

# **Religious Sects and Cults: The Study of New Religious Movements in the United States**

Young Scholars in American Religion  
2009-2011

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## **Institutional Setting**

Wake Forest in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, is a private, secular university with an undergraduate college dedicated to providing students with a liberal arts education. The student body numbers around 4500, many of whom graduated in the top ten percent of their high school class. The majority of these students are from the South (53 percent) and are affiliated with some branch of Christianity (Catholicism is the single largest denomination represented). However, in recent years, the college has been working hard to increase the racial, economic, regional, and religious diversity of the undergraduate population. Eliminating the SAT requirement and admitting students based on a more holistic approach has yielded some success in this regard. Students tend to be motivated and bright, involved and inquisitive. The challenge, for many, is balancing their academic interests and expectations with their various extracurricular commitments.

Wake Forest upholds the teacher-scholar ideal for its professors, which demands excellence in both teaching and research. This encourages professors to develop their pedagogical skills, to consider connections between their teaching and research, and allows for smaller classroom sizes. The faculty/student ratio on campus is 11:1. My appointment is in the Religion Department where courses serve two primary purposes. First, our introductory courses fulfill a humanities requirement for the college. Second, our upper-level courses offer majors, minors, and interested students (there are no prerequisites) a wide variety of topics in and approaches to the study in religion. Our department has a strong teaching reputation on campus and classes regularly fill to capacity. Introductory classes average around thirty, while upper-level seminars range from fifteen to twenty students. In my experience, students in religion classes tend to be open-minded, respectful, and interested in the ways religion intersects with and shapes various systems—economics, politics, etc. The primary pedagogical challenges involve motivating students to go beyond what is easy for them and helping students realize their own assumptions, context, and situatedness.

## **Content, Considerations, and Changes in Teaching “Cults”**

I have taught this course three times. The first incarnation revolved around extensive historical study of nineteenth- and twentieth-century new religious movements (NRMs). We spent a week on each “cult,” reading and discussing both primary and secondary sources; however, at the end of the semester, the students still struggled to move beyond the “cult” stereotype with all of its negative associations. As a result, the second time around, I put stereotypical and media representations of “cults” in the foreground. Less time was spent on Shakers and Oneida Perfectionists and more was focused on analyzing media portrayals in newspapers, magazines, and television. This approach necessitated an issue-oriented structure with classes on the brainwashing controversy, charges of NRM violence, and the ethics of deprogramming along with fewer, more select twentieth-century NRM case studies. This strategy helped students challenge and move beyond the “cult” stereotype, yet some expressed frustration as they wanted to “learn more” about various NRMs. So, I again revised and the results follow. In this latest version, the

emphasis on the “cult” stereotype and issues of religious representation remains, but I have also tried to incorporate their desire for more “traditional” knowledge about what these groups believe and practice.

In addition, throughout these various incarnations of the course I have struggled with its title. “Religious Sects and Cults” reifies the very language and stereotypical concepts that, I hope, the course destabilizes and challenges. However, I have asked students to consider this issue every semester and they have consistently stated that cult ideology is so pervasive in American culture that they most likely would not have taken a class about “new” or “alternative” religions. As a result, I have left the title “as is” for now.

### **Additional Assignment Rationale and Details**

Two course assignments focus on “cult” representation. First, having read and discussed various articles on the negative media portrayal of “cults,” the students are asked to write a five to six page paper that analyzes a popular culture or news media portrayal of a NRM. The assignment is intended to hone their skills in analyzing and interpreting representation practices. Second, I wanted students to have the opportunity to go deeper into their study of a particular NRM, yet this assignment needed to make sense within the context of the course. As a result, I designed a small group (2-3 students) paper and project that asks students to research a NRM of their choice that we have not studied in class—its beliefs and history, the controversies surrounding the group, and its relationship to course issues. The students then write a collaborative 6-8 page paper on their NRM. This part of the assignment affords students the opportunity to “learn more” about a “cult” of interest and they also learn about other NRMs through class presentations of their research. However, given the course emphasis on representation, I also secure permission for each group to create a public display on their NRM for the school library (you could also use bulletin boards, or trifold display boards). There are six display cases in the entrance to our library and I divided the class into six small groups. In terms of studying representation this makes sense to me. In one assignment I ask students to analyze representation and in the group project they have to engage in the act of representation. Students cannot then simply critique the portrayals of others, but they have to address the hard choices and the stereotypes involved in presenting a group to the public—the very issues we discuss in the course. Given that many people only ever encounter NRMs through the media, analyzing and acquiring these representation skills are of vital importance.

