started guide \(https://get.slack.help/hc/en-us/articles/218080037-Getting-started-for-new-users\)](https://get.slack.help/hc/en-us/articles/218080037-Getting-started-for-new-users) if you need help.

Each week the syllabus features a main, book-length reading, and an article- or chapter-length reading for comparison. All of the main readings listed on the schedule are available for purchase in the university bookstore and elsewhere. Feel free to buy or borrow as you like: just be sure you have a copy you can read in full. The comparison readings are available through the university library, in PDF, or online, though in a few instances I have suggested editions that would be worth purchasing.

## Assignments

All written assignments should be submitted to the course Blackboard site as a PDF. You should also circulate your book reviews and primary sources via Slack so that other people in the class can read them. Book reviews and primary sources must be circulated by Thursday night before the relevant class meeting. Standard rules for historical papers: 11- or 12-point serif font; 1-inch margins; follow the *Chicago Manual of Style* religiously. Final grades will be calculated using the typical percentage-based grading scale (A = 93–100, A- = 90–92, B+ = 88–89, B = 83–87, B- = 80–82, ... F = 0–59).

**Pre-circulated discussion questions (5%) and participation (5%).** Preparation and participation are expected as a matter of course in a graduate class. Complete all readings before class and submit all assignments by the due date. The better you prepare, the better our class discussions will be. Each week you will post three substantive questions or points of discussion to the Slack group. You can raise points about the works under discussion, the relationship between them, or the relationship to anything we've read previously. These should be posted by 1:00pm on Monday before class. During the weeks you present a book review or lead the primary source discussion, you do not have to submit questions.

**Leading discussion of primary sources (10%).** Beginning with week three, you will sign up for one week in which you will identify primary sources related to the topic, circulate them among the group, and lead a discussion of them. I will help you identify good sources; just plan ahead in advance if you want help with that. Often these sources could be ones that were explicitly discussed in the main readings for that week.

**Book reviews (2 x 20%) and leading class discussion.** For each week on the syllabus, there will be suggested additional books on the subject. Over the course of the semester, you will write two reviews of books related to that week's discussion. You may select any book from the additional readings or, with permission, any other book on the history of capitalism and American religion, or the history of capitalism more generally. The reviews should be analyses, not summaries. *Reviews in American History* is a better model than *JAH* or *AHR* book reviews. Explain the overall argument of the book, whether it is effective, what are its source base and theoretical framework, and how it fits into the literature we have been reading. These reviews are stepping stones to your final essay, as well as important contributions towards broadening the base of knowledge for the class. The same week your review is due, you will give a presentation about and lead a brief discussion of your chosen books on the weeks you signed up for.

**Essay on religion and capitalism (40%).** You will write a fifteen-page historiographical essay on a topic of your choice related to religion and capitalism. This essay should be based on five or six books, at least three of which you should have read specifically for this assignment. You will turn in a few sentences about your topic as well as a list of books for approval in advance. You will also submit a complete rough draft (emphasis on *complete*) for comment, which will be worth 5% of your course grade. The final paper will be worth the other 35%.

- Topic statement and book list due on October 14.
- Rough draft due on December 1.
- Final paper due on December 10.

## Schedule

### August 24 (Week 1): Globalism

Katherine Carté Engel, *Religion and Profit: Moravians in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

David P. King, *God's Internationalists: World Vision and the Age of Evangelical Humanitarianism* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), introduction. [PDF]

Suggested readings:

- King, *God's Internationalists*.
- Block, *Ordinary Lives in the Early Carribean*.
- Norton, *Sacred Gifts, Profane Pleasures*.

### August 31 (Week 2): Commerce

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

Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, ed. Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells (New York: Penguin, 2002), 1–95. [Also available online via GMU Libraries.]

Suggested readings:

- Peterson, *The Price of Redemption*.
- Innes, *Creating the Commonwealth*.

### September 14 (Week 3): Money and markets

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

Stewart Davenport, *Friends of the Unrighteous Mammon: Northern Christians and Market Capitalism, 1815–1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), ch. 1.

Suggested readings:

- Davenport, *Friends of the Unrighteous Mammon*.
- Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium*.
- Noll, ed., *God and Mammon*.
- Sklansky, *The Soul's Economy*.

### September 21 (Week 4): Capital

Rebecca Kobrin, ed., *Chosen Capital: The Jewish Encounter with American Capitalism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012).

Karl Marx, *Capital*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1981), ch. 1.

Suggested readings:

- Michels, *A Fire in their Hearts*.
- Lederhendler, *Jewish Immigrants and American Capitalism*.
- Heinze, *Adapting to Abundance*.
- Joselit, *The Wonders of America*.

### September 28 (Week 5): Commodities

Lerone A. Martin, *Preaching on Wax: The Phonograph and the Shaping of Modern African American Religion* (New York: New York University Press, 2014).

Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), ch. 6.

Suggested readings:

- McDannell, *Material Christianity*.
- Giggie, *After Redemption*.
- Gutjahr, *An American Bible*.
- Sack, *Whitebread Protestants*.

### October 5 (Week 6): Consumption

Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Consumer Rites: The Buying and Selling of American Holidays* (Princeton: 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). [Also available online (<https://archive.org/details/giftformsfunctio00maus>).]

Suggested readings:

- Lofton, *Consuming Religion*.
- Corrigan, *Business of the Heart*.
- McCrossen, *Holy Day, Holiday*.

