

# The Student Syllabus – America's Story - A Spiritual Journey

Questions to consider in doing the readings

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## 1st Quarter – Origins and Early Development of the American Covenant

### Unit 1 - pp. 1-11 (Preface)

What is it that seems to cause the rise and fall of a society over the generations? How is it that the author of this particular history or narrative understands personally that very dynamic? Why does he view a covenant with God – especially by its leaders ... but also by a society in general – to be so vitally important to a society's ultimate success? Also ... why is historical narrative itself so important in understanding and managing the dynamics or "science" of society?

### Unit 2 - pp. 12-32 - (America's Moral-Spiritual Inheritance-1)

How does Western society in general differ from the other major moral codes of the world ... such as the Hindu and Buddhist variety? What role did ancient Jewish, Greek and Roman society play in the development of the Western social order? How did Jesus bring a very different understanding to life ... and its general purpose?

### Unit 3 - pp. 32-46 (America's Moral-Spiritual Inheritance-2)

What happened to Jesus's Christian legacy when it stopped being persecuted and finally became accepted - even "Romanized" - by Roman authorities? How was it that Christianity was able to survive the onslaught of the Germanic tribes ... even when once-powerful Rome did not? How did the rediscovery of wealth and power (centuries later ... thanks mostly to the crusades) finally stir deep challenges from religious reformers desirous of returning Christianity to its original 1st century character? Why was such reform considered to be such a danger to the "Christian" social order of the 1500s and 1600s? What was it that the "Puritans" were attempting to achieve in terms of social reform in England? But how did a rising belief in the power simply of Human Reason itself also shake the foundations of that same social order?

### Unit 4 - pp. 47-68 (Getting Started in America)

In what ways were the Spanish, French and Dutch involved in "Europeanizing" the Americas? What was the intended purpose of the Virginia settlement ... and how was its startup in the early 1600s? How did Virginia tend to imitate Europe's older feudal order? What was the nature of the relationship with the Indians at that time? Just exactly how "Christian" was Virginia also at that time?

Why did English "Separatists" come to New England as "Pilgrims" also in the early 1600s? Why did thousands of English Puritans soon join them in this venture? In what ways was New England so very different from Virginia? How did New England have its own distinct challenges facing its survival and development?

What was the purpose and general character of the Maryland colony? What was happening in England in the mid-1600s that would impact the development of the American colonies? What was the purpose and general character of the Carolina colony? The Dutch New Netherland colony? James's New York and New Jersey? Penn's Pennsylvania? What was behind the establishment of the Georgia colony?

### Unit 5 - pp. 69-86 (Independence – and the New Republic-1)

Why did Berkeley have such a problem with Bacon and his supporters? How did this help push Virginia

towards the acquiring of slaves rather than just indentured workers to support the Virginia aristocracy?

How and why would the religious fervor of the early-to-mid 1600s both in England and in the American colonies find itself being replaced in the later 1600s by a very Secular or Humanist belief that human reason alone (human "Enlightenment") would do a better job at directing social progress? Where did that leave the Puritan spirit in America as it moved from the 1600s into the 1700s? How was it then that a "Great Awakening" of the Christian spirit suddenly exploded in America in the 1730s-1750s? Why was this historically such a significant event?

How did England's Hanoverian kings at first give America a lot of freedom to develop ... and then have all that changed under George III? Why were the Americans so reactive? What pushed the Boston region to the lead in the reaction? What was the role of the Second Continental Congress in the conflict? What were the key developments both in Congress and on the battlefield in the later 1770s? Why was Washington so vital to the American effort? Why did the British finally move their action to the American South? How did things turn out there for the British ... especially at Yorktown?

#### Unit 6 - pp. 86-100 (Independence – and the New Republic-2)

What were the major challenges facing America as it emerged into a post-war world? Why was it necessary for Franklin to remind fellow politicians gathered in Philadelphia in 1787 to write a new constitution to build their work on what they all knew was God's work ... and not their own political self-interests so rationally presented (they were mostly lawyers by trade) – which was getting them nowhere. What exactly was the form of government they finally came up with ... and what were the guarantees that it would work - that is, not allow power to result eventually in some kind of political tyranny? How did a supposedly similar effort by the French to construct their own new Republic fail so miserably ... while the American effort succeeded so brilliantly?

