

## **Religion 355: Religious Intolerance in the Contemporary U.S.**

**Professor Melissa M. Wilcox**  
**MW 1:00-2:20, Olin 219**  
**Whitman College, Fall 2007**

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### **Course summary:**

This course explores several important facets of religious tolerance and intolerance in the U.S. today. It begins with the development of religious pluralism and the separation of church and state, but then questions the limits of this separation through examining the evidence for “public Protestantism” in the U.S. The rest of the course examines instances of religious intolerance in the U.S. – both intolerance of specific religions and religiously-based intolerance of specific groups – in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. We’ll explore the contours of religious intolerance, from hate crimes and violent protest to more subtle events and attitudes in our own communities and our own lives. Equally importantly, we’ll also consider ways to combat intolerance in all its myriad forms.

### **Required texts:**

- Phillip E. Hammond, David W. Machacek, and Eric Michael Mazur, *Religion on Trial: How Supreme Court Trends Threaten Freedom of Conscience in America* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira, 2004).
- Derek H. Davis and Barry Hankins, eds., *New Religious Movements and Religious Liberty in America* (Waco, Tx.: Baylor University Press, 2002).
- Smith, Huston. *A Seat at the Table: Huston Smith in Conversation with Native Americans on Religious Freedom*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.
- Stephen Feldman, *Please Don't Wish Me a Merry Christmas: A Critical History of the Separation of Church and State* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).
- Howard L. Bushart, John R. Craig, and Myra Barnes, *Soldiers of God: White Supremacists and their Holy War for America* (New York: Kensington Books, 1998).
- Sells, Michael Anthony and Emran Qureshi. *The New Crusades: Constructing the Muslim Enemy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.
- Ann Pellegrini and Janet R. Jakobsen, *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

Occasionally, additional reading assignments will be posted on CLEo. All course materials will also be on reserve in Penrose.

**Course requirements:**

Final grades in the course will be determined as follows:

Thought papers: 7 @ 5% each.....	35 %
Current event presentation:.....	15 %
Presentation of final project.....	10 %
Final project.....	30 %
Class participation.....	10 %

Remember to keep all papers I return to you so that you can track your own grade in the course.

*Thought papers:* These are 1- to 2-page papers that ask you to look more deeply at the topic we’re studying. They will often require you to examine your own experiences with the issues at hand; sometimes they also require a small amount of outside research. The point of these assignments is to push all of us to think critically about how the work we’re doing in the classroom is relevant in our own lives and our own communities. We’ll discuss the thought papers on the day they’re due, so late papers will only receive half credit. Guideline questions for the thought papers are included in this syllabus.

*Current event presentations:* Sign-ups for these presentations will take place at the end of week 2, so be ready to choose a topic! In your presentation, you’ll educate the class about a current or recent event in Walla Walla, Washington state, or your home region (if elsewhere in the U.S.) that’s related to the topic we’re studying that day. In putting together your presentation, you may find it helpful to use databases that include newspaper articles and news magazines. Also check out the web sites of Washington newspapers that have online archives, and consider checking the web sites of groups that track discrimination, such as the Southern Poverty Law Center or the Council on American-Islamic Relations. Each presentation should be 10 to 15 minutes in length and may include handouts, video, slides, or other presentation aids. *If you will need any extra equipment for your presentation, please let me know at least a week in advance so that I have time to reserve it.*

*Final project presentation:* Final projects are your opportunity to educate the class on some aspect of religious intolerance that we have not yet covered. (This does not mean that you can’t do your final project on a topic we’ve covered; you simply need to go well beyond the course material in your research.) During our final exam session (which will run a little late), you will need to give an 8-10 minute presentation on your final project. As with the current event presentations, visual aids and handouts are encouraged but not required. If you need media equipment for your presentation, please let me know by **Monday, December 3**.

*Final project:* There are three options for the final project, with only two general requirements guiding all of them. First, your project must focus on some aspect of religious intolerance in the contemporary U.S., and second, it must embody a critical analysis of your topic—this is not simply a fact-finding report. Within those guidelines, you may choose a service learning project, a creative project, or a formal paper. **You must discuss your project option and topic with me before Friday, November 9.** Projects are due in class during our final exam session on **Tuesday, December 11.**

