

Revised Syllabus
SOAN 3200/RLST 3170
Religion, Society, and Culture
Fall 2005
TTH 1:00-2:40

Instructor: Julian M. Murchison
Room: SHH 369
Office: SHH 346
Office Hours: MW 1:00-2:00 and TTh 3:00-4:00, or by appointment
Email: murchjm@millsaps.edu
Phone: Ext. 1437
Course website: www.millsaps.edu/socio/religion.shtml

Course Description:

Religion has always been a central focus of study for anthropology and sociology as well as the other social sciences, not to mention other disciplines. Religious forms and practices are incredibly diverse and varied, but nearly every human society or culture seems to present some type of religion. Religion's near universality, however, does not imply that sociologists, anthropologists, and other social scientists readily agree on a definition of religion, much less comprehensive theories about religion. Different theorists propose different understandings of the essence of religion and build their theoretical frameworks based on these understandings. During the course of the semester, we will become familiar with many of these frameworks and analyze their utility, particularly with regard to specific ethnographic examples.

While we will read many different treatments of religion around the world during the course of the semester, this course is not a survey of world religions. In other words, though understanding the basic principles and practices of the religions in question is crucial, as anthropologists and sociologists, we will focus on *how religion is social and cultural* — i.e., how it fits into larger social and cultural systems. The questions we will be asking during the course of the semester include the following: How do religious rituals help to produce group cohesion as well as culturally and socially-skilled individuals? What is the relationship between religion and politics as well as social structure? Is religion representative of inherent social tensions? What is the cultural function of religious symbols? And, most fundamentally, we will be asking *What is religion and what does it mean to be "religious"?*

Required Texts:

Baer, Hans A., and Merrill Singer
2002 African American religion: varieties of protest and accommodation. Knoxville:
University of Tennessee Press.

Belcove-Shalin, Janet S., ed.

1995 *New world Hasidim: ethnographic studies of Hasidic Jews in America*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Metcalf, Barbara Daly, ed.

1996 *Making Muslim space in North America and Europe*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Monahan, Susanne C., William A. Mirola, and Michael O. Emerson, eds.

2001 *Sociology of Religion: a reader*. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall.

Ortner, Sherry B.

1978 *Sherpas through their rituals*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.

Reserve Readings:

Glazier, Stephen D.

1999 *Anthropology of Religion: A Handbook*. Westport, CT: Praeger. [Selections]

Harding, Sandra

1987 "Convicted by the Holy Spirit: The Rhetoric of Fundamental Baptist Conversion." *American Ethnologist*, 14:167-181.

Tice, Elizabeth T.

2001 *Inside the Mormon Mind: The Social Psychology of Mormonism*. Boston: Pearson Custom Publishing. [Selections]

Course Requirements:

1) Attendance and Participation (20%) You are required to attend class and to participate in class discussions and activities. Each of you is allowed two absences before your attendance and participation grade begins to suffer. *Please note that this policy does not discriminate between excused and unexcused absences; you are allowed two absences total.* I will make exceptions for college-sanctioned events, such as Model-UN or intercollegiate athletics. However, you are responsible for talking to me about any such absences *ahead of time*. This is a discussion-oriented course, and a significant component of your grade will depend on your regular, productive participation in class discussion and other activities. *You cannot earn a good attendance and participation grade if you do not attend class regularly, but it is not enough simply to attend class in the sense of filling a chair. In order to earn a good attendance and participation grade, you must regularly come to class prepared to participate in an engaged and thoughtful manner (i.e., having done the reading and other assignments).* Tardiness is disruptive

for the entire class and will negatively affect your attendance and participation grade. If you have any concerns about attendance or participation, please see me as soon as possible so that we can deal with the concerns.

