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Office Hours: *by appointment only*
F 11:30a-12:20p
W afternoons, time varies

SOC375: RELIGION AND AMERICAN CULTURE

Spring 2007
F, 12:30-3:20 pm in SSB321

Course Purpose and Description: To correctly understand U.S. culture, one must understand the religions that influenced, and continue to influence, its citizens. Religion oriented the entire lives of early colonists, impacting the institutions they created, the interactions they had, and the cultural norms they established. Today, religion is just as influential in American culture. It shapes the personal realms of its citizens, as well as every institution within it (e.g., school curricula, genetic research, foreign policy). Grasping some of the complex ways religion influences, and is influenced by, American cultural processes will be of value to any interested citizen, and especially to those who seek to better understand the dynamic interplay of religion and American culture in the making of American individuals.

Students successfully completing this course, then, will have achieved several important learning goals. First, they will appreciate the commonalities of American religious groups, the diversity of these same groups, and the interrelationships of these groups with American culture and postmodern society. Second, they will gain an overview of how scholars interpret religion in society, both historically and recently. Third, they will differentiate sociological from other perspectives on religion (e.g., psychological, theological, historical), and will be able to apply a sociological perspective to religion in contemporary society. To achieve these goals, this course will present students with various opportunities to observe and consider religion and American culture. Opportunities will include two (possibly three) mandatory field experiences, intensive reading from a variety of texts, guest presentations, film documentaries, and course discussions.

Learning Goals:

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

- Use key concepts (e.g., meaning system, modernity, post-modernity, plausibility structure, discourse, cultural repertoire, formal organization, charisma, legitimation) to analyze American religion.
- Apply key concepts and theories to observation and analysis of formally organized, nascent, and amorphous religious groups.
- Critique reductionist theories of religion, using empirical evidence and social construction theory.
- Critique functionalist theories of religion, using empirical evidence and critical theory.
- Articulate the complex web of relationships among American religion, power/politics, race/ethnicity, education, social stratification, and family life.
- Contrast U.S. religious life with that of European countries, and describe the diverse ways American exceptionalism has been used and abused as an explanatory tool.
- Articulate important intersections between religion and family life, and between religion and the life course of contemporary U.S. residents.
- Distinguish historically significant and widely-subscribed U.S. religions -- in particular, Conservative Protestantism, Mainline Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, Judaism, and Islam.

Required Readings:

- Peter L. Berger. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. Anchor, 1969.
Tim Clydesdale. *The First Year Out: Understanding American Teens after High School*. University of Chicago Press, 2007
Lynn Davidman. *Tradition in a Rootless World*. Univ of California Press, 1991
Mark Juergensmeyer. *Terror and the Mind of God*. Univ of California Press, 2001.
Christian Smith with Melinda Denton. *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. Oxford University Press, 2005.
Robert Wuthnow. *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since 1950*. Univ of California Press, 1998

Students must also read the following photocopied articles by

- Peter L. Berger. "Secularization & Pluralism" Pp. 25-46 in *A Far Glory: The Quest for Faith in an Age of Credulity*. Anchor Books, 1992.
Steve Bruce. "Religion in the United States" Pp 204-228 in *God is Dead: Secularization in the West*. Blackwell, 2002.
Harry Collins & Trevor Pinch. "Introduction," "Edible Knowledge," and "Conclusion." in *The Golem: What You Should Know about Science, 2nd Edition*. Cambridge University Press, 1998.
Robert Wuthnow. 3 chapters from *The Restructuring of American Religion*. Princeton University Press, 1988
Rosabeth Moss Kanter. 3 chapters from *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective*. Harvard University Press, 1972.
R. Stephen Warner. 1993. "Work in Progress Toward a New Paradigm for the Sociology of Religion." *American Journal of Sociology*. Vol 98.

The professor also reserves the right to add articles throughout the course (and you have the right to suggest the same), based on the course of our class discussions, student interest, and current events.

Required Costs:

You will be required to attend two (possibly 3, depending on final enrollment of the course) field trips, and these may either require transportation "co-pays" (whether or not you ride in the bus or van), or arranging your own transportation to/from the field site.

Course Policies:

1. *Attendance and Participation:* Students demonstrate their commitment to learning by regularly attending class, by arriving *on time* and *staying for the full class period*, by contributing usefully to class and e-discussions, by doing their part to create an atmosphere of respectful and serious learning, and *by reading the assigned material in advance of the class*. You will be expected to so express your commitment in this class, with 15% of your final grade based on your class readiness & participation. You may also expect that I will start class promptly, end on time, answer your questions fully and respectfully, return your exams and papers in a timely manner, and be available to meet with you during my office hours.
2. *Papers and Examinations:* Students demonstrate their academic seriousness by turning in all papers and assignments on time, and by rigorously maintaining the highest standards of academic writing. This includes (but is not limited to) spelling, grammar, style, documentation, and format (thus, papers & assignments should be, except where noted, typed on 8.5x11 inch white paper, double-spaced, with 1 inch margins and a 10-12 point typeface, stapled in the upper left-hand corner--*no manila/plastic/cardboard covers, please*). Dedicated students for whom this presents a challenge will avail themselves of the college's writing center. *Please note I have strict paper limits:* it is far harder to write a brief, focused paper than to write a long one – allow plenty of time for editing and rewriting. I have VERY high standards about written work!
 - a. *All assignments must be turned in on time.* Overwork, personal struggles, and the like are important issues, and I encourage you to avail yourselves of your residence staff, student development staff, or the college's counselors for help in these matters. Such issues,

however, do not constitute a valid excuse for lateness. Neither do variations on “the computer ate my paper,” “I can’t get the computer to print,” “I submitted it to SOCS,” or “Didn’t you get my paper in the mail?” count as valid excuses. Valid excuses are a death in the immediate family or severe illness (which I will confirm with family members, the Dean of Students, &/or the Health Center). Late papers are *severely* penalized (i.e., 5 points for papers not turned in *at the start of class*, 10 points for papers arriving after class on the day assigned, 20 points the following day, 30 points the day after that). Papers and assignments must be turned in on time. Thanks to SOCS, I can see exactly when you submitted your assignments to me.

b. Likewise, *examinations must be taken at the scheduled time*. Only those with official TCNJ activities (e.g., field trips, athletic teams), or the valid reasons specified above, may reschedule their examinations. No make-up exams will be given to students who notify the professor *after* the exam has taken place, unless they were incapacitated and physically unable to call beforehand (i.e., unconscious in a hospital). Make-up examination format is at my discretion (usually an oral examination).

c. *Plagiarism/Cheating* will be prosecuted to the fullest extent possible. Don’t be foolish--you don’t want me as your adversary. I have respect for the student who accepts the consequences of poor preparation and turns in his/her *own* work. Do what is honorable and right.

3. *Grading Distribution*: Your course grade will be based on the following percentages:

Class Readiness & Participation	15%
Reading Notes/2&2 Questions	5%
Field Experience Papers (2 @ 12.5% or 3 @ 8.33%)	25%
Midterm Exam	25%
Final Exam	<u>30%</u>
TOTAL	100%

Grade distribution is the traditional 0 to 100 point scale: 93-100=A, 90-92=A-, 87-89=B+, 83-86=B, 80-82=B-, 77-79=C+, 73-76=C, 70-72=C-, 67-69=D+, 60-66=D, less than 60=F.

4. *E-mail & SOCS*: I will be making extensive use of e-mail and the course website on SOCS. Remember, if you don’t use your TCNJ e-mail address, put in a forwarding order so that you’ll receive notices (you are required by college policy to check your TCNJ e-mail for notices, etc.)

Course Assignments:

1. *Reading Notes; 2&2 Questions*: We will be reading a number of different texts/articles this semester, and it is imperative that you come prepared to discuss these in class. To facilitate this, you will submit to me at the start of each class two items: 1) a one-page, single-sided sheet of reading notes, and 2) one-page with at least 2 reading clarification questions and at least 2 discussion questions. Let me explain how each of these sheets will be processed:

The *reading notes* will not be graded, I will simply record their presence/absence each week, and save them until the exam. During the in-class component of the exams, which are otherwise closed-book, you will receive these reading notes back to assist you. So it is clearly in your interest to do the best job you can each week with your one-page, single-sided sheet of reading notes. How you format/design these is entirely up to you – just make sure your name and the date of the class is written clearly on them, and that you stick to one-side of one regular-size (8.5 x 11) sheet of paper. IMPORTANT NOTE: I shall do everything I can to ensure the safekeeping of these notes; however, a page of notes may get separated from the rest and lost -- while this is unfortunate, I will not allow you to reschedule the exam if this occurs. What I will do is give everyone an opportunity, before the exam begins, to check that they have all their notes, and if any are missing, and let me know if any are missing so that I can print a replacement page from the SOCS at that moment.

The *2&2 Questions* will be graded – on a check, check-plus, check-minus, or no credit scale. I will use these questions to guide our discussion in each class, beginning first with the

clarification questions, then moving to the discussion questions. For the clarification questions, don't be afraid to write what you fear may be a "dumb" question. There are no dumb questions; chances are, if you are confused by something in the readings, others are too. For the discussion questions, you want to ask questions that are not factual ("what" and "when") but analytical and interpretive in nature. Often, these questions stem from a "why" or "how." Keep in mind the class restriction on theological and moral discourse: don't submit questions that require theological or normative (moral) judgments/analysis. Submit at least 2 questions in each category that are addressed to that week's readings.

2. *Field Experiences & Papers*: It would be a crime to teach this class and never take advantage firsthand of the vivid examples of American religious that surround us. Hence, we will do two (possibly three) **mandatory** field trips. *You must attend these field trips*. One trip will be to Sunday worship services at Shiloh Baptist Church in Trenton, NJ, and last from 10 am to 3 pm. For the other trips, we will visit a Mosque for Friday prayers and observe a Shabbat service at a synagogue. These trips will last approximately 4 hours. Depending on the final enrollment of the course, we will do both or split up to do these field trips. Specific information will be distributed in class as the details are determined for these trips.

You will also write a three page (no longer than 3 pages, double-spaced) paper of "*reflections and connections*" for each field trip. That is, a paper in which you *reflect* upon what you observed/experienced – how the field experience helped you understand or see things in a new or more vivid way (if true) – and in which you *connect* your observations/experience with specific concepts discussed in course readings. Again, no more than 3 pages, and it is due in SOCS on the date indicated. The best papers identify one or two key observations and then make thoughtful connections to the texts, key concepts, and possibly other course materials (a guest speaker, documentary). The worst papers present one's emotional reactions only, write long lists of things that were observed, and lack insightful and specific connections to the course texts.

3. *Exams*: There will be two essay examinations. Both exams will include a take-home and an in-class component. All take-home examination questions will have a strict word limit (e.g., 300 words per question). You will receive the questions over e-mail, and must submit them using the virtual dropbox on SOCS, by the date and time indicated. The in-class exams will be closed-book, except for the reading notes described above.

Course Schedule (tentative; field trips and reflection papers are still to be scheduled, and your professor reserves the right to adjust):

Date:	What's happening:	What's due:
Aug 31	Course Welcome; Opening Documentary	Kanter, skim excerpts from <i>Commitment & Community</i>
Sept 7	Religion in American Life, part 1	Davidman, Ch 1-4 Wuthnow, <i>After Heaven</i> , pref, Ch 1-2
14	Religion in American Life, part 2	Davidman, Ch 5-8 Wuthnow, excerpts from <i>Restructuring of Am Religion</i> .
21	Religion in American Life, part 3	Wuthnow, <i>After Heaven</i> , Ch 3-8
28	Religion & Modernity, part 1	Berger, pref, Ch 1-2 Collins & Pinch, excerpts from <i>The Golem</i>
Oct 5	Religion & Modernity, part 2	Berger, Ch 3-7
12	The Secularization Debate	Bruce, excerpt from <i>God is Dead</i> Warner, "New Paradigm," AJS Berger, excerpts from <i>A Far Glory</i> .
19	Review, In-Class Component of Mid-Term Exam	<i>Submit take-home essay questions to SOCS by noon this day.</i>
26	Religion & Violence, part 1	Juergensmeyer, pref to rev. ed., Ch 1-4
Nov 2	***Class cancelled***	Juergensmeyer, Ch 5-7
9	Religion & Violence, part 2	Juergensmeyer, Ch 8-10
16	Youth, Culture, & American Religion, part 1	Smith, intro., Ch 1-3 Clydesdale, intro., Ch 1-2
23	<i>Thanksgiving Break</i>	<i>Be thankful there's no reading assignment this week.</i>
30	Youth, Culture, & American Religion, part 2	Smith, Ch 4-6 Clydesdale, Ch 3-5
Dec 7	Pulling it all together?	Smith, Ch 7, concl. Clydesdale, Ch 6 Juergensmeyer, Ch 11
Exam Week	See registrar's schedule for date and time of in-class component of Final Exam	<i>Submit take-home essay component to SOCS by 5pm on Friday, Dec 14th</i>