

RELIGION AND AMERICAN POLITICS





DESCRIPTION

The American political landscape exists within the tension of celebrating religious diversity and espousing a narrative of Christian origin. The result is complex questions over the place of religion in the public sphere. This seminar will explore major debates and controversies in American religions and politics from the colonial period to the present. Special attention will be paid to debates about the impact of religion on the Constitution, Civil Rights movements, the Christian Right, Church-State debates, Supreme Court decisions, and presidential elections.

Students analyze speeches, debates, court cases, visuals, popular culture, and scholarly articles to explore how religion and politics work together to shape the U.S.

REQUIRED TEXTS

All articles, links, documents, and videos will be available online.



EXPECTATIONS

This seminar is an introductory course in religious studies. I do not expect students have prior knowledge about any of the material we cover or the way scholars study religion. That's what we're here to learn.

Part of a seminar is learning how to talk about challenging topics. I expect you to be prepared for each class, having done the assigned readings and considered ways to thoughtfully engage through questions, comments, and interaction.

OUTCOMES

Demonstrate an understanding of the American religious landscape and develop religious literacy.

Recognize the role religion played in American politics since the formation of the nation state.

Learn to analyze and support different perspective and develop the skills necessary for both national and global engagement.

Cultivate a knowledge of the lived political process.

LATE WORK

Assignments must be completed on time, unless prior approval is given. That said, I recognize this is a challenging time and I'm willing to work with you if you need additional support. Please email me as soon as possible to discuss extensions. Late assignments without prior approval will receive a 10% deduction per week they are late.

INTEGRITY

All assignments in this course fall under the Student Code of Conduct. For more information on these policies, refer to CMC's Statement of Academic Integrity.

Please, don't cheat. Consequences range from a zero on the assignment to a failing grade in the course. If you have questions about proper citation, please reach out prior to submission.

ACCESSIBILITY

I'm happy to work with you to meet any and all accessibility needs. Please contact Student Accessibility Services and your Academic Advisor so that we can set whatever provisions you need to succeed in this course.





TECHNOLOGY

This class is being held on campus.

All reading assignments will be available online on your CMC portal.

I welcome the use of laptops in the classroom to ensure everyone has their readings available in class, as well as for taking notes. However, I expect that laptop use will be specific to course content.

GROUND RULES

Part of the humanities classroom is learning to thoughtfully engage with ideas that are different than your own. In this class, you will undoubtedly be challenged.

You are welcome to discuss personal beliefs. However, this is not a theology course. Opinions and perspectives should maintain a spirit of inquiry and dialogue. I am committed to ensuring safe and inclusive environment for these conversations.



GRADING RUBRIC

Participation (25%)

Reading Notes (25%)

Media Analysis Proposal (15%)

Media Analysis (35%)

A = 94-100 | A- = 90-93

B+ = 87-89 | B = 83-86 | B- = 80-82

C+ = 79-77 | C = 73-76 | C- = 70-72

D+ = 67-69 | D = 63-66 | D- = 60-62

F = 59 and below

ASSIGNMENTS

PARTICIPATION

Participation is a required component of this course. Please show up ready and prepared to discuss the course readings and other assignments. Each class will be broken into two parts. The first half of the class will be devoted to a contextualizing lecture. The second half of each course is devoted to discussing the reading in relation to lecture material or current events.

Part of humanities scholarship is learning to actively engage with unfamiliar ideas. Our course participation offers an opportunity to learn how to discuss new and complex ideas in productive and meaningful ways.


READING NOTES

Liberal arts education is about learning to learn. This is a skill that will support both this course and your future academic journey at CMC. Central to this is learning to read, understand, and think critically about challenging material.

Reading notes demonstrate thoughtful engagement with course material, and prepare you with the historical context necessary to complete your media analysis.

Reading notes are due each Thursday by 5pm.





"NOW I AM BECOME DEATH, THE
DESTROYER OF WORLDS."
-J. ROBERT OPPENHEIMER QUOTING
THE BHAGAVAD GITA

EXTRA CREDIT

For up to 2 percentage points, students have the option to watch *Malcolm X* and write a two-page, double-spaced reflection on film and its relationship to course material. Extra credit assignments are due prior to final's week.

ASSIGNMENTS



MEDIA ANALYSIS PROPOSAL

Over the course of this seminar, we'll focus our attention on the popular discussion that happens around various topics.

Choose a specific topic from our course content and find 5 pieces of media that engage that topic. Newspapers, documentaries, news broadcasts, and political debates are all possible options. You may also use your own social media timeline for one of your media sources.

Your proposal should include a title, thesis, list of sources, and a couple of sentences explaining their relevance to the course.