2) Individual Presentations (15%) During the first week of class, each of you will be assigned a topic and date for presentation. Each of your presentations will focus on a different theorist who has contributed significantly to the study of religion in the social sciences. On the assigned date, you will be required to make a presentation about the relevant theorist's approach to religion. I encourage you to be creative with the format of these presentations, but you should make sure you provide a broad overview of the relevant theory. Each of you should produce a one- to two-page handout to accompany your presentation. This handout will be distributed to your classmates. I will be happy to have the handout copied, but you must get it to me at least 24 hours prior to the class meeting. *I expect you to consult with me about these presentations.* I will be happy to provide guidance about useful sources and to help clarify any concerns.

3) Midterm and Final Exam (30%) Each exam will consist of several short-answer questions and a single essay. You will have a choice of two essay questions. The questions will require you to reflect upon and integrate various materials covered up to that point in the course. Each exam will account for 15% of your final grade.

4) Film Analysis (10%) For this assignment you will analyze the depiction of religion in a popular film using one or more of the theoretical frameworks we have discussed in class. The theoretical framework you choose should be different from the one you present to the class. Any film that deals with religion directly or indirectly can serve as the basis for this paper; some of the many possibilities include *Ali*, *Malcolm X*, *The Mission*, *Stigmata*, *Little Buddha*, and *Brother from Another Planet*. This analytical paper should be 1,200-1,500 words in length.

5) Final Paper (25%) The final paper will be a research project concerning a topic in the sociology or anthropology of religion of particular interest to you. Please feel free to consult me in the process of deciding on a topic. I will be happy to help you brainstorm about topics or to help you refine a specific topic. You will submit a prospectus for this final paper during week 7. Please remember that this paper should not simply be a report. Your research should ask a particular analytical question and your paper should use that research to build a well-developed and well-supported analytical argument. The final paper should be 3,750-5,000 words in length. All sources must be properly cited, of course.

Class Policies:

The dates provided on this syllabus for the submission of assignments are *deadlines*. Late submissions will only be accepted at the discretion of the instructor and, if accepted, will be penalized half of a letter grade (5%) for each day late. You should submit all assignments by the

beginning of the class meeting on the date due. You should also keep a hard copy of all assignments and save them on disk for your own records. If legitimate, unavoidable circumstances require you to seek an extension, make sure you consult with me about an extension as early as possible *before the deadline*. No work will be accepted after the final exam date.

If you miss class, for whatever reason (i.e., excused or unexcused, including due to late registration), *you* are responsible for making up any work. Absences do not exempt you from the deadlines for assignments. If you know you are going to be absent, you need to *plan ahead* and plan to turn in any assignments ahead of time. Similarly, being sick on the day that an assignment is due does not exempt you from the deadline either. I expect you to have been working on the assignment all along. You need to be prepared for the unexpected. In the event of an absence, talk to me and fellow students to find out what was covered, get notes, etc. You will not be allowed to make up an exam without proper documentation indicating that your absence was excused.

You are responsible for doing *all* of the reading on time. Reading involves taking notes and thinking critically about the words on the page. If a reading assignment is listed for a particular day, that reading assignment should be completed *prior to* the class meeting on that date.

If you have a question about a topic covered in the readings, class, or elsewhere, please do not hesitate to ask me about it. You are welcome to contact me over email or to come to see me in office hours, but I also encourage you to ask questions in class, where your classmates can benefit from your questions.

As students at Millsaps, you have all pledged to abide by the Millsaps Honor Code. I expect you to meet the high standards of academic honesty embodied in the Honor Code. Academic honesty is vital for our intellectual endeavors. Plagiarism and other forms of cheating are acts of dishonesty. If I find that a student has been academically dishonest, college policies require that I report the case to the academic dean for consideration by the Honor Council. Please take your responsibilities under the Honor Code very seriously. You should always submit your own original work for this class and cite *all* sources upon which you have drawn in developing papers and other projects. I will be unable to grade your work if you fail to provide proper citations.

If you are challenged with a learning disability, it is your responsibility to register with Student Services and to inform me of any allowances granted by the college. I will be happy to work with you to make sure that we arrange for the appropriate allowances.

