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SOC375: RELIGION AND AMERICAN CULTURE

Fall 2014
TF 2:00-3:20 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 no less influential in American culture; it shapes the personal realms of its citizens and touches 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 commonalities across American religious groups, differences across these same groups, and the interrelationships of these groups with American culture and postmodern society. Second, they will gain an overview of how scholars make sense of religion in society, both over time and presently. 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 three mandatory field experiences, intensive reading from a variety of texts, guest presentations, 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.
- Converse analytically and civilly about religion, religious groups, and religious/normative/philosophical matters.
- 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.
- 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.

Or, to put it more formally, this course furthers core components of the college's, school's, and department's student learning outcomes – including written & oral communication, critical analysis and reasoning, intercultural competence, ethical reasoning and compassion, respect for diversity, sociological knowledge, and application of sociological knowledge.

Required Readings:

Davidman, Lynn. *Tradition in a Rootless World*. Univ of California Press, 1991

Juergensmeyer, Mark. *Terror and the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence, 3rd Edition*. Univ of California Press, 2003.

Roose, Kevin. 2009. *The Unlikely Disciple: A Sinner's Semester at America's Holiest University*. Grand Central Publishing

Smith, Christian with Patricia Snell. *Soul in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*. Oxford University Press, 2009.

Students must also read the following pdf articles by

Robert Bellah et al. "Religion" from *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. University of California Press, 1985.

Peter L. Berger. "Religion and World Construction", "Religion and World Maintenance," and the "Process of Secularization" in *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. Anchor, 1969.

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.

Roy Clouser. Selected excerpts from *The Myth of Religious Neutrality*, Revised Edition. University of Notre Dame Press, 2005.

Harry Collins & Trevor Pinch. "Introduction," "Edible Knowledge," and "Conclusion." in *The Golem: What You Should Know about Science, 2nd Edition*. Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Ecklund, Elaine Howard. "The Real Religious Lives of Scientists" from *Science vs. Religion: What Scientists Really Think*. Oxford, 2010.

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 three field trips; two will require bus "co-pays" of \$10 each (whether you ride in the bus or not). We will need to coordinate rides with other students to the mosque/synagogue/sahib trips

Mandatory College-wide Policies and Statements:

This course conforms to all campus-wide course and academic policies. You may view these policies using these links:

- Final Exam-Evaluation-Reading Days Policy:
<http://policies.tcnj.edu/policies/digest.php?docId=9136>
- Absence and Attendance Policy:
<http://policies.tcnj.edu/policies/digest.php?docId=9134>
- Academic Integrity Policy:
<http://policies.tcnj.edu/policies/digest.php?docId=7642>
- Disability Support Services:
<http://differingabilities.pages.tcnj.edu>

- Americans with Disability Act Policy:
<http://policies.tcnj.edu/policies/digest.php?docId=8082>

E-mail and voice-mail: I check e-mail each morning, and voice mail only on days we have class. Please don't expect me to check my e-mail over the weekends, at night, or during breaks. I never check voice-mail from home. I usually reply within 2 business days to all e-mail messages.

Fourth hour equivalency statement: Although this class meets for three hours each week, it is a 4-credit (1 unit) course that offers a depth of learning with additional learning tasks unfolding in the equivalent of a fourth hour. Students will engage in group or individual learning projects outside of class and/or additional learning experiences occurring multiple times during the semester on or off-campus, including community-engaged learning activities and/or campus-wide events.

Course-specific 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 web 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 10% 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 maintaining the highest standards of good writing. This includes (but is not limited to) spelling, grammar, style, documentation, and format. Dedicated students for whom this presents a challenge will avail themselves of the college's writing center. *Please note I often use strict word 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 expectations 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 document," "I uploaded it to CANVAS," "I don't know why the file is blank on CANVAS," or "Didn't you get my paper via e-mail?" count as valid excuses. Valid excuses are a death in the immediate family or severe illness. Late papers are *severely* penalized (i.e., 5% for papers not turned in *at the start of class*, 10% 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. On CANVAS, I can see exactly when you submitted assignments.

b. Likewise, *examinations must be taken at the scheduled time.* Only those with official TCNJ activities (e.g., field trips), 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 (almost always it is a 20 minute, one-on-one oral examination).

c. *Plagiarism/Cheating* will be reported to the Academic Integrity Officer and I will press for the highest penalties 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, & Reading Notes	20%
Weekly Blog Posts & Comments	20%

Field Experience Blogs	15%
Midterm Exam	20%
Final Exam	<u>25%</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 & CANVAS*: I will be making extensive use of the course website. 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.). I reply to nearly all e-mail inquiries within 48 hours; e-mail is the best way to contact me.

