

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

**Professor Melissa M. Wilcox**  
**MW 1:00-2:20, Olin 155**  
**Whitman College**  
**Fall 2011**

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Office hours: Tu 9:00-10:30, Th 10:30-12:00  
(If you can't make these times, see me for an appointment)

### **Course summary:**

This course explores several important facets of religious tolerance and intolerance in the U.S. today. It begins with 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:**

- John Corrigan and Lynn S. Neal, eds. *Religious Intolerance in America: A Documentary History*. Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 2010.
- Huston Smith, *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).
- Anny Bakalian and Mehdi Bozorgmehr, *Backlash 9/11: Middle Eastern and Muslim Americans Respond* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).
- Ann Pellegrini and Janet R. Jakobsen, *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004).

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:.....	20 %
Final project.....	30 %
Class participation.....	15 %

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

*Final project:* There are two 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 or a formal paper. **You must discuss your project option and topic with me before Thursday, November 10.** Projects are due in your CLEo drop box **by 2:00 p.m. on Friday, December 16.**

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. Formal paper: 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.**

*Discussion helpers – "Ouch" and "Oops":* Some of the issues we discuss in class may be sensitive for you, or for your classmates. If a classmate says something that you find disrespectful (to you or to someone else), say "ouch!" You can help out your classmate by explaining what you found disrespectful and why. If you accidentally say something that another person finds disrespectful, say "Oops!" We're all learning, and sometimes we make mistakes and inadvertently hurt someone. Saying "oops" lets your classmates know that you've realized you made a mistake.

<p><b>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.</b></p>
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## Thought Paper Guidelines

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. Submit each paper to your CLEo drop box by 1:00 p.m. on the day it is due, but bring notes or a copy of the paper to class to use in discussion.

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/cisgenderism). 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 Wednesday, September 7**

What was it like to read the Maria Monk piece, and then to find out its origin? Did you read it as real originally? If so, why do you think this happened? If not, what in your own background do you think enabled you to see through it? What lessons does this experiment hold for understanding how religious intolerance works, and perhaps how to change it?

### **2. Due Wednesday, September 21**

Now that you've done some reading on the history of religious intolerance in the U.S., ponder what you've learned. What seems to drive religious intolerance? Do you see any patterns in the documents we've read? Pick a contemporary (21<sup>st</sup>-century) case of religious intolerance that you remember. Does it follow the patterns you've identified? Why or why not?

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

**Option 1:** (If you or someone you know identifies as Native American or First Nations *and* is willing to discuss this issue, please do this option.) Talk to someone who is Native American/First Nations (if you are Native American/First Nations, 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/hir traditional culture while she/he/ze was growing up? Has she/he/ze ever encountered prejudice or misguided beliefs about her/his/hir traditional culture?

**Option 2:** (Do this only if you don't know anyone who identifies as Native American or First Nations *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/First Nations cultures and histories? Were you ever taught about Native American/First Nations religions, and if so, what were you taught? Were you ever taught about contemporary Native Americans/First Nations people? 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 American/First Nations people? About Native American/First Nations religions? Do you think

popular culture and the education system in the North American countries constitute a form of religious intolerance against Native Americans and First Nations people? Why or why not?

#### **4. Due Monday, October 24**

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, November 2**

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/hir 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 16**

What is the relationship between the cultural representations of a group of people and their treatment by others? Think about the different ways in which Muslims are portrayed in U.S. popular culture (TV, movies, cartoons, ads, print media, etc.). Do you think those portrayals influence how non-Muslims think about and treat Muslims in the U.S.? Or is popular culture simply an accurate representation of how the majority of non-Muslims in the U.S. already feel about Muslims? Which comes first: the attitude or the representation? And how might one intervene in this process to create a safer environment for Muslims in the U.S.?

#### **7. Due Wednesday, December 7**

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 cisgender), 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, heterosexism, transphobia, or cisgenderism; see the beginning of this assignment sheet for details.)

## Course Schedule

### **Week 1: Introductions**

Wednesday, 8/31: Introduction to class  
No reading.

