

## THOUGHT AND PRACTICE OF AMERICAN RELIGIONS

American Studies 5102  
(Winter/)Spring Semester 2000  
M., W., F., 12:20-1:10 p.m.

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Office hrs.: M 1:30-3:30, W 3:45-4:45

### Required books:

Mary Farrell Bednarowski, *The Religious Imagination of American Women*  
Thomas Cahill, *The Gifts of the Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels*  
Diana L. Eck, *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras*  
Rodger Kamenetz, *The Jew in the Lotus*  
Jane I Smith, *Islam in America*  
Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (or a substitute book by a Native American)  
Cornel West, *Race Matters*

### Optional books:

Patrick W. Carey, *The Roman Catholics in America*

Thomas E. FitzGerald, *The Orthodox Church*  
James E. Kirby, *The Methodists*  
Don Morreale, *The Complete Guide to Buddhist America*

This course, operating seminar style, will be an investigation of the contemporary observances, ethical frameworks, core beliefs, shared texts, arts and architecture and demographics of major religions in the United States. Through readings, library research, field learning and site visits, the class will learn about religions in the U.S. today and will conduct research collaboratively on "Religious Pluralism in the Twin Cities." We anticipate producing a web site and a handbook publication of factual information about religious centers, houses of worship and organizations in the Minneapolis and St. Paul metropolitan area at the end of the course.

### Religions and Branches of Religions Practiced in the Twin Cities:

African American churches and Christian religious practice  
African-American Islam  
Asian-American Christian churches and Christian religious practice  
Baha'i  
Buddhism  
Catholic Christianity  
Chinese cultural Confucianism or Taoism  
Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints  
Eastern Orthodox Christianity

Hinduism (and other Indian religions)

Islam

Judaism (can pick one branch)

Kwanzaa

Native American traditional spirituality

Native American Christianity

New Age spirituality and religious practice

Protestant Christianity (can pick one denomination: Lutherans, Episcopalians, Methodists)

Unitarianism

Wicca (or paganism or contemporary goddess religion)

Others identified by the class as currently practiced in the Twin Cities and recognized officially as religious bodies

**Topics:**

1) Observances

a) Holidays and celebrations

b) Regular practices and rituals in community or alone

c) Customary behaviors

2) Shared thought

a) Moral codes or systems of ethics

b) Core beliefs

3) Texts, arts and architecture

a) Sacred texts

b) Architecture, sacred sites and worship spaces

c) Arts items used ceremonially and collectively

d) Arts items (music, poetry, fiction, paintings, sculpture) created with religious cultural reference

4) Demographics

a) Location (country, region, tribe) of origin of the group

b) Numbers and locations of people in the group in the world

c) Locations of group members in the United States

d) Locations, age groups and other cultural information about group members in the Twin Cities

**Projects:**

- 1 Each student keep a writer's notebook with entries of one to three paragraphs about each reading done for the class, each lecture, each guest speaker or special session of the class and your field notes and library search notes for your research projects. Turned in three times during the semester.
- 2 Each student choose two religions or branches of major religions from the list, one with whom she or he is familiar as participant or family member and one with which she or he has little previous knowledge and do research throughout the term on the four topics about each of the religions/groups as they are manifest in the present-day United States and in the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

- 3 Some class member should choose to cover all of the religious groups listed.  
Treatment of some religions and topics pertaining to them may be briefer than others.
  
- 4 Students are asked to write two 10-page typewritten papers on each of the religions of his or her choice, a total of four, primarily from knowledge gained through field learning in the Twin Cities, supplemented by library research. Each student will also be asked to make an oral report or participate in a panel discussion on each of the religions or groups within religions in the class. Though grades will be assigned on an individual basis, students can work collaboratively on the projects and can work in groups with the Macalester College students with whom the class will join in a Religious Pluralism of the Twin Cities Project as an affiliate with the [Harvard University Pluralism Project](#).
  
- 5 Final project: at the end of the semester, all the students are invited to contribute to a web site and a handbook of religious pluralism of the Twin Cities, which we hope to publish under the names of all the contributors. Individual or group contributions will need to be succinct short pieces drawn from the information of the earlier papers, demonstrably accurately researched and polished suitably for publication. Some students may choose to write a 20-page paper and reduce their "handbook" contribution from it. Others may want their "handbook" contribution to be the final paper or project. Some may work entirely in groups from this class and/or with the Macalester College students.
  
- 6 The instructor and individual students can discuss options.

**Schedule:**

Class will operate seminar style with two parallel activities going on all semester. We will read and discuss some religious studies texts in class each week and also we will pursue as a whole class the Religious Pluralism in the Twin Cities project with preparation for library and field learning sessions in class, periodic reports on the work underway, and have at least one outside-of-class hour workshop session with the Macalester College counterpart class. Some Fridays the class will be dismissed at the regular hour with substitute Friday or weekend time spent doing field work at religious sites or attending services of worship as a group or as teams or individuals.

