

Religion in Multicultural America

Fall Term 1997

Tuesday and Thursday at 11:00

This course is an exploration of the changing religious landscape of the United States, looking at the history and dynamic interaction of the various religious traditions that now compose the American religious scene. We will look briefly at Native American, Christian, and Jewish traditions, but our focuses will be more on the religious life of Asian-Americans -- Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Jain -- and on the African-American and immigrant traditions of Islam. Throughout we will maintain a dual focus on how the various religious traditions are changing in the American environment and how America is changing in this new multireligious context. This course will use the Pluralism Project CD-ROM, *On Common Ground: World Religions in America* as our basic text. This CD-ROM is available at a discounted price at the Harvard Coop and at the Harvard Divinity School Bookstore. It may also be accessed from the Harvard Network in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences.

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Course Website:

<http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/religion1007>

The website will have information about the course, the syllabus, assignments, announcements, and information on how to access *On Common Ground*. It also contains an image base and a link to the Pluralism Project homepage, which, in turn, links to the websites of a variety of religious traditions.

Sept. 16 (Tu) Introduction: Multicultural/Multireligious America

What are the changing religious demographics of the U.S.? What are the religious dimensions of America's multiculturalism? What are the ways in which difference is designated in the U.S.?

Sept. 18 (Th) Introduction: On Common Ground, An Orientation

What are the contestations, the problems, the opportunities of a more complex religious pattern in the U.S.? What difference does it make that the United States is now a "multireligious" nation?

Workshop: Access *On Common Ground* from the Network or from your own CD-ROM disk. Explore "A New Religious Landscape" by selecting one city or region to investigate, and explore "America's Many Religions" by selecting a religious tradition you know little about and investigating the range of information contained in the CD-ROM. If you want some guidance, you can access and download the *Guide for Teachers and Students*: <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/cup/ocg>. For background on the Pluralism Project and its resources, look at the website: <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~pluralism>.

Reading: ["The Mosque Next Door: Neighboring Faiths,"](#) Harvard Magazine.

Sept. 23 (Tu) Immigration: A Multireligious History

What encounters with religious difference have shaped the history of the United States? What is the early history of Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, and Muslim America?

On this day immediately after class there will be a special orientation at the Computer Classroom (Science Center Room 120) from 12:15 to 1:00.

Sept. 25 (Th) Tolerance? Melting Pot? Exclusion? Universalism? Cultural Pluralism?

What are some of the ways in which diversity and unity, *pluribus* and *unum*, have been approached in the making of America? What have been some of America's strategies for defining and dealing with difference?

Resources: *On Common Ground*: Look at "Encountering Religious Diversity," especially the Historical Perspectives sections on Asians and Asian Exclusion; God's Melting Pot; The Right to be Different; Xenophobia: Closing the Door; A Three Religion Country.

Additional Reading: Philip Gleason, "The Melting Pot: Symbol of Fusion or Confusion?"

Sept. 27 (Tu) Religious Freedom: Native America--The Land, the "Frontier," the Encounter

What does "America" look like from the perspective of its Native peoples? What range of attitudes have shaped Native-Christian encounters?

Oct. 2 (Th) Religious Freedom

What were the issues at stake in the passage of the Native American Religious Freedom Act? The Smith Decision? The Lyng Decision? How has the issue of religious freedom been raised by Sikhs? By Santeria Practitioners? By Pagans?

Resources: *On Common Ground* : "Encountering Religious Diversity" Historical Perspectives, Section on Native Americans and Christians (Documents); "America's Many Religions" Native American Section; "Encountering Religious Diversity," Today's Challenges, Section on Encounter in the Courts.

Reading: Christopher Vescey, ed. *Handbook of American Indian Religious Freedom*, Prologue; Chapters 1, 4, & 5.

Oct. 7 (Tu) Christian America: The American myth, then and now

What does it mean to speak of a "Christian America"? What was the Christian composition of the country in 1700? In 1850? In 1950? In 1990?

Oct. 9 (Th) Christian America: The contestation and controversy

What are the presuppositions and arguments over whether the United States is a Christian country? [David Bains]

Resources: *On Common Ground*: "America's Many Religions," Section on Christianity, especially looking at Christianity in America; "Encountering Religious Diversity," Sections on Establishment or Tolerance (Documents); The Free Exercise of Religion; African Religion in America

Reading: Look at Robert T. Handy, *Christian America* (Chapters II- IV) or Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, Chapter 9, "Christian Power in the American Republic."

Oct. 14 (Tu) Catholic and Jewish Americans

How were questions of diversity first addressed with the coming of large Catholic and Jewish immigrant populations? How have these questions continued in American life? What was the significance of the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions?

