

# AMERICAN GODS

**FYS 100-47/100-48**

**Fall Semester 2014**

**Instructor:** Douglas Winiarski

**Course Meeting Times:** MW 3:00–4:15 P.M.; 4:30–5:45 P.M.

**Location:** Weinstein Hall 105

**Email:** [dwiniars@richmond.edu](mailto:dwiniars@richmond.edu)

**Cell Phone:** (804) 683-3152 (emergencies only please!)

**Office Hours:** by appointment

The New World is a “good land for men, but a bad place for gods,” declares Mr. Wednesday in Neil Gaiman’s *American Gods* (2001). This award-winning, science fiction novel tells the story of Shadow, a former convict who suddenly finds himself thrust into a war between old world deities, who have been carried to America during centuries of migration by peoples from around the world, and their upstart adversaries: the new gods of media, popular culture, technology, and transportation. Our first-year seminar examines Gaiman’s unusual retelling of American religious history. We’ll begin by developing a historical context for the novel. During the first half of the semester, students will explore the history of alternative and outsider religious traditions in the United States during the Age of Andrew Jackson (1824–1845). This dynamic period in American history witnessed an unprecedented explosion of new religious movements, as well as the transplantation of various religious traditions resulting from increased European migration and the African slave trade. The second unit of the course is designed to provide students with a set of critical tools with which to examine Gaiman’s provocative novel. We will learn how to analyze the place of religion in contemporary American culture by studying a series of theoretical essays on popular religion, sacred space, and material culture. The course concludes with an extended discussion and analysis of *American Gods*, which is slated to become a major cable television series in the near future.

## Blackboard

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The information on this paper syllabus is also available on our course Blackboard website. For the rest of the semester, Blackboard will serve as the official clearinghouse for all course-related information and resources, including reserve readings, grade reports, email communications, paper assignments, handouts, slide show presentations, and links to course-related websites. To access this material, direct your browser to <https://blackboard.richmond.edu>. I strongly encourage everyone to familiarize themselves with our Blackboard website at the beginning of the semester. Please contact me immediately if you encounter any difficulties with the login screen.

## FYS Requirements

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“American Gods” is designed to meet the general guidelines of the University of Richmond’s First-Year Seminar (FYS) program. I strongly encourage all students to familiarize themselves with the FYS program during the first week of the semester. A link to the FYS website is available on Blackboard.

## Course Procedures & Requirements

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“American Gods” has no prerequisites and assumes no prior knowledge of the topic. Our bi-weekly meetings will consist of short presentations and seminar-style discussions. Keeping up with the scheduled reading assignments is crucial. I expect that you will spend an average of two to three hours preparing for each class and roughly two hours per page when writing papers for class.

Attendance is mandatory. I will evaluate your work on occasional short written homework assignments as well as the quality of your participation in each of our class discussions using the following scale: 5 (excellent: multiple informed/insightful comments), 3 (good: moderate contributions), 1 (poor: minimal participation), and 0 (incomplete/absent). Please do not email me to explain class absences other than those for approved University of Richmond events/activities. Individual graded assignments are described in greater detail in the “Assignments” section of the course Blackboard website.

Final grades for the semester will be calculated as follows:

Class Attendance and Participation	35%
Prophets of the Early Republic paper (3 pages)	10%
Article Summary & Presentation (1 page)	5%
Annotated Bibliography	10%
Religion & Popular Culture paper (7 pages)	15%
<i>American Gods</i> paper (10 pages)	25%

## Required Texts

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The following books are available for purchase in the campus bookstore or from major internet distributors such as Amazon and Barnes and Noble.

1. Gaiman, Neil. *American Gods: A Novel*. Tenth Anniversary ed. New York: William Morrow, 2011.
2. Johnson Paul E., and Sean Wilentz. *The Kingdom of Matthias: A Story of Sex and Salvation in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
3. Hacker, Diana T. *A Pocket Style Manual*, fifth ed. Boston: Bedford Books, 2010.

In addition, we will be reading a series of primary texts and scholarly articles that are available in one of three formats: (1) online, (2) through one of Boatwright Library’s subscription databases, or (3) as PDF files stored on our Blackboard website. You will need to print copies of these texts and bring them with you to class.