**Final project details are on the next page**      →      →      →

1. Service learning project: Two of the most important solutions to religious intolerance are education and action. Since this class is providing a partial education, you may want to add the action in your final project. This project option allows you to fulfill your course requirements by working with a group that is actively engaged in fighting religious intolerance or embracing religious diversity. You must put in a minimum of 15 hours with this group over the course of the semester, and your write-up must include documentation of your hours (for instance, a note from your coordinator). During your project presentation, and in a 5- to 6-page final paper (plus the bibliography), you should describe the group and its background, history, and goals; explain what you did with the group during the semester; and most importantly, offer a reasoned analysis of the group's strengths and weaknesses in contributing to religious tolerance.
2. Creative project: This option is based in research (library, current events, and/or ethnographic) rather than in service learning. It requires the same analytical strength as the other projects, but allows you to present your conclusions in a creative format. For this option, you should research some aspect of religious pluralism or intolerance in the contemporary U.S. and prepare a critical analysis of your topic. Using your choice of creative medium (music, drama, poetry, prose, dance, sculpture, photography, painting, etc.), create a work of art that expresses your critical analysis. Then write a 5- to 6-page paper (plus the bibliography) that explains your critical analysis and the ways in which it is expressed in your art. During your project presentation, you will present your art and explain the analysis it expresses.
3. Formal paper: As with the creative project, this project requires you to research and critically analyze a topic related to religious tolerance or intolerance in the contemporary U.S., using library, current events, and/or ethnographic research. If you choose this option, you will need to make an argument for your analytical thesis, using facts and examples drawn from your research, in a 10- to 12-page paper (plus the bibliography). During your project presentation, you will present your research topic and your thesis, accompanied by a condensed version of the arguments you made in your paper to support that thesis.

*Class participation:* Since this course relies heavily on discussion, it is extremely important that you be in class, on time and prepared, each day. Please do the day's reading before coming to class, and be prepared to discuss the reading assignments. You are expected to bring the day's reading materials to class unless you are physically unable to do so. **Students who miss more than four class sessions without informing me in advance will lose 50% of this portion of their grade.**

## Course policies:

*Students with disabilities:* If you have a disability and need my help in making this course fully accessible to you, please feel free to contact me, either in person or through the Academic Resource Center (527-5213). I'll be happy to help in whatever way I can.

*Inclusive language:* Inclusive language is the use of accurate and unbiased gender terminology, and it is required in this course. It's important for a number of reasons. For one thing, language shapes how people think. When religious studies was considered to be the study of the beliefs of *man*, for instance, people (usually male scholars) tended to study male writers, male believers, male religious leaders, and so on simply because it didn't occur to them to study women as well. As a result, they had a less accurate understanding of religion than we have today. "Humanity" and "humans" are gender-inclusive terms; "man" and "men" are not.

Non-inclusive language also can be misleading, inaccurate, or vague. Traditional formal English, for example, requires that you use the singular pronoun "he" as a generic pronoun. Thus, you might say that "when a new member is initiated into the secret society, he must undergo several hours of ordeals." People who read that sentence are left wondering whether "he" includes women or whether this secret society is for men only. The solution? When you use singular generic terms (like "one," "anyone," "a person," etc.), use the combined pronoun "she or he." Or, for a less awkward sentence, simply use a plural noun ("people," "initiates," "members," etc.), because English has a non-gendered plural pronoun ("they").

*"Late fees":* Late thought papers will receive half credit. Without prior arrangements, there will be no make-ups for current event presentations or final project presentations. Final projects will lose 5 percentage points for each day (including weekends) they are late.

*Academic dishonesty:* Honesty is an integral part of academic learning; any form of cheating expresses gross disrespect for the efforts of your teacher, the hard work of your classmates, and your own privilege in having access to a quality education. I will not hesitate to report and pursue incidents of suspected academic dishonesty, including plagiarism and copying others' assignments. **The maximum penalty for academic dishonesty is permanent expulsion from Whitman.**

**This class is an educational safe zone. It welcomes and respects the viewpoints of students of all sexual orientations and genders as well as all races, ethnicities, religions, and abilities. All members of this learning community are expected to treat each other with respect and dignity, and to listen especially carefully to the voices of cultural and social minorities.**

## Thought Paper Guidelines: Religion 355, Fall 2007

In crafting these papers, please consider all of the questions in each prompt, but please *don't* simply answer each one in succession. Rather, use these questions to help you shape a cohesive set of reflections on the topic we're covering.

Note: Papers 4, 5, and 7 require you to interview someone informally. If you are uncomfortable with any of these assignments, there is a second option: rather than interviewing someone who is a potential *target* of religious intolerance, interview someone whom you believe to be a potential *perpetrator* of religious intolerance: someone who, consciously or unconsciously, expresses racism (or ethnocentrism), anti-Semitism (or perhaps Christocentrism), or homophobia/biphobia/transphobia (or heterosexism/monosexism). Adapt the questions in the assignment to this context: e.g., explore the ways in which someone's religious beliefs and worldview shape that person's attitudes towards Jewish people and/or Judaism. Be respectful even if you disagree with the person you are interviewing!

