

# *Social Justice, Spirituality, and the American Radical Tradition*

REL 293 – Spring 2022

**Meetings:** Tuesday/Thursday, 10:50 AM –12:05 PM, Seelye 109

**Instructor:** Dr. David J. Howlett, Mellon Visiting Assistant Professor of Religion  
[dhowlett@smith.edu](mailto:dhowlett@smith.edu)

**Office Hours:** Monday 1:30–3:00 PM; Tuesday 1:00–2:30 PM  
Zoom link for office hours:

**First Week Zoom Meeting Link:**

**Course Description:** This course explores how American spiritual communities have produced radical social change and alternative visions for the future. Subjects include nineteenth-century Black prophets and abolitionism; Spiritualists and women’s suffrage; Latinx Catholics and labor activism; Black churches, Jewish liberals, and the Civil Rights movement; Native traditionalists and the Red Power movement; Mormon feminists and the ERA; radical Catholics and the anti-nuclear movement; the new religious left and LGBTQ rights; practitioners of green spirituality and the climate crisis; and spiritual-but-not-religious folks and the Black Lives Matter movement. As part of a class podcast project, students will also interview contemporary activists.

**Course Goals:** Students will leave this class with

- an understanding of the ways that religion and spirituality have been utilized in the “American radical tradition” since the 19th century.
- an awareness of how visions for spiritually-inspired social justice have been shaped by gender, sexuality, race, age, class, and other categories of difference.
- an ability to engage secondary and primary historical sources in an original research paper.
- an ability to write a popular book review of a scholarly work.
- an ability to use readily accessible software to write and produce a podcast episode.

<b><u>Final Class Grade:</u></b>	Mapping Project	10%
	Book Review	25%
	Research Essay	25%
	Podcast Episode (3 component parts)	30%
	Class Participation (Moodle, DJ, Reporter)	10%

## **Assignments and Assessment:**

**Mapping Project:** For this activity, we will be working with Tracy Tien and Jon Caris of the Spatial Analysis Lab team and a community partner, MANNA Community Kitchens. Together, we will investigate questions, analyze data, and create maps that will help MANNA staff better understand community needs in Northampton. Before the semester began, I met with the MANNA team, and they gave us three questions that they would like us to investigate. On week three of class, the Spatial Analysis Lab team will conduct a guided workshop aimed at helping us analyze and answer these questions with available data sets. Then, in a small group, you will ultimately construct a map that visually represents your group's answer to one of the three questions posed by MANNA. Thus, this project seeks to give you an empathetically sensitive applied academic experience with local activists, as well as offers you a new modality for analysis beyond the textually-based analysis that will predominate in this course. More information about this project will be handed out in class.

**Book Review:** Students will complete a journalistic article on a select book that frames the book's main arguments in an accessible, journalistic style for an intelligent, non-specialist, non-academic audience. A rubric detailing this assignment will be handed out in class. (1000 words)

**Mini-Research Essay:** In preparation for your podcast episode, you will complete a mini-research essay on the broader contemporary movement to which your selected group belongs (the food justice movement, the movement to end nuclear weapons, or the New Sanctuary Movement). In this essay, you will provide background to how this social movement emerged and then track how and why various spiritual communities have organized around it. This essay will be approximately 5 to 7 pages in length. A rubric with further details will be handed out in class.

**Podcast Episode:** With two partners, you will write and produce a podcast episode about a spiritual group or individual involved in social justice activism. This semester, we are interviewing activists involved in the food justice movement, the New Sanctuary Movement, and the anti-nuclear movement. In subsequent semesters, students will interview activists in other movements. Our podcasting project has three component parts.

- 1) **Interview with an Activist:** As a class, we will agree upon three common questions to ask of all of our activists. With your class partner, you will interview and record your activist via Zoom (media release forms will be collected prior to the interview). You will turn in the transcript of this interview (automatically generated by Zoom) and write a short reflection paragraph upon the interview process.
- 2) **Podcast Script:** You and your partner will write a podcast script about your featured activist and their movement. To do so, you will use audio excerpts from your interview and analysis based upon your research essay. As a class, we will

agree upon a common intro and outro, as well as a generic outline for the body of the script. Beyond that, you will be responsible for the content.

