

Chosen Peoples, Chosen Nation

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Class Meetings:
Tues / Thurs, 1:10 - 2:30
in Fisk Hall, Rm. 412

Office Hours: Wed 10 - 12,
or other times by appointment

Course Description:

This course will examine a range of social, political and philosophical issues surrounding the concept of “chosenness”—the belief that a particular community (usually one’s own) has been singled out by God for some special favor or purpose. We will trace the roots of this concept in the Hebrew Bible, and examine a number of religious communities (including orthodox Jews, Puritan settlers, Black Hebrew Israelites, and the Christian Identity movement) who have claimed divine chosenness through narratives of Israelite descent. Above all, however, we will examine the role of chosenness in popular understandings of American national identity—tracing the history of United States claims to be a “chosen nation,” and exploring the way these claims may shape contemporary American foreign policy. We will, in other words, explore the politics of chosenness from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob through George W. Bush.

Students will explore these questions through careful analyses of the course readings, active participation in seminar discussions, a series of short papers on the readings, and a longer final paper drawing on both course readings and independent research.

Required Readings:

Four texts will be available to purchase at Broad Street Books, and on reserve at Olin:

Regina Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain*

Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad*

Ernest Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation*

Michael Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*

A substantial packet of photocopied readings is also required, and will be available to purchase at Suburban Card and Gift (in Metro Square, off Main Street) and on reserve at Olin. Texts from the reader are marked with an (R) in the schedule of readings and assignments.

In addition, students will need a Bible (in any translation). There will be a few required Bible readings, and biblical texts will come up fairly often in class.

Course Requirements:

Reading: This is a reading intensive course, and some of the texts develop challenging theoretical analyses that will require intensive reading. You will need to keep up with the scheduled readings, read carefully, and come to every class with a solid grasp on the texts.

Attendance and Participation: Regular attendance and class participation are absolutely required. There is no way to grasp the themes of the course without active participation in class discussions. For this reason, I will take attendance in each class and structure the course to encourage—or perhaps require—your participation.

Short Papers and Discussion Questions: Over the course of the semester, you will write three papers on the course readings, of about 3-5 pages each. These will be scheduled in such a way that six or seven students will write papers at the end of each unit of the course (except the first one), or in the middle of longer units. In addition to your paper, you will prepare a question for class discussion (presumably on the issues you explore in the paper). The papers and questions will be due by 9 am on the relevant day of class. I'll circulate your questions in class, and I may ask paper writers to help facilitate discussion of their question. We will discuss my expectations for these papers and questions in more detail in class.

Final Research Papers: You will also write a 10-12 page research paper on any topic related to themes of the course, due during finals week, on May 16th. Your research paper may build on one of your papers on the course readings—expanding its scope through additional reading and research—or it can start fresh on a new topic. An abstract and preliminary bibliography for your paper will be due in class on April 20th. We will discuss my expectations for these papers in more detail in class.

Final Grades: Your grade in the course will be based on your three short papers (about 15% of the final grade each), your final research paper (about 30% of the final grade) and your attendance and class participation (about 25% of the final grade). This grading equation may not be precise, however, as I tend to grade assignments by an absolute standard, while determining final grades relative to the performance of the class.

Fair Warnings: You'll find that I am reasonably flexible about assignment deadlines when students face medical or personal issues, but I will penalize late papers if you don't communicate with me about these issues in a timely manner. I will only give incompletes to students facing medical or personal crises at the end of the semester. And finally, you should know that I am an anti-plagiarism fanatic. I will have *zero tolerance* for plagiarism, and I will refer all cases of intentional plagiarism to the Honor Board for disciplinary action.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

1/26 Introduction to the Course. No reading.

Unit 1: Introducing Chosenness, From Abraham to W.