### **1. Due Monday, September 17**

Recall or research a recent event in your own community (at Whitman, in Washington, or in your home region – if elsewhere in the U.S.) that involved public Protestantism, cultural Protestantism, Protestant hegemony, civil religion, or some combination thereof. In your thought paper, briefly describe the event and then analyze it as a form of religion/culture/state interaction. Do you think the event you analyzed was an example of religious intolerance? Why or why not?

### **2. Due Wednesday, September 26**

Read the two “Santería” selections on CLEO. What factors do you think cause the severe reactions toward this religion in U.S. culture, as exemplified in the Hialeah court case? Do you feel that practitioners of Santería deserve the protections that other religions receive under the constitution? Why or why not?

### **3. Due Wednesday, October 10**

**Option 1:** (If you or someone you know identifies as Native American *and* is willing to discuss this issue, please do this option.) Talk to someone who is Native American (if you are Native American, you have the option of talking about your own experiences). Has that person ever experienced racism or ethnocentrism? Was it ever tied to religion? What did that person learn about her/his traditional culture while s/he was growing up? Has s/he ever encountered prejudice or misguided beliefs about her/his traditional culture?

**Option 2:** (Do this only if you don't know anyone who identifies as Native American *and* is willing to discuss this issue.) First, think about your schooling before college, if you were raised in North America (if you weren't, please see me for an alternate set of questions). What do you remember learning in school about Native American cultures and histories? Were you ever taught about Native American religions, and if so, what were you taught? Were you ever taught about contemporary Native Americans? Next, think about popular culture in the U.S.—both now and when you were growing up (if you grew up here). What does popular culture tell us about Native Americans? About Native American religions? Do you think popular culture and the education system in the U.S. constitute a form of religious intolerance against Native Americans? Why or why not?

#### **4. Due Monday, October 22**

Talk to someone you know who is Jewish (if you are Jewish, you have the option of talking about your own experiences). Has that person ever experienced anti-Semitism? If so, in what ways? Have you seen it in your own community/ies? Why do you think this form of religious prejudice has been so persistent in the U.S.? How prevalent do you think it is today? (Note: You may also adapt this assignment by interviewing someone who expresses anti-Semitism or Christocentrism; see the beginning of this assignment sheet for details.)

#### **5. Due Wednesday, October 31**

Talk to someone you know who identifies as a racial or ethnic minority (if you identify as a racial or ethnic minority, you have the option of talking about your own experiences). Has that person ever experienced racism? If so, did her/his experiences ever involve religion? How do you think religion and racism got linked together? If you were raised within any religion, do you think your own religious background contains the seeds (or more) of racism? Do you think that religion can be actively anti-racist as well? If so, how? If not, why not? (Note: You may also adapt this assignment by interviewing someone who expresses racism or ethnocentrism; see the beginning of this assignment sheet for details.)

#### **6. Due Wednesday, November 14**

Reflect on the various official (i.e., from the White House) U.S. representations of the war in Iraq –official explanations for the initial invasion and for the ongoing U.S. military presence in Iraq, as well as official descriptions of the war itself, of Iraq and Iraqis (especially the Iraqi resistance), and of the role of the U.S. military. Consider these representations in light of the readings in *The New Crusades*. Do your observations resonate with, complicate, or challenge the chapters we read (they may do all three)? Illustrate your claims with at least one concrete example of official U.S. representations of the war in Iraq.

#### **7. Due Monday, December 3**

Talk to someone you know who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer or questioning (if you identify as any of these, you have the option of writing about your own experiences). How has religion affected that person's life? What are her/his/hir feelings toward religion now? Finally (if you identify as straight and mono-gendered), what did your own religious and social upbringing teach you about people who are LGBTQ? How does that affect your interactions with LGBTQ people you know? (Note: You may also adapt this assignment by interviewing someone who expresses homophobia or heterosexism; see the beginning of this assignment sheet for details.)

## Course Schedule

### **Week 1: Introductions**

Wednesday, 8/29: Introduction to class  
No reading.

### **Week 2: The First Amendment**

Monday, 9/3: Labor Day and the First Amendment  
Read: Syllabus; Hammond et al., Preface, Introduction, Ch. 1  
Question to ponder: Do the values celebrated during Labor Day reflect those discussed in the book's brief overview of the Bill of Rights, or are they more recent developments? Then again, what *are* the values celebrated during Labor Day?

