

American History I (HIS 131)

This course is a survey of American history from pre-history through the Civil War era. Topics include the migrations to the Americas, the colonial and revolutionary periods, the development of the Republic, and the Civil War. Upon completion, students should be able to analyze significant political, socioeconomic, and cultural developments in early American history.

Activity: Exploring the Diversity of Religious Traditions in Early American History

Author: John R. Peacock, Professor of History at Nash Community College

Activity Description: Students will research the predominant religious traditions in America prior to 1865 and trace their European and African/Middle Eastern origins.

Objectives:

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Discuss the religious diversity of antebellum America.
2. Research an early American religious tradition and its Old World origins.
3. Compare and contrast the original religion and the early American one.
4. Create and make a presentation on the researched findings.

Global Learning Outcome(s):

This activity addresses the following Global Learning Outcomes:

1. Research and analyze global cultures and their influences on both early and modern day North American culture.
2. Demonstrate an appreciation for the contributions of European and African/Middle Eastern populations to American cultural development.

Time:

This is at the discretion of the individual instructor, but 4-6 weeks is suggested.

Materials and Resources:

1. Computer and internet access.
2. Resources Recommended by the Carolina Center for the Study of the Middle East and Muslim Civilizations:

The Pluralism Project (Harvard) has a wealth of resources, including easy, understandable resources for students. <http://pluralism.org/>

Islam in America Timeline <http://thirteen.org/edonline/accessislam/timeline1530.html>

Prince Among Slaves Website is another goldmine, including resource packets that connect to the film of the same name <http://princeamongslaves.org/>

The Arab American National Museum in Dearborn, Michigan has four short, free, and easy to read booklets published on their website as well as other useful information.

Khaled A. Beydoun, "Ramadan: A Centuries-Old American Tradition" Retrieved from:

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/06/ramadan-american-tradition-201462714534443176.html>.

“Thomas Jefferson’s *Qur’an*” explores Jefferson’s relationship with the Islamic world:
<http://15minutehistory.org/2013/11/06/episode-30-thomas-jeffersons-quran/>

Suggested Book: Julianne Hammer and Omid Safi (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to American Islam* (New York: Cambridge University Press)

See also: The National Humanities Center Resource Toolbox, *The Autobiography of Omar ibn Said, An Enslaved Muslim in the United States, 1831* at nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/

NC Culture Kits available at <http://carolinanavigators.checkfront.com/reserve/>

More popular with K-5 but religion one is more advanced

Includes artifacts from major world religions

Online articles and Youtube videos (eliminates financial issues for students)

Can keep kit for three weeks

3. Resources Recommended by Carolina Center for European Studies:

The Pluralism Project (see above)

NC Culture Kits (see above)

Faculty and Staff Resources at UNC-CH:

Tobias Hof, Visiting Professor of History

<http://history.unc.edu/people/adjunct-and-visiting-faculty/tobias-hof/>

Konrad Jarausch, Professor of History

<http://history.unc.edu/people/faculty/konrad-h-jarausch/>

Lloyd Kramer, Professor of History

<http://history.unc.edu/people/faculty/lloyd-s-kramer/>

Josiah Drewry, West European Librarian

drewry@email.unc.edu

4. Resources Recommended by Carolina African Studies Center:

Books, films and learning boxes as well as online resources for teachers are available at:

africaoutreach@unc.edu

africa.unc.edu/outreach (web)

Africa -Wide Information (Combines databases sourced from Africa, Europe and North America)

5. Other Selected Resources That Might Be Helpful:

Oxford University Press has two series that are useful for both faculty and students. One is the Religion in American Life series. The other is the Oxford History of the United States series. Especially relevant in the former are:

Jon Butler, Grant Wacker, and Randall Balmer, *Religion in American Life: A Short History*, 2nd ed. (OUP, 2011). The best short survey of the topic available.

Edward E. Curtis IV, *Muslims in America: A Short History* (OUP, 2009).

Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., *African American Religion: A Very Short Introduction* (OUP, 2014)

Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*, updated ed. (OUP, 2004)

Especially relevant in the Oxford History of the United States series are:

Robert Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763-1789* (OUP, 2005). See especially pp. 46-52 and "Bibliographical Note", pp. 702-703.

Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (OUP, 2009). See especially Chapter 16 ("Republican Religion") and the voluminous "Bibliographic Essay."

Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (OUP, 2007). See especially Chapter 5 ("Awakenings of Religion") and "Bibliographical Essay", pp. 865-868.

James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (OUP, 1988), *passim*.

Some other books that address the impact of religion on specific aspects of early American history include:

Brian Fagan, *Fish on Friday: Feasting, Fasting and the Discovery of the New World* (Basic Books, 2006). This unusual book would also be of use for the Food Activity.

Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783* (UNC Press, 1979). See especially pp. 13-24 and Chapter IV.

George C. Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War* (UNC Press, 2010).

David Goldfield, *America Aflame: How the Civil War Created a Nation* (Bloomsbury Press, 2011). This book places religion at the center of the causes of the Civil War.

NOTE: I think the most useful sources to help the instructor and the students get started would be the Harvard Pluralism Project and Butler, Wacker, and Balmer, *Religion in American Life: A Short History*. I do highly recommend the referenced pages in the Oxford History of the US series for an overview of American religion and its impact during the different time periods.

Procedure

1. Students will read and be prepared to discuss appropriate chapters in the assigned American History textbook. In the textbook I am currently using (Shi and Tindall, *America: The Essential Learning Edition*, W. W. Norton, 2015), the most relevant chapters are 2, 3, 11, and 12.
2. Instructor will lecture on the main religious traditions in early America and the impact of religion on major developments such as the American Revolution, territorial expansion, the antislavery movement, and the Civil War.
3. Students will research an early American religious tradition and its Old World origins and prepare a 3-4 page written or a 15-20 minute oral presentation. Both the written and oral formats should include at least one visual (e.g., a timeline of the religion's origin and diffusion in the New World, a map of the religion's distribution in early America, or an artifact associated with the religion).
4. At least two weeks prior to the due date, students will submit an annotated bibliography.
5. Each student's presentation will address the following:
 1. What religious tradition did you choose? Is it a religion in and of itself, or is it a variation (denomination, sect, etc.) on an already existing belief system?
 2. When and where did it originate?
 3. How and when did it migrate to America?
 4. What are some of its basic practices and rituals?
 5. In what ways did it change from its country of origin to early America?
 6. In what ways has it changed over time from early American history until now? (This question could be part of a class discussion at the end of the module.)

Assessment:

One of the challenges of teaching at a community college is the wide range of interest and ability levels in each class. Partly for that reason and partly because I believe in trusting the professional judgment of SACS-qualified faculty, I resist being too specific as far as the means of assessment. However, I hope the following guidelines will be helpful:

1. I think it is usually best when students pick their own topics. However, it might be necessary to assign topics in order to assure complete coverage of the major religions.
2. The purpose of the annotated bibliography is to help the instructor know if the student is on the right track as far as sources are concerned. A grade could be assigned at the

instructor's discretion, but I view this as a "scaffolding" step to help diagnose problems students might have with selecting and evaluating sources.

3. In assessing the final presentation, the following should be considered:

I would strongly encourage students to do an oral presentation because it is the best way for the class as a whole to benefit from each student's research. However, if time does not permit a large number of presentations or if a student has a mortal fear of public speaking, a written presentation is acceptable. For online courses, I suppose a written presentation would be required. Either way, the assessment should consider:

1. Organization (A written outline should be submitted for oral presentations.)
2. The presentation is coherent, well-developed and thoroughly documented.
3. The presentation uses appropriate language for an academic setting and is respectful of the audience and of different points of view. This is perhaps especially important when dealing with the touchy subject of religion.
4. The presentation meets the length requirements. (At least three pages if written and at least fifteen minutes if oral are suggested).
5. At the instructor's discretion, students can be rewarded for finding resources not listed above. These could include information obtained from a local church, mosque, or temple archive or library as well as from colleges with religious affiliations, such as Duke University, Wake Forest University, Guilford College, Davidson College, Barton College, St. Augustine's University, Shaw University, Bennett College, North Carolina Wesleyan College, Meredith College, etc.