The Christian Right

in

American Culture

Dept. of Religious Studies
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The Christian Right in American Culture

President Bush has said that Jesus is his favorite philosopher. Televangelist Pat Robertson has prayed for the demise of Supreme Court justices. Jerry Falwell has blamed 9/11 on abortionists, feminists, and homosexuals. How representative are these public figures of conservative Christianity in America? This course will examine the history, theology, politics, and practices of the diverse groups often collected under the umbrella of the "Christian Right." Along the way we'll look at megachurches, speaking in tongues, Promise Keepers, the feminism of submissive wives, anti-Darwin creation scientists, and who among us will be left behind after the Rapture.

Students will emerge with a comprehensive understanding of conservative Christianity and its place in American culture. They will learn not just the historical background but also the nature of fundamentalism, evangelicalism, and pentecostalism, becoming adept at distinguishing among these movements while also observing their similarities.

Required Readings


Handouts / online readings

Evaluation

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interest group journal</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm exam</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Review</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research paper</td>
<td>30%</td>
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On participation:

In order to participate, it seems reasonable to assume that you must be in class. Attendance will be taken at each session. More than one unexcused absences will hurt your participation grade. If you are absent, you are responsible any information, materials, and assignments for that day.

Our time together will be most productive, and most enjoyable, when everyone is well prepared. Students must read and reflect upon assigned materials ahead of time, and come to class ready to engage one another in conversation. You will sometimes be called upon to deliver questions or comments about the materials in advance of class. And at least once, each of you will be paired with a colleague and officially designated as discussion leader for that day’s session.

The percentage of your final grade assigned to “participation” places a substantial responsibility upon your shoulders, but this also true for me. Assessing a student’s participation can be an inexact science, but I will try to dispel whatever aura of mystery customarily attaches to such judgments. At least twice during the semester, I will not only tell you what your participation grade is to that point, I will also provide you with concrete feedback on what you might do to improve it (should this be necessary). You may also request a status report on your participation at any time during the semester. By the time May arrives, in other words, there should be little confusion about either what your participation grade will be or how it got that way.

Generally speaking, here is how I will evaluate your participation:

A — Students demonstrate that they have read and reflected upon the assigned materials. Students consistently offer insightful comments, questions, and evaluations of the readings, and also respond thoughtfully to their peers in class discussions.
B - Students demonstrate they have read and reflected upon the materials. Students occasionally provide comments, raise questions, and engage peers in class discussions.

C - Students demonstrate at least a nodding acquaintance with the assigned materials, and infrequently offer questions or join in class discussions.

D - Students are unfamiliar with assigned materials, do not respond adequately to questions, and customarily ignore class discussions.

F - Students seem to have stumbled into the wrong class, demonstrating a willful ignorance of assigned materials and an unjust desire to merely borrow the precious oxygen of their peers during class discussions.
BOOK REVIEW

The “Christian Right” has an astonishingly sophisticated, wide-ranging media subculture that remains relatively unknown outside of evangelical circles. Conservative Christians consume an enormous amount of books—so many, in fact, that the New York Times has struggled with just how to count Christian bestsellers. (Because so many are purchased in bulk, usually by and for church groups, these sales somehow don’t really count when it comes to judging a book’s popularity. That’s why Rick Warren’s The Purpose-Driven Life and Joel Osteen’s Your Best Life Now are found on the recently created “Advice” subcategory of bestsellers, lest their sales numbers be compared with such “real” nonfiction books as, say, James Frey’s A Million Little Pieces. And of course, none of Oprah’s book clubs are buying in bulk, are they? But I digress….)

Your task for this assignment: find a book written by and for evangelicals Christians. Read it and review it. A good review will describe the book: its author, its contents, its style, its target audience. A good review will also analyze the book in light of course themes. A good review will be about five pages long.

Some suggestions for how to go about selecting the right book:

† Approach the assignment topically. If you walked into the home library of a typical American evangelical, toward which section would you gravitate? The possibilities, in short, are endless. Scriptural commentaries, theology, church and state, religious fiction, end-times prophecy, self-help, devotional guides for daily living, prayer guides, politics, stewardship, sex and relationships, weight maintenance—these are only a few of the genres which are aimed directly at an evangelical audience.