Wednesday, 9/5: What is religious liberty?  
Read: Hammond et al., Chs. 2, 3, 4

→ **Be ready to sign up for a current event presentation**

### **Week 3: Legal freedom, cultural hegemony?**

Monday, 9/10: Applying the First Amendment  
Read: Hammond et al., Chs. 5, 6, 7, Conclusion

Wednesday, 9/12: Civil religion, public Protestantism, and cultural Protestantism  
Read: CLEo – Bellah, Albanese  
Davis & Hankins, Ch. 9

### **Week 4: Public Protestantism and NRM's**

Monday, 9/17: Class discussion – Civil religion and public Protestantism  
Read: Davis & Hankins, Chs. 1, 8

→ **Thought paper #1 due**

Wednesday, 9/19: Not so Protestant? Christian NRM's and Millennialist Christians  
Read: CLEo – Tabor; Davis/Hankins, Chs. 6, 7, 11

### **Week 5: Non-Christian NRM's**

Monday, 9/24: Non-Christian NRMs  
Read: Davis & Hankins, Chs. 2, 4, 5, 10

Wednesday, 9/26: Class discussion – New religious movements  
Read: Smith, "Preface," "The Indian Way of Story," "Introduction"

→ **Thought paper #2 due**

### **Week 6: Native American religious rights I**

Monday, 10/1: Deloria, Echo-Hawk, LaDuke, Black Elk  
Read: Smith, Chs. 1-4

Wednesday, 10/3: George-Kanentiio, Dayish, Foster, Frichner, Lopez  
Read: Smith, Chs. 6-9

→ **Field trip to Tamástlikt Cultural Center, or possible film night – *False Promises* (dir. Rustin Thompson, 2002, 57 min.), *River People* (dir. Michal Conford and Michele Zaccheo, 1990, 50 min.), and/or *Kennewick Man* (dir. Kyle Carver and Ryan Purcell, 2001, 86 min.)? We'll decide on this as a class.**

**Week 7: Native American religious rights II**

Monday, 10/8: Fall break – no class

Wednesday, 10/10: Class discussion – Native American religious rights

Read: Smith, Chs. 10, 11, Afterword (including “Message from the Hopi Elders”)

→ **Thought paper #3 due**

**Week 8: Religious freedom and anti-Semitism**

Monday, 10/15: Histories of anti-Semitism

Read: Feldman, Chs. 1, 2, 7

Wednesday, 10/17: Public Protestantism and anti-Semitism

Read: Feldman, Chs. 8, 9

**Week 9: Anti-Semitism and Identity Christians**

Monday, 10/22: Class discussion – Anti-Semitism

→ **Thought paper #4 due**

Read: Feldman, Ch. 10

Wednesday, 10/24: White supremacy and Christianity

Read: Bushart, Introduction, Chs. 1-6

**Week 10: White supremacy**

Monday, 10/29: Reinterpreting Christianity

Read: Bushart, Chs. 7-10

Wednesday, 10/31: Class discussion – White supremacy

→ **Thought paper #5 due**

Read: Bushart, Chs. 11, 12, 18-20, Epilogue

**Week 11: Constructing Islam, constructing the West**

Monday, 11/5: Constructing Islam

Read: Qureshi & Sells – Qureshi & Sells (Introduction), Trumpbour

Wednesday, 11/7: A Clash of Civilizations?

Read: Qureshi & Sells – Said, Mottahedeh

*Film: Point of Attack* (dir. Kathleen Foster, 2004, 46 min.) or *Reel Bad Arabs* (dir. Sut Jhally, 2006, 50 min.)

→ **Friday, 11/9: Last day to contact me about your final project idea!**

**Week 12: Global and local consequences of Islamophobia**

Monday, 11/12: Global Islamophobia

Read: Qureshi & Sells – MacMaster, Sells

Wednesday, 11/14: Class discussion – Islamophobia in the U.S.

Read: CLEo – CAIR reports, “American Public Opinion” and “Western Muslim Minorities”

→ **Thought paper #6 due**

*Read by the end of break: Pellegrini & Jakobsen, Preface and Introduction*

**11/17 – 11/25: THANKSGIVING BREAK**

Questions to ponder: How is the Thanksgiving holiday tied up with all of the issues we’ve been studying in class? Why does Whitman take Columbus Day and Thanksgiving off but not Labor Day?

**Week 13: Religion and homophobia – biphobia – transphobia**

Monday, 11/26: The limits of tolerance and essentialism

Read: Pellegrini & Jakobsen, Chs. 1, 2

Wednesday, 11/28: Radical visions

Read: Pellegrini & Jakobsen, Chs. 3, 4

**Week 14: Conclusions – Religious intolerance**

Monday, 12/3: Class discussion – Religion and anti-LGBT beliefs

Read: Pellegrini & Jakobsen, Ch. 5 and Conclusion

→ **Thought paper #7 due**

→ **Last day to request media equipment for your project presentation**

Wednesday, 12/5: Conclusions – Beyond intolerance, beyond tolerance

Instead of a reading assignment: Write down and bring to class *two concrete strategies* for dismantling religious intolerance and moving beyond the rhetoric of tolerance.

**Finals week: Project presentations**

Tuesday, 12/11, 9:00-12:00 (our final exam session): Project presentations

→ **Final project papers due in class!**