#### Unit 7 - pp. 101-117 (The American Republic Gets Up and Running-1)

How and why did Washington set a key precedent in terms of the length of presidential service? What did Hamilton do to put the dollar and the federal government on strong economic foundations? Why did Jefferson differ politically so deeply with Washington and Hamilton ... and what did he do to counter their political positions? Why was he so completely wrong about the dynamics of the French Revolution? How did John Adams fare as US president? What were Jefferson's various policies and programs as US president? What did John Marshall do as Supreme Court Chief Justice to award power to his federal court ... power not specifically assigned to the court by the US Constitution? Why did America declare war against Britain in 1812 ... and how did things go for America in that war?

#### Unit 8 - pp. 117-135 (The American Republic Gets Up and Running-2)

How was it that America ended up owning Florida? How did Henry Clay hope to defuse the rising North-South dispute over slavery with his "Missouri Compromise"? What was the real meaning of the "Monroe Doctrine"? In what ways was Andrew Jackson so very different from his predecessor as US president, John Quincy Adams? What was so unique about America ... according to the thinking of the Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville? What and why was the "Indian Removal" of the 1830s? How was it that Texas came to be such a big part of the American expansive instinct? What did O'Sullivan mean by the term "Manifest Destiny"? What finally brought Mexico and America to war with each other? How is it that Oregon, California, and other Western territories also got pulled into this American expansion? What was the economic panic and depression of the late 1830s all about?

How did rising Unitarians (and Humanists) – individuals such as Jefferson, Emerson, Thoreau, etc. – find themselves up against a very strong "Awakening" Christian spirit in America? Who were the key individuals responsible for this "Second Great Awakening"? What were some of the more unusual religious varieties birthed by this same Awakening? How did this Awakening also inspire huge Christian missionary and educational programs?

## 2nd Quarter – The Gradual Rise to Greatness

### Unit 1 - pp. 136-158 (Civil War and Recovery)

How was it that growing anti-slavery attitudes and activities in the North were deepening a North-South political-cultural split? Why did the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 fail horribly to resolve the growing North-South bitterness over the slavery issue? Why did Taney's Supreme Court Dred Scott Decision of 1857 only make the situation worse? In what ways was Lincoln definitely not the "country bumpkin" that other, more "sophisticated," American leaders at first consider him to be? Why did he ask his political critics to become part of his presidential cabinet? What was it indeed that made Lincoln one of America's greatest presidents (some would even say the greatest of all!)? Why did his election to the presidency trigger the American Civil War?

Why was finding the right military leader such a deep challenge to Lincoln in the first years of the war? How was it that the Battle of Gettysburg almost ended the Civil War ... but ultimately didn't? What was it that distinguished Grant from the other Union generals? How was it that the battles in southern Tennessee and northwestern Georgia seemed to mark a turning point in the war? How was 1864 a time of deep Southern military setbacks ... and early 1865 the end of the Confederacy? How was the assassination of Lincoln a huge tragedy not only for the North but also for the South?

Why was Johnson unable to hold off the intense spirit of anti-South revenge coming from the Republican Radicals? How was it that Grant proved to not be as high quality a president that he had been as a general? How did the end of the Civil War now open up a rush westward ... into the remaining Indian territories?

### Unit 2 - pp. 159-182 (America Comes of Age-1)

What made the "Captains of American Industry" (or "American Robber Barons" as others termed them) so incredibly wealthy? What were the key elements of the American Industrial Revolution of the late 1800s ... and how did such material development overshadow the realm of American national politics ... especially in the matter of social reform designed to counter the rapid spread of wealth and power separating Americans? How was Western society in general also turning increasingly to the social-reformist idea of the political empowerment (through political struggle) of the common citizen ... something that would also inspire a rising spirit of nationalism? Where did Marx and Lenin stand on this matter?

