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## Ira Chernus

PROFESSOR OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES  
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO AT BOULDER

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# SYLLABUS

RLST 5030, sec. 002

Fall, 2006

Seminar in the Academic Study of Religion:

Prof. Ira Chernus

Topics: American Civil Religions

This course will:

1. explore the notion of “American Civil Religion” as an academic category
2. examine the history of that notion and critiques of it
3. test that category against a range of historical data, including the war on terrorism.
4. set the discussion in the context of some classic theories in the academic study of religion

### REQUIRED READINGS:

Richard T. HUGHES, *Myths America Lives By*, University of Illinois Press

Robert BELLAH, *The Broken Covenant*, 2nd ed., University of Chicago Press

Marcela CRISTI, *From Civil to Political Religion*, Wilfred Laurier University Press

John F. WILSON, *Religion and the American Nation*, University of Georgia Press

Ira CHERNUS, *Monsters To Destroy*, Paradigm Publishers

These books are available at the LEFTHAND BOOKSTORE, 1200 Pearl Street (just east of Broadway, south side of mall, lower level). They are usually open 10:00-9:00 Monday - Saturday and noon-6:00 Sunday; call 443-8252 to check exact hours. They take cash, check, and Visa and Mastercards.

John F. Wilson, *Public Religion in American Culture*, Temple University Press. This book is out of print and should be purchased used. (Check Amazon.com, Abebooks.com, etc.)

You will find links to all of the other reading in the online syllabus, linked from the course home page: <http://www.colorado.edu/ReligiousStudies/chernus/CivilReligions/index.htm> Please rely on the online syllabus, rather than this print version, because the syllabus may change during the course.

I will have office hours in Humanities 284 on Wednesday 1:00 – 2:00 and at other times by appointment: [chernus@colorado.edu](mailto:chernus@colorado.edu); 303-492-6169; 720-494-9011

I will be glad to make appropriate accommodations for any student with any kind of special needs for enhancing your education.

### SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS:

Sept. 11: The Classical Theory of American Civil Religion

BELLAH (whole book); Ira Chernus, [Nuclear Madness](#), 47-56; Eric Sharpe, [Comparative Religion](#), 82-86; Brian Morris, [Anthropological Studies of Religion](#), 106-122; Durkheim, [Elementary Forms of Religious Life](#), 37-57

## Sept. 18: The Theoretical Foundation

CRISTI 1-73; Pierard and Linder, [\*Civil Religion and the Presidency\*](#), 30-47; Durkheim, [\*Elementary Forms of Religious Life\*](#), 235-261, 454-479

## Sept. 25: American Civil Religion and its Critics

CRISTI, 55-68, 74-89; John F. Wilson, "[The Shape of the National Covenant](#)," "[The Religious Meanings of Community](#)," "[Civil Religion as a Revitalization Movement](#)" (from *Public Religion in American Culture*); WILSON, *Religion and the American Nation*; Donald Jones, "[Civil and Public Religion](#)," *Encyclopedia of American Religious Experience*, 1398-1408; N.J. Demerath and Rhys Williams, "[Civil Religion in an Uncivil Society](#)," *Annals of the American Academy* 480 (July, 1985), 154-166; James Mathison, "[Twenty Years After Bellah](#)," *Sociological Analysis* 50 (Summer, 1989), 129-149; James Mathison, "[Twenty Years After Bellah](#)," *Sociological Analysis* 50 (Summer, 1989), 129-149; Ira Chernus, "[Unpublished Fragments](#)"

## Oct. 2: American Civil Religion and Multiculturalism: The Perspectives of Max Weber and Reinhold Niebuhr

HUGHES, ix-89; Brian Morris, [\*Anthropological Studies of Religion\*](#), 51-79; Ira Chernus, [review](#) of "Myths America Lives By"; Ira Chernus, *American Nonviolence*, "[Reinhold Niebuhr](#)." To read Niebuhr's own writings, go to online syllabus for my nonviolence course:

<http://www.colorado.edu/ReligiousStudies/chernus/4800/SyllabusFall2004.htm> and read assignments for Oct. 21 - Nov. 2.