Course Assignments:

1. *Reading Notes*: 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 (*and post to CANVAS*) a one-page, single-sided sheet of reading notes. 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* (only one page PER CLASS DAY, no matter how many different readings we may have). IMPORTANT NOTE #1: These reading notes *must be your individual work only*; they are not to be the product of collaboration with any other students. IMPORTANT NOTE #2: 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 call up the page from CANVAS to show you at that moment (*hence posting your reading notes to CANVAS each week*). IMPORTANT NOTE #3: You must post your reading notes to CANVAS before class begins (whether present or absent, and whether class meets or is cancelled); if you do not, you will not receive credit for the reading notes.

2. *Weekly Blog Posts & Comments*: You will each need to submit a weekly blog post on the CANVAS website for this course. You will *post once each week* (except during skip weeks – see CANVAS), and you will also *comment twice each week* on a classmate's blog. A blog is, of course, an informal online forum in which individuals post thoughts, musings, reflections, opinions, and arguments – and invite others to comment on their posts. Your blog posts will be visible to everyone else in the course, including your professor. Your posts should average 150-250 words, and your comments about others' posts should be at least 75 words. Of course, you need not agree with each other nor with me, but you will be required to be civil and respectful.

NOTE: The blog is *not a site for proselytizing* (for or against religion, or any specific form of religion); such blogs will not receive course credit and will be deleted by the professor – this does not mean one cannot write about one's own beliefs or practices, or those of others, only that such writing must be descriptive and analytical in nature, not persuasive or normative/judgmental (i.e., about what ought to be or ought NOT be).

By the end of the semester, you should have at least 12 posts to your blog (*not counting your field experience blogs – see item #3 below*) and at least 24 comments on others' blogs.

OK, so what should you post to your blog about? On the first page of the syllabus, you'll find a description of the course. You can blog about that. You can blog about the learning goals. You can blog about texts/readings, discussions in class, or my comments in class. You can even be daring and blog about stuff outside of class – e.g., a news article or op-ed; a movie; or an

observation. What I'm looking for with this assignment is: evidence of your ability to engage thoughtfully with the class materials/issues, to think analytically and critically, to make integrative/synthesizing connections, to demonstrate that you've read the assignments, and to consider the implications of what you are learning. As a general rule, *you shouldn't post about the same source/issue/topic more than twice* – be sure to vary your “stimuli,” and at least 6 of these posts should connect specifically to the course readings. As for comments on others' posts, I will ask you to spread around your attention here as well. No given student should receive more than 4 comments from you.

Periodically, but not weekly, I will grade and sometimes comment on your posts and comments. *Posts/comments more than one week overdue will not receive any credit*. I will actually read them more often than I grade them, and you may find your post or comment on the screen in class for discussion – this is a good thing; I don't put up posts to shame them!

3. *Field Experiences & Reflection Blogs*: It would be a crime to teach this class and never take advantage firsthand of the vivid examples of American religions that surround us. **Hence, we will do three mandatory field trips.** *You must attend these field trips*. One trip will be to Cairn University (a very small college in the same tradition as Liberty University which Kevin Roose attends) – this trip will last approximately 7 hours. A second trip will be to Sunday worship services at Shiloh Baptist Church in Trenton, NJ, and last from 10 am to 3 pm. For the third trip, we may visit a Mosque for Friday prayers, observe a Shabbat service at a synagogue, or possibly visit the new Sikh or Hindi Temples in Lawrenceville. These trips will last approximately 4 hours. We will split up to do these field trips. Specific information will be distributed in class as the details are finalized for these trips.