### Unit 3 - pp. 182-202 (America Comes of Age-2)

In what key ways did Jane Addams, William Jennings Bryan, Teddy Roosevelt and Howard Taft serve America as agents of deep social reform? But what also was the impact of a spreading spirit of Secular-Humanism – focused especially on that idea of "progress through liberating struggle" and thus identified at the time as "Progressivism" or "Liberalism" – on the Christian moral-spiritual legacy of both America and the larger Western world? How did this then lead to a revising of the Constitution in such a way that made it more "democratic" – undercutting the checks and balances system originally built into the Constitution (originally designed to keep power from accumulating in one or other of America's several political institutions)? How did all of this "progressive reform" impact American Christianity?

### Unit 4 - pp. 203-219 (America Enters the World Stage-1)

How did this rising spirit of nationalism inspire deeply the global "imperialism" that so consumed Western society in the latter part of the 1800s? What role did America play in this Age of Imperialism? What was America president Wilson's stand on this matter of imperialism? How did this nationalist-imperialist urge finally push the European powers in 1914 into a pointless war against each other right there in the European heartland? Why did it simply drag on – to no great purpose – except mutual slaughter? How did this finally bring on the Russian Revolution? How did this in turn inspire an intellectually self-blinded Wilson to get involved in this tragic war? What was he hoping to see result as America's involvement

in the war? What were the ultimate results for both America and Europe when simply sheer exhaustion finally brought things to an end? Who, in the end, were the "winners" and "losers" in this pointless struggle?

#### Unit 5 - pp. 219-237 (America Enters the World Stage-2)

In what kind of a post-war mood did the "Great War" leave America and Europe? Why do we say that things "roared" in the 1920s? How did America seem to divide into "two Americas": a depressed rural America ... and a partying urban America? How did all of this impact the spirit and soul of the two Americas? What role did presidential leadership play in all of this? What hard economic realities finally brought the urban "partying" in America to an end?

What exactly did Franklin Roosevelt have in mind with his "New Deal"? What were the immediate benefits of all his government programs? How did the Idealism of the Humanists at first cause them to believe that they had discovered a new religion – a "Religious Humanism" – that would save America spiritually (and materially)? But why did Roosevelt's New Deal ultimately fail to bring America out of its economic depression? How did this depression impact American Christianity ... and in what ways did Christian America seek to restore its broken world?

#### Unit 6 - pp. 238-255 (World War Two and the Start of the Cold War-1)

What was the supposed appeal of the European dictators – Stalin, Hitler, and Mussolini? Why was "appeasement" by Chamberlain supposedly the correct program in dealing with these dictators? Why would Gandhi prove to be a serious problem for Britain during its coming dark days? Indeed, why was Western society in general under challenge by rising Asian powers? What started the war in China in 1937?

Why did Hitler and Stalin decide to ally themselves ... and immediately begin the war in Europe in 1939? Why did only a "Sitzkrieg" result as a result of the Russian-German aggression? Why did America want to stay out of these matters? What finally brought America into the war? How did the American conflict with the Japanese go at first in the Pacific? Why was the action in Italy so difficult ... and what happened at Anzio – and then Rome? Why was the Russian stand at Stalingrad so important? Why did the Western allies choose to move from their Normandy landing towards Paris rather than straight east towards Germany? What happened to the effort to swing into Germany from the Dutch North? Meanwhile, what was happening in the Pacific?

#### Unit 7 - pp. 255-269 (World War Two and the Start of the Cold War-2)

In what ways was Truman a most awesome replacement for Roosevelt upon the latter's death in the last days of the European war? What action by Truman soon ended the war with Japan?

What was the "Iron Curtain" that Churchill described as having fallen across central Europe? What did Truman do to help block the efforts of Stalin to take control of Greece and Turkey ... and in his Communist Parties attempts to take control of Western Europe as well? How did events in Czechoslovakia in 1948 finally wake up the general American populace to the serious danger of Stalin's Communist program? How did Truman take the lead in the West in opposing Stalin ... in Yugoslavia, in Berlin, and in the creation of NATO? Why did China fall so quickly to Mao's Communists? How did political confusion at war's end in Korea lead to a bitter war between the North and South of that country ... and a strong division between Truman and MacArthur as to how American actions should proceed there?