To prepare students for this task, we spend a whole class period on how to construct a display and the issues involved in such an undertaking. First, the Preservation Librarian responsible for the display cases speaks with the class for approximately twenty minutes. He shows examples of items from previous exhibits, talks about the elements of effective displays, and provides the students with helpful tips from what font size to use to various techniques for constructing and replicating images. After this discussion, I supply the project groups with mini-display boards, markers, tape, and scissors. They bring images and texts related to their NRM, and with the aforementioned supplies, they begin to talk through and create sample mini-displays. Once completed, groups explain their rationale and the class discusses challenges (stereotypes, controversy, lack of interest) each particular group might face. I also show them displays created by one of my previous classes so they have models to examine. Further, they read about a controversial display incident that highlights the politics of representation and I project two images of religious violence with the question “What would you do?” The controversy and these two images emphasize the responsibility involved in this undertaking, and help us discuss whether or not including “inflammatory” material in a public display is appropriate.

## **Religious Sects and Cults: The Study of New Religious Movements in the United States**

**I have made a ceaseless effort not to ridicule, not to bewail, nor to scorn  
human actions, but to understand them.  
~Spinoza**

### **The Texts:**

I do not use a textbook, but rather utilize a selection of readings available to students through electronic reserve and the Internet.

### **The Course:**

Living communally, dressing differently, following a charismatic leader, these are all traits associated with the idea of “cults,” and “cult members” are seen as brainwashed, gullible, sheep being led to their doom by a charlatan shepherd, but is this an accurate perception or merely a stereotype? In this course, we will examine the relationship between popular “cult” rhetoric and the reality lived by these religious groups. Throughout the course, we will pay special attention to the “cult” stereotype and how this stereotype is perpetuated through various forms of media. And, as we delve into the beliefs and practices of various New Religious Movements (NRMs)—Shakers, People’s Temple, Mormonism, Branch Davidianism, Satanism, and Wicca—we will also examine the consequences of the “cult” stereotype holds for these groups. Our investigation will not stop with “What does X group believe?”, but rather will continue to investigate cultural reactions to these religious groups. Along the way, we will also analyze major issues that arise in the study and perception of NRMs in the United States (violence, brainwashing, language, etc). Throughout, this course emphasizes the need for you to study the concept of “cult” as both a religious term and a rhetorical device.

### **The Goals and Promises:**

1. By the end of the semester, you will be able to articulate the complexities of defining “cult,” as well as identify central issues that arise in the study of NRMs.
2. By the end of the semester, you will be able to describe and assess a variety of ways in which the “cult” stereotype operates.
3. By the end of the semester, you will gain a more sophisticated understanding of religious power and privilege in American culture as we investigate the construction of “normal” and “deviant” religions.
4. By the end of the semester, you will be familiar with a number of religions known as “cults” and better understand and be able to articulate your own understanding of these groups.
5. By the end of the semester, you will have strengthened several skills and habits that are important for your career development. Skills: textual analysis, persuasive writing, oral communication, active listening, critical empathy, etc. Habits: timeliness, professional presentation of work, professional conduct, etc.
6. By the end of the semester, you will have helped create an open, engaging, and fun learning environment that continually sought academic excellence, honesty, and integrity.

## **Reaching the Goals:**

The following assignments provide you with an opportunity to explore course topics and issues in more depth and are designed to help you realize the course goals.

