



# RELS 118 Modern History of Religions: The Americas

Dr. Brennan Keegan  
MWF 11-11:50  
Ed. Center 103

## Course Description

This course surveys the history of religions in the Americas from 1491 to the present, with attention to how these religious traditions shape and are shaped by social, political, and economic factors in their global context. Students will be introduced to Indigenous American and African traditions, as well as European and Asian traditions, and the ways these religious communities contributed to the making of the Americas as we know them today. We will focus on how colonialism, the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, migration, and new religious movements remade the religious landscape of the hemisphere. We will explore the religious diversity of the Americas, the internal diversity of religious traditions, and how these traditions have changed over time. For each topic, students will first engage secondary sources that set the historical stage and introduce broader analytical questions, then turn to primary sources that will provide students with direct access to the words, beliefs, and emotions of specific historical actors in specific places.

## What's in this syllabus

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## Required Texts:

Anna Peterson and Manuel Vasquez, *Latin American Religions: Histories and Documents in Context*, (New York University Press, 2008).

Marie Griffith, *American Religions: A Documentary History*, (Oxford University Press, 2007).

## Course Objectives

- Gain literacy and appreciation for the diversity of religious traditions in the Americas;
- Recognize and discuss how religions and religious practices shape and are shaped by their cultural contexts;
- Distinguish diverse practices within a particular religious worldview;
- Improve ability to write and think analytically and comparatively about broad themes and historical moments, as well as specific texts and case studies.

## Student Learning Outcomes

- Students will analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted or valued in various expressions of human culture, evaluated in weekly reflections and two response papers;
- Students will examine relevant primary source materials as understood by the discipline and interpret the material in writing assignments, evaluated in primary source analysis papers and in-class discussion.

## Course Assignments

Participation in Class	200 pts.
Reflection Posts	200 pts.
Quizzes	200 pts.
Two Reflection Papers	200 pts.
Final Exam	200 pts.

## RELS 118

**Dr. Brennan Keegan**

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**Office:** 202 at 4 Glebe Street

**Office hours:** Mondays & Wednesdays  
2-4pm & by appointment

## #Coronavirus Content

For now, this is a 100% in-person class. We do not have excessive space in our classroom and therefore cannot fully socially distance. **You must be wearing a mask at all times** and are *strongly encouraged* to get vaccinated to protect yourself and your classmates. You will not be allowed to eat in class and if you must take a drink, do so and very quickly put

your mask back on. Even if you have had COVID in the past, vaccinations are the only way that we are going to fully move away from this pandemic. Vaccinations are available for free twice a week on campus: [learn more here](#). Only students quarantining due to a COVID positive test will be allowed to join class via Zoom. If you have been exposed to COVID, get tested. "I might have COVID" is not the same as "I have COVID." Please do not take advantage of the pandemic to simply not come to class. In-person attendance is required, this is not a hybrid course. Before the drop/add deadline, students should decide whether the course plan on the syllabus matches their own circumstances.

Due to the reality of COVID, we may be required to change tactics and move the course fully online. This may include a shift in course requirements and due dates, but we will do what we need to ensure the safety of students and instructor and you will be given all necessary information in a timely fashion. We will remain flexible and vigilant—we got this!

## #Secondary Source Reflection Posts (200 points)

**Pre-class task.** It is very important that you not only **read the assigned material**, but that **you critically examine and interrogate it**. You should take note of the issues and questions that you want to bring to class. You will be reading a mix of secondary and primary sources throughout the semester. Every time we read a secondary source, to ensure that you complete and are critically evaluating the readings, you will be required to post reflection posts to the OAKS Forum, a minimum of 15 times, midnight before class (you get 4 skips). These should be 200-300 words (roughly a big paragraph) and include the following:

1. Very briefly summarize what you read. What did you learn?
2. Critically reflect on the material. What did you find puzzling, thought provoking, challenging or interesting? What are your thoughts about the topics covered? What about these readings

resonated with you? Why? What material from other classes or experiences can you share that will expand the conversation on this topic?

3. Pose one question for in-class discussion. These questions can be drawn directly from the text or can be the result of thoughts you had by relating this specific text with previous readings or experiences.