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### 3rd Quarter – Cold-War America

#### Unit 1 - pp. 270-287 (Middle-Class America Triumphant-1)

How did America's Veterans (or "Vets") of the recent war now find themselves facing new social dynamics – such as a nervous labor movement, their own "Baby Boom," their post-war Christianity ... but most of all, their fear of Communists (or former Communists) at home right there in America? How was it that McCarthy was able to take such advantage of the Vets' fear of Communism in their country ... and leave such bitterness in the hearts of the American "Progressives" or "Left" against the Vets? What kind of a leader was Eisenhower? Why would the Vets' offspring, the Baby Boomers, grow up to be so very different in their understanding of life and its dynamics than their "Middle American" Vet parents? Why did the Vets themselves suffer from too much Idealism and too little Realism ... especially in the realm of foreign policy? Where did American Blacks fit in this social profile in the 1950s?

#### Unit 2 - pp. 287-301 (Middle-Class America Triumphant-2)

How did Stalin's death in 1953 raise hopes of a lightening of the Russian grip and a calming of the Cold War? How did that actually work out ... in Berlin, in Iran, in Hungary? Why were the efforts of Britain and France to hold onto their vital Suez Canal such poor timing in all this dynamic ... and what were the political results for both Britain and France? How was America's "anti-imperialist" foreign policy principle not evident in America's dealings with its Latin neighbors to the South? Why did a U-2 incident destroy hopes for an end to the Cold War?

In what ways did Kennedy represent a new, younger spirit? Why did his foreign policy not get off to an impressive start? Why, however, did his Peace Corps program appeal so greatly to the young Silent generation? How did the Cuban missile crisis change that dynamic? How was Dr. King able to get America to move against the racism that tarnished deeply the American social profile? Why was former French Indo-China meanwhile becoming a greater problem?

#### Unit 3 - pp. 302-317 (America Shifts to the Humanist Left-1)

How did the political changeover after Kennedy's assassination change the character of American politics deeply? What, in Johnson's background, shaped his understanding of what he was supposed to do as US president? In what ways did Johnson's Great Society programs take America down a political route almost opposite of what Americans previously understood to be the proper role of government? How did his action in Vietnam add further to the idea of governmental professionalism directed from DC.

What was the rising role of the Supreme Court in all of this deep social change hitting America at this point? Why was Congress unable to counter the Court's major political-legal initiatives undercutting Christianity's traditional social-moral role in American society?

#### Unit 4 - pp. 317-336 (America Shifts to the Humanist Left-2)

Why did DC's "affirmative action" program deepen rather than soften racial animosities in America? Why was Johnson's Vietnam War such a catastrophe? How did all this tempt De Gaulle to try to replace American leadership in Europe with French leadership? Where did America stand in the 1967 fight between Israel and its Arab neighbors ... and in the 1968 Czech crisis ... and in matters concerning Mao's China?

What kind of deep social changes began to develop within the Boomer generation? Why was 1968 such a horrible year at home in America itself?

How did Nixon's election bring hope that America might pull itself out of its messes both domestically and internationally? Why was 1969 another eventful year for America?

#### Unit 5 - pp. 337-349 (The 1970s – America Divided-1)

Why was Nixon's (and Kissinger's) Realpolitik so poorly understood or accepted by this Progressivist America ... especially in Nixon's winding down the American disaster in Vietnam? Why did Nixon's détente with both the Soviets and Chinese go unappreciated by his Democratic Party or Progressivist

adversaries? In what ways did the Watergate issue give Nixon's adversaries the weapons to bring down this otherwise very popular president? How did his Congressional adversaries even cut back Nixon's ability to restrict "pork barrel" spending by Congress and the federal bureaucracy? How did the Arab-Israeli war of October 1973 test Nixon-Kissinger's Realpolitik?