The proposal is due on October 14 by 5pm.

MEDIA ANALYSIS

Drawing on the media information on your topics, write an 8-page analysis of how this topic is covered in the public.

Does the discussion correspond with our class readings and discussions? How does the media engage broader concerns in the study of religion and politics? Use examples from assigned course readings to support your analysis.

Media analysis papers are due on the day of the final, December 14 by 5pm.

CLASS SCHEDULE

DATE	TOPIC	READING SCHEDULE
W1: 8/31	Introduction	Review Syllabus and Readings
W1: 9/2	What is Religion?	Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious"
W2: 9/7	What is American Religion?	PRRI, "America's Changing Religious Identity" Ingraham, "The Non-Religious"
W2: 9/9	Religion and Politics	Pew Research, "Politics from the Pulpit" Goodwin, Goodwin, "America's Contraceptive Mentality"
W3: 9/14	Exceptionalism	Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity" Baldwin, "The American Dream and the American Negro"
W3: 9/16	Disestablishment and Free Exercise	Washington, "Letter to the Jews of Newport" Noll, "The Separation of Church and State" in <i>The Old Religion in a New World</i>
W4: 9/21	Abolition and Enfranchisement	Beecher, "Essay on Slavery and Abolition" Truth, "Ain't I A Woman?"
W4: 9/23	Suffrage and VRA	Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet" Haberman, "Rigged Election and the Politics of Race"
W5: 9/28	Immigration	Jenkins, "Canonical Bishops Rebuke..." Chavez, "The Mexican-American and the Church" McConnell, "I Believe in Juan Saldado"
W5: 9/30	Anti-Catholicism	Zeitzy, "When America Hated Catholics" Gjeltzen, "Amy Coney Barrett's Catholicism is Controversial..."
W6: 10/5	Wounded Knee, AIM, #NoDAPL	Wenger, "We are Guaranteed Freedom" <i>We Shall Remain</i>
W6: 10/7	RFRA	RFRA (1993) Burwell v. Hobby Lobby (2014)
W7: 10/12	Burwell Opposition	Loewentheil, "The Satanic Temple, Scott Walker" Imhoff, "The Supreme Court's Belief in Faith"
W7: 10/14	The Extent of Religious Freedom US	Sullivan, "The Impossibility of Religious Freedom" PAPER PROPOSAL DUE BY 5PM!
W8: 10/19	FALL BREAK!	NO CLASS!

CLASS SCHEDULE

DATE	TOPIC	ASSIGNMENT (DUE BEFORE CLASS)
W8: 10/21	Religion and the ATF	Gallagher, "Negotiating Salvation" Goodwin, "This is Not About Religion"
W9: 10/26	Intolerance	Petrey, "Proclaiming the New Heterosexual Family" Denvir, "The War on Christmas"
W9: 10/28	Islamophobia	Rashid, "What Does Shari'ah Mean?" Emon, "Banning Shari'a" Posner, "Welcome to the Shari'ah Conspiracy Theory Industry"
W10: 11/2	White Supremacy	Smith, "My Name is Legion" Pasquier, "White Catholics"
W10: 11/4	#BLM	Butler, "The Fire this Time" Cresler, "Why White Terrorists Attack Black Churches"
W11: 11/9	LGBTQ Rights	Massie, "LGBTQ Religion Activist" Brintnall, "North Carolina's HB2"
W11: 11/11	Emotion in Public	Schaefer, "Trump's Evangelical Support in the Gut" Berlant, "Trump, or Political Emotions"
W12: 11/16	Medicine and Public Health	Whitehead and Perry, "Culture Wars Delay Herd Immunity" Snowden, "AIDS"
W12: 11/18	Q and Conspiracy	Goodwin, "Satan Sellers" Rusonello, "QAnon"
W13: 11/23	Workshop	Please bring your paper proposals to seminar.
W13: 11/25	THANKSGIVING RECESS!	NO CLASS!
W14: 11/30	To Serve God and Money	Urban, "Fair Game: Secrecy, Security, and the church of Scientology in Cold War America" Swaine, MacMillan, Boorstein, "Mormon Church Investment Fun"
W14: 12/2	Criminalizing Sex Criminalizing Faith	S.B. 102, Utah's Bigamy Amendments Goodwin, "Raiding Zion to Save It"
W15: 12/7	Where are we now?	Boorstein, "Christian Revolt" Sharlet, "The Sought to Convert Us"
W15: 12/9	Conclusions	Khan, "The Future of Faith"
W16: 12/14	FINAL PAPER DUE BY 5pm!	



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Office hours: Tuesday and Thursday
11am-1pm or by appointment via Zoom.
I usually reply to email within 24 hours.
Reach out early and often!