**Religious Pluralism; Contemporary Experience of Religion; Hinduism and Christianity**

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|-----------------|--|
| Jan. 19, 21     | Organization, project plans and selections.<br>Begin reading Eck, Encountering God   |
| Jan. 24, 26, 28 | Continue reading Encountering God<br>Write a short piece for your notebook that parallels Eck's introductory material on your own earlier religious consciousness from your religious tradition and your first encounters with religious traditions previously |

unfamiliar to you As a class, choose specific religions on which to work  
Jan. 28—Library research session with Celia Hales Mabry in S30C Wilson  
Library: meet there at 12:20

### **Religious Pluralism in the Twin Cities; Contemporary American Women's Religious Knowledge**

Jan. 31, Feb. 2, 4      Finish discussing Encountering God  
Begin by Weds., Feb. 2, Bednarowski, *The Religious Imagination of American Women*  
Mon., Jan. 31—Turn in first installment of writer's notebook

Feb. 7, 9, 11      Finish reading Bednarowski book  
Mon.—discuss book  
Weds.—guest speaker  
Fri.—no class (research)

### **Judaism**

Feb. 14, 16, 18      Finish first phase of research, first paper due  
Start reading Cahill, *The Gifts of the Jews*  
Find and read other material about contemporary American Judaism  
Mon.—no class  
Weds.—First paper due, discuss findings in class  
Fri.—discuss Cahill book, possibly attend a Jewish service together

### **Judaism; Buddhism**

Feb. 21, 23, 25      Finish and discuss Cahill book and other material on Judaism  
Student oral reports in class  
Start reading Kamenetz, *The Jew in the Lotus*  
Mon. or Weds., 4:00-5:30 p.m. workshop with Macalester College students  
on how to do site visits and how to plan teamwork for our Religious  
Pluralism of the Twin Cities collaborative project

### **Continue Buddhism; start Islam**

Feb. 28, Mar. 1, 3      Read Morreale, *The Complete Guide to Buddhist America* (or a substitute  
work on Buddhism such as Richard Hughes Seager, *Buddhism in America*)  
Finish discussion on Buddhism  
Arts experience projected  
Student oral reports  
Start reading and discuss Smith, *Islam in America*  
Weds., Mar. 1—Second paper due

Mar. 6, 8, 10      Finish Smith, *Islam in America*

Find and read other material about contemporary American Islam  
Possibly do a site visit together to a mosque  
Students working on Islam do class reports

### **Native American Religions and Spirituality**

Mar. 13, 15, 17      Read and discuss Silko, Ceremony (or other Native American work)  
Find and read other material about contemporary and past Native American spirituality and religion  
Fri., Mar. 17—Second installment of writer's notebook due

### **African American Religions and Spirituality**

Mar. 20, 22, 24      Read and discuss West, Race Matters  
Find, read and discuss other materials about contemporary African American expressions of religion (Kwanzaa, African American denominations of Protestantism, African American members of mainline Protestant and Catholic and evangelical Protestant churches, the Nation of Islam or "Black Muslims", African immigrant Islam)  
Possible field work opportunities or site visits

Mar. 27, 29, 31      Spring Break

### **Orthodox Christianity; Roman Catholic Christianity**

Apr. 3, 5, 7      Read and discuss Carey, The Roman Catholics in America (some students)  
Read and discuss FitzGerald, The Orthodox Church (some students)  
Arts experience projected  
Site visit to a Catholic Church and/or Orthodox Church service  
Field work opportunities  
Fri., April 7—Third paper due

### **Protestant Christianity; Unitarianism; the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints; Baha'i**

Apr. 10, 12, 14      Read and discuss Kirby, The Methodists (some students)  
Student oral reports  
Field work opportunities or site visits

### **Continue Protestant Christianity; Lutherans in Minnesota**

Apr. 17, 19, 21      Lecture, student oral reports, possible site visits  
(Good Friday)      Fri., April 21—Fourth paper due

**Wicce; Contemporary Goddess Spirituality; Contemporary Nature Sprituality;  
New Age Religion**

Apr. 24, 26, 28 Lecture, field learning reports, site visits or reports  
Mon., April 24—Turn in third installment of writer's notebook

**Final Organization of Religious Pluralism in the Twin Cities Project**

May 1, 3, 5 Student oral reports  
Field learning reports and web site and handbook planning  
Fri., May 5—Final papers and/or handbook contributions due

No exams

**Grading:**

10% of final grade on class participation

20% of grade on final project

10% of grade on each of the installments of the writer's notebook and each of the  
small papers (70% total)