RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND CIVIL SOCIETY: AN INTERFACULTY WORKING GROUP AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY
Proposal for an Interfaculty Working Group
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In 1991, I developed the Pluralism Project to involve Harvard students in the study, documentation, and interpretation of the growing religious diversity of the United States resulting from the new post-1965 period of immigration. The Project, based in the Study of Religion in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, began by involving undergraduate and graduate students within our own faculty as well as students from the Graduate School of Education and the Divinity School. During the past few years, many other colleagues in the University have also been interested in the range of questions that have arisen in American society as a result of the new immigration. This interfaculty working group will gather together colleagues from the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, the Law School, the Divinity School, the Medical School, the Business School, the Kennedy School of Government, and the Graduate School of Education, all of whom are interested in the changing religious, cultural, and ethnic landscape of the United States in the light of America's new immigration in the post-1965 period.

The special work of the Pluralism Project over the past decade has been to study the Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, and Jain traditions as they take root in American soil and begin to generate the traditions and infrastructures distinctive to American religious life. This is only part of the story, however. These years have also seen the reconfiguration of American religious and cultural life through Hispanic, Afro-Caribbean, and East Asian immigration. America's Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish communities have also become more multi-sided and complex.
Traditional formulations of both "secularism" and "pluralism" have become increasingly problematic. Today, issues of religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity are on the agenda of virtually every public institution--from schools and universities to courts, zoning boards, and hospitals.

The work of the Pluralism Project has generated an educational multimedia CD-ROM, "On Common Ground: World Religions in America," a network of affiliates at other universities, and a web site (http://www.pluralism.org). Our distinctive contribution is to bring together people who normally work in related fields, but rarely meet, for instance scholars who study Islam in America and Buddhism in America, or scholars of American history and those who study the history of Sikh and Hindu diaspora communities. Sometimes scholars interested in the new participation of Muslims in American public life are quite unaware of the similar questions raised by Buddhists or Sikhs, for example. In addition to our academic conferences, we have cultivated relationships with relatively new advocacy organizations concerned with bringing Muslim, Sikh or Hindu voices to bear on American public issues such as education, civil rights, and workplace accommodation. This summer, we will be hosting an NEH summer seminar for high school teachers on World Religions in America.

Our hope for this working group would be to engage people who are interested in thinking together about the questions raised by the new immigration --historians, sociologists, and scholars of religion, law, education, and public policy. Undoubtedly our schedules are too crowded to meet one another individually, but gathering together we can surely generate a lively conversation. We can learn about one another's work and perhaps begin to share some of the rich resources and perspectives here on the Harvard faculty.
Thirteen faculty have confirmed their interest in this working group. Leila Ahmed, Professor of Women's Studies in Religion at the Divinity School, specializes in women and gender in Islam. Dorothy Austin, Associate Minister at the Memorial Church, has an interest in religion and psychology and is concerned with the wide range of issues facing ministry in a multireligious university. Linda Barnes, Lecturer in Social Medicine at the Medical School, directs a research project on immigrant spirituality and health practices. Nathan Glazer, Professor Emeritus in Sociology and Education, has ongoing interest in the fields of ethnicity and immigration, the sociology of American Jews, and social policy. Swanee Hunt, Director of the Women and Public Policy Program at the Kennedy School of Government, has a long-standing interest in religion. David Little, Director of the Center for the Study of Values in Public Life at the Divinity School, focuses on religious ethics and the sociology of religion. Scotty McLennan, Lecturer at the Business School, focuses on leadership, ethics, and religion. Martha Minow, Professor of Law, chairs a Social Science Research Project on "The Free Exercise of Culture." Richard Parker, Lecturer in Public Policy at the Kennedy School of Government, teaches a course on religion and public policy. Christopher Queen, a Lecturer in the Study of Religion and Dean of Students at the Extension School, specializes in the field of Buddhism in America and has published a book on Engaged Buddhism in the West. Marcelo Suarez-Orozco, Co-Director of the Harvard Immigration Project, focuses on Latino immigration in his work at the Graduate School of Education. Mary Waters, Professor of Sociology, has a special research interest in second generation immigrants and the issues of assimilation and identity.

During 2000-2001, this working group will share our own work in a series of lunch and dinner meetings, bringing an occasional speaker to stimulate our discussion. It is our hope that this community of conversation will stimulate new perspectives on
immigration, religious pluralism, and American civil society and may well lead to the creation of new courses and fresh research.