#### Unit 6 - pp. 349-366 (The 1970s – America Divided-2)

Why and in what ways did Ford have such a huge moral challenge facing him as Nixon's replacement?

How did Congress's undercutting of the Nixon presidency ultimately lead to the murderous collapse of the political systems of both South Vietnam and Cambodia? Why did Congress fail to understand its own role in this?

Why did the "outsider" Carter (Georgia governor) rather than the "insider" Ted Kennedy (US Senator) become the Democratic Party presidential candidate in 1976? What kind of a leader was Carter? What did Carter mean by claiming to bring "Morality" to the conduct of American foreign policy? How did that relate to his surrender of the Panama Canal? How did that confuse Iranian politics deeply and dangerously – despite a quick return of Carter to something more resembling Realpolitik – and how did Carter's new Realism apply in other foreign policy areas? How did the Iran crisis go from bad to worse – much, much worse? Why was the oil crisis that hit the world in 1979 worsened greatly by Volcker's intervention to "fight" inflation?

How was the assault by American Progressivists on Middle America and its longstanding social standards intensified in the 1970s? How was it that the Supreme Court took a leading role in this social development? How did Christianity attempt to make a comeback in the face of this same development?

#### Unit 7 - pp. 367-385 (The World's Sole Superpower-1)

In what different ways did Regan demonstrate that he too was a practitioner of Realpolitik – both at home and abroad (eg. dealing with the air traffic controllers' strike, with Lebanon, with Granada)? How was it that America was able to climb out of the economic depression that hit at the beginning of the 1980s? Why was tying Social Security to the federal debt not a good idea? How was Reagan able to incentivize Gorbachev into wanting to "liberalize" Russia? What was also happening in China at that same time? What was the Iran-Contra Affair all about?

What kind of a president was Bush, Sr.? What was happening in both Russia and China during his presidency? What was the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait all about ... and how did Bush, Sr. handle the matter? Why did Bush fail to get himself reelected?

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### 4th Quarter – The Superpower under Challenge

#### Unit 1 - pp. 385-397 (The World's Sole Superpower-2)

What kind of a leader was Clinton? What was his understanding of his presidential responsibilities in his early days in office? How is it that Gingrich forced Clinton to back away from his Liberal programming instincts ... and have Clinton become himself rather "centrist" in economic-social matters?

How did Clinton also demonstrate Realpolitik instincts when it came to foreign policy matters (Somalia, Israel-Palestine, Haiti, Rwanda ... and ultimately Bosnia)? How was that same Realpolitik instinct put to service several years later in Kosovo, in relations with Russia, and in NATO's expansion? But in what ways was the Arab Middle East firing up as a major problem area? How did Muslim aggressiveness impact America itself in 1993?

How was America itself showing ever deeper instincts for violence in its handling of social-political matters (Rodney King, Ruby Ridge, Waco, Oklahoma City, O.J. Simpson, Columbine High School)? How

was it now that Congress's impeaching of presidents seems to have become a regular part of the American political process?

How was America itself continuing to undergo deep social change during the 1980s and 1990s? Why could Reagan not get an amendment passed to override the Supreme Court's forbidding of prayer in public schooling? How in 1987 did the Supreme Court go even further in undercutting America's longstanding Christian cultural-moral foundations? What were the varying Christian responses to these developments?

#### Unit 2 - pp. 409-427 (America Stumbles)

What kind of a leader was Bush Jr.? Why was the makeup of his presidential cabinet so important? How did 9/11 change Bush's priorities? What were Bush's intentions in Afghanistan ... and what were Rumsfeld's ideas on the matter? Why not also take on Pakistan ... a much bigger al Qaeda base? Why did Bush (and Cheney-Rumsfeld) turn America's attention fully to Saddam's Iraq? Why did the world fail to offer its support to the Iraq operation the way it did to the Afghanistan operation? What was the original plan for Iraq ... and how did that work out? What was the 2007 troop "Surge" all about?