Oct. 16 (Th) The Triple Melting Pot: Protestant, Catholic, Jew

What did Will Herberg mean by the "triple melting pot?" How did John Courtney Murray address the question of Catholic participation in the American pluralist project?

Resources: *On Common Ground*: "Encountering Religious Diversity" Historical Perspectives sections on Catholic and Jewish Immigrants (Documents); Parliament of Religions 1893 (Documents: especially Hirsch) God's Melting Pot (Documents), and The Right to be Different (Documents); Xenophobia: Closing the Door (Documents); A Three Religion Country (Documents)

Additional Reading: Selections from Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew*; John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths*.

Oct. 21 (Tu) Buddhism in America: The Buddhist Churches of America; The Fo Kuang Buddhist Movement. Chinese, Japanese, Korean Buddhism

Oct. 22 (W) "Becoming the Buddha in LA": Film on Buddhism through the lens of the city of Los Angeles

Oct. 23 (Th) Buddhism in America: South East Asian Traditions

Resources: *On Common Ground*: "America's Many Religions" Section on Buddhism.

Additional Reading: Stuart Chandler, "Chinese Buddhism in America: Identity and Practice," Alfred Bloom, "Shin Buddhism in America: A Social Perspective," and A.W. Barber & Cuong Nguyen, "Vietnamese Buddhism in America: Tradition and Acculturation," in Charles Prebish and Kenneth Tanaka, eds. *The Faces of Buddhism in America* (manuscript).

Oct. 28 (Tu) The Traditions of "New Buddhists" in the United States

What forms and streams of Buddhism have been adopted and adapted by Euro-Americans? How would you describe the various forms of Euro-American Buddhism?

Before or during this week you are encouraged to attend a session at one of the Buddhist meditation centers in Cambridge. See the Pluralism Project book, *World Religions in Boston: A Guide to Communities and Resources*.

Oct. 30 (Th) Buddhist Practice and American Pragmatism

What has been and continues to be the distinctive appeal of Buddhism to Americans not born as Buddhists? What aspects of the Buddhist tradition have become central?

Resources: *On Common Ground*: "America's Many Religions" Section on Buddhism

Additional Reading: Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America*

Nov. 1 (Sat) Deepavali Celebration: Sri Lakshmi Temple, Ashland

Nov. 4 (Tu) Vivekananda, Yoga, and Krishna Consciousness

What forms of Hinduism were first introduced in the U.S. and how have they shaped American ideas about the Hindu tradition? How have Hindus of the "new immigration" responded to these earlier forms of Hindu presence in the U.S.?

Nov. 6 (Th) Hindus, Sikhs, and Jains in the United States

What are the forms of religious life being transplanted in the U.S. from South Asia? What new questions do Hindus, Jains, and Sikhs have to face in the American environment? What "adaptive strategies" do these communities use? How important is "religion?" "culture?" "ethnicity?"

Resources: *On Common Ground*: "America's Many Religions" Sections on Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism

Additional Reading: Raymond Williams, *Religions of Immigrants from India: New Threads in the American Tapestry*

Nov. 11 (Tu) Veterans Day Holiday

Nov. 13 (Th) Constructing and Defining Hinduism

What are the kinds of temples and religious institutions being built by Hindus in America? What kinds of traditions do they reflect? What are the challenges of Hindu continuity in America?

Resources: *On Common Ground*: Sections on Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism

Additional Reading: Raymond Williams, *Religions of Immigrants from India: New Threads in the American Tapestry*

Nov. 18 (Tu) Hinduism in America: The Problematic of Pluralism

Does the Hindu tradition of multiple gods and ways of religious life make positive and reinforcing contribution to the ideal of American pluralism?

Nov. 20 (Th) Islam in America: African American Traditions

What has been the strong appeal of Islam to African Americans? What are the major periods of African American Islam? What are its major streams today?

Resources: *On Common Ground*: "America's Many Religions" Section on the Islamic Tradition; "Encountering Religious Diversity" Historical Perspectives Section on African Religion in America

Additional Reading: Aminah Beverly McCloud, *African American Islam*.

Nov. 25 (Tu) Islam in America: A Case-Study of Los Angeles Muslims

What does the Muslim community of Southern California look like today? What is its history? What have been its concerns? tensions? problems? challenges?

[Kambiz GhaneaBassiri]

Nov. 27 (Th) Thanksgiving Holiday

Dec. 2 (Tu) Islam in America

When and from what parts of the world have Muslim immigrants come to the U.S.? What concerns have shaped the American Muslim community through the decades? In what ways have Muslims encountered stereotypes about Islam?

Dec. 4 (Th) Islam in America: The Problematic of Pluralism

How do Muslims understand their role as engaged participants in a pluralist society? What are some of the forms of Muslim political and civic participation today?