† Visit and browse around the Stepping Stones Christian Bookstore, 929 Broad Street. The store’s web site will alert you to hours, and what you might expect to find when you go: www.steppingstonesweb.com.

† Consult a Christian magazine (Christianity Today, World, Charisma) and look at book advertisements (many Christian publishers seem to have enormous promotional budgets, so you should find lots of these) or lists of bestsellers.

† Go to the web site of the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association and browse through the list of Gold Medallion award-winners. Click on awards and then choose a year; a set
of categories appears, and you can then browse until your heart’s content.

Key Deadlines

**APRIL 4 (Tu)** LAST DAY FOR BOOK TO BE APPROVED

**APRIL 18 (Tu)** BOOK REVIEW DUE
COURSE SCHEDULE
The Christian Right in American Culture

**Part 1: The Roots of the Christian Right**

Jan. 24 (Tu)    Introduction

Jan. 26 (Th)    Christian America? Religion and the Founding of the Republic
Read: Library of Congress online exhibit http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/

Jan. 31 (Tu)    Secular America? The Court Hijacks the Culture
Read: Everson v. Board of Education (1947)
       Engel v. Vitale (1962)
       Abington v. Schempp (1963)

Feb. 2 (Th)      Who Is the “Christian Right”? Definitions

Feb. 7 (Tu)      Holiness and Pentecostalism I: Speaking in Tongues
Read: Wacker, 1-148

Feb. 9 (Th)      Holiness and Pentecostalism II: Gender & Society
Read: Wacker, 149-270

Feb. 14 (Tu)     Holiness & Pentecostalism III: Snakehandlers & Strychnine Drinkers
Read: Covington, Salvation on Sand Mountain

Feb. 16 (Th)     Fundamentalism I: Beginnings
Read: Weber, 1-94

***Evening Screening: “The Apostle”***
Feb. 21 (Tu)  
Fundamentalism II: Climax  
Read: Larson, 1-196

Feb. 23 (Th)  
Fundamentalism III: Retreat and Regrouping  
Read: Larson, 197-266

Feb. 28 (Tu)  
Re-Redeeming America: The Emergence of Neo-Evangelicalism  
Read: Handout *

March 2 (Th)  
Billy Graham  
Read: Handout *

March 7 (Tu)  
Review

March 9 (Th)  
MIDTERM EXAM

Part 2: The Christian Right Emerges

March 14 (Tu)  
“With God on Our Side”

March 16 (Th)  
“With God on Our Side”

SPRING BREAK  MARCH 18-APRIL 2

April 4 (Tu)  
“With God on Our Side

April 6 (Th)  
Falwell I: The Moral Majority  
Read: Harding, 1-82

April 11 (Tu)  
Falwell II  
Read: Harding, 83-152
April 13 (Th) Falwell III: Rhetorical Tropes
Read: Harding, 153-276
Part 3: Contemporary Snapshots

April 18 (Tu) Christian America?
Read: Smith, 1-60

April 18 (Tu) Gender I
Read: Griffiths, 1-109

April 20 (Th) Gender II
Read: Griffiths, 110-213

April 25 (Tu) Gender III
Read: Smith, 160-192
Excerpt from Morgan, The Total Woman *

***BOOK REVIEW DUE***

April 27 (Th) Open: Students’ Choice
Read: ???

May 2 (Tu) Education
Read: Smith, 129-159

May 4 (Th) Foreign Policy
Read: Weber, 187-268
**Evening Screening: “Hell House”

May 9 (Tu) Popular Culture
Read: Handout *
May 10 (W)  Evening Screening: “Saved”

May 11 (Th)  Conclusion
Read: Smith, 193-196

FINAL EXAM WEEK  MAY 15-19

RESEARCH PAPER DUE WEDNESDAY, MAY 17, 4:00 P.M.