1. To successfully reach these goals, remember to plan ahead, work hard, ask for clarification when necessary, and keep the following information in mind.
2. **The Honor Code.** All assignments must be completed in accordance with the Wake Forest Honor Code: <http://www.wfu.edu/judicial/honor.html>. Failure to abide by the rules of this community will result in failure of the course.
3. If you have a disability that may require an accommodation for taking this course, please contact the **Learning Assistance Center** within the first two weeks of the semester. Then please provide me with the appropriate form as soon as possible.
4. **Plagiarism** is a violation of the honor code: “To put your name on a piece of work any part of which is not yours is plagiarism, unless that piece is clearly marked and the work from which you have borrowed is fully identified” (<http://www.wfu.edu/english/major/academicwriting.html>). Failure to observe this community rule will result in failure of the course.
5. The **Writing Center** is a helpful resource for your papers.
6. Take advantage of **office hours**. I am happy to meet and talk with you as you make your way through the course.

### **\*\*Participation and Professionalism—20%**

- **Assignment and Purpose: Participate in Class and Cultivate Professional Conduct.** Discussing issues and hearing classmates’ varying perspectives broadens your thinking and helps sharpen your own analysis. Speaking and sharing ideas with each other is a vital part of learning. It also helps you cultivate a variety of professional skills that are important in the workplace—listening and responding to others, expressing your own ideas, discussing areas of agreement and disagreement, empathizing with the situations of others, etc.
- **Your participation and professionalism grade reflects consideration of the following:**
  - **Participation**
    - is relevant to the course and the discussion
    - offers insights into the material
    - asks questions of others that facilitate, rather than stop, discussion
    - goes beyond what is “easy” and “superficial”
    - is willing to engage different perspectives
    - demonstrates honest and critical engagement with the material
    - is focused appropriately during small and large group discussions
  - **Professionalism**
    - is on time
    - is prepared
    - is respectful (ex. focuses on topic at hand, does not write notes to neighbors, does not study for another class during this class)
    - is awake, alert, and pays attention
    - takes notes

- turns off cell phone and puts it away at start of class
- brings readings to class
- completes assignments as directed
- avoids packing up early
- **Attendance or “Sick Days”**
  - The WF *Bulletin* states that students are “expected to attend classes regularly and punctually,” and you cannot learn if you are not in class. As a result, a total of three “sick days” are allowed.
  - We will have additional discussion of this policy during the first two classes.
- Given the importance of participation, **NO LAPTOPS** will be allowed.
- Disagreement is expected in a course about religion. We must learn how to talk with each other when we disagree. This is a hard, but necessary skill. So, when disagreement occurs, be respectful of others’ viewpoints. Ways of dealing with different perspectives include: “You made a good point, but I disagree because...” or “I respect your view, but it seems to overlook...”
- Shy students: Break it down: Work on having one question or insight ready for each class. Remember that this is a learning community that needs and benefits from your voice.

### **\*\*Journals—15%**

- **Assignment:** Write a one page journal entry that **analyzes one** of the assigned readings for that day’s class.
- **Approach:** Each journal entry should have two paragraphs. The first paragraph should identify the most important point or sentence in one of the readings and explain your rationale--why your selection is the most vital to the reading. The second paragraph should pose at least one question designed to get to the heart of the assigned reading and offer an explanation of why you think your question(s) are significant.
- **Purpose:** (1) Journals help you read the course material more carefully and analytically, (2) Journals prepare you for class lecture and discussion, (3) Journals help you analyze and retain course information, and (4) Journals improve your persuasive writing skills.
- **Logistics:**
  - **Due at the start of each class.** They will **not** be accepted at the end of class. Printers can be notoriously unreliable. Plan ahead!
  - **Only one entry will be accepted per class and you must attend the class (no exceptions for illness, travel, etc.). Plan accordingly.**
  - Each entry will be evaluated as acceptable or unacceptable based on the description above.
  - **1 page, double-spaced, Times 12, one-inch margins, no huge headers (you need only include your name, the date, class time, and your journal count).**
  - Only acceptable entries will be considered in the overall journal count that determines your journal grade. Unacceptable entries do not influence your grade.
  - **NOTE: Two journals are required.** All students are **required** to write a journal for the second class on 9/5 and for class on 12/5. These journals are included in your overall journal count. Directions for these entries are listed in the Course Outline under those dates.

