

## **RELIGION in the AMERICAN PUBLIC SPHERE**

(W44540 and V3803)

Prof. Courtney Bender  
cb337@columbia.edu  
504 Kent, 854-3716

### Course Description:

This seminar is designed to introduce students to tools and concepts for understanding the social organization of public religion in the United States. We will analyze the contemporary positioning of religion and religious interests within public life, using social scientific methods and theories. Analyzing religion's varied interactions within several public institutions and arenas provides an opportunity to develop a portrait of (a) the position(s) of religion within public space, and (b) the shifting boundaries of religious and non-religious activity, and (c) the consequences and implications of these interactions.

### Course Requirements:

Attendance and participation in class discussion (20%)

Weekly reading essays (30%)

A weekly, 3-4 page typed "memo" on the day's readings. Barring focusing on some particular problem or concern of your own, papers should address a "question" found at the heading of each week's topic. You may skip three memos.

Research paper (40%)

An independent research paper that deals with one or more cases, and one or more of the substantive issues addressed in the course. While the course will focus on the contemporary United States, those with appropriate expertise are encouraged to conduct research on historical or cross-national topics. A focused paper topic proposal and short bibliography (two pages) is due on 17 October.

Class presentations (10%)

Each student will present their final research (two-three sessions will be scheduled for student research presentations in lieu of a final examination).

Required Books available at Labyrinth and on reserve in Butler.

Berger, Peter. *The Sacred Canopy* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969).

Casanova, José. *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

Hammond, Phillip E. *With Liberty for All* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox,

1998).

Kertzer, *Ritual, Power, Politics* (Yale 1988).

Silk, Mark *Unsecular Media* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 1996).

Smith, Christian. *Resisting Reagan: The U.S. Central America Peace Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996).

Wineburg, Robert. *A Limited Partnership*. (Columbia, 2000)

*A READER of articles assigned will be available by mid-September at Copyquick (Amsterdam and 119th).*

Suggested Book (also available at Labyrinth)

Robert Alley. *The Constitution and Religion* (Prometheus 1999).

## Schedule of Readings and Discussion Subjects

5 September

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

12 September:

FRAMING OVERARCHING QUESTIONS: HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE AND PUBLIC RELIGIONS

*What is the public sphere, and where is religion's place or places in it? How is the place of religion in the American public sphere changing?*

Casanova, José. *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago, 1994) pp. 3-66.

Smith, Timothy. "Congregation, State and Denomination: The Forming of the American Religious Structure," *William and Mary Quarterly* 25:155-176 (1968).

Eck, Diana. "The Multireligious Public Square" (Routledge 1999).

Suggested:

Wald, Kenneth. *Religion and Politics*

Davis, Derek. *Religion and the Continental Congress, 1774-1789 : contributions to original intent* (Oxford 2000).

19 September:

CIVIL RELIGION I: PUBLIC RITUALS AND COMMEMORATIONS

*What makes a public event or commemoration "religious"? The "nascent" and not so nascent Christian and Protestant aspects of Bellah's interpretation of civil religion. How has this changed since its initial formulation?*

Bellah, Robert. "Civil Religion in America," pp. 168-189 in *Beyond Belief*.

Linenthal, Edward. "Introduction" and "Locating Holocaust Memory: The United States Holocaust Museum" pp. 1-35; 220-261 in *American Sacred Space* Chidester and Linenthal, eds.

Kertzer, David. *Ritual, Power, Politics* selections.

26 September:

CIVIL RELIGION II: RELIGIOUS OTHERS – THE CASE OF THE BRANCH DAVIDIANS

*if certain dominant religious views help constitute an American "civil religion," is there a contra-civil religion, or "uncivil" religions? How do public events, rituals, and the media help form dominant understanding of religious others? what does this say about the effects of religious pluralism outlined by Berger and others?*

Marvin, Carolyn and David Ingle. "Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Revisiting Civil Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*.

Ammerman, Nancy. "Report to the Justice and Treasury Departments Regarding Law Enforcement Interaction with the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas. September 1993.

[http://hrr.hartsem.edu/bookshelf/ammerman\\_article1.html](http://hrr.hartsem.edu/bookshelf/ammerman_article1.html)

Hall, John R. "From Jonestown to Waco" pp. 44-75 in *Apocalypse Observed* (Routledge 1999).

Silk, Mark. *Unsecular Media* (Illinois 1995). selections

3 October:

CULTURAL MODELS FOR STUDYING RELIGION IN SOCIETY

*"Moods and motivations," values and beliefs, practice. Ritual, religious and otherwise. What are the prospects and challenges to studying religious values and beliefs in "public" life?*

Geertz, Clifford. "Religion as a Cultural System," pp. 87-125 in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Basic, 1973).

Swidler, Ann. "Finding Culture," pp. 11-24 in *Talk of Love* (Chicago, 2001).

Kertzer, *Ritual, Power, Politics*, selections

Lal, Vinay. "Sikh Kirpans in California Schools: The Social Construction of Symbols, the Cultural Politics of Identity, and the Limits of Multiculturalism" in *New Spiritual Homes: Religion and Asian Americans*. (University of Hawaii 1999).

Suggested:

Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. trans. K. Fields (Free Press, 1997). [ask me for selections]

Wuthnow, *Meaning and Moral Order* (California, 1988).

Berger, Peter. *The Sacred Canopy*, part 1.

