

Rel237 Religion in American Life

Paper 3 Guidelines

Due: Wed, April 23, 2014. 5:00pm. Email to andrew.coates@duke.edu

Late penalty: 1/3 of a letter grade per 24 hours.

Note: file names must begin with your last name.

Specs: 4 pages (1100-1300 words, excluding bibliography). 12-point Times New Roman or Cambria. 1" margins. Double-spaced. Number all pages. Last name on all pages. Chicago style preferred. No cover page necessary.

Your third essay will present careful analysis of a major issue in twentieth-century or twenty-first-century American religious history. You MUST formulate a strong thesis and defend it with careful analysis of primary sources (sources we discussed in class are acceptable, but you may include others as well). For this essay, you will also be responsible for gathering additional evidence from secondary sources (books/articles written by historians) to support your argument.

In the event that you analyze an image or other material artifact, please provide a copy of it with your paper.

1. Select an artifact or ceremony from the history of American civil religion and analyze its function. What is civil religion in America and how does this object or event or place serve the practice of that religion? Do you find compelling evidence that "civil religion" is a substantial religious phenomenon in its own right? Is "civil religion" just Christianity by another name or is it something unique?
2. Analyze an image of a religious figure such as Jesus or Moses or Buddha—an image (television, film, internet, poster, painting, print) that circulates among Americans. Why does the image appeal to people? How is it used? What does it mean to those who admire it—as well as to those who do not? How does the image bestow on its admirers a sense of their personal, social, and possibly national identity?
3. Discuss the influence of the 1960s on religion in America. Select an example such as Buddhism, Native American religions, Hinduism, the Nation of Islam, drug culture, or "spirituality." Why were many Americans drawn to the images, narratives, or practices of such traditions? How did these "outsider" religions impact the way Americans thought about, practiced, or otherwise engaged with religion?

4. In his first inaugural address, president Barack Obama declared, "We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus, and non-believers." Since then, scholars of religion have become fascinated with "the nones," a group of Americans who claim adherence to no religious tradition. Choose a specific example of "the nones" for your analysis. What defines this community? Who are they, really? What defines them as a group? Does this community take any interest in "religion"? If so, how? In what ways, if at all, can we justify the study of non-belief in a class about religion in American life?