➤ **Journal Grading:**

- A (95%)=16 acceptable journal entries
- B (85%)=14 acceptable journal entries
- C (75%)=12 acceptable journal entries
- D (65%)=10 acceptable journal entries
- Less than 10 acceptable entries will result in a zero for this portion of the course.
- **NOTE: Lack of professionalism in your journals—emailing me your assignment rather than printing it yourself, failure to staple your work, and disregarding the logistics above—will result in a lower grade than is shown above.**

**\*\*Paper—20%**

- **The Assignment: Analyze a Media Portrayal of an NRM.** Your assignment is to write an informative and persuasive essay on the media’s portrayal of one NRM, using at least one to two primary sources on your chosen topic and at least one secondary source. Or, put another way, your task is to construct an argument—clearly stated in a thesis sentence in the introduction of your paper—about the media’s portrayal of a specific NRM based on your analysis of primary sources. Your analysis can focus on the depiction of an actual NRM by the news media, the portrayal of an actual NRM by entertainment media, or the portrayal of a fictional NRM by entertainment media.
- **Approach:**
- Choose a topic of interest that is relevant to the class. Options include, but are not limited to:
    - Analysis of news media coverage, including newspapers, news magazines, news shows.
    - Analysis of television or film. For example, examine how HBO’s show *Big Love* portrays Mormonism or the ways FX’s *Nip/Tuck* depicts Scientology.
    - Analysis of web-site(s). For example, Steve Hassan’s “Freedom of Mind” site.
    - Analysis of literature. For example, Laurie King’s novel *A Darker Place*.
  - Do a broad search in the library and on the web to find possible sources for your paper. After examining a broad range of sources, select the best one to two primary sources that will enable you to construct a convincing argument about your topic. Poor source selection will make it difficult to write a great paper. Choose carefully. You may (but are not required to) apply course readings and materials. Write your persuasive essay. It should be organized around a clearly stated thesis (an argument), which is supported by evidence from your primary sources. To help with your thesis, make yourself complete this sentence: “In this essay, I argue that...”
- **Purpose:** (1) The paper gives you an opportunity to explore a topic of interest in more depth, (2) The paper sharpens your analytical and writing skills, (3) The paper hones your ability to analyze and interpret representation practices, and (4) The paper helps you apply course concepts to the world around you.

➤ **Logistics:**

- **NOTE:** Lack of professionalism in your work will lower your paper grade. This includes: emailing rather than printing your paper, failure to staple your work, forgetting to title your work, failure to include page numbers, and disregarding the logistics below.
- Due Date: **Papers are due to my office by the start of class on November 7<sup>th</sup>.**
- Late Policy: Late papers will **not** be accepted, plan accordingly.
- Length: Papers should be 5-6 pages long. Length **IS** part of the assignment.
- Format: Double-spaced, Times 12, one-inch margins, no cover page.
- Citations: MLA in-text citation style; include a properly formatted Works Cited.
- **Failure to properly cite a source is plagiarism and a violation of the Honor Code.**
- Sources: At least one to two primary sources and one secondary source **not** discussed in class. You should include any secondary sources necessary to support your argument.