### **Week 2: Nineteenth-century religious intolerance**

Monday, 9/5: Anti-Catholicism in U.S. history  
Read: Syllabus; Corrigan and Neal, Ch. 2; CLEo - Hammond  
Wednesday, 9/7: Anti-Mormonism in U.S. history  
Read: Corrigan and Neal, Ch. 3, CLEo - Albanese

→ **Thought paper #1 due**

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

### **Week 3: Intolerance of new religious movements**

Monday, 9/12: Intolerance and nineteenth-century NRMs  
Read: Corrigan and Neal, Ch. 4, CLEo - Bellah  
Wednesday, 9/14: Intolerance and twentieth-century NRMs  
Read: Corrigan and Neal, Ch. 7

### **Week 4: Late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century intolerance**

Monday, 9/19: Intolerance and the Branch Davidians  
Read: Corrigan and Neal, Ch. 8  
Wednesday, 9/21: Class discussion – Tracking patterns in intolerance  
Read: Corrigan and Neal Ch. 5; Smith, “Preface,” “The Indian Way of Story,”  
“Introduction”

→ **Thought paper #2 due**

### **Week 5: Native American religious rights I**

Monday, 9/26: Deloria, Echo-Hawk, LaDuke, Black Elk  
Read: Smith, Chs. 1-4  
Wednesday, 9/28: George-Kanentiio, Dayish, Foster, Frichner, Lopez  
Read: Smith, Chs. 6-9  
*Film: Kennewick Man* (dir. Kyle Carver and Ryan Purcell, 2001, 86 min.)

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

Monday, 10/3: Lyons, Deloria, Smith  
Read: Smith, Chs. 10, 11, Afterword (including “Message from the Hopi Elders”)

→ **Field trip to Tamástslíkt Cultural Center: day and time TBA**

Wednesday, 10/5: Class discussion – Native American religious rights  
No reading

→ **Thought paper #3 due**

### **Week 7: Religious freedom and anti-Semitism**

*Monday, 10/10: Fall break - No reading.*  
Wednesday, 10/12: Histories of anti-Semitism  
Read: Feldman, Chs. 1 and 7, Corrigan and Neal Ch. 6

**Week 8: Responding to Anti-Semitism**

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

Read: Feldman, Chs. 8, 9

Wednesday, 10/19: Don't wish me a Merry Christmas?

Read: Feldman, Ch. 10

**Week 9: Anti-Semitism and White supremacy I**

Monday, 10/24: Class discussion – Anti-Semitism

No reading

→ **Thought paper #4 due**

Wednesday, 10/26: White supremacy and Christianity

Read: Bushart, Introduction, Chs. 1-6

*Film: Blink* (dir. Elizabeth Thompson, 2000, 57 min.)

**Week 10: White supremacy II**

Monday, 10/31: Reinterpreting Christianity

Read: Bushart, Chs. 7-10

Wednesday, 11/2: Class discussion – White supremacy

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

→ **Thought paper #5 due**

**Week 11: 9/11 Backlash and response I**

Monday, 11/7: Models and histories of backlash

Read: Bakalian and Bozorgmehr, pp. 1-24, Ch. 2

*Film: Divided We Fall* (dir. Valarie Kaur and Sharat Raju, 2006, 110 min.)

Wednesday, 11/9: Hate crimes and organizational responses

Read: Bakalian and Bozorgmehr, Chs. 4, 5

Finish film

→ **Thursday, 11/10: Last day to contact me about your final project idea!**

**Week 12: Backlash and response II**

Monday, 11/14: Government initiatives and mobilization

Read: Bakalian and Bozorgmehr, Chs. 6, 7 (*through p. 198 only*)

Wednesday, 11/16: Class discussion – Islamophobia in the U.S.

Read: Bakalian and Bozorgmehr, Finish Ch. 7, Ch. 8

*Film: Point of Attack* (dir. Kathleen Foster, 2004, 46 min.)

→ **Thought paper #6 due**

**NOVEMBER 19-27: THANKSGIVING BREAK!****Week 13: Religion and homophobia – biphobia – transphobia**

Monday, 11/28: Sexual freedom, religious freedom

Read: Jakobsen and Pellegrini, Preface and Introduction

Wednesday, 11/30: The limits of tolerance and essentialism

Read: Jakobsen and Pellegrini, Chs. 1, 2

**Week 14: The limits of tolerance**

Monday, 12/5: Radical visions

Read: Jakobsen and Pellegrini, Chs. 3, 4

Wednesday, 12/7: Class discussion – Religion and anti-LGBT beliefs

Read: Jakobsen and Pellegrini, Ch. 5 and Conclusion

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

→ **Thought paper #7 due**

**Finals week:**

**Final project papers due in your CLEo drop box by 2:00 p.m. on Friday, 12/16.**