

**Jonathan Ebel**  
**YSAR Syllabus**  
**RLST 436: Religion in America, 1900-1941**

**Institutional context**

The University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (hereafter Illinois), is the flagship campus of the University of Illinois system. There are roughly 30,000 undergraduates enrolled and another 7,000 or so graduate students. Somewhere north of 90% of our undergraduates come from in-state. Their tuition is, famously, keeping the lights on.

The geographic center of our campus is the humanities quad. The college that lives in this quad, Liberal Arts and Sciences (LAS), enrolls more students than Agriculture, Community and Environmental Sciences (ACES), Engineering, Business, or Education. Our new president, Michael Hogan, is a historian. In spite of all this, humanities folk often feel like second-class citizens on campus. I haven't yet reached my own conclusions about the relationship of such feelings to our own institutional realities and to those of our peer institutions, but so far Illinois has proven to be a fabulous place to be junior humanities faculty.

The Department of Religion has been in existence in some form for close to forty years. We only became a department formally last year, but have looked and acted like one since our inception in the early seventies. We reside within the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and, by an accident of real estate, are part of the School of Literatures, Cultures, and Linguistics. We have twelve faculty, a handful of affiliated folks, and one vacant line. We are still working out some of the problems with the teaching of our courses, but those problems have not detracted from our very solid reputation on campus, Religion is a growth field at Illinois and it is exciting to be part of that growth.

Our department will be launching an M.A. program in the fall or 2012 so there has been a push to create advanced courses that serve our core constituency, the undergraduate majors, and that can also serve our own future grad students and the many other grad students now at Illinois who have taken an interest in religion. One measure of that interest among grad students is the fact that I am currently serving as a reader on five dissertation committees in four different fields. This is one of those courses intended to draw advanced undergrads and graduate students.

**Course history**

I designed RLST 436 as the front-end of a sequence on religion in the twentieth century United States. I am in the process of pulling together the companion course. This course is mostly about the religious history of the period. But I have two additional foci. One is the different genres of books that describe history and how religion is woven into them; the other is learning to read efficiently and effectively when the load is very, very heavy.

RLST 436 meets once a week for three hours in a seminar style. I lecture for the first hour and then turn the conversation over to two students who have signed up to lead and

are, in a perfect world, present and prepared. The requirements for the course also include two response papers and a research paper. This syllabus is more ambitious than the one I used the first time through the course but it is also cleaner and more focused. It includes three works of fiction, which is something new and risky. Also, I am teaching a bunch of books that inform a book-length project on religion and the Great Depression that I would like to move forward. (That's the self-serving part of the class, but I have found that assigning books I need to read or reread keeps me leaning forward on the fifteen-week march. So it's not all self-serving). I have taught this course only once before. It went quite well considering that just one graduate student signed up and four of the nine undergrads were, for various reasons, limited in what they could contribute. Enrollment for the upcoming semester (Spring 2011) currently stands at eleven with four grad students and seven undergrads.

### **Structural rationale and assignments**

As in any course, there is something arbitrary about starting points and ending points and the texts we use to demarcate them. Of course the topics and texts that fill out the middle are also not given. I chose modernity, gender, society, and identity because they are, to my mind, so central to the period and because they allow conversations to build across the semester. How do Zangwill's prophecies sound a short fifteen years later? Are Rauschenbusch and Baldwin describing the same planet? What happened to Reinhold? What does Dorothy Day see that Bruce Barton does not and vice versa? I have tried here to move roughly chronologically and to group texts such that we do not come at any single issue from only one faith or racial perspective. I'm not entirely satisfied with the result, but it will work for now.

There is nothing fancy about the assignments. The course is half about doing and reacting to the reading and half about heading off on one's own to research a topic of interest. When I taught this class two years ago I read four phenomenal research papers, three that I would classify as strong efforts, and two others. One little piggy never found its way home.

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## **RLST 436: Religion in America: 1900-1941**

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### Course Description and Goals:

This seminar takes a thematic and roughly chronological approach to the religious history of the United States from 1900 to 1941. It is designed to familiarize students both with the religious lives and thoughts of Americans in the first four decades of the twentieth century and with the many overlapping issues confronting American society and American religion during that time. We will focus our discussions on four themes: debates over the meaning of modernity, understandings of the relationship between religion and society, the gendering of faith, and the relationship between religion and American identity. We will read from many scholarly monographs during the course, but readings will also come from works of fiction and primary documents. Students will be evaluated based on four graded exercises: two in-class presentations, one mid-term paper, and a final research project.

