THE GRADUATE CENTER
Ph.D. PROGRAM IN HISTORY

Hist. 75000-01:
Religions and Enlightenments in Early America

3 credits
Class nbr: 55390

Class time: Mondays 11:45am–1:45pm (classes online via Zoom; link to be posted on Blackboard)
Instructor: Prof. John Dixon
E-mail: john.dixon@csi.cuny.edu
Online office hours (to be held via Zoom; link on Blackboard): Mondays 2pm–4pm or by appointment.

Course Description:

This course introduces students to newer scholarship on early American religion and the Enlightenment. It asks how recent historiography and a post-secular turn in the interdisciplinary study of religion are reshaping the meaning and relationship of what is religious and what is secular. How do historians currently define and examine religion and the Enlightenment? How did religion, the Enlightenment, evangelicalism, science, and skepticism intersect in early America? And, perhaps most fundamentally, what role should these themes play in survey histories of the United States now that grand narratives of secularization and modernization have lost their sway?

The readings for this course emphasize religious diversity, mix popular and elite culture, and span the colonial, Revolutionary, and early nation periods. In addition to raising large interpretive questions about the place of religion and secularism in early American history, the course addresses a number of more specific social, cultural, and intellectual topics, including alchemy, happiness, polygamy, death, slave conversion, electricity, and heresy. Students will write a substantial historiographical or research paper on a topic of their choice.

Assignments and grading:

- Participation and discussion. All students are required to attend and participate actively in each meeting. Every student will lead the class discussion for at least one session. (25% of total course grade.)
- Five brief response papers (500–1000 words each) on assigned readings. Pick any five of the books assigned. Match your own interests, but also manage your workload! Submit to instructor via email. (25% of total course grade, or 5% per response paper.)
- Approx. 15-page seminar paper. Students may write either a research paper or a historiographical paper. Topics must be approved by the instructor. A paper proposal (no more than 2-pages long) and bibliography must be emailed to the instructor by March 22. The final paper is due (via email) on May 24. (50% of total course grade.)
Schedule of readings/discussions
Readings marked with an asterisk (*) are already available online via the GC library. Library copies of the other readings have been requested and may become available online before or during the semester.

2/1: Introduction

2/8: The end of secularization?

2/15: President’s Day (College Closed)

2/22: Alchemy, science, and popular religion in colonial New England

3/1: Awakenings

3/8: Polygamy, captivity, and Catholicism
*Allan Greer, *Mohawk Saint: Catherine Tekakwitha and the Jesuits* (New York: Oxford University Press USA, 2005)
3/15: New Netherland and religious liberty

3/22: Death
Proposal/bibliography due

Spring Recess: March 27 - April 4

4/5: Slavery and race

4/12: Jews in the Caribbean
and one from:

4/19: Happiness, electricity, and the Enlightenment

4/26: Religion and the Revolution

5/3: Religion and the Radical Enlightenment
5/10: Politics and religious infidelity (part 1)

5/17: Politics and religious infidelity (part 2)

Final papers due: 5/24