You do NOT need to respond to the posts of your peers, these posts are to grade your own comprehension and analysis. Is it clear that you read the material? Do you offer direct evidence from the text? Thoughtful reflection? Is the answer to your question not easily found within the reading (these should be *discussion questions*)? *For example: How do the Five Pillars of Islam contribute to Muslim identity? or Can religious believers recognize multiple traditions as legitimate and not lose their faith?* I will compile these questions before class in order to address content confusion and guide in-class discussion. **Due on OAKS midnight before class (15 times).**

### #Participation in class (200 points)

**In-class task.** Active student participation is crucial for the success of this course and the development of your individual learning. We learn best when we learn together. Throughout this course, we'll spend considerable time laying a foundation conducive to respectful but challenging discussion through which we can all grow. We will grapple with complicated, emotional, and thought-provoking topics as a community. In this endeavor, we will seek to be supportive of each other and to actively reflect on our own assumptions. Attendance is mandatory, as is participation in class discussions and work performed in groups. In discussion, aim for substantial contributions over quantity of comments. That is, comments should respond to those made by others—listen to each other, move the discussion forward, and pose new questions for consideration. You have two, no questions asked absences. For every additional absence, 2% will be subtracted from your grade. At 7 absences (1/3 of classes) you will automatically receive an F for the course.

I trust you to tell me directly any time you are going to miss class due to health issues and in turn, I will trust that the explanation you give for your absence is honest and truthful. If you miss class, make up activities will be assigned. If you are sick for a prolonged period of time, we will work together to determine a plan of action that will benefit your learning.

The College of Charleston community is enriched by students of many faiths that have various religious observances, practices, and beliefs. We value student rights and freedoms, including the right of each student to adhere to individual systems of religion. The College prohibits discrimination against any student because of such student's religious belief or any absence thereof. Please let me know at least a week before the religious holiday so I might make appropriate changes to group work.

### #Content Quizzes (200 points)

Throughout the semester you will be quizzed on content to ensure you are keeping up with the readings and course material. Careful marginalia (those notes you make on your readings) and clearly structured in-class notes will serve you well. The quiz questions are pulled directly from your textbooks and readings and will be reinforced through in-class instruction. Worth 50 points each.

### #Primary Source Analysis Papers (200 points)

**Task:** Develop the skills of identifying, reading, and analyzing primary sources by providing a close reading of a primary text encountered in class in a 500 to 750-word paper (2-3 pages). You will have two opportunities to submit an analysis paper on the primary source of your choosing from the first half

(due February 28) and then the second half of the course (due April 8). Please double-space. Eleven or twelve-point type is preferred. All quotes and paraphrased ideas must be clearly cited (MLA, in-text parenthetical is fine). Upload a digital copy to OAKs' drop box before class begins.

**While reading the source:** Think about the source's production: **who produced it, when, and why**. Pay attention to the biases and what the source is *not* telling you: it's **unstated assumptions**, the **positionality** of the author. Think about the source's potential **audience**: Who was the intended recipient? Think about the **significance of the source** more broadly: what can it tell us about its author/creator? What can it tell us about the context in which it was produced?

**In the paper:** Your paper should include the following information in an integrated, flowing paper (that is, not broken up into awkward subsections, but a cohesive analysis).

1. **Historical background of the source.** What was happening at the time the source was written? Be sure to indicate the source(s) of your information. Give priority to information that is likely to have a direct bearing on how you interpret the source. These will likely be secondary sources we read in class but may require additional research (about half a page).
2. **Context for writing the source.** Who wrote it? When? Why? What is it about? For whom did the author write? Did the author have a personal stake in how events turned out? (about half a page).
3. **Analysis.** What can be learned from the source? Give specific examples of statements (by directly quoting and citing) that are particularly insightful, thought-provoking, and/or can usefully summarize the source. Does the source reveal anything about general attitudes in the specific time and place of its writing (e.g. towards religion, revolution, slavery, gender, etc.)? Does the author offer insights into the specific historical events or personages? Try to go beyond the basic facts presented in the source to analyze the larger insights into history which might be gained. (at least two or three paragraphs)
4. **Conclusion.** What is your overall assessment of the source? What did you learn? How does it fit within the religious history of the Americas? (about half a page)

**Grading Criteria (100 Points Each):** *25 Points* – Overall presentation of the paper (grammar, spelling, clarity of prose, and citations, as well as sentence and paragraph structure, flow, transitions, and organization); *35 Points*: Engagement with source(s) and course material (Does the paper use appropriate sources to respond to the prompt? Does the paper adequately use quotations or summaries of sources in the explanation? Engage with the sources to make larger commentary on the historical moment and location?) *40 Points*: Analysis. (Were all questions/aspects of the prompt covered? Was the analysis supported with evidence from the readings throughout the paper? Does this paper go beyond merely restating the prompt to creatively engage and connect the source to the religious history of the Americas?)

