

REL 360

New Religious Movements, Popular Media, and Violence in American History

Institutional and Curricular Context

Cleveland State University is a research university located in downtown Cleveland, Ohio. Although CSU started life as a commuter school, it is actively, and rapidly, transforming itself into a traditional residential campus. Most students still come from Ohio and neighboring states although students from outside the U.S. are well-represented. There are currently 17,000 students, 8 academic colleges, and 200 academic programs. CSU also has a law school and business school. There are no Ph.D. programs in the humanities, although Philosophy and History do offer Master's Degrees.

The religious studies program is housed in the department of Philosophy and Comparative Religion. The merging of these two departments occurred in 2013 and is for organizational efficiency purposes only. There is no program cross over. The department offers a BA in Religious Studies as well as a minor in the same field. Our department is very small, with four full-time tenured faculty members in the Comparative Religion field. I am the sole Americanist, but I also teach several thematic courses and courses on theory and method.

At the 300-level, this course is designed primarily for majors and minors who are exploring topics about which they may write for their senior capstone experience. The course draws on both theoretical, interpretive, and primary source materials regarding New Religious Movements, the Media, and Violence. The course covers the full span of American history via case studies drawn from the 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th and 21st centuries. Students are not required to take this course, although it does fulfill a "research-intensive course" requirement majors, general education requirements, and a university-wide "writing across the curriculum" requirement. Enrollment for the course is around 15-20 students. The course meets for 50 minutes, three times a week for 15 weeks.

Method

My courses are always driven by relatively challenging reading loads and rigorous discussions. In this course, these are complemented by a significant writing requirement. I organize the course around three central questions: 1) What is a New Religious Movement 2) What do we mean by "media" 3) What does these concept have to do with power and violence? All readings, writing assignments, and discussions will address one or more of these questions.

The ultimate point of the course is for students to see how the dynamics of socio-religious marginalization create and re-create the religious (and sometimes political) landscape in the United States. Because this course is designated as Research Intensive and counts for "Writing Across the Curriculum" credit, a significant portion of the last part of the semester is devoted to the craft of conceiving, researching, and writing a scholarly paper.

Cleveland State University

REL 360

New Religious Movements, Popular Media, and Violence in American History

Time: MWF 10:00-10:50 AM

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Course Description: This course explores the phenomenon of “New Religious Movements,” sometimes called “cults.” We look at how NRM is actually a category group’s move into and out of, rather than a fixed list of religious traditions; it is a label that almost no group embraces. In the American context, nearly every religious group that has come to enjoy social approval and a “mainstream” label spent some time in the NRM category. The popular media is one of the key tools that facilitate the creation and maintenance of the NRM category. We will look at how various media outlets (pamphlets, newspapers, radio, television, and the Internet) use the NRM category, why they do so, and explore the impact this has on the broader society. Finally, this course looks at how violence, both physical and rhetorical, is an integral part of the way that the NRM category has functioned in the American context since the 17th century.

Course Outcomes:

1. Students will gain a broad understanding of the taxonomy of religion and the role it plays in the broader American social and culture context
2. Students will understand the role of the media in the creation and maintenance of categories of marginalization
3. Students will come to understand the nature and causes of religious violence directed at and coming from New Religious Movements
4. Students will learn research and writing skills relevant to their broader education at Cleveland State University. This will result in the production of a 15-20 page research paper.
5. **Respect and Classroom Etiquette:**
As adults and college students, you are expected to display maturity and respect in the classroom. Everyone in the class is paying for the privilege of participating, and disruptions of class time represent a type of theft. In addition, please remember that, as the course instructor, the classroom is also my place of business—I work here. I take this very seriously. In order to avoid any difficulties here is a list of items basic to classroom etiquette:
 1. **Be on time.** Please be seated and ready to begin at the appointed time. Entering the classroom late disrupts the lecture and causes the class to lose valuable time—time that students are paying for. Chronic tardiness (being late more than once or twice) will affect your grade.
 2. Turn off cell phones and other similar devices.
 3. **No texting. Seriously.**
 4. No socializing during lecture or discussion
 5. Respect the views of others. This does not mean you must agree with them, but you must respect them.