## Oct. 9: American Civil Religion and Multiculturalism: The Perspective of Michel Foucault

HUGHES, 91- 195; Paul Rabinow, "[Introduction](#)" (from *The Foucault Reader*), 3-27; Richard Harland, "[Foucault as Archaeologist](#)" and "[Foucault as Genealogist](#)" (from *Superstructuralism*), 101-116, 155-166; Madan Sarup, "[Foucault and the Social Sciences](#)" (from *PostStructuralism and Postmodernism*), 58-75, 80-87

## Oct. 16: American Civil Religion and Multiculturalism: Diverse Perspectives

"[Forum: American Civil Religion Revisited](#)," *Religion and American Culture* 4(1), 1994, 1-23; Rita Kirk Whillock, "[Dream Believers](#): The Unifying Visions and Competing Values of Adherents to American Civil Religion," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 24(2), 1994, 375-388; Charles Long, "[Interpretations of Black Religion in America](#)," (from *Significations*), 148-155; Randi Jones Walker, "[Liberators For Colonial Anahuac](#): A RuminatiOn On North American Civil Religions," *Religion and American Culture* 9(2), 1999, 183-203; Mircea Eliade, "[Paradise and Utopia](#)" (from *The Quest*), 88 - 101; Catherine Albanese, "[Dominant and Public Center](#)," 202-217;

## Oct. 23: From Civil to Political Religion, Part I

CRISTI, 91-163

## Oct. 30: From Civil to Political Religion, Part II

Nov. 6: American Civil Religion and Twentieth-Century History

Robert Simon, [Gramsci's Political Thought](#), 18-28; Enrico Augelli and Craig Murphy, "[Gramsci's Understanding of Ideology](#)" and "[Elements of Common Sense in America](#)," (from *America's Quest for Supremacy and the Third World*), 13-29, 35-52; Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, [chapter 10](#) and [chapter 11](#); C.D.B. Bryan, *Friendly Fire*, 54-59; Gary Wills, "[Original Sinlessness](#)," (from *Reagan's America*), 449-460; Martin Marty, *Modern American Religion*, vol. 3, "A Civic Religion of the American Way of Life," 294-332; Ira Chernus, "[The Word 'Peace' as a Weapon of \(Cold\) War](#)," *Peace Review*, December, 1998, 605-611; Ira Chernus, "[Eisenhower: Faith and Fear in the Fifties](#)"

Nov. 13: Neoconservatives and the Religious Right

CHERNUS, Introduction and chapters 1 - 6; Edward Tabor Linenthal, "[War and Sacrifice in the Nuclear Age](#)," (from Chernus and Linenthal, eds., *A Shuddering Dawn*), 20-32;

Nov. 27: American Civil Religion and the War on Terrorism

Robert Bellah, "[Seventy Five Years](#)," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, February, 2002; CHERNUS, chapters 7 - 14

Dec. 4: Alternatives: American Civil Religions?

CHERNUS, Conclusion; Ira Chernus, "[Martin Luther King, Jr.](#)" (from *American Nonviolence*)

Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*: Song of Myself, Song of the Exposition, Song of the Redwood Tree, Song of the Universal, Pioneers! O Pioneers!, With Antecedents, A Broadway Pageant, By Blue Ontario's Shores, Thou Mother With Thy Equal Brood, Rise O Days from Your Fathomless Deeps, The Centenarian's Story, Come Up From the Fields Father, Vigil Strange I Kept, Over the Carnage Rose, Spirit Whose Work is Done, Adieu to a Soldier, Turn O Libertad

Get an edition of *Leaves of Grass* that includes Whitman's essay, "Democratic Vistas," and read as much of the essay as you can.

Dec. 11: Presentations of Student Research

## **COURSE RESPONSIBILITIES:**

Everyone is responsible for coming to class well prepared to discuss the reading.

The major writing responsibility is a research paper analyzing one manifestation or example of civil religions in light of some of the theoretical models we study.

DEADLINES for research project:

OCTOBER 2: research topic approved

OCTOBER 30: preliminary outline and bibliography

NOVEMBER 27: rough draft

DECEMBER 18: final paper due

In addition, each student will write four short (appx. 5 page) papers responding to the reading and give class presentations and lead discussion based on those papers.