

SOC 397: SECTS AND VIOLENCE: CULTS, RELIGIOUS INNOVATION, AND SOCIAL CONFLICT

Professor James A. Kitts

Office Hours: Fri 10:00am-12:00pm Machmer W-36B

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CLASS MEETINGS:

Mon 4:00-7:00 pm

Machmer Hall W-13

This course will examine controversial religious groups that are often called “cults.” In describing cults, popular media have focused on armed confrontations, mass suicides, and alleged satanic conspiracies. They have portrayed cult members as coerced or brainwashed, unable to save themselves from abuse and control. In contrast, many social scientists have investigated cults as social movements, advocating unconventional beliefs in a world that is often hostile to innovators. With rigorous sociological lenses, we will examine cults’ occasionally catastrophic conflicts with government authorities, established religious organizations, and anti-cult movements. As we engage this controversial material, we will refine our skills in writing cogent argumentative essays.

REQUIREMENTS

Students must complete course readings *before* the assigned date. Due to the importance of discussion and collaborative writing, class participation will be crucial. Also, our activities, readings, and discussions will often require use of computers and access to the Internet. All assignments must be typed and double-spaced.

In addition to writing conferences with me and workshops with your peers, I strongly encourage you to use the UMass Writing Center for supplementary feedback.

See: <http://www.umass.edu/writingcenter/index.html>

BOOKS AND READINGS

- Dawson, Lorne L. 2003. *Cults and New Religious Movements: A Reader*. (\$15-\$52)
- Bromley, David G. & J. Gordon Melton. 2002. *Cults, Religion, & Violence*. (\$7-\$37)
- Johnson, William A., Richard P. Rettig, Gregory M. Scott, Stephen Garrison. 2009. *The Sociology Student Writer’s Manual*. Sixth Edition. (\$19 -\$68)

Readings marked * on the syllabus are on Moodle. Download these materials in advance, as problems with downloading or printing these articles will not excuse you from the readings.

For questions on Moodle, contact the OIT Help Center (413) 545-9400 or submit an online help ticket at <http://www.oit.umass.edu/>

NOTE: *This course includes readings and audiovisual materials that some of you may find violent, obscene, or otherwise offensive. Our discussions of religious conflicts will highlight differences in our faiths and values. I ask students to treat one another with respect as we learn from this intellectually and personally challenging material.*

GROUND RULES

- All class sessions are mandatory. Students who miss the first week (session 1) will be dropped.
- Each regular class meeting will begin with a writing exercise related to the readings. If you are absent, late, or unprepared, you must write a (short) extra paper to enhance your learning. This make-up paper is required, and is not a penalty, so ‘excuses’ for absences are irrelevant.
- The exam and paper due dates are not flexible. There are no make-ups for exams or papers.
- If you have a conflict with a paper due date, submit the paper early.
- There is no curve, so grades will not be competitive and I encourage group study.
- Grades are *never* negotiable, but I do accept *substantial* projects for “extra credit.”
- Make frequent backups of your files. Lost papers and failed disks do not earn extensions.
- Video and audio recording in class is prohibited, unless requested by Disability Services.
- Students may not use laptops, tablets, or cell phones during class, unless I ask you to do so.

GRADES

| Final Grade Breakdown | | 0-100 Scale | Letter Grade | 4.0 Scale |
|---------------------------|-----|----------------|-----------------|--------------|
| First Paper (max 3 pgs) | 10% | 93+ | A | 4.0 |
| | | 90-92 | A- | 3.7 |
| Second Paper (max 10 pgs) | 10% | 88-89 | B+ | 3.3 |
| | | 83-87 | B | 3.0 |
| Third Paper (max 7 pgs) | 25% | 80-82 | B- | 2.7 |
| | | 78-79 | C+ | 2.3 |
| Final Exam | 25% | 73-77 | C | 2.0 |
| | | 70-72 | C- | 1.7 |
| Class Participation | 30% | 68-69 | D+ | 1.3 |
| | | 60-67 | D | 1.0 |
| | | <60 | F | 0 |

“Class participation” represents constructive involvement in discussions and activities, written feedback on your peers’ writing, and your portfolio of in-class exercises.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students will maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. You *may* study the exam together, and I encourage you to do so. You *must* share drafts of your papers with your peers and give them feedback. However, you may *not* copy (or paraphrase) text from any other source without citation and/or quotation, as appropriate. You also may not speak with anyone else or consult any written materials during an exam. You are responsible for complying with this policy: http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/downloads/AcademicHonestyPolicy.pdf

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

I am happy to provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities, with written notice by [Disability Services](#). Please let me know how I can make the class work for you.