6. Be willing to expand your horizons and exercise your intellect through active engagement with lectures and readings.

7. Your presence, in both physical and mental terms, is expected in this course. Part of each class session will involve a discussion in which you are expected to actively, and productively, participate. Missing class for any reason other a legitimate illness or other such dire circumstance is a bad idea and will hurt your grade.

8. A special note on laptops use: USING THE INTERNET DURING CLASS TIME IS PROHIBITED. VIOLATION OF THIS POLICY WILL RESULT IN A REVOCATION OF THE PRIVILEGE OF USING A LAPTOP IN CLASS

Statement on Students with Disabilities

Educational access is the provision of classroom accommodations, auxiliary aids and services to ensure equal educational opportunities for all students regardless of their disability. Any student who feels he or she may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the Office of Disability Services at (216) 687-2015. The Office is located in MC 147. Accommodations need to be requested in advance and will not be granted retroactively.

Statement on Plagiarism

(<http://www.csuohio.edu/academic/writingcenter/WAC/Plagiarism.html>)

The CSU Student Handbook describes plagiarism as stealing and/or using the ideas or writings of another in a paper or report and claiming them as your own. This includes but is not limited to the use, by paraphrase or direct quotation, of the work of another person without full and clear acknowledgment. Minor infractions comprise those instances of cheating, plagiarism, and/or tampering which affect the grade of an individual class assignment or project of lesser (<25% of grade) importance. Multiple instances of minor infractions within a course or across courses constitute a major infraction. Major infractions comprise those instances of cheating, plagiarism, and/or tampering which affect the overall course grade, such as a major/ comprehensive exam, term paper or project, final grade evaluation, or academic standing and status. Major infractions automatically result in an entry on the student's permanent record that the student has engaged in academic misconduct. Procedures of reporting plagiarism are described on pages 17-21 of the Student Handbook.

<http://www.csuohio.edu/studentlife/conduct/StudentCodeOfConduct2004.pdf>

Readings:

NOTE: This class carries a rather rigorous. *Also, you must have the books BEFORE the readings are due. I cannot make exceptions to this policy for any reason (including financial aid problems).*

There are two required books and numerous articles used in this course. The books may be purchased in the University bookstore.

1. Olav Hammer, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to New Religious Movements* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
2. Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers*, 8th edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).
3. All other readings listed in the syllabus will be posted on the class Blackboard page

Grading:

Grades on individual assignments will generally be given as a number of points out of some total possible (e.g., 10/10, 23/25, 48/60, etc.). Letter grades will be a function of the resulting percentages, as follows:

	87-89.9% = B+	76-79.9% = C+			
94-100% = A	83-86.9% = B	70-75.9% = C	60-69.9% = D	0-59.9% = F	
90-93.9% = A-	80-82.9% = B-				

Participation: 15%

Research Question: 15%

Argument Statement: 15%

First Draft: 15%

Critiques of Reading Group Papers: 10%

Response to Critiques: 10%

Final Draft: 20%

Schedule:

Week 1: New? Religious? Movement? Defining our terms

Readings: Hammer, Introduction; Wright, Introduction

Week 2: A Brief History of Popular Media and Religion in America

Readings: Julius H. Rubin, "Contested Narratives: A Case Study of the Conflict Between a New Religious Movement and Its Critics," in Benjamin Zablocki and Thomas Robbins, eds., *Misunderstanding Cults* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

Week 3: Creating Ideologically Oppositional Worlds

Readings: Douglas E. Cowan, "Constructing the New Religious Threat: Anticult and Countercult Movements," in Daschke and Ashcraft, 317-330; David Bromley, "The Sociology of New Religious Movements," in Hammer, 13-28

Week 4: Religious "Others" in Colonial America

Readings: Linford D. Fisher, "Colonial Encounters," in Paul Harvey and Edward Blum, eds., *The Columbia Guide to Religion in American History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 1-67; Chapters 4-6 of *Adrian Chastain Weimer, Martyr's Mirror: Persecution and Holiness in Early New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Week 5: The U.S. Constitution and the First Amendment: Anything Goes? The FBI and Waco

Readings: "American Religions and the Authority of Law," in Eric Mazur, *The Americanization of Religious Minorities* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 1-27; "Introduction," in David Sehat, *The Myth of American Religious Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1-10; Nancy T. Ammerman, "Waco, Federal Law Enforcement, and Scholars of Religion," in Wright, 282-298.