## Library Research Sessions

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Throughout the semester, we will be working to enhance your information literacy/library research skills. These skills will be developed through a series of library research sessions with our designated FYS librarian, Carol Wittig. The library research sessions will introduce you to the resources available at the UR Libraries, including the library website, catalog, and research databases. The sessions will also discuss ways to cite and evaluate your information.

## Disability Accommodations

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Students with disabilities for whom accommodations have been formally granted by a University of Richmond Disability Advisor must present a copy of their “Disability Accommodation Notice” to each professor within the first week of the academic term. Accommodations must be negotiated in advance for each scheduled course assignment. Students should plan to consult with me at least one week prior to any scheduled deadline.

## Grade Scale

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Final grades will be assigned based on the following grade scale: A+ (98–100); A (93–97); A- (91–92); B+ (88–90); B (83–87); B- (81–82); C+ (78–80); C (73–77); C- (71–72); D+ (68–70); D (63–67); D- (61–62); F (60 and below).

## Cell Phones & Other Devices

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While in class, please disable all cell phones and other communication devices. In addition, I ask that all students refrain from using laptop computers, tablets, and other electronic devices, which create distractions that disrupt the flow of our seminar discussions.

## Paper Assignment Deadlines

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<u>September 26</u>	Prophets of the Early Republic paper due in my office mailbox before 5:00 P.M.
<u>October 6</u>	Article Summary due in class.
<u>October 24</u>	Annotated Bibliography due in my office mailbox before 5:00 P.M.
<u>November 14</u>	Religion & Popular Culture paper due in my office mailbox before 5:00 P.M.
<u>December 15</u>	<i>American Gods</i> paper due in my office mailbox before 5:00 P.M.

## Class Schedule

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### Old & New Religions in the Age of Jackson

<b>Monday, Aug. 25</b>	<b>Introduction to the Course</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete the online “FYS Library Tutorial” if you have not already done so during Orientation (External Links).</li> </ul>
<b>Wednesday, Aug. 27</b>	<b>The Kingdom of Matthias I</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Johnson and Wilentz, <i>Kingdom of Matthias</i>, pp. 3–47.</li> </ul>
<b>Monday, Sept. 1</b>	<b>The Kingdom of Matthias II</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Johnson and Wilentz, <i>Kingdom of Matthias</i>, pp. 49–125.</li> </ul>
<b>Wednesday, Sept. 3</b>	<b>The Kingdom of Matthias III</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Johnson and Wilentz, <i>Kingdom of Matthias</i>, pp. 127–179.</li> </ul>
<b>Monday, Sept. 8</b>	<b>Library Research Session (Library Catalog &amp; Databases)</b> <p>NOTE: CLASS MEETS IN BOATWRIGHT LIBRARY, ROOM B-26.</p>
<b>Wednesday, Sept. 10</b>	<b>Visionary World of Joseph Smith</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jessee, “Early Accounts of Joseph Smith’s First Vision,” pp. 275–294 (Blackboard).</li> </ul>
<b>Monday, Sept. 15</b>	<b>Library Research Session (Early American Imprints)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bushman, “Visionary World of Joseph Smith,” pp. 183–204 (Blackboard).</li> </ul>
<b>Wednesday, Sept. 17</b>	<b>No Class</b> <p>USE THIS TIME TO WORK ON YOUR PAPERS. BE SURE TO SCHEDULE AN APPOINTMENT WITH ONE OF OUR DESIGNED WRITING CENTER FELLOWS: BOYI ZHANG (SECTION 47) AND KASSIE ANDREADIS (SECTION 48).</p>
<b>Monday, Sept. 22</b>	<b>Writing Workshop (Thesis Statements)</b> <p>DEPOSIT “PROPHETS OF THE EARLY REPUBLIC” PAPERS IN MY OFFICE MAILBOX (DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES, WEINSTEIN HALL, ROOM 102) BEFORE 5:00 P.M., FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 26.</p>
<b>Wednesday, Sept. 24</b>	<b>Thomas Cole &amp; Landscape Tourism</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cole, “Sketch of my tour to the White Mountains,” pp. 26–33 (Blackboard).</li> <li>McNulty, ed., <i>Correspondence of Thomas Cole and Daniel Wadsworth</i>, pp. 10–14 (Blackboard).</li> <li>Browse the Thomas Cole National Historic Site website (External Links). Click the “Learn” button and read the “Thomas Cole Bio.” Watch the park’s online video, <i>Thomas Cole: Painting the American Landscape</i>. Then, click the</li> </ul>