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK ONE – WHAT ARE NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS (NRMS)?

total pages

Monday, September 9

Bring books to class today, read the below, and come prepared for a quiz.

Dawson, Lorne “Introduction.” in Dawson, (pp. 1-3).

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Barker, Eileen. “The Scientific Study of Religion? You Must be Joking!” in Dawson, (pp. 7-24).

Beckford, James “The Continuum Between ‘Cults’ and ‘Normal’ Religion” in Dawson, (pp. 26-30).

Depending on your last name, you will present on one of the following profiles from Miller’s (1995) *America's Alternative Religions*. Just read your profile for today, and you will give your presentations as scheduled over the next few weeks:

- (last name begins A to B) Van Zandt, D. E. “Children of God.” 127-132.*
- (last name begins C to E) Paden, R. “Boston Church of Christ.” 133-140.*
- (last name begins F to G) Rochford, E. B. J. “Hare Krishna in America.” 215-221.*
- (last name begins H to K) Barker, E. “Unification Church.” 223-229.*
- (last name begins L to M) Chevannes, B. “The Rastafari Abroad.” 297-302.*
- (last name begins O to Q) Matthews, C. “Neo-Paganism and Witchcraft.” 339-345.*
- (last name begins R to S) Bednarowski, M.F. “Church of Scientology.” 385-392.*
- (last name begins T to Z) Ellwood, R. S. “UFO Religious Movements.” 393-399.*

WEEK TWO – NRMS AND THEIR MEMBERS

total pages

Monday, September 16

Wallis, Roy. “Three Types of New Religious Movements.” in Dawson, (pp. 36-56).

32

Stark, Rodney and William Sims Bainbridge. “Cult Formation: Three Compatible Models.” in Dawson, (pp. 59-69).

Wednesday, September 18

PAPER #1 THESIS LIST DUE (on Moodle)

Consult pages 17-27 in the *Sociology Student Writer’s Manual* as needed.

Thursday, September 19

PAPER #1 THESIS PEER REVIEW (on Moodle)

Saturday, September 21

PAPER #1 DUE (on Moodle)

Consult pages 38-62 and 77-99 in the *Sociology Student Writer’s Manual* as needed.

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK THREE – WHO JOINS NRMs?

total pages

Monday, September 23

- Glock, Charles Y. “The Role of Deprivation in the Origin and Evolution of Religious Groups.” in Dawson, Lorne. *Cults in Context*, pp. 147-158.* 36
- Lofland, John and Rodney Stark. 1965. “On Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective.” *American Sociological Review* 862-875.*
- Levine, Saul. “The Joiners.” in Dawson, pp. 131-142.

BRING TWO HARDCOPIES OF THE FINAL DRAFT OF PAPER #1

WEEK FOUR – THE CONVERSION PROCESS

total pages

Monday, September 30

- Lofland, John. 1997. “Becoming a World-Saver Revisited.” Pp. 284-289 in *Social Movements: Readings on Their Emergence, Mobilization, and Dynamics*, edited by Douglas McAdam and David A. Snow. Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury Publishing.* 32
- Snow, David A. and Cynthia L. Phillips. 1980. “The Lofland-Stark Conversion Model: A Critical Assessment.” *Social Problems* 27:430-447.*
- Dawson, Lorne “Who Joins New Religious Movements and Why: Twenty Years of Research and What Have We Learned?” in Dawson, pp. 116-126.

