Religious Outsiders and the American State
Dr. Shari Rabin

This course explores the relationship between select outsider religions – Native Americans, Jews, Catholics, Muslims, Mormons, and Buddhists – and the American state from the beginnings of the nation until the present day. In a country that is premised on the separation of church and state but that also includes diverse religious communities, the place of religion in public life and of the government’s role in regulating and defining religion have long been contested. What do church-state relations look like if we focus on groups outside of the Protestant mainstream? What are the scope and limits of “religious freedom”? In this course, students explore these questions in relationship to immigration, education, national security, first amendment jurisprudence, and more.

Originally taught at a mid-size public institution, this upper level seminar course was adapted for a selective liberal arts college, which involved adding more reading material and writing assignments. The course offers students an introduction to an exciting field of inquiry in religious studies that has immediate contemporary relevance. The major goals of the class are for students to be able to: 1) read governmental and legal documents as primary sources, 2) understand how precarious and limited ‘religious freedom’ has been in the United States, and 3) situate contemporary religion-state battles in historical context. The assignments are designed in service of these three goals and build upon one another. While there are many communities that might be included in such a class, included those whose identity as “religious” is fundamentally contested – for instance, voudou or Scientology – I ultimately decided to prioritize a deeper engagement with select communities that
demonstrate a range of understandings of “religion” and relationships to processes of racialization.

**Required Text:**
Sylvester Johnson and Steven Weitzman, *The FBI and Religion: Faith and National Security Before and After 9/11*

**Assignments:**

**Participation (20%):**
You will be excused for up to **FOUR (4)** absences during the semester. If you miss more than four classes, you should not expect to pass this course. This class is a seminar, which means that you must come to class prepared and actively join in discussions and activities with good faith and generosity.

**Analysis Paper (15%):**
In three to five pages, you will analyze Donald Trump’s “Executive Order Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States” (January 27, 2017). This paper should offer a close reading of the text and contextualize it in relationship to at least one primary or secondary source we have discussed in class. **Due Week 6**

**Synthesis Paper (20%):**
Read one of the following chapters from *The FBI and Religion* and write four to six pages describing what it tells us about the relationship between religious outsiders and the American state. In the process, you should summarize your chapter’s argument and connect it to one other assigned course reading (20%). **Due Week 10**
- Regin Schmidt, Catholic Church, 108-120
- Sarah Imhoff, Jews, 121-133
- Karl Evanzz, Nation of Islam, 148-167
- Matthew Bowman, Mormonism, 191-202
- Junaida Rana, Kashmiri Americans, 256-268

**Final Assignment:**
- Find a reliable news article identifying an issue of public policy related to one outsider religious group and one area of public policy. Submit a two-page proposal 1) describing the issue and 2) summarizing one course reading that it relates to. **(10%)**. **Due Week 11**
  - **Groups:** Jews, Catholics, Muslims, Mormons, Native Americans, Buddhists, or another group approved by me.
  - **Areas:** Immigration, Education, National Security, Healthcare, Military, Prison, Free Exercise, Establishment, or another issue approved by me.
- Give a brief in-class summary of your issue and its history during **Week 14 (5%)**.
- Write 8-10 pages analyzing the issue in historical context, using course readings and other relevant research. **(30%)**
## PART I – Orientations

### Week 1 – Introduction

- “State,” *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, [https://keywords.nyupress.org/american-cultural-studies/essay/state/](https://keywords.nyupress.org/american-cultural-studies/essay/state/)
- The First Amendment (1789)

### Week 2 – Religious Insiders and Outsiders

- Pew Research Center Studies
- FBI Hate Crime Statistics

## PART II – Identifying Religion

### Week 3 – Land and Mobility

- Chinese Exclusion Act (1881)

### Week 4 – Immigration and the Military

- Congressional Committee on Immigration Report (1920)
- Lyndon B. Johnson speech on the Immigration Act (1965)
### Week 5 – Identifying Race and/or Religion

- United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind, 261 U.S. 204 (1923)

### PART III – Defining/Defending America

#### Week 6 – Elected Office


➤ Analysis Paper Due

- John F. Kennedy’s Speech on Religion (1960)

#### Week 7 – Education

- Tracy Fessenden, “From Disestablishment to ‘Consensus’: The Nineteenth Century Bible Wars and the Limits of Dissent,” *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular, and American Literature*, 60-83.
- “Instruction of the Propaganda Fide Concerning Catholic Children in American Public Schools” (1875)

### Week 8 – National Security


- Moorish Science Temple FBI Files

### Week 9 – Defining “Threats”


- Michael Barkun, “The FBI and American Muslims after September 11,” in *The FBI and Religion*, 244-255
- “Muslim NYPD Chaplain on Faith, Fear, and Getting Stopped by Airport Security,” *Fresh Air*, January 18, 2017

### PART IV – Contesting Religious Freedom

#### Week 10 – Mormons and Native Americans


#### Synthesis Paper Due

- Jonathan Sarna and David Dalin, “Old
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