**\*\*Group Project—15%**

- **The Assignment: NRM Case Study: Display, Paper, & Presentation.** You will be placed in groups of 2 or 3 based on interest. As a group, you will research a specific NRM (its beliefs, history, treatment, and controversies). Then based on that research you will write a collective 6-8 page paper that contains two parts. Part 1 should provide a well-researched and documented overview of the group you studied, and Part 2 should analyze the most important issues to consider when studying your group and explain why that is the case. Then, you will create a display about your NRM for one of the cases in the entrance to the ZSR Library. Lastly, you will present your display and findings to the class on October 17<sup>th</sup>. [NOTE: You should take a photo of your display and incorporate this into your presentation.]
- **Approach:**
  - Possible Groups for Study: Rastafarianism, Aum Shinrikyo, the Solar Temple, Children of God (aka The Family), the Nation of Islam, The Raelians, Heaven's Gate, ISKCON (aka The Hare Krishnas), Unificationism (aka The Moonies), or another group that we have **not** covered in class.
  - Recommended Research Steps: (1) Choose your NRM; (2) Decide what needs to be covered (see list above) and who is going to do what; (3) Do research and gather data; (4) Discuss your findings, then compile and prioritize the information; (5) Write the paper; (6) Use the paper to plan the display; (7) Finish display and revise/edit paper.
- **Purpose:** (1) To give you the opportunity to explore one NRM in more depth, (2) To improve your ability to gather, analyze, and present research, (3) To grapple with the politics of representation, (4) To develop your collaborative research skills, (4) To clearly and effectively communicate your findings to others.
- **Logistics:**
  - Due Date: All project assignments (paper, display, and presentation) are to be completed by class time on October 17<sup>th</sup> when you will present to the class.
  - Late Policy: No late papers or displays will be accepted.
  - Length: 6-8 pages.

- Format: Double-spaced, Times 12, one-inch margins, no cover page.
- Citations: MLA in-text citation style; include a properly formatted Works Cited.
- **Failure to properly cite a source is plagiarism and a violation of the Honor Code.**
- Sources: Primary and secondary sources on the NRM you are studying.
- **Help:**
  - The Preservation Librarian will be coming to class on September 14<sup>th</sup> to discuss the most effective ways to create a successful display for the ZSR Library.
  - Work together to create a cohesive paper, display, and presentation. If a team member is not doing their part, please report this to me as soon as possible.
  - Visit my office hours or schedule an appointment.

**\*\*Exams—30% (15% each)**

- In-Class Mid-Term Exam on October 3<sup>rd</sup>. The exam will be a combination of objective, short answer, and short essay questions. The exam will be based on class readings, class lectures, and class discussions.
- In-Class Final Exam on December 7<sup>th</sup>. The exam will be a combination of objective, short answer, and short essay questions. The exam will be cumulative and based on class readings, class lectures, and class discussions.

**Course Grade Scale: A (93-100), A- (90-92), B+ (88-89), B (83-87), B- (80-82), C+ (78-79), C (73-77), C- (70-72), D (65-69), F (0-64).**



## Course Outline

### Issues in the Study of NRMs I

#### August 31 A Class on Cults?!: Introduction

**Class Question: What are we doing this semester?**

Viewing and Discussion of “Cult Fiction” *Boy Meets World* (Season 4, episode 88)

Overview of Syllabus

Expectations & Criteria for a Successful Class

#### September 5 What’s In a Word?: Sects, Cults, or New Religious Movements

**Class Question: What language should we use to describe these groups?**

**Required Journal:** Prior to doing any of the assignments, write a one page reflection on your perceptions and definitions of the words “sect” and “cult.”

**Reading:**

- C. Wessinger, *How the Millennium Comes Violently*, “Introduction”
- From [http://web.archive.org/web/20060907005952/http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/re/move/Conceptualizing Cult and Sect](http://web.archive.org/web/20060907005952/http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/re/move/Conceptualizing%20Cult%20and%20Sect)”
- From <http://www.religioustolerance.org/cults.htm> “Definition of Terms: Cults, Sects, and Denominations”

#### September 7 The Power of the Media: The “Cult” Exposé

**Class Question: How do the media portray NRMs?**

**Web Assignment:** Bring in a “cult”-related article from a magazine or a news-related web-site. We will use these articles as a way to test Beckford’s thesis.