Dec. 5 (F) Visits to Boston area mosques

Resources: *On Common Ground*: "America's Many Religions" Section on Islam; "Encountering Religious Diversity," Many Sections of Today's Challenges

Additional Reading: Chapters from Yvonne Haddad, *The Muslims of America*. Selections from *The Minaret*; *The AMC Report*; Hassan Hathout et al., *In Fraternity: A Message to Muslims in America*.

Dec. 9 (Tu) Multiculturalism and Pluralism: The Discussion Today, What contributions do various public intellectuals make to the discussion on pluralism? To what extent is "religion" a category of analysis in their work?

Dec. 11 (Th) Interfaith America: Distinctive Issues of Religious Pluralism

How has the "interfaith" movement developed the United States? What are the public, private, and theological implications of the burgeoning of interfaith activities?

Resources: *On Common Ground*: "Encountering Religious Diversity" Today's Challenges. Many sections.

Additional Reading: Robert Bellah (*The Broken Covenant*); Michael Walzer (*What it Means to be an American*); Charles Taylor and Amy Gutmann, (*Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition*) Steven Carter (*The Culture of Disbelief*); Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. (*The Disuniting of America*); Nathan Glazer (*We are All Multiculturalists Now*).

Dec. 16 (Tu) Class Forum on Religion in Multicultural America

Presentations, Discussion, and Debate

Requirements:

1. Participation in a weekly discussion section, having explored the questions posed for each week.
2. Site visits to at least two religious centers
3. Four critical reflection papers, one of which should be on one of the religious centers you have visited; the other three on questions to be posed from the materials in the CD-ROM.
4. A final term paper of approximately 20 pages, due January 14, the first day of the examination period. You should frame a topic that is of vital interest to you. It could involve library research, internet research, fieldwork, or a combination of the three. No matter what specific topic you select, your paper should investigate one or more religious traditions and the specifically American context. It could be an historical paper, for example, on the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions, on various "church-state" issues, or on the history and development of one of the religious traditions in the U.S. It could be a more theoretical paper, addressing some of the literature on pluralism, multiculturalism, and the issues of "identity" in the U.S. from the perspective of religious analysis. It could be a fieldwork paper on a temple, mosque, interfaith council, or organization. In other words, you have a great deal of latitude, but also a great deal of responsibility in posing the questions that will guide your research. There is an extensive bibliography in *On Common Ground*. The Pluralism Project office in Vanserg 201 has extensive files on temples, mosques, gurdwaras, etc. as well as a

library with periodicals, newsletters, videos, tapes, and books. Please call to arrange a visit the Pluralism Project early in the semester to acquaint yourself with what is there. The phone number is 496-2481; the Project Manager is Elinor J. Pierce.

Resources:

Our primary resource for the course is *On Common Ground: World Religions in America*, a CD-ROM edited by Diana L. Eck and published by Columbia University Press, 1997.

This is the primary required reading for the course. Since it has just been published, this course also provides a first critical review of its classroom use. If you access *On Common Ground* from the Harvard network, note that the button "About this CD-ROM" on the Home page contains some basic orientation.

How do you get access to *On Common Ground*?

¥ The best way is to buy the CD-ROM. It may be purchased at the Harvard Coop textbook section or at the Harvard Divinity School Bookstore in the basement of the Divinity. At HDS, please ask for *On Common Ground* at the cash register, since it will be sold only to people registered for this course.

¥ For those in FAS houses or dorms, *On Common Ground* may be accessed in your room from the FAS network. Use the instructions found on the Religion 1007 website:
<http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/religion1007>

¥ FAS students may use the computers in the Computer Center in the basement of the Science Center; HDS students may use the computers in the basement of Andover Library.

¥ Many of Harvard's libraries and buildings also have computer rooms. The Barker Center (2nd floor) has a computer room, for example.

Additional readings are on reserve in Andover, Lamont, and Hilles Libraries. Where an article is assigned for reading or discussion, it will be handed out in class. Many of the additional readings have also been ordered for purchase at the Harvard Coop or the HDS Bookstore for the convenience of those of you especially interested in a topic or disinclined to read the occasional chapter or two on reserve. For those interested in focused work on Buddhism or Islam, for instance, you may find it helpful to invest in your own copy of one of these books.

Books ordered for those who may wish to purchase them include:

¥ Christopher Vescey, ed. *Handbook of American Indian Religious Freedom* (New York: Crossroad, 1991).

¥ Robert T. Handy, *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

¥ Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore, A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Penguin, 1989).

¥ Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America* (Boston: Shambhala, 1992).

¥ Raymond Williams, *Religions of Immigrants from India and Pakistan: New Threads in the American Tapestry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

¥ Aminah Beverly McCloud, *African American Islam* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

¥ Yvonne Haddad, *The Muslims of America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

¥ Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, reprinted 1983).