- 3) **Edited Podcast Episode:** With script in hand, you will record and edit a podcast episode using WeVideo editing software. The Smith Learning, Research, and Technology Team will provide in-class tutorials about how to use this software, as well as share about best practices for a successful podcast episode. Your final podcast episode is due during finals week.

**Moodle Posts:** To facilitate engaged learning, better discussions, and better comprehension of the material, you will post about each week's readings on Moodle. These posts may address your thoughts, questions, or epiphanies generated by the texts and should be, at minimum, 200 words. Each week, half of the class will post on the Tuesday reading (due on Monday night) and half of the class will post on the Thursday reading (due on Wednesday night). You may skip posting for two weeks at any point in the semester. These posts count towards your participation grade.

**Class DJ and Class Reporter:** You will be asked to sign up for performing the respective jobs of class DJ and class reporter once in the course of the semester. As DJ, you will select a piece of music that you will play as students enter the classroom on a particular date. Then, you will be asked in class to explain why you selected the piece. Ideally, the piece will be linked to a theme, idea, or term addressed in the course. As class reporter, you will be asked to summarize the previous class's content in only 30 seconds. I encourage you to be as creative, (appropriately) humorous, serious, or matter-of-fact as you wish. However, you need not write out a script for this 30-second "report." Have fun with these class jobs!

**Assessment of Student Work:** Students will be subject to a standard grading scale as follows:

A+ 97-100

A 94-96

A- 90-93

B+ 87-89

B 84-86

B- 80-83

C+ 77-79

C 74-76

C- 70-73

D+ 67-69

D 60-66

D- 56-59

F 55 and below

## **Classroom Procedures and Policies:**

**Academic Dishonesty:** The Student Handbook notes the following:

Students and faculty at Smith are part of an academic community defined by its commitment to scholarship, which depends on scrupulous and attentive acknowledgement of all sources of information and honest and respectful use of college resources.

Smith College expects all students to be honest and committed to the principles of academic and intellectual integrity in their preparation and submission of course work and examinations. All submitted work of any kind must be the original work of the student who must cite all the sources used in its preparation.<sup>1</sup>

If you have questions about what might constitute inadvertent plagiarism, please consult me before you hand in your work.

**Late Assignment Policy:** I hope you can hand in your work on time via Moodle, but I will be flexible as necessary. Please do be in contact with me before the due date if you cannot make it.

**Accommodations for Students:** If you have a disability or a personal circumstance that you think will affect your learning in this course, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can discuss the best ways to meet your needs. Students who need accessibility accommodations are encouraged to contact Disability Services ([www.smith.edu/about-smith/disability-services](http://www.smith.edu/about-smith/disability-services)) and obtain an official letter of accommodation.

**Title IX Rights and Responsibilities:** The Smith College Title IX website notes the following:

Gender-based and sexual misconduct is any unwanted and unwelcome sexual behavior that significantly interferes with a student's success or access to educational opportunities at the college. A student with a complaint alleging gender-based and sexual misconduct should report it to the Title IX coordinator (Laura Kirschstein, [lkirschstein@smith.edu](mailto:lkirschstein@smith.edu)). Complaints regarding sexual violence (sexual assault, dating/domestic violence, and stalking) may also be reported to the Smith College Campus Safety Department or the Dean of Students Office. Complaints of sexual misconduct between Smith College students or where the individual allegedly committing the misconduct is a Smith College student are governed by the Smith College Student Code and applicable state and federal laws.

Beyond this policy, you should know that I am a mandatory reporter at the college. In the event that you experience a Title IX violation, you may talk to me, and I will keep your information private to the greatest extent possible. However, as a professor, I have a responsibility to report any information regarding sexual misconduct and crimes that I learn about to make our campus a safe place for all. For further information about Title IX rights and related all-college policies, as

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<sup>1</sup> "Student Conduct & Social Responsibility: Academic Honor Code," Smith College, accessed September 3, 2019, <https://www.smith.edu/sao/handbook/socialconduct/honorcode.php>.

well as support services, please consult the following webpage:  
<https://www.smith.edu/