### **#Final Exam (200 points)**

Your final exam will consist of multiple choice, identification, short answer questions, which will cover the religious practices, beliefs, and objects of the religious traditions studied, as well as a short essay asking you to reflect on the study of religion more broadly. Many of your quiz questions throughout the semester will be literally reproduced on this exam. My suggestion is to review these quizzes as a study tool, create timelines, note important historical actors and movements, and review reflection posts.

Course Schedule (\*indicates pdf available on OAKS)

Date	Topic	What to Read/Watch/Do	What's Due
<b>Unit 1: Americas? America?</b>			
1/10	Introduction to the Course	Read the syllabus. Post any questions or confusions to the "Course Lounge"	
1/12	What is America?	*Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, "Americas? America?"	
1/14	Mapping the Americas	**"North America: Physical and Human Geography" & "South America: Physical and Human Geography" <i>National Geographic</i> (links on OAKS). In-class mapping exercise	Reflection Post 1
1/17	<b>No class. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.</b>		
1/19	Studying Religion	<b>No in person Class – Dr. Keegan at conference.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Watch "Defining Religion" VoiceThread (<b>+2 Comments</b>) (1.1)</li> <li>○ Watch "How and Why Study Religion" VT (1.2)</li> <li>○ Watch "Religious Literacy" VT (1.3)</li> <li>○ Take Religious Literacy Survey</li> <li>○ Post to the discussion forum: Why study religious history? how and why should we study religion?</li> </ul>	Online Discussion
1/21	Studying History	<b>No in person Class – Dr. Keegan at conference.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Watch, Chimamanda Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story" (TED Talk)</li> <li>○ Watch, "50 states, 50 different ways of teaching America's past," CBS News.</li> <li>○ Read *Peter Manseau, "Unearthing History," in <i>One Nation, Under Gods</i>.</li> <li>○ Post to the discussion forum: Why is telling history complicated? Difficult? Is there <i>one</i> story to tell? What are some best practices as we study history?</li> </ul>	Online Discussion
<b>Unit 2: Pre-Colonial Indigenous America</b>			
1/24	Studying Latin Am. Religion	"Introducing Religion in Latin America" in <i>Latin American Religion</i> , 1-16.	Reflection Post 2
1/26	Indigenous Latin America	"Indigenous Religions" in <i>Latin American Religion</i> , 20-32.	RP 3
1/28	Mayan & Amazonian Religions	"The Popul Vuh" (Mayan) and "The Watunna" (Amazonian) in <i>Latin American Religion</i> , 33-40, 49-54.	
1/31	Studying Native Am. Religion	*Suzanne Crawford O'Brien, "Practical Reverence" in <i>Religion and Culture in Native America</i> , 1-15.	RP 4
2/2	Native Am. Storytelling	Visit and carefully explore <a href="#">Dyani White Hawk's "Hear Her"</a> at the Halsey Institute for Contemporary Art. Be sure to sign in for credit.	<b>Quiz 1</b>
<b>Unit 3: Colonial America</b>			
2/4	Colonialism	"Colonial Encounters" in <i>Latin American Religion</i> , 55-67.	RP 5