10 October:

INSTITUTIONAL APPROACHES TO STUDYING RELIGION IN SOCIETY

*Organizations, "institutions" big and small, rules, structures, and the like. Are religious organizations and institutions different from non-religious organizations? how so?*

Wuthnow, Robert. "Introduction" and "Cultural Production," pp. 1-39 in *Producing the Sacred* (Illinois 1994).

DiMaggio, Paul. "The Relevance of Organization Theory to the Study of Religion"

pp. 7-24 in *Sacred Companies* (Oxford 1997).

Williams, Rhys. "Constructing the Public Good: Social Movements and Cultural Resources." *Social Problems*. 42(1995): 124-144.

Yang and Ebaugh. " Transformations in New Immigrant Religions and Their Global Implications" *American Sociological Review* 66 (2001): 269-288.

17 October:

**TOPIC PROPOSAL DUE**

RELIGIOUS SOCIAL REFORM AND PROTEST MOVEMENTS

*Groups have often used resources within religious traditions to challenge or reform dominant forms of social life. How and when are such movements successful (and by what do we measure their success? How should we characterize the relationship between movements' public face and rhetoric and participants views and beliefs?*

Smith, Christian. *Resisting Reagan: The U.S. Central America Peace Movement* (Chicago 1996) **OR**

Special issue on Promise Keepers. *Sociology of Religion*. Spring 2000.

Williams, Rhys and and Jeffrey Blackburn. "Many are Called by Few Obey: Ideological Commitment and Activism in Operation Rescue," pp. 167-188 in *Disruptive Religion*, ed. Christian Smith (Routledge 1996).

Suggested:

Ginsburg, Faye. *Contested Lives: the Abortion Debate in an American Community* (California 1989)

Thomas, George. "Cultural Analysis of Religious Change and Movements." *Sociological Inquiry* 55 (1996): 285-302.

Morris, Aldon. *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*. (Free Press 1984)

24 October

CHURCH AND STATE: THE COURTS

*How is religion defined and legitimated in the courts? What trends can we see, historically and currently?*

Hammond, Phillip. *With Liberty for All: Freedom of Religion in the United States* (Westminster 1998).

U.S. Supreme Court decision related to free exercise. *One be summarized and commented upon with a partner (3-5 pages). Be prepared to discuss/present in class:*

*Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe* (2000).

*City of Boerne v. Flores* (1997)

*Employment Division v. Smith* (1990)

*Wisconsin v. Yoder* (1972)

*United States v. Seeger* (1965)

*Torcaso v. Watkins* (1961)

Cases can be read in the Law Library (bound volumes) or in somewhat edited form in Robert S. Alley, ed. *The Constitution and Religion* (Prometheus 1999). *Santa Fe* is still posted on the USSC "sliplists" web page.

31 October

RELIGIOUS SPECIAL INTERESTS: RELIGION AND DOMESTIC POLITICS

*Religious groups have had differential success when becoming involved in politics. How do such groups frame their positions? Likewise, in recent times we have heard more about the "success" of religious conservatives in pushing moral agendas than of religious liberals. Why is this the case?*

Wuthnow, Robert. "Special Interests," pp. 88-104 in *Producing the Sacred*.  
Casanova, José. *Public Religions in the Modern World*. chs. 6 and 7.

Suggested:

Graber Miller, Keith. *Wise as Serpents, Innocent as Doves : American Mennonites Engage Washington*. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1996).

7 November

CHARITABLE CHOICE: RELIGIOUS NON-PROFIT SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

*Religious groups have often worked in the voluntary sector, providing succor to the poor, hungry, and sick. As welfare and entitlements decrease in the contemporary American scene, rhetoric suggesting that churches and communities should provide for their own has increased. How have religious groups provided for the poor, how are they doing so now, and what should we make of this rhetoric?*

Chaves, Mark. "Religious Congregations and Welfare Reform: Who Will Take Advantage of "Charitable Choice"?" *American Sociological Review* 64 (1999): 836-846.

Wineburg, Robert. *A Limited Partnership*. (Columbia 2000).

"Charitable Choice" web page of the Center for Public Justice (A Christian think tank) <http://www.cpjustice.org/>

Suggested:

Allahyari, *Visions of Charity* (California 2000).

14 November

CONGREGATIONS AND COMMUNITIES: LOCAL INITIATIVES AND SOCIAL PRACTICES

*Churches and synagogues (and increasingly temples and mosques) are permanent fixtures in neighborhood landscapes. But what roles do play in their local communities, and in informing broadly shaped notions of public discourse?*

Marty, Martin. "Public and Private" Congregation as Meeting Place," in *American Congregations*, volume 2. (Chicago 1994).

Ammerman, Nancy. *Congregation and Community* (Rutgers 1997) selections.

Becker, Penny Edgell. *Congregations in Conflict* (Cambridge 2000) selections.

21 November: no class meeting

28 November

RELIGIOUS TALK IN DAILY LIFE: RECENT COMMENTS ON "PUBLIC" RELIGION AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Berger, Peter. *The Sacred Canopy* chs. 2, 5-7.

Wolfe, Alan. "A Quiet Faith," in *One Nation, After All*

Bender, Courtney "Introduction" and chs. 4-5, *Heaven's Kitchen: Practicing Religion at God's Love We Deliver*

Suggested:

Nina Eliasoph. *Avoiding Politics*. (Cambridge 1998).

4 December, 7-9 p.m.; 5 December; potentially another meeting during the following week:

Class presentations