**Religions in the United States**Brad Stoddard, McDaniel College

**Course Description**

This class offers a wide-ranging examination of the diverse religious life of the United States both in history and today. Attention is given to religion among native/First Nations peoples, mainstream groups such as Judaism, Catholicism, and Protestantism, marginal movements such as Scientology and other new religious movements, and religions among recent immigrants. The course will look at the history of religions in the United States, themes that have characterized U.S. religions, and case studies drawn from religious practice in the United States.

**Teaching Resource: “Center” Project Research Paper**

As we discuss the first week of class, the telling of history has political implications. Not only do people tell different versions of history, but histories typically reflect the biases of the people who write them, and those histories have overt political, legal, and sociocultural implications. The telling of American religious history is no exception. Histories about American religion inform the way people think about religion in the U.S., particularly as it relates to what counts as being in the “center” or in the mainstream of American religious history. Scholars (and the broader population) disagree over what constitutes the “center” or the mainstream, but they tend to agree that historical precedent matters.

For this assignment, in 5-6 pages, students will construct a history that places a particular group at the “center” of American religious history. This history will reference the histories we learn in class and in class readings; however, each student should selectively emphasize the history that “fits” the student’s narrative. Students will also consider the political, legal, and sociocultural implications of their history. In other words, why does it matter that this group has existed in the “center” of American religious history? Students will add an additional page that identifies the history that would undermine the argument you made in the previous pages and that identifies the student’s personal reasons for choosing this group.