

Chosen Peoples, Chosen Nation

Henry Goldschmidt
Religion Department, Rm. 211

Phone: (860) 685 - 2294
Email: hgoldschmidt@wesleyan.edu

Class Meetings:
Tues / Thurs, 9:00 - 10:20
in Fisk Hall, Rm. 312

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 purpose or favor. We will trace the roots of this concept in the Hebrew Bible, and examine a number of religious communities (including contemporary Jews, Puritan settlers, Black Israelites, Rastafarians, and the Christian Identity movement) who have claimed divine chosenness and Israelite descent. Above all, however, we will examine the role of chosenness in the construction of American national identity—tracing the history of United States claims to be a “chosen nation,” and exploring the ways these claims may have shaped contemporary American foreign policy. In short, we will explore the politics of chosenness from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob through George W. Bush and beyond.

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:

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

Michael Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*

Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad*

Stanley Hauerwas and Frank Lentricchia (eds.), *Dissent from the Homeland*

Regina Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain*

Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny*

A fairly large packet of photocopied readings is also required, and will be available to purchase at Pip Printing (179 Main Street -- order in advance at pipmid.com). The reader will also be on reserve at Olin, and the readings will be available as pdfs on Blackboard. If you access the readings at Olin or on Blackboard you’re required to copy them or print them out. Texts from the reader are marked with an (R) in the schedule of readings.

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. Most of the texts are fairly straightforward, but some develop challenging theoretical analyses that will require intensive reading, and others are drawn from primary sources that will require close interpretation. 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 for the first one), or in the middle of our long final unit. In addition to your paper, you will prepare a question for class discussion (presumably on the issues explored in the paper). The papers and questions will be due by 5 pm on the day before the relevant class meeting. I will circulate your questions in class, and I may ask paper writers to comment on their discussion 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 a topic related to themes of the course, due during finals week, on May 11th. 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 7th. 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.

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

1/22 Introduction to the Course. No reading.

Unit 1: Introducing Chosenness, From Abraham to W. and Beyond

1/27 Genesis 12:1-9, Genesis 17, Exodus 19 - 20, Deuteronomy 7 - 8, Isaiah 42 - 43, Nehemiah 9 - 10, Amos 3:1-2

1/29 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)
Barack Obama, Inaugural Address, January 20, 2009 (R)

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

2/3 Regina Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain*, Preface, Introduction, and Chapters 1 - 2

2/5 Regina Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain*, Chapters 3 and 5

Unit 3: Debating Chosenness Among Medieval and Modern Jews

2/10 Menachem Kellner, "Chosenness, Not Chauvinism: Maimonides on the Chosen People" (R)
Ze'ev Levy, "Judaism and Chosenness: On Some Controversial Aspects" (R)

2/12 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: Chosen Race, Part One: Black Israelites

2/17 Albert Raboteau, "African-Americans, Exodus, and the American Israel" (R)
Yvonne Chireau, "Black Culture and Black Zion: African-American Religious Encounters With Judaism" (R)
Roberta Gold, "The Black Jews of Harlem" (R)

2/19 Barry Chevannes, "Introducing the Native Religions of Jamaica" (R)
Laurence Breiner, "The English Bible in Jamaican Rastafarianism" (R)
In class film: Monica Haim, "Awake Zion"

- 2/24 William Levay, "Roots, Rock, Rebbe: Matisyahu and the Cultural Version" (R)
Henry Goldschmidt, "The Voices of Jacob on the Streets of Brooklyn" (R)

Unit 5: Chosen Race, Part Two: White Israelites

- 2/26 Kingdom Identity Ministries, "Doctrinal Statement of Beliefs" (R)
Michael Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, Preface, Chapters 1 and 4
- 3/3 Michael Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, Chapters 6 - 9
- 3/5 Michael Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, Chapters 10 - 13
- 3/6 - 3/22 Spring Break -- woo hoo! But think about your final research papers.

Unit 6: Chosen Nation, Part One: America as a "City on a Hill"

- 3/24 Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny*, Prologue and Chapter 1
John Winthrop, "A Modell of Christian Charity" (R)
Michael Wigglesworth, "God's Controversy with New England" (R)
(and get started on Bercovitch if you have time)
- 3/26 Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad*, Chapters 1 - 3
- 3/31 Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad*, Chapters 4 - 5 (ch. 6 optional)

Unit 7: Chosen Nation, Part Two: America in the Age of Manifest Destiny

- 4/2 Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny*, Chapter 2
Lyman Beecher, "A Plea for the West" (R)
John O'Sullivan, "A Divine Destiny for America" (R)
Walt Whitman, "Passage to India" (R)
- 4/7 Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny*, Chapters 3 - 4
Albert Beveridge, "The Star of Empire" (R)
Reinhold Niebuhr, "Anglo-Saxon Destiny and Responsibility" (R)
Abstracts for Final Research Papers Due in Class
- 4/9 Deborah Madsen, *American Exceptionalism*, Chaps. 2 and 4 (R)

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

- 4/14 Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America" (R)
Conrad Cherry, "Introduction" to *God's New Israel* (R)
Roberta Coles, "Manifest Destiny Adapted for 1990s War Discourse: Mission and Destiny Intertwined" (R)
- 4/16 George W. Bush, Address to Congress, September 20, 2001 (R)
George W. Bush, Address to the Nation, September 11, 2002 (R)
Stephen Chapman, "Imperial Exegesis" (R)
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)
- 4/21 Daniel Berrigan, "After" (in *Dissent From the Homeland*)
Robert Bellah, "Seventy-Five Years" (in *Dissent*)
Wendell Berry, "Thoughts in the Presence of Fear" (in *Dissent*)
Slavoj Zizek, "Welcome to the Desert of the Real!" (in *Dissent*)
Jean Baudrillard, "L'Esprit du Terrorisme" (in *Dissent*)
John Milbank, "Sovereignty, Empire, Capital, and Terror" (in *Dissent*)
Srinivas Aravamudan, "Ground Zero; or The Implosion of Church and State" (in *Dissent*)
- 4/23 Vincent Cornell, "A Muslim to Muslims: Reflections after September 11" (in *Dissent*)
Michael Baxter, "Dispelling the 'We' Fallacy from the Body of Christ: The Task of Catholics in a Time of War" (in *Dissent*)
Peter Ochs, "September 11 and the Children of Abraham" (in *Dissent*)
Stanley Hauerwas, "September 11, 2001: A Pacifist Response" (in *Dissent*)
- 4/28 John Yoder, "The Constantinian Sources of Western Social Ethics" (R)
John Yoder, "Civil Religion in America" (R)
Stanley Hauerwas, "A Christian Critique of Christian America" (R)
- 4/30 Stephen Webb, *American Providence*, Intro, Chaps. 2 and 4, and Conclusion (R)
- 5/5 National Security Strategy of the United States, September 17, 2002 (R)
Eugene McCarragher, "The Most Intolerable of Insults" (R)
- 5/11 *Final Research Papers Due in my Mailbox on Monday May 11th by 5 pm***