### Expectations:

I expect you to be prompt, present, and ready to discuss the readings assigned for the day. Assignments are to be turned in to my office by 5pm on the day they are due; after 5pm they will be late. I will not accept e-mailed submissions. I expect you to participate in discussions and to do so using language that is respectful.

### Assignments:

	<u>Undergrad</u>	<u>Grad</u>
In-class presentations (2)	10%	15%
Response Paper 1 (3-5pp)	20%	10%
Response Paper 2 (3-5 pp.)	20%	10%
Final Paper (16-20 pp.)	40%	50%

### Grading Criteria

I provide the following list of letter grades and the kind of work that leads to them to make clear my approach to grading. I will use these criteria throughout the course and will stand by the grades that they yield. There will be no extra credit opportunities or extra assignments for those dissatisfied with their grades. The period for evaluated work in this course ends with the final exam.

**A:** The student demonstrates command of the material, an ability to engage the material critically beyond statements drawn from lectures and readings, and a clarity of thought and expression unmarred by misspellings or grammatical errors.

**B:** The student demonstrates command of the material, thorough knowledge of ideas and critiques presented in lectures and readings, and has few problems expressing herself/himself.

**C:** The student knows something of the material and the ideas presented in lectures and readings, but explains them only partially and without serious reflection. Poor grammar and spelling sometimes detract from her/his writings.

**D:** The student knows little of the material and the ideas presented in lectures and readings, and does little more than recite facts / statements made in class. Poor grammar and spelling sometimes detract from her/his writings.

**F:** This student is unfamiliar with the material and unable to explain it in any meaningful way. She/he rarely participates in class.

Late Paper Policy:

I consider all papers turned in after the beginning of class to be late. Late papers will be marked down by a full grade and an additional full grade for each day they are late.

**Bibliography:**

**Monographs:**

Leonard Dinnerstein, *Anti-Semitism in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995)

William Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976)

Colleen McDannell, *Picturing Faith: Photographing the Great Depression* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004)

Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985)

Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001)

Matthew Sutton, *Aimee Semple McPherson and the Resurrection of Christian America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009)

Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001)

**Selected primary texts and fiction:**

James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*

Bruce Barton, *The Man Nobody Knows\**

Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness*

W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

Reinhold Niebuhr, *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic*

Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*

Israel Zangwill, *The Melting Pot\**

**Schedule:**

**Week I: Introduction**

W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, excerpts.

**I. Religion and Modernity**

**Week II: Modernity Rising**

Israel Zangwill, *The Melting Pot*

**Week III: The Meaning of the Modern**

William Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism*

J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, introduction

**Week IV: Faithfully Anti-Modern**

Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture*

**II. Religion and Gender**

**Week V: A Man Problem?**

Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity*

**Week VI: Soldiers for God and Country**

Jonathan Ebel, ““The Great War, Religious Authority, and the American Fighting Man,”  
*Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture*, Volume 78, Number 1, March 2009.

Bruce Barton, *The Man Nobody Knows*

**Week VII: Brothers and Sisters in the Lord**

Matthew Sutton, *Aimee Semple McPherson and the Resurrection of Christian America*

### **III. Religion and Society**

#### **Week VIII: Mapping Social Crises:**

Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, chapters 5-6

Billy Sunday, "Booze"

Leonard Dinnerstein, *Anti-Semitism in America*, 58-77

#### **Week IX: Theologizing Social Crises**

Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, chapters 1-4, 7.

#### **Week X: Re-Theologizing Social Crises**

Reinhold Niebuhr, *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic*

*King's Business* (one issue)

### **IV. Religion and Identity**

#### **Week XI: The Question of Two-ness**

James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*

#### **Week XII: Human Erosion**

Colleen McDannell, *Picturing Faith*

#### **Week XIII: No class. Research week.**

#### **Week XIV: Communitas and Caritas**

Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness*

Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street*

#### **Week XV: The Coming of the Good War**

Leonard Dinnerstein, *Anti-Semitism in America*, 78-150

Reinhold Niebuhr, "Why the Christian Church Is Not Pacifist"

Roosevelt, War Message to Congress

#### **Exam period: Research Papers due**