You will also write a 600 word blog of “*reflections and connections*” for each field trip. That is, a blog post 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, about 600 words, and it must be posted by the date indicated. The best posts identify one or two key observations and then make insightful connections to the texts, key concepts, and possibly other course materials (a guest speaker, documentary). The worst posts present superficial reactions, write lists of general observations, and lack thoughtful, probing, and specific connections to course materials.

If you miss a field trip for a reason other than those specified in Course Policy #2 or refusal of another instructor to excuse you from class, or if you choose not to attend (because of paid work, family obligation, overslept, etc.) – the possibility of completing a make-up assignment is at my discretion. Should you miss for a legitimate reason, the make-up assignment will likely be the assignment of additional reading and a 5-7 page analysis paper.

4. *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 during class, and must submit your answers using CANVAS, 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 are not confirmed and some are not yet listed, and your professor reserves the right to adjust):

Date:	What's happening:	What's due:
Aug 26	Course Introductions	
29	Sampling American Religion Film: <i>Friends of God</i>	Pew Forum, “Summary of Key Findings: American Religious Landscape Survey” Roose, pp 1-65

Sep 2	**no class meeting, follow Monday schedule**	Roose, pp 66-112
Sep 5	Sampling American Religion, continued Film: <i>Scenes from a Parish</i>	Roose, pp 113-164 Davidman, Ch 1
9	Sampling American Religion, continued Theories of Religion & Society	Davidman, Ch 2 Roose, pp 165-199
12	Sampling American Religion, continued Film: <i>Scenes from a Parish</i> (part 2)	Davidman, Ch 3 Roose, pp 200-271
16	Religion & Identity	Davidman, Ch 4 Roose, pp 271-315
19	Religion & Identity, continued Film: <i>Homegoings</i>	Davidman, Ch 5-6
23	Religion, Science, and Epistemology	Collins & Pinch, excerpts from <i>The Golem</i>
	*** field trip to Cairn University, approx 9a-4p*** (Wed)	Blog post for field trips due at 5pm 1 week (7 days) after the trip
26	Religion, Science, and Epistemology, continued Guest lecture: Dr. Roy Clouser	Clouser excerpts Davidman, Ch 7
30	Religion, Science, and Epistemology, continued	Ecklund, Ch 1 Davidman, Ch 8
Oct 3	Religion & Modernity Film: <i>Homegoings</i> (continued)	Berger, "Religion & World Construction" and "Religion and World Maintenance"
	*** field trip to Shiloh Baptist Church, approx 10a-3p*** (Sun)	Blog post for field trips due at 5pm 1 week (7 days) after the trip
7	Religion & Modernity, continued	Berger, "The Process of Secularization"
10	The Secularization Debate	Berger, excerpts from <i>A Far Glory</i> . Bruce, excerpt from <i>God is Dead</i>
14	***Fall Break***	
17	The Secularization Debate, continued <i>Receive take home essay question</i>	Warner, "New Paradigm," AJS Bellah et al, "Religion" chapter from <i>Habits of the Heart</i>
21	Mid-Term Exam	<i>Submit take-home essay questions to CANVAS by start of class this day.</i>
24	Religion & Violence	Juergensmeyer, pref to rev. ed., Ch 1
28	Religion & Violence, continued	Juergensmeyer, Ch 2-3
31*	**no class meeting**	Juergensmeyer, Ch 4
Nov 4	Religion & Violence, continued	Juergensmeyer, Ch 5-6
7	Religion & Violence, continued Film: <i>Soul Searching</i>	Juergensmeyer, Ch 7-8
11	Religion & Violence, continued	Juergensmeyer, Ch 9-10
Nov 14	The Religious Lives of American Young Adults Film: <i>Soul Searching</i> , part 2	Smith, intro., Ch 1-2
18	The Religious Lives of American Young Adults, cont.	Smith, Ch 3-4

21	The Religious Lives of American Young Adults, cont.	Smith, Ch 5-6
25	The Religious Lives of American Young Adults, cont.	Smith, Ch 7-8
28*	<i>**Thanksgiving Break**</i>	
Dec 2	The Religious Lives of American Young Adults, cont.	Smith, Ch 9-10
5	Pulling it all together? <i>Take-home component of final exam questions distributed</i>	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 CANVAS by 5pm on Tuesday, Dec 9th</i>