WEEK FIVE – SOCIAL NETWORKS AND NRM RECRUITMENT

total pages

Monday, October 7

- Stark, Rodney and William S. Bainbridge. 1980. “Networks of Faith: Interpersonal Bonds and Recruitment to Cults and Sects.” *American Journal of Sociology* 85:1376-1395.* 39
- Snow, David, Louis Zurcher, and Sheldon Ekland-Olson. 1980. “Social Networks and Social Movements: A Microstructural Approach to Differential Recruitment.” *American Sociological Review* 45:787-801.*
- Rochford, E. Burke. 1982. “Recruitment Strategies, Ideology, and Organization in the Hare Krishna Movement.” *Social Problems* 29:399-410.*

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK SIX – BRAINWASHING AND COERCIVE CONVERSION

total pages

TUESDAY, October 15

- Singer, Margaret Thaler. “The Process of Brainwashing, Psychological Coercion, and Thought Reform.” in Dawson, (pp. 147-159). 31
- Richardson, James T. “A Critique of ‘Brainwashing’ Claims About New Religious Movements.” in Dawson, (pp. 160-165).
- Robbins, Thomas “Constructing Cultist ‘Mind Control.’” in Dawson, (pp. 167-177).

WEEK SEVEN – CHARISMA IN NRMS

total pages

Monday, October 21

- Weber, Max. 1968. “The Nature of Charismatic Authority and Its Routinization” in *Charismatic Authority. Max Weber on Charisma and Institution Building*. S.N. Eisenstadt. Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press. 48-65.* 32
- Galanter, Marc. 1999. “The Charismatic Group.” *Cults: Faith, Healing, and Coercion*. New York, Oxford University Press. 1-12.*
- Zablocki, Benjamin. 1980. *Alienation & Charisma*. New York: Free Press. 10-12.*

WEEK EIGHT – PAPER 2

Monday, October 28

Begin Paper 2 during class (WE WILL MEET AT DUBOIS LIBRARY, DOWNSTAIRS IN THE CALIPARI ROOM)

Saturday, November 2

PAPER #2 DUE

Consult pages 77-99 and 110-128 in the *Sociology Student Writer’s Manual* as needed.

Optional reading: Barker, Eileen. 2002. “Watching for Violence: A Comparative Analysis of the Roles of Five Types of Cult Watching Groups.” pp. 123-47 in Bromley & Melton.

WEEK NINE – VIOLENCE AND NRMS

total pages

Monday, November 4

- Melton & Bromley. 2002. “Challenging Misconceptions about the New Religions-Violence Connection .” pp. 42-54 in Bromley & Melton. 32
- Thomas Robbins. 2002. “Sources of Volatility in Religious Movements” pp. 57-76 in Bromley & Melton.

GIVE ORAL PRESENTATION BASED ON PAPER 2

Readings Marked ‘*’ are on Moodle at <https://moodle.umass.edu/>

COURSE SCHEDULE

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| WEEK TEN – APPLICATION: JONESTOWN | total pages |
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WEDNESDAY, November 13

Dawson, Lorne. 2002. “Crises of Charismatic Legitimacy and Violent Behavior in New Religious Movements.” pp. 80-98 in Bromley & Melton. 40

Hall, John R. 2003. “The Apocalypse at Jonestown” pp 186-206, in Dawson.

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| WEEK ELEVEN – APPLICATION: WACO | total pages |
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Monday, November 18

Wright, Stewart. 2002. “Public Agency Involvement in Government-Religious Movement Confrontations.” pp. 102-121 in Bromley & Melton. 40

Hall, John R. 2002. “Mass Suicide and the Branch Davidians.” pp 149-168, in Bromley & Melton.

Friday, November 22

PAPER #3 THESIS LIST DUE: MOODLE

Consult pages 17-27 in the *Sociology Student Writer’s Manual* as needed.

Saturday, November 23

PAPER #3 THESIS PEER REVIEW (on Moodle)

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| WEEK TWELVE – APPLICATION: HEAVENS GATE | total pages |
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Monday, November 25

Balch & Taylor 2002. “Making Sense of the Heaven’s Gate Suicides.” pp. 209-28 in Bromley & Melton. 20

Optional Reading: Introvigne, Massimo & Jean-Francois Mayer. 2002. “Occult Masters and the Temple of Doom: The Fiery End of the Solar Temple.” pp. 170-86 in Bromley & Melton.

PAPER #3 PROPOSAL DUE (3 COPIES): WRITING WORKSHOP

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| WEEK THIRTEEN – PAPER 3 |
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Monday, December 2

PAPER #3 DRAFT DUE (2 COPIES): WRITING WORKSHOP

Consult pages 77-99 and 110-128 in the *Sociology Student Writer’s Manual* as needed.

Friday, December 6

PAPER #3 FINAL PORTFOLIO DUE (ALL DRAFTS & FEEDBACK)