**Reading:**

- J. Beckford, “The Mass Media and NRMs,” from *New Religious Movements: Challenge and Response*

#### September 12 The Power of Perception: The “Cult” Stereotype in American Culture

**Class Question: How has the “cult” stereotype permeated American culture?**

**In-Class Video:** “The Joy of Sect” *The Simpsons* (Season 9, episode 191)

**Reading:**

- R. Bellah, “Conclusion: Competing Visions of the Role of Religion in American Society,” from *Uncivil Religion*
- L.S. Neal, “They’re Freaks!,” *Nova Religio* (February 2011)

## September 14 Preparing for the Project: Tools for Success & the Politics of Representation

**Class Question:** How can I excel in my project?

**Guest Speaker:** ZSR Preservation Librarian

**Assignment:** (1) Do a web search on your project group's NRM, bring in 2-3 images related to your NRM and some sample text that conveys information about your group; (2) Consider how we should introduce and frame our project for the Library public.

**Reading:**

- L.S. Neal, "From Classroom to Controversy" (unpublished paper)

## Historical Patterns in the Study of NRMs

### September 19 The Mainstream and the Margins: NRMs in the United States

**Class Question:** What role do NRMs play in the American religious landscape?

**Reading:**

- L. Foster, "Cults in Conflict," from *Uncivil Religion*
- S. Stein, *Communities of Dissent*, "Preface"
- J. D. Hunter & D. Franz, "Religious Pluralism and Civil Society," from *A Nation of Religions: The Politics of Pluralism in Multireligious America*

### September 21 19<sup>th</sup> Century NRMs: The Shakers and the Oneida Perfectionists

**Class Question:** What do we gain by placing NRMs in historical perspective?

**Reading:**

- *Encyclopedia of Religion*, "The Shakers" and "John Humphrey Noyes"
- L. Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia*, "Celibacy and Feminism" and "Free Love and Feminism"

### September 26 From Protestant Sect to Deviant Religion: Mormonism in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

**Class Question:** How and why do NRMs begin?

**In-Class Video:** "The Restoration"

**Reading:**

- *Encyclopedia of Religion*, "Mormonism"
- "Joseph Smith Recounts His First Vision"
- Joseph Smith's "Revelation on Plural Marriage"
- Excerpt from Reynolds v. U.S.
- S. Harper, "Dictated by Christ," *Journal of the Early Republic* (Summer 2006)

### September 28 From the Margins to the Mainstream?: Mormonism in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

**Class Question:** How has the Mormon image changed (or not) from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries?

**In-Class Video:** “All About the Mormons” *South Park* (Season 7, episode 108)

**Reading:**

- J. Shippo, *Sojourner in the Promised Land*, “Surveying the Mormon Image since 1960”
- K. Murtagh, “Blasphemous Humor in *South Park*,” from *South Park and Philosophy*

### October 3 In-Class Mid-Term Exam

## Issues in the Study of NRMs II

### October 5 Conversion and Recruitment: The Ethics of Success

**Class Question:** How and why do NRMs succeed?

**Reading:**

- J. Lofland, “The World-Saver Model Revisited” from *American Behavioral Scientist* (July/August 1977)
- R. Stark, “How New Religions Succeed: A Theoretical Model,” from *The Future of New Religious Movements*

### October 10 Enduring Allegations Against NRMs: The Charge of Brainwashing

**Class Question:** What is at stake in using the term brainwashing?

**Reading:**

- L. Dawson, “The Brainwashing Controversy,” from *Cults and New Religious Movements: A Reader*

### October 12 Counter-Cult, Anti-Cult, and The Morality of Deprogramming

**Class Question:** Should there be limits on someone’s religious rights?

**Reading:**

- From <http://web.archive.org/web/20060907005952/http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/re/move/>, “Conceptualizing Anti-Cult and Counter-Cult”
- T. Patrick, *Let Our Children Go!*, “Prologue”
- J. T. Biermans, *The Odyssey of New Religious Movements*, “Deprogramming/Faithbreaking”

### October 17 Group Project Presentations

Each of the 6 groups will have 10 minutes to present. For the presentations to run as smoothly as possible, please have any images or powerpoint presentations placed on a thumb drive.