What deep social-moral changes were taking place in the American economic dynamic during those same Bush Jr. years? Why did that all end up as a catastrophic 2008 economic "meltdown"? Why did Bush now believe that it was the government's job to bail corporate America out of this catastrophe?

How at the same time were the moral foundations of Christian "Middle America" further undercut politically (especially by the federal courts)?

#### Unit 3 - pp. 428-454 (Obama Strives to "Change" America-1)

Why was a well-recognized American war hero (McCain) unable to defeat a relatively politically-inexperienced Obama in the 2008 elections? What did Obama have in mind with his call for deep "Change" in America? What about his origins made him the person he was? How were his two Supreme Court appointments so impactful on American society? How did Obama himself act against the "homophobia" of traditional America – such as in his opposition to Congress's once widely-supported 1996 Defense of Marriage Act or DOMA? How did Christian social values now find themselves even under legal assault? And why did racial hostilities heat up during the Obama years?

Why was the national economy and society now coming under stronger governmental management? Why did the federal debt climb (double even) in each of the Bush Jr. and Obama 8-year (two-terms each) presidential years?

Why was Obama nominated (and ultimately awarded) the Nobel Peace Prize ... before he had done anything of note? In what ways did Obama move to end American involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan ... and with what results? What about the bin Laden takedown? How did the spreading spirit of revolt in the Middle East (the 2011 "Arab Spring") come to involve America – and with what results ... particularly in Libya and Syria? How was Russia now taking on a more familiar heavy hand in its politics both at home and abroad ... and China also? How did Obama and the West react to this? What was the effort to improve relations with Iran all about?

#### Unit 4 - pp. 455-481 (Into the Age of Trump)

Why was the 2016 election such a controversial event? How was research material developed by the Hillary campaign (the Steele dossier) claiming a pro-Trump "Russian connection" in that election used as a basis to try to impeach Trump? What were key elements of the Trump background and personality? What was happening during the very long investigation into the "Russian connection" ... and with what ultimate results? How were Trump's Supreme Court appointments designed to change the political disposition of the Court? On what basis did the Democrats attempt a second time to impeach Trump? How did the Corona Virus outbreak – and subsequent lockdown – impact America and the world politically and socially?

What was Trump's – and Congress's – response to the hordes of people heading to America across its border with Mexico? What was the new trade pact with Canada and Mexico? What was happening in Venezuela? How were China and Russia becoming more aggressive in their relations with America and the West? How about America's relations with the Arab or Muslim world? How was the Trump personality itself part of Trump's own foreign policy program ... and with what results – especially in Europe?

Why were the 2020 elections even more chaotic than the deeply contested 2016 elections?

#### Unit 5 - pp. 482-491 (Biden Takes Command)

What kind of personal background did Biden bring to the presidency? What was the nature of the numerous Executive Orders that Biden immediately put into effect on becoming US president? In what ways did he seek to continue Obama's "Change" right on into his own presidency? What was his position vis-à-vis the Mexican-American border-crossing into America of massive numbers of immigrants? Why was he so interested in "freeing up" the American voting process? What happened to Biden's efforts (like Roosevelt's in the 1930s) to increase the number of Supreme Court seats? What was his view on the matter of federal government spending ... and taxation? How well did he conduct the American withdrawal from Afghanistan?

#### Unit 6 - pp. 492-506 (The Lessons of History)

In what key ways does America seem deeply divided between two very different moral-spiritual approaches to life: the Spiritual or Christian approach and the Materialist or Mechanical approach? How has that actually always been the case ... even since America's early years in the 1600s? Why is the matter of God so controversial in America today? What are the essential differences between Human Reason and Divine Reason? Why are strong moral codes so vital to the strength and success of any society?

#### Unit 7 - pp. 506-523 (The Lessons of History)

Why is the moral character of a society's leaders also of critical importance to any society? Why is it so hard for some people to see God's hand in human history ... especially in this matter of God's long-standing covenant with America? What is Christian or Middle America to do today in the face of these challenges?