

# Religion 101

## Introduction to the Study of Religion

Wesleyan University • Fall 2006

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Class Meetings:  
Tues. / Thurs., 2:40 - 4:00  
in Fisk Hall, Rm. 302

Office Hours: Wed. 2 - 4,  
or other times by appointment

### Course Description

This course will introduce students to the academic study of religion, but it will not offer a survey of global religious diversity. It will focus on religious communities in the United States, but it will not offer an overview of American religious history. Rather, it will use a series of empirical case studies to explore theoretical issues in the study of religion. Among other topics, we will examine: the construction of “religion” as a conceptual category, anthropological approaches to religious difference, theories of religious experience, the role of religion in defining American national identity, and the religious dimensions of popular culture. Together, these discussions will offer students a set of analytical tools for understanding the role of religion in contemporary social and political life.

### Required Readings

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

David Chidester, *Authentic Fakes*

Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

Susan Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*

William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

Winnifred Sullivan, *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom*

A course reader will also be available to purchase at Suburban Card and Gift (in Metro Square on Main Street), and on reserve at Olin. Readings in the reader are required, and will be indicated with an (R) on the syllabus.

## Course Requirements

**Reading:** This is a reading-intensive course. You will need to keep up with the scheduled readings, read carefully, and come to every class with a solid grasp of the texts.

**Attendance:** Regular attendance is required, and I will take attendance in each class. New material will be introduced in lectures, for which you will be held responsible. Class participation is strongly encouraged, although not required (since the class is too large).

**Short Papers and In-Class Tests:** Over the course of the semester, you will write four short assignments on the course readings—two papers and two in-class tests. These are scheduled on the syllabus, near the ends of major units. The papers will be about three pages long, and the tests will include brief essays and identification questions on major issues in the readings. I will discuss my expectations for these assignments in class.

**Take-Home Final Exam:** You will also write a comprehensive take-home final exam, consisting of a number of short essays on the major issues in the course. I will discuss my expectations for the final exam in class.

**Final Grades:** Your grade in the course will be based on your short papers and in-class tests (about 15 - 20% of the final grade each), along with your take-home final (about 30% of the final grade). In addition, your final grade will suffer if you have extensive absences.

**Fair Warnings:** I will be reasonably flexible about assignment deadlines when students face medical or personal issues. But I will penalize late papers, and I will not offer make-up tests, if you fail to communicate with me about these issues in a timely manner. I will only give in-completes to students who face such issues at the end of the semester. Finally, you should know that I am an anti-plagiarism fanatic. I will have *zero tolerance* for cheating or plagiarism of any kind, and I will refer any intentional cases to the Honor Board for disciplinary action.

## Schedule of Readings and Assignments

9/5 Introduction to the Course.

### Unit 1: The Concept and Politics of “Religion”

9/7 Melford Spiro, “Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation”

9/12 Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System”

9/14 Winnifred Sullivan, *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom*, Intro. and Chapter 1

9/19 Winnifred Sullivan, *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom*, Chapters 2 - 3, and pp. 199 - 218 of Appendix B (Pals and Sullivan expert witness reports)

- 9/21 Winnifred Sullivan, *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom*, Chapters 4 - 5
- 9/26 Mock trial in class. No reading.

***Paper #1 Due in Class.***

**Unit 2: Religious Experiences and their Social Contexts**

- 9/28 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Lectures 2 and 3  
Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Chapters 1 - 3
- 10/3 Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, Chapter 1 (R)  
Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Chapters 5 - 9
- 10/5 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Lectures 9 and 10  
Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Chapters 10 - 12
- 10/10 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Lectures 16 and 17  
Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Chapters 13, 17, and 18
- 10/12 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Lecture 20  
re-read Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," pp. 91 - 98
- 10/17 No Class. Fall Break.

**Unit 3: Encountering Religious Difference**

- 10/19 Jonathan Z. Smith, "Map Is Not Territory" (R)
- 10/24 Weston La Barre, *They Shall Take Up Serpents*, Chapters 1 and 2 (R)  
In class film: "Holy Ghost People"
- 10/26 Weston La Barre, *They Shall Take Up Serpents*, Chapters 9, 10, and 12 (R)

**Unit 4: Encountering Difference in American Evangelical Christianity**

- 10/31 Laura Bohannon, "Shakespeare in the Bush" (R)  
Susan Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, Introduction and Chapters 1 - 2
- 11/2 Susan Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, Chapters 3 - 6
- 11/7 Susan Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, Chapters 7 - 10 and Postscript
- In Class Test on Units 3 and 4.***

### **Unit 5: Religion and American National Identity**

- 11/9 Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America" (R)  
W. Lloyd Warner, "An American Sacred Ceremony" (R)
- 11/14 Conrad Cherry, *God's New Israel*, Introduction (R)  
Nicholas Street, "The American States Acting Over the Part of the Children of Israel in the Wilderness" (R)  
John O'Sullivan, "A Divine Destiny for America" (R)  
George W. Bush, Second Inaugural Address (R)
- 11/16 No class. Professor at a conference.
- 11/21 Werner Sollors, "Typology and Ethnogenesis" (R)  
Albert Raboteau, "African-Americans, Exodus, and the American Israel" (R)  
Robert Allen Warrior, "Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians" (R)
- 11/23 No Class. Thanksgiving Break.

### **Unit 6: Religion and American Popular Culture**

- 11/28 David Chidester, *Authentic Fakes*, Introduction, Chapters 2, 3, and 10
- 11/30 David Chidester, *Authentic Fakes*, Chapters 5, 6, 8, and 11

### **Unit 7: Rethinking "Religion"**

- 12/5 Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Bare Facts of Ritual" (R)  
***Paper #2 Due in Class.***
- 12/7 Supreme Court of the United States, *Lynch v. Donnelly* (R)

**12/18 *Take Home Final Due in my Mailbox on Monday, December 18th at 5 pm.***