Class Schedule:

Week 1 (8/22/05-8/26/05): Introduction

Tuesday (8/23): Syllabus

Thursday (8/25): *Anthropology of Religion*, 103-136; *Sociology of Religion*, 1-4

Week 2 (9/12/05-9/16/05): What's Going on in People's Minds?!

Tuesday (9/13): *Inside the Mormon Mind*, 29-80

Thursday (9/15): *Anthropology of Religion*, 19-84; *Sociology of Religion*, 37-43
Film: "Holy Ghost People"

Week 3 (9/19/05-9/23/05): Modernization and Secularization?

Tuesday (9/20): *Sociology of Religion*, 196-224

Presentation on James G. Frazer

Thursday (9/22):

Presentations on Bronislaw Malinowski and E.E. Evans-Pritchard

Week 4 (9/26/05-9/30/05): The Importance of Rituals for Sherpas and Others

Tuesday (9/27): *Sherpas Through Their Rituals*, 1-32; *Sociology of Religion*, 5-15

Presentation on Emile Durkheim

Thursday (9/29): *Sherpas Through Their Rituals*, 33-90; *Sociology of Religion*, 47-54

Presentation on Victor Turner

Week 5 (10/3/05-10/7/05): Rituals and Sherpas (cont.)

Tuesday (10/4): *Sherpas Through Their Rituals*, 91-156

Presentation on Roy Rappaport

Thursday (10/6): *Sherpas Through Their Rituals*, 157-169; *Sociology of Religion*, 16-23, 297-303

Presentation on Clifford Geertz

Week 6 (10/10/05-10/14/05): Sacred Space

Tuesday (10/11): *Making Muslim Space*, 1-45

Presentation on Mircea Eliade

Thursday (10/13):

Take-Home Midterm Exam Handed Out, Due Tuesday, Oct. 18

Week 7 (10/17/05-10/21/05): Charisma and Authority

Tuesday (10/18): *New World Hasidim*, xi-xv, 1-30, 257-275; *Sociology of Religion*, 360-373
Presentation on Max Weber

Thursday (10/20): *Making Muslim Space*, 92-127
Presentation on A.F.C. Wallace

Final Paper Prospectus Due

Week 8 (10/24/05-10/28/05): Religious Symbols and Markers

Tuesday (10/25): *Making Muslim Space*, 186-233
Presentation on Claude Levi-Strauss

Thursday (10/27):
Presentation on Peter Berger

Week 9 (10/31/05-11/4/05): Race, Ethnicity, and Religion

Tuesday (11/1): *Making Muslim Space*, 46-91

Thursday (11/3): *Sociology of Religion*, 78-95

Week 10 (11/7/05-11/11/05): Hasidism in the New World

Tuesday (11/8): *New World Hasidim*, 31-86
Presentation on Mary Douglas

Thursday (11/10): *New World Hasidim*, 87-134

Week 11 (11/14/05-11/18/05): Hasidism in the New World (cont.)

Tuesday (11/15): *New World Hasidim*, 135-180
Presentation on Joseph Campbell

Thursday (11/17): *New World Hasidim*, 181-256

Week 12 (11/21/05-11/25/05): Marx and African-American Religion

Tuesday (11/22): *African American Religion*, xv-xxii, 1-26; *Sociology of Religion*, 15-16, 419-426

Presentation on Karl Marx

Thursday (11/24): **THANKSGIVING**

Week 13 (11/28/05-12/2/05): African-American Religion (cont.)

Tuesday (11/29): *African American Religion*, 27-182
Presentation on Marvin Harris

Film Analysis Paper Due

Thursday (12/1): *African American Religion*, 183-231
Presentation on Talal Asad

Week 14 (12/5/05-12/9/05): Politics and the Enchanted World

Tuesday (12/6): *Sociology of Religion*, 115-143, 399-403

Presentation on Michael Taussig

Thursday (12/8): *Sociology of Religion*, 43-47, 326-336; Harding

Final Research Paper Due

FINAL EXAM