“Explore Cole’s Paintings” link, enter “Virtual Gallery,” and closely examine the following wilderness landscape paintings:

1. *Landscape with Dead Trees* (1825)
2. *Falls of the Kaaterskill* (1826)
3. *Kaaterskill Falls* (1826)
4. *From the Top of Kaaterskill Falls* (1826)
5. *The Clove, Catskills* (1827)
6. *A View of the Two Lakes and Mountain House* (1844)

**Monday, Sept. 29**

**A Jewish Peddler in Yankee New England**

- Goodman, ed., “Jewish Peddler’s Diary,” pp. 45–73 (Library Databases).

**Wednesday, Oct. 1**

**Mandan *Okipa* Ritual**

- Catlin, *Letters and Notes*, pp. 155–184 (Blackboard).
- Examine Catlin’s original four paintings of the Mandan *okipa* ritual (Blackboard).

**Monday, Oct. 6**

**Religions of the Slave Quarters**

- Chireau, “Conjure and Christianity in the Nineteenth Century,” pp. 225–246 (Blackboard).
- Gomez, “Prayin’ on Duh Bead,” pp. 59–87 (Blackboard).

SELECT ONE OF THE TWO ESSAYS ABOVE TO READ IN PREPARATION FOR CLASS. ARTICLE SUMMARY DUE IN CLASS.

**Wednesday, Oct. 8**

**The Apocalypse of Nat Turner**

- Gray, *Confession, Trial, and Execution of Nat Turner*, pp. 3–23 (Blackboard).

**Monday, Oct. 13**

**No Class—Fall Break**

**Wednesday, Oct. 15**

**Library Research Session (Annotated Bibliographies)**

**Monday, Oct. 20**

**Library Research Session (Citing Sources)**

- Corrigan and Neal, ed., *Religious Intolerance in America*, pp. 49–55 (Blackboard).

NOTE: CLASS MEETS IN BOATWRIGHT LIBRARY, ROOM B-26.

**Monday, Oct. 20**

**Special Evening Screening of *Gangs of New York***

DETAILS T.B.A.

**Wednesday, Oct. 22****Anti-Catholic Nativism**

DEPOSIT ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY IN MY OFFICE MAILBOX  
(DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES, WEINSTEIN HALL, ROOM 102)  
BEFORE 5:00 P.M., FRIDAY, OCTOBER 24.

### Theorizing Religion & Popular Culture

**Monday, Oct. 27****Defining Religion**

- Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," pp. 207–228 (Blackboard).

**Wednesday, Oct. 29****Religion & Popular Culture**

- Chidester, "Church of Baseball," pp. 743–765 (Library Databases).
- Watch The Kingsmen's performance of "Louie, Louie" (External Links).
- Watch clip from *Animal House* (External Links).

**Monday, Nov. 3****No Class****Wednesday, Nov. 5****Material Religion**

- McDannell, "Interpreting Things," pp. 371–387 (Blackboard).

**Monday, Nov. 10****Sacred Space**

- Linenthal and Chidester, "Introduction," pp. 1–42 (Blackboard).

**Wednesday, Nov. 12****Religion & Violence**

- Lincoln, "The Study of Religion in the Current Political Moment," pp. 1–18, 97–102 (Blackboard).

BE SURE TO SCHEDULE AN APPOINTMENT WITH ONE OF OUR DESIGNED WRITING CENTER FELLOWS: BOYI ZHANG (SECTION 47) AND KASSIE ANDREADIS (SECTION 48). DEPOSIT RELIGION & POPULAR CULTURE PAPERS IN MY OFFICE MAILBOX (DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES, WEINSTEIN HALL, ROOM 102) BEFORE 5:00 P.M., FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 14.

