

Religion 330: Religion, Critical Theory, and Politics
Religion, Race, and Democracy in American Pragmatism
Swift 16
Wednesdays 1-3

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

How can religion be salvaged when we can no longer rely on supernatural certainty? In the late nineteenth, early twentieth centuries a group of American thinkers—the pragmatists—were seized by this crisis of religious certainty. Less commonly observed is that African Americans also grappled with the same dilemma. Their answers, classical and contemporary, give rise to a variety of frameworks for thinking about both the morals of democratic participation and the morals of race. This class will ask, What is it about pragmatism and its justifications of religion that make it especially good terrain for articulating these concerns? How do pragmatic conceptions of religion influence the identity labels we use to create political community?

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

a) participation: This course will be taught as a seminar course—not a lecture course. I will be directing and shaping discussion, as well as raising important theoretical concerns. Your questions, preoccupations, perplexities, and passions will comprise our discussion's substantive content. You should consider this class a collective intellectual endeavor in which our questions and concerns contribute to an environment of open and respectful exchange. Of course, it is essential that you come to class having read closely and ready to contribute to class discussion. Participation will count for approximately 15% of your grade

b) seminar presentation: 15%

- Presenting (10minutes): The idea is not to summarize the assigned text, but to give a provocative critical reading. Plumb your passions, and then incorporate them into your response. You need to turn in a written copy of your presentation.

c) writing (see syllabus for due dates)

- Mid-term paper (6 pages) 25%
- Final paper (12 pages) 50%

STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

“Academic accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please schedule an appointment with the instructor early in the semester to discuss any accommodations for this course which have been approved by the Director of Disability and Support Services as indicated in your accommodation letter.”

REQUIRED TEXTS: AVAILABLE AT COLLEGE BOOKSTORE

- William James, *Pragmatism and Other Writings* (Penguin)
- W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Dover)
- W. E. B. Du Bois, *Darkwater* (Dover)
- Eddie Glaude: *In a Shade of Blue* (Chicago)
- John Dewey, *A Common Faith* (Yale)
- Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton)

ASSIGNMENTS AND SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Sept 3: Introductory Session

September 10: Historical and Philosophical Background

- T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace*, Ch 1. **[BB]**
- James T. Kloppenberg, "Pragmatism: An Old Name For Some New Ways of Thinking?" **[BB]**
- Richard J. Bernstein, "Pragmatism's Common Faith" **[BB]**

September 17: Beginnings and Applications: Emerson, Charles S. Peirce, and Thinking About Race

- Emerson, "Circles," "Experience," "Politics" **[BB]**
- Peirce, "The Fixation of Belief," <http://www.peirce.org/writings/p107.html>
- Peirce, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear" <http://www.peirce.org/writings/p119.html>
- Paul C. Taylor: Appiah's Uncompleted Argument: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Reality of Race" **[BB]**

September 24: James' Pragmatism

- James, 191-305 in *Pragmatism and Other Writings*
- James, selections from *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

October 1: James and Santayana

- James, 1-132 in *Pragmatism and Other Writings*
- Santayana--TBA

October 8: A Neglected Tradition: Black Pragmatism—W. E. B. Du Bois

- Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*
- Du Bois, *Darkwater*
- "Revelation of Saint Orgne" **[BB]**

October 15: John Dewey's Pragmatism

- Dewey, "Christianity and Democracy," "The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy," "The Need for the Recovery of Philosophy," "The Value of Historical Christianity" (1889)

- Dewey, *A Common Faith*, all
- John Patrick Diggins, “Pragmatism and Its Limits” [BB]

Fall Break

October 29: A Neglected Tradition—Ralph Ellison and Zora Neale Hurston

- Selected Readings: Ellison [BB]
- Selected Readings: Hurston [BB]

Mid-term paper due on Monday Nov 3, my office, 3pm

November 5: Rorty’s Revival of Pragmatism

- “Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism,” Religious Faith, Intellectual Responsibility and Romance,” “The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy,” “On Ethnocentrism,” “Anticlericalism and Atheism” [BB]

November 12: Jeffrey Stout: a contemporary voice

- Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*

Nov 13-14: Secularism and the Liberal Arts Required Thurs Night Lecture: Jeffrey Stout

Nov 19: Cornel West: Prophetic Pragmatism

- West. “Why Pragmatism,” “On Prophetic Pragmatism,” “Pragmatism and the Sense of the Tragic,” “The Limits of Neopragmatism,” “A Philosophical View of Easter,” “Subversive Joy and Revolutionary Patience in Black Christianity” [BB]

Nov 26: No class

Thanksgiving

December 3: Eddie S. Glaude: Post-Soul Pragmatism

- Glaude, *In a Shade of Blue*, all

December 10: “Knowledge and Belief in America” [BB]

Final Paper: Due Date TBA