2/7	Spanish Conquistadors	"Royal Ordinances on Pacification, 1573," "In Defense of the Indians," and "An Account of the Idolatries..." in <i>Latin American Religion</i> , 68-77.	
2/9	African Religions	"Religions of the African Diaspora," <i>Latin American Religion</i> , 89-99.	RP 6
2/11	Enslaved Africans	"The Archbishop of Bahia Rules on Slave Evangelization and Aspects of Their Treatment, (1701)" in <i>Latin American Religion</i> , 100-104. Watch, "The Atlantic Slave Trade" <a href="https://youtu.be/3NXC4Q_4JVg">https://youtu.be/3NXC4Q_4JVg</a> & "Anansi" from <i>American Gods</i> : <a href="https://youtu.be/CL3rzeZjLzU">https://youtu.be/CL3rzeZjLzU</a>	
2/14	Candomblé	"The Taste of Blood: Spirit Possession in Brazilian Candomblé" in <i>Latin American Religion</i> , 112-115. Watch, "A Look Inside the world of Candomblé" <a href="https://youtu.be/HeA4_01jNNk">https://youtu.be/HeA4_01jNNk</a> .	
2/16	Protestants in America	*Randall Balmer and Lauren Winner, selections from <i>Protestantism in America</i> .	RP 7
2/18	The Puritans	Watch, <i>The Witch</i> – we will have a communal showing of this Thursday night 2/17.	RP 8 (film response)
2/21	Puritan Primary Sources	John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity," Increase Mather, "Sleeping at Sermons Is a Great and a Dangerous Evil," and Anne Bradstreet "To My Dear Children," in <i>American Religions</i> , 16-27.	
2/23	Religion & Slave Codes	*Thomas Ingersoll "'Relese us out of this Cruell Bondegg': An Appeal from Virginia in 1723."	
<b>Unit 4: Revolution and Independence</b>			
2/25	Democracy & Religion	*Nathan Hatch, "Introduction: Democracy and Christianity," <i>The Democratization of American Christianity</i> , 3-16.	RP 9
2/28	Religious Freedom	The Philadelphia Synagogue, "Petition," 148-150. AR: Thomas Jefferson, "A Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom," 150-152, in <i>American Religions</i> .	Primary Source Paper 1 Due
3/2	Revolución	"Independence and Modernity" in <i>Latin American Religions</i> . 127-141. Watch, "Latin American Revolutions" <a href="https://youtu.be/ZBw35Ze3bg8">https://youtu.be/ZBw35Ze3bg8</a>	RP 10
3/4	Forming New Republics	Antonio Conselheiro, "Sobre a República" and "Despedida," 148-152, "Ley de Patronato Eclesiástico de la Gran Colombia" (1824), 156-158 in <i>Latin American Religions</i> .	Quiz 2
<b>March 7-11 no classes - Spring Break</b>			
<b>Unit 5: Shifting Identities in the North</b>			
3/14	Religion and the Civil War	*Phillip Shaw Paludan, "Religion and the American Civil War," 21-37.	RP 11
3/16	US Slavery & Religion	Frederick Douglass, "Appendix," to <i>Life of an American Slave</i> , 213-220 and George Armstrong, "The Christian Doctrine of Slavery," 239-244, in <i>American Religions</i> .	
3/18	Westward Expansion	*Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, "Cult Of The Covenant," <i>An Indigenous People's History Of The United States</i> , 45-55.	RP 12
3/21	Native Visions	*Philip Deloria, "Introduction" to <i>Black Elk Speaks</i> .	

		Black Elk, "Black Elk Speaks," in <i>American Religions</i> , 341-352.	
3/23	Immigration	*Laurence Moore, "Immigrant Religion and the Right to be Different," in <i>Touchdown Jesus</i> , 109-128.	RP 13
3/25	Immigrant Hopes & Fears	Mabel Potter Daggett, "The Heathen Invasion of America," 384-8 and Swami Vivekanda, "Hinduism as a Religion," 402-411, in <i>American Religions</i> .	
3/28	West to East	*Timothy Tseng, "Asian American Religions," in <i>The Columbia Guide to Religion in American History</i> .	RP 14
<b>Unit 6: Protest and Liberation in the South</b>			
3/30	Rising Protestantism	"Protestantism in Latin America," in <i>Latin American Religions</i> , 159-169.	RP 15
4/1	Pentecostals	Christian Lalive D'Epina, "The Pentecostal 'Conquest' of Chile," 176-182 and Lesley Gill, "Like a Veil to Cover them" 191-197, in <i>Latin American Religions</i> .	Quiz 3
4/4	Changing Catholicism	"Postconciliar Roman Catholicism" in <i>Latin American Religions</i> , 202-213.	RP 16
4/6	Liberation Theology	Gustavo Gutierrez, "Notes for a Theology of Liberation," and Frei Betto, "What is the Base Ecclesial Community?" in <i>Latin American Religion</i> , 219-226.	
4/8	Creative reimaginings	Watch in class, <i>Cimarrón Spirit: Afro-Dominican Maroon Culture</i> on Kanopy.	Primary Source Paper 2 Due
<b>Unit 7: Religious Diversity</b>			
4/11	Civil Rights	*Paul Harvey, "Religion and the Civil Rights Movement," in <i>The Columbia Documentary History of Religion in American since 1965</i> . Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham City Jail," 502-513 in <i>American Religions</i> .	RP 17
4/13	Religion and Race	*Jerry Falwell, "Ministers and Marches," 57-60. *Malcom X, selections from <i>The Biography of Malcom X</i> .	
4/15	S. American Religious Diversity	"Contemporary Religious Diversity and Change," in <i>Latin American Religions</i> 239-254.	RP 18
4/18	Diverse Brazil	"Ritual, Ethnicity, and Religious Identity in the Muslim Communities in Brazil," and "Zen Buddhism in Brazil," in <i>Latin American Religions</i> , 266-278.	
4/20	Islam in the Americas	*Jane Smith, "Islam in America" in <i>The Columbia Guide to Religion in American History</i> .	RP 19
4/22	American Christianity	Mary Daly, "Beyond God the Father," and Cornel West, "Christian Theological Mediocrity," in <i>American Religions</i> , 536-549.	Quiz 4
4/25	Religion in the Americas	No Reading. Review.	
4/30	1-3pm	Final exam (Saturday, I know, lame)	