### *American Gods*

**Monday, Nov. 17*****American Gods***

- Gaiman, *American Gods*, pp. 1–230 (Part One).

**Wednesday, Nov. 19*****American Gods***

- Gaiman, *American Gods*, pp. 1–230 (Part One).

- Monday, Nov. 24**                      **No Class—Thanksgiving Break**  
     ▪ Gaiman, *American Gods*, pp. 233–418 (Part Two).
- Wednesday, Nov. 26**              **No Class—Thanksgiving Break**  
     ▪ Gaiman, *American Gods*, pp. 233–418 (Part Two).
- Monday, Dec. 1**                      ***American Gods***  
     ▪ Gaiman, *American Gods*, pp. 421–542 (Part Three).
- Wednesday, Dec. 3**              ***American Gods***  
     ▪ Gaiman, *American Gods*, pp. 545–588 (Part Four).  
     ▪ Gaiman, *American Gods*, “Introduction to the Tenth Anniversary Edition,” pp. ix–xi; “Note on the Text,” pp. xiii–xiv; “Appendix,” pp. 527–529; and “How Dare You?” pp. 539–541 (also available on Blackboard for students who purchased an early edition of the novel).

DEPOSIT *AMERICAN GODS* PAPERS IN MY OFFICE MAILBOX (DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES, WEINSTEIN HALL, ROOM 102) BEFORE 5:00 P.M., MONDAY, DECEMBER 15.

## Reserve Reading Bibliography

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### Available on Blackboard

- Bushman, Richard L. “The Visionary World of Joseph Smith.” *BYU Studies* 37 (1997–1998): 183–204.
- Catlin, George. *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of the North American Indians*, vol. 1, pp. 155–184. London: Tosswill & Meyers, 1841.
- Chireau, Yvonne. “Conjure and Christianity in the Nineteenth Century: Religious Elements in African American Magic.” *Religion & American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 7 (1997): 225–246.
- Cole, Thomas. “Sketch of my tour to the White Mountains with Mr Pratt,” ed. Kathleen Erwin. *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 66 (1990): 26–33.
- Corrigan, John, and Lynn Neal. “Anti-Catholicism.” In Corrigan and Neal, eds., *Religious Intolerance in America: A Documentary History*, pp. 49–55. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010.
- Geertz, Clifford. “Religion as a Cultural System.” In *Theories of Religion: A Reader*, ed. Seth D. Kunin with Jonathan Miles-Watson, pp. 207–228. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2006.
- Gomez, Michael A. “Prayin’ on Duh Bead: Islam in Early America.” In *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South*, pp. 59–87. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.
- Gray, Thomas R. *The Confession, Trial, and Execution of Nat Turner, the Negro Insurrectionist*. 1881; New York: AMS Press, 1975.
- Jessee, Dean C. “The Early Accounts of Joseph Smith’s First Vision.” *BYU Studies* 9 (1969): 275–294.

- Lincoln, Bruce. "The Study of Religion in the Current Political Moment" and "Appendix A," pp. 10–18, 93–98. In Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- Linenthal, Edward T., and David Chidester. "Introduction." In Linenthal and Chidester, eds., *American Sacred Space*, pp. 1–42. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.
- McDannell, Colleen. "Interpreting 'Things': Material Culture Studies and American Religion." *Religion* 21 (1991): 371–387.
- McNulty, J. Bard., ed. *The Correspondence of Thomas Cole and Daniel Wadsworth*, pp. 10–14. Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 1983.

**Available through Boatwright Library Databases (Use Journal Titles)**

- Chidester, David. "The Church of Baseball, the Fetish of Coca-Cola, and the Potlatch of Rock 'n' Roll: Theoretical Models for the Study of Religion in American Popular Culture." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64 (1996): 743–765.
- Goodman, Abram Vossen, ed. "A Jewish Peddler's Diary, 1842–1843." *American Jewish Archives* 3 (1951): 81–111.