

**The United States is “a nation with the soul of a church.” G.K. Chesterton**

**“Critics suggest that religion in America is like the proverbial prairie river: a mile wide and an inch deep.” Fowler & Hertzke, p. 52.**

**“It is one thing to say with the prophet Amos, ‘Let justice roll down like mighty waters,’ and quite another to work out the irrigation system.” William Sloane Coffin**

**Course Description:** In Democracy in America, Alexis De Tocqueville wrote of the Americans, “Religion is the first of their political institutions.” This course examines the complex relation between religion and politics in contemporary American society, and so addresses De Tocqueville’s claim. Americans have one of the highest rates of religious affiliation and church attendance in the world. Yet the U.S. Constitution emphasizes strict separation of church and state and forbids the use of religion as a qualification for public office. Some observers think these two facts about the United States are related---that Americans can be free to worship according to conscience because government steers clear of organized religion.

To be sure, church-state relations are not the same as the complex linkage between religion and politics. Religious communities have shaped politics and public policy in the past and in the present. The course explores the relationship between religion and politics in the United States in hopes of understanding better the political influence of churches, temples, and mosques, as well as the American commitment to tolerance and religious freedom. In particular, attention will be given to Supreme Court decisions on church-state issues, to the role of religion in presidential campaigning & governance, and to issues of pluralism, prejudice and tolerance in American society.

**Course Approach:** The scholarly literature on this subject is huge and new developments are breaking all the time. Thus while ample opportunities will be provided for student to discuss course readings, substantial class time will also be devoted to covering topical issues and trends not fully covered by the readings, most notably in burgeoning Internet resources, religious web pages, religious news magazines, and the like. Thus, to do well in this course, you must both do the reading AND come to class.

## **Specific Learning Outcomes**

Students will develop critical awareness of the religious factor in historical political development, political culture, voting behavior, lobbying, elite political behavior (Congress and the Presidency), and judicial politics.

- Students will understand the role of religion in American public life and be able to distinguish constitutionally mandated church-state separation from the broader relation between religion and politics. Comparisons with other countries will be discussed.
- Students will examine the growing pluralism of American civic life, studying Muslims, Mormons, and other religious & ethnic minorities including African-Americans, Latinos, and women. While the United States champions religious liberty, examples of intolerance and religious persecution will also be discussed.
- Students will examine debates about church lobbying, church participation in election campaigns, and limits upon church endorsement of candidates for public office.
- Students will analyze whether officeholders and voters may bring religious convictions to bear in public policy making for a diverse society.
- Students will develop their research and writing skills through briefing a Supreme Court case on church-state relations and through in-class oral presentations. This class fulfills in part the Rutgers general education requirement for graduation.

## **REQUIRED BOOKS FOR PURCHASE:** (Barnes & Noble in Hahnes)

R.B. Fowler, Allen Hertzke, Laura Olson, and Kevin Den Dulk, **Religion and Politics in America**, 6<sup>th</sup> edition (Routledge, 2019). Paperback.

David Smith, **Religious Persecution and Political Order in the United States**. (Cambridge Univ.Press, 2015). Paperback.

David M. O'Brien, **Animal Sacrifice & Religious Freedom: Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye v. City of Hialeah** (University Press of Kansas, 2004). Paperback.

**Recommended: A Wall of Separation? Debating the Public Role of Religion**, by Ted Jelen and Mary Segers (Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), an anthology of important readings.

**Additional Readings:** In addition to the books, there will be a few short articles and newspaper clippings **online** for this course. These are **required** readings.

**A Note about Terminology:** Throughout the course we will examine the political role of a variety of religious congregations: Protestant churches, Catholic parishes, Quaker meeting houses, Jewish synagogues, Hindu or Buddhist temples, Moslem mosques, etc. However, for the sake of brevity, I will use the generic term “churches” to refer to these, even though it is not entirely accurate to do so.

**A Note about Respect for Religious Diversity** (in this, the most diverse university in the entire United States): The course is designed to help students understand the variety of religious voices in American politics, along with the ideologies, approaches, and challenges that characterize them. To a certain degree, I assume some basic knowledge of different religious traditions on the part of students. However, we stand to learn from each other in this course. Members of the class will be resources on the beliefs and practices of different faith traditions. Basically, there is no such thing as a “stupid question.” Please do not hesitate to raise questions in class, or ask for special assistance outside of class.

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

1. Midterm and Final Exams (no makeups). 40%
2. Interview & short written assignment (4 to 6 pp). 20%
3. Oral Report & written Paper on a Supreme Court case on church-state issues. 30%
4. Class Attendance and Participation. Attendance is essential, and students will forfeit one grade point for any two unexcused and undocumented absences. Overall class attendance and participation will be the deciding factors in grading borderline cases (this often affects many students). 10%

The Course schedule will be distributed at our first class meeting on Tuesday September 7, 2021.

### **Important Note during the Pandemic from Rutgers President Holloway and Chancellor Cantor:**

In order to protect the health and wellbeing of all members of the Rutgers-Newark community, masks must be worn by all persons inside campus buildings when in the presence of others, and in buildings in non-private enclosed settings (e.g., common workspaces, workstations, meeting rooms, classrooms, etc.). Masks should securely cover the nose and mouth. Masks must be worn during class meetings. Each day before you arrive on campus or leave your residence hall, you must complete the brief survey on the My Campus Pass symptom checker self-screening app found at: **myRutgers Portal**.