**The Fine Print.** OAKS: OAKS, including Gradebook, will be used for this course throughout the semester to provide the syllabus and class materials and grades for each assignment, which will be regularly posted. **Grading Scale:** A: 93-100; A-: 90-92; B+: 87-89; B: 83-86; B-: 80-82; C+: 77-79; C: 73- 76; C-: 70-72; D+: 67-69; D: 63-66; D-: 61-62 F: 60 or below. **Late Policy:** Assignments are due at the beginning of the class unless otherwise noted. Any assignment turned in after the deadline is considered late. You will be penalized one letter grade (10%) for

each day the assignment is late, up to a week. After a week, I will not accept the assignment. **Regarding plagiarism:** Lying, cheating, attempted cheating, and plagiarism are violations of our Honor Code that, when suspected, are investigated. Each incident will be examined to determine the degree of deception involved. Incidents where the instructor determines the student's actions are related more to misunderstanding and confusion will be handled by the instructor. The instructor designs an intervention or assigns a grade reduction to help prevent the student from repeating the error. The response is recorded on a form and signed both by the instructor and the student. It is forwarded to the Office of the Dean of Students and placed in the student's file. Cases of suspected academic dishonesty will be reported directly by the instructor and/or others having knowledge of the incident to the Dean of Students. A student found responsible by the Honor Board for academic dishonesty will receive a XXF in the course, indicating failure of the course due to academic dishonesty. This status indicator will appear on the student's transcript for two years after which the student may petition for the XX to be expunged. The F is permanent. Students can find the complete Honor Code and all related processes in the Student Handbook at: <http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/honor-system/studenthandbook/index.php>. **Technology Use in Class:** We will be busy in every class session and we don't need any electronic distractions. Silence your cell phones before you enter the classroom. If it rings, I reserve the right to answer it. Laptops are allowed unless it becomes clear that students are misusing them. **Center for Student Learning:** The Center for Student Learning's (CSL) academic support services provide assistance in study strategies, speaking & writing skills, and course content. Services include tutoring, Supplemental Instruction, study skills appointments, and workshops. The services are available to you at no additional cost. For more information regarding these services please visit the CSL website at <http://csl.cofc.edu>. **Mental & Physical Wellbeing:** At the college, we take every student's mental and physical wellbeing seriously. If you find yourself experiencing physical illnesses, please reach out to student health services (843.953.5520). And if you find yourself experiencing any mental health challenges (for example, anxiety, depression, stressful life events, sleep deprivation, and/or loneliness/homesickness) please consider contacting either the Counseling Center (professional counselors at <http://counseling.cofc.edu> or 843.953.5640 3<sup>rd</sup> Robert Scott Small Building) or the Students 4 Support (certified volunteers through texting "4support" to 839863, visit <http://counseling.cofc.edu/cct/index.php>, or meet with them in person 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Stern Center). These services are there for you to help you cope with difficulties you may be experiencing and to maintain optimal physical and mental health. **Diversity Statement:** Consistent with College of Charleston's commitment to inclusivity, I pledge to do my best to run the class in a manner that is respectful of difference, including but not limited to, physical and mental ability, age, socio-economic status, religious identity, gender identity, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality and veteran status. Students are expected to be respectful of these differences in their conduct in class and on campus. **Accommodations:** We all learn in different ways. If you know or believe that you need additional help, the College will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Students should apply for services at the Center for Disability Services/SNAP located on the first floor of the Lightsey Center, Suite 104. Students approved for accommodations are responsible for notifying me as soon as possible and for contacting me one week before accommodation is needed: <http://disabilityservices.cofc.edu/>. **Email etiquette:** I am happy to communicate with you via email and will do my best to respond within 24 hours during the week. If it's 3 AM and you're feeling panicked, angry, frustrated, or annoyed, that most likely is NOT a good time to send an email. Ever. To me or anyone else. Take this as an important life lesson. It will serve you well. If you are sure that your questions or comments are professional and appropriate, be sure to include these professional courtesies: 1. In the subject line please indicate the content of the email and 2. Begin your message in the following manner: Dear Professor Keegan... And finish with sincerely, best, thanks, etc. followed by your full name. Do the same for every professor you're in contact with! Professionalism goes a long way.