### October 13 (Week 7): Corporations

Daniel Vaca, *Evangelicals Incorporated: Books and the Business of Religion in America* (Harvard University Press, 2019).

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 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 293–315.

Suggested readings:

- Grem, *The Blessings of Business*.
- Gloege, *Guaranteed Pure*.
- Kruse, *One Nation Under God*.
- Corrigan, Porterfield, and Grem, eds., *The Business Turn in American Religious History*.

### October 19 (Week 8): Railroads

David Walker, *Railroading Religion: Mormons, Tourists, and the Corporate Spirit of the West* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

Greg Umbach, “Learning to Shop in Zion: The Consumer Revolution in Great Basin Mormon Culture, 1847-1910,” *Journal of Social History* 38, no. 1 (2004): 29–61. [GMU Libraries (<http://mutex.gmu.edu/login?url=https://muse.jhu.edu/article/172354/>).]

Suggested readings:

- Godfrey, *Religion, Politics, and Sugar*.
- Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*.

**October 26 (Week 9): Labor**

Heath W. Carter, *Union Made: Working People and the Rise of Social Christianity in Chicago* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Arlene Sánchez Walsh, “Emma Tenayuca, Religious Elites, and the 1938 Pecan-Shellers’ Strike,” in Christopher D. Cantwell, Heath W. Carter, and Janine Giordano Drake, eds., *The Pew and the Picket Line: Christianity and the American Working Class* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016), ch. 6.

Suggested readings:

- Cantwell, Carter, and Drake, eds., *The Pew and the Picket Line*.
- Fones-Wolf, *Trade Union Gospel*.
- Roll, *Spirit of Rebellion*.
- Phillips, *A Kingdom on Earth*.
- Luker, *The Social Gospel in Black and White*.
- Bourgeois, *All Things Human*.
- Piehl, *Breaking Bread*.
- Miller, *God at Work*.

**November 2 (Week 10): Recessions**

Alison Collis Greene, *No Depression in Heaven: The Great Depression, the New Deal, and the Transformation of Religion in the Delta*, 2017.

Kenneth J. Heineman, *A Catholic New Deal: Religion and Reform in Depression Pittsburgh* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 1999), 113–142.

Suggested readings:

- Heineman, *A Catholic New Deal*.

**November 9 (Week 11): Retail**

Nicole C. Kirk, *Wanamaker’s Temple: The Business of Religion in an Iconic Department Store* (New York: New York University Press, 2018).

Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 67–86.

Suggested readings:

- Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart*.
- Moore, *Selling God*.
- Leach, *Land of Desire*.
- Finke and Stark, *The Churching of America*.

**November 16 (Week 12): Energy**

Darren Dochuk, *Anointed with Oil: How Christianity and Crude Made Modern America* (New York: Basic Books, 2019).

Amanda J. Baugh, *God and the Green Divide: Religious Environmentalism in Black and White* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), ch. 1. [Available via GMU Library catalog.]

Suggested readings:

- Baugh, *God and the Green Divide*.
- Berry, *Devoted to Nature*.
- Stoll, *Inherit the Holy Mountain*.

### **November 23 (Week 13): Prosperity**

Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Marla F. Frederick, *Colored Television: American Religion Gone Global* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), ch. 2. [Available via GMU Library catalog.]

Suggested readings:

- Frederick, *Colored Television*.
- Walton, *Watch This*.
- Matzko, *The Radio Right*.

### **November 30 (Week 14): Celebrity**

Kathryn Lofton, *Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon* (University of California Press, 2011).

Tara Isabella Burton, *Strange Rites: New Religions for a Godless World* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2020), introduction and ch. 5.

Suggested readings:

- Burton, *Strange Rites*.
- Bowler, *The Preacher's Wife*.

## **Fine print**

This syllabus may be updated online as necessary. The online version of this syllabus is the only authoritative version. In particular, this syllabus may be updated significantly as necessary in response to the pandemic.

Everyone is bound to have difficulties during the pandemic. If you need accommodations or special arrangements or forbearance, please let me know. I will do everything I can to help you, but you do need to communicate with me about any difficulties you face and help you need and come to a agreement with me about the details of the .

Students must satisfactorily complete all assignments in order to pass this course. I am sometimes willing to grant extensions on assignments 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 projects) will be accepted after the last day that the class meets. I will discuss grades only during office hours.

Students must check (and respond as necessary) to communications sent via email or Slack.

See the [George Mason University catalog \(http://catalog.gmu.edu/\)](http://catalog.gmu.edu/) for general policies. The university and I are committed to supporting diversity in the classroom as explained in the [statement on diversity \(http://ctfe.gmu.edu/professional-development/mason-diversity-statement/\)](http://ctfe.gmu.edu/professional-development/mason-diversity-statement/). You are expected to know and follow George Mason's policies on [academic integrity \(http://oai.gmu.edu/\)](http://oai.gmu.edu/) and the [honor code \(https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/full-honor-code-document/\)](https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/full-honor-code-document/). 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 through [their website \(http://ods.gmu.edu\)](http://ods.gmu.edu). You are responsible for verifying your enrollment status. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office. Please note the dates for dropping and adding courses from the [GMU academic calendar \(https://registrar.gmu.edu/calendars/fall\\_2020/\)](https://registrar.gmu.edu/calendars/fall_2020/).