Week 6: Catholicism vs. Protestantism in the Nineteenth Century "Old Religious Movement" as marginalizing category; "Cult"

Readings: Chapter 5 in Peter Schrag, *Not Fit for Our Society: Immigration and Nativism in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Chapter 2 in Chester Gillis, *Roman Catholicism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 48-67; James T. Richardson: "Definitions of Cult: From Sociological-Technical to Popular-Negative," *Review of Religious Research* 34:4 (June 1993): 348-356; Douglas E. Cowan, "Major Controversies Involving New Religious Movements," in Hammer, 44-62.

Week 7: Thinking about research in Religious Studies: Methods and Theories (No class Wed. and Friday for Thanksgiving)

Readings: "What Research is and How Researchers Think About It" in Turabian, 1-23;

Week 8: Topic to Question to Working Hypothesis

Readings: For this week's reading, I am introducing a packet containing documents from stages of my latest published work (hereafter "Taysom"). This week, read sections I and II: "Possible Topics, Main Questions, Who Cares?" and "Sharpening the Questions and Narrowing the Field."

Week 9: Primary and Secondary Sources in the field of NRMs

Readings: "Finding Useful Sources," and "Engaging Useful Sources," in Turabian, 24-62; Douglas E. Cowan, "New Religious Movements and the Evolving Internet," in Hammer, 44-62.; Taysom, Section III: "Bibliography and Primary Source Locations"

Week 10: Choosing an Angle: Ritual, Apocalypticism, Texts

Readings: Graham Harvey, "Rituals in New Religions," in Hammer, 97-112; Olav Hammer and Mikael Rothstein, "Canonical and Extracanonial Texts in New Religions," in Hammer, 113-131; Gary W. Trompf, "History and the End of Time in New Religions," in Hammer, 63-79; **STATEMENT OF RESEARCH QUESTION DUE FRIDAY**

Week 11: Argument and Drafting

Catherine Bell, *Ritual*, Introduction; Taysom: Section IV, "Drafts 1-3 of Ritual Framework"; "Planning your Argument," and "Planning a First Draft," in Turabian, 49-72. **STATEMENT/EXPLANATION OF ARGUMENT, PRIMARY AND SECONDARY BIBLIOGRAPHIES DUE FRIDAY**

Week 12: Dissection an article for claims, argument, evidence, tone, and clarity

Readings: Reuven Firestone, "Jihadism" as a New Religious Movement," in Hammer, 263-286; Marat Shterin, "New Religious Movements in Changing Russia," in Hammer, 286-302.

Week 13: The Politics and Emotion of Studying New Religious Movements: Jonestown. Readings: Transcript of the final "White Knight" tape. We will be listening to, and discussing, the entire recording in class on Friday

Week 14: **First Drafts Due to Reading Group on Monday, Critiques of Papers due on Friday.** Three guest professors will come and discuss the "art" of providing constructive criticism.

Readings: Papers from your reading group

Week 15: Using criticism to strengthen your work. This week three guest professors will come to discuss how they respond to critiques. **Brief responses to critiques due Friday**

Readings: Student critiques of your draft; "Taysom," Section V: Letters from External Reviewers.