### **October 19 Enduring Allegations Against NRMs: The Charge of Violence**

**Class Question: What is the relationship between NRMs and violence?**

**Reading:**

- G. Melton and D. Bromley, “Challenging Misconceptions about the New Religions—Violence Connection,” from *Cults, Religion, and Violence*

## **Case Studies of 20<sup>th</sup> Century NRMs**

### **October 24 From Civil Rights to Revolutionary Suicide: The Peoples Temple**

**Class Question: What was People’s Temple?**

**Reading:**

- *Encyclopedia of Religion*, “Jonestown and Peoples Temple”
- J. Hall, “The Apocalypse at Jonestown,” from *Cults and New Religious Movements*
- From “Alternative Considerations of Jonestown and Peoples Temple” (<http://jonestown.sdsu.edu/>), “Letters from Annie Moore”

### **October 26 From Dream to Nightmare?: Remembering Jonestown**

**Class Question: How do we begin to understand what happened at Jonestown?**

**Reading:**

- J.Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion*, “The Devil in Mr. Jones,”
- From “Alternative Considerations of Jonestown and Peoples Temple” (<http://jonestown.sdsu.edu/>): “American as Cherry Pie,” “Affidavit of Deborah Layton Blakely,” “Accusation of Human Rights Violations,” “A Witness to Tragedy and Resurrection”

### **October 31 What Happened at Waco?: “Operation Showtime”**

**Class Question: What happened at Waco?**

**In-Class Video:** “Waco: The Rules of Engagement”

**Reading:**

- *Encyclopedia of Religion*, “Branch Davidians”

### **November 2 Why Did Waco Happen?: The Consequences of the “Cult” Stereotype**

**Class Question: Why did Waco happen?**

**Reading:**

- J. Corrigan & L.S. Neal, “Why Waco?” from *Religious Intolerance in America*
- J. Hall, “Mass Suicide and the Branch Davidians,” from *Cults, Religion, and Violence*

**November 7 No Class, Paper Due (deliver to my office by class time)**

### **Issues in the Study of NRMs III**

**November 9 The Scandal of Scientology: The Tom Cruise and *South Park* Effect**

**Class Question: Why is Scientology so controversial and mocked?**

**In-Class Video:** “Trapped in the Closet” *South Park* (Season 9, episode 137)

**Reading:**

- D. Bromley and M. Bracey, “The Church of Scientology,” from *Sects, Cults, and Spiritual Communities*
- From <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/08/02/AR2007080201887.html>, M. Oppenheimer, “Scientology”

**November 14 Satanism: The “Cult” that Wasn’t**

**Class Question: What is Satanism?**

**Assignment:** Bring your computers to class. We will research ideas about and media coverage related to Satanism in the 1980s.

**Reading:**

- D. Bromley, “Satanism: The New Cult Scare,” from *The Satanism Scare*

**November 16 Satanism: The Lure of the Myth**

**Class Question: Why is Satanism such a powerful construct in American culture?**

**Reading:**

- L. Stratford, *Satan’s Underground*, “Basement of Death,” “Brainwashed and Broken,” and “A Letter to Victims”
- P. Jenkins & D. Maier-Katkin, “Occult Survivors,” from *The Satanism Scare*

**November 21 Satanism and Wicca: Rhetoric versus Reality**

**Class Question: Why do so many see Satanism and Wicca as connected?**

**Reading:**

- *Encyclopedia of Religion*, “Wicca”
- J. Richardson, “Satanism and Witchcraft,” *New Religious Movements and Liberty in America*
- From the Chick Tracts Web-site (<http://www.chick.com/default.asp>), read “Boo”  
**OR** “The Nervous Witch”

**November 28 Warfare against Wicca: The Reality of Intolerance**

**Class Question: Why is Wicca such a controversial and persecuted religion?**

**Reading:**

- Catherine Cookson, “Fighting for Free Exercise from the Trenches,” from *New Religious Movements and Religious Liberty in America*
- J. Corrigan & L.S. Neal, “Intolerance Toward “New” Religions in the Twentieth Century,” from *Religious Intolerance in America*

**December 5 What’s in a Word?: Revisited**

**Class Question: What language should we use to describe these groups?**

**Required Journal Due: This journal should be a reflection on the course and what you have learned.**

Course Recap and Review

Course Evaluation

**December 7 In-Class Final Exam**