1/31 Genesis ch. 12:1-9, Genesis ch. 17, Exodus chs. 19 - 20, Deuteronomy chs. 7 - 8, Isaiah chs. 42 - 43:15, Nehemiah chs. 9 - 10

- 2/2 Werner Sollors, "Typology and Ethnogenesis" (R)
Nicholas Street, "The American States Acting Over the Part of the Children of Israel in the Wilderness" (R)
George W. Bush, Second Inaugural Address, January 20, 2005 (R)

Unit 2: Divine Chosenness and Israelite Identity in the Hebrew Bible

- 2/7 Regina Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain*, Forward, Introduction, and Chapter 1
Walter Moberly, "Are Monotheism and Election Bad For You?" (R)
2/9 Regina Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain*, Chapters 2 and 4
2/14 Regina Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain*, Chapters 3 and 5

Unit 3: Debating Chosenness Among Medieval and Modern Jews

- 2/16 Menachem Keller, "Chosenness, Not Chauvinism: Maimonides on the Chosen People" (R)
Ze'ev Levy, "Judaism and Chosenness: On Some Controversial Aspects" (R)
2/21 Arnold Eisen, "A Part and Apart" (R)
Mordecai Kaplan, "The Chosen People Idea an Anachronism" (R)
Will Herberg, "The 'Chosenness' of Israel and the Jew of Today" (R)

Unit 4: The Puritan Settlers: New England as New Canaan

- 2/23 Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad*, Chapters 1 - 3
2/28 Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad*, Chapters 4 - 5 (ch. 6 optional)

Unit 5: Chosen Nation, Part One: America in the Age of Manifest Destiny

- 3/2 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Chapters 1 - 2 (R)
Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples*, Chapters 1 - 2 (R)
3/7 Ernest Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation*, Preface and Chapters 1 - 2 (ch. 3 optional)
3/9 Ernest Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation*, Chapters 4 - 5 (ch. 6 optional)

3/10 - 3/27 Spring Break.

Unit 6: Chosen Race, Part One: Black Israelites

- 3/28 Albert Raboteau, "African-Americans, Exodus and the American Israel" (R)
Henry Goldschmidt, "Race, Nation, and Religion" (R)

- 3/30 Sylvester Johnson, *The Myth of Ham in Nineteenth-Century American Christianity*, Chapters 1 - 3 (R)
- 4/4 Yvonne Chireau, "Black Culture and Black Zion: African-American Religious Encounters With Judaism" (R)
 Roberta Gold, "The Black Jews of Harlem" (R)
- 4/6 Bernard Wolfson, "African-American Jews: Dispelling Myths, Bridging the Divide" (R)
 Henry Goldschmidt, "The Voices of Jacob on the Streets of Brooklyn" (R)
- 4/11 Barry Chevannes, "Introducing the Native Religions of Jamaica" (R)
 Laurence Breiner, "The English Bible in Jamaican Rastafarianism" (R)
 C. D. Yawney, "Remnants of all Nations" (R)

Unit 7: Chosen Race, Part Two: White Israelites

- 4/13 Kingdom Identity Ministries, "Doctrinal Statement of Beliefs" (R)
 Michael Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, Preface, Chapters 1 and 4
- 4/18 Michael Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, Chapters 6 - 9
- 4/20 Michael Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, Chapters 10 - 13
Abstracts for Final Research Papers Due in Class

Unit 8: Chosen Nation, Part Two: America in the Age of the Bush Doctrine

- 4/25 Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America" (R)
 Conrad Cherry, "Introduction" to *God's New Israel* (R)
 Stephen Chapman, "Imperial Exegesis" (R)
 George W. Bush, Address to Congress, September 20, 2001
 and Address to the Nation, September 11, 2002 (R)
- 4/27 George W. Bush, Address to the Nation, October 7, 2001 (R)
 Osama bin Laden, Videotaped Address, October 7, 2001 (R)
 Bruce Lincoln, "Symmetric Dualisms: Bush and bin Laden on October 7" (R)
- 5/2 Stephen Webb, *American Providence*, Intro, Chaps 1, 2, 4, and Conclusion (R)
- 5/4 Catherine Keller, *God and Power*, Preface, Chapters 1, 2 and 8 (R)
- 5/9 National Security Strategy of the United States, September 17, 2002 (R)
 Eugene McCarragher, "The Most Intolerable of Insults" (R)
- 5/16 *Final Research Papers Due in my Mailbox on Tuesday May 16th by 5 pm***