FINAL DRAFT DUE DECEMBER 7

CSU General Education Designations

This course is approved for the fulfillment of both Arts and Humanities (with skills in critical thinking and writing) and Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) requirements in CSU's General Education curriculum. The criteria for these designations are as follows:

Arts and Humanities

1. Courses must be offered at the 100/200 level in an arts and humanities discipline including but not limited to English, History, Philosophy, Art History, Music History, Religious Studies, or Modern Languages. Courses offered in other disciplines may be approved if they meet the other conditions indicated below.
2. Courses must provide students with background knowledge and analytical skills that will allow them to:

- a. Demonstrate understanding of how human beings interpret, translate, and represent diverse experiences of the world through language, literature, the historical record, philosophical systems, images, sounds, and performances.
- b. Apply that understanding to the study of the human condition, cultural heritage, cultural artifacts, creativity, and history.

** Additional criteria for courses focused on Asia, Latin America, Africa and/or the Middle East:

1. The primary focus of the course must be on a society or societies in Asia, Latin America, Africa and/or the Middle East. Courses that compare these societies to those of North America and/or Europe may be approved only if the majority of the course material concerns the first group of societies and the principal purpose of the course is to improve students' understanding of those societies.
2. Content must be presented from the perspective(s) of the societies being studied, not simply European and/or American perceptions of those societies.

Skill Area: Critical Thinking

To qualify in the skill area of critical thinking a course must:

1. Designate that at least 15% of the student's grade in the course is based on an evaluation of critical thinking.
2. Require students to attain skills beyond lower-level knowledge, thereby requiring:
 - a. Higher-order thinking (analysis, synthesis, evaluation); **OR**
 - b. Skills that involve the use of content knowledge (e.g. finding information to solve a problem); **OR**
 - c. The recognition of the importance and usefulness of knowledge and skills gained in the course (e.g., recognize the ability to and importance of working with others to solve intellectual problems).

Skill Area: Writing

To qualify in the skill area of writing a course must:

1. Designate that at least 15% of the student's grade in the course is based on an evaluation of writing.
2. Include writing assignments that directly relate to the course goals.
3. Include instruction in writing-to-learn and/or writing-to-communicate. While writing-to-learn emphasizes the student's experience, writing-to-communicate highlights the reader's experience. Both are necessary to produce a thoughtful text that observes academic writing's conventions.
4. Require that students write a total of 2,000 words (8 pages, double-spaced, in 12-point font, with 1" margins) in multiple assignments.
5. Assign writing throughout the semester.

Writing Across the Curriculum

A course approved for the WAC requirement must meet all of the following criteria:

1. Require students to write between 3,000 and 5,000 words (10-20 pages, double-spaced, in 12-point font, with 1" margins) in writing assignments (which may include drafts).¹

¹ The word count may only include one preliminary draft for each final draft.

2. Final versions of at least one assignment should total at least 2,000 words (eight pages).²
3. Teach students writing-to-learn strategies that foster students' experiences in learning and writing-to-communicate strategies that foster students' respect of readers' experiences.³ Whenever possible, planning assignments (e.g. reading logs, pre-writing strategies) and peer reviews should be included.
4. Assign writing complex enough to require substantive revision for most students. The instructor should give feedback to assist students in preparing subsequent papers or drafts of papers. This feedback should not consist entirely of mechanical correction of punctuation and grammar.
5. Provide instruction in discipline-appropriate forms of texts, arguments, evidence, style, audience, and citation.
6. Assign writing throughout the semester.
7. Where appropriate, address the needs of students regarding library competency.
8. Assign writing in English unless the course is specifically geared to improving writing at the 300-level in another language.

Additional criteria

9. In order to receive a C or better in the course, students must write at a satisfactory skill level (C or better). If the student's writing is weak, but shows understanding of the course material, the student may be assigned a D, in which case WAC credit will not be received for the course.
10. Maximum enrollment for this course is 35 or 45 with a graduate assistant.

² Exceptions to this criterion may be granted in disciplines or courses where students do a substantial amount of writing, but the course structure and/or content does not create opportunities for an assignment of this length.

³ Writing-to-learn helps students use writing to explore many aspects of the course as well as their own reflections; these activities should foster learning at deeper levels than memorization or recitation. Writing-to-communicate emphasizes aspects of writing (style, grammatical correctness, coherence, focus) that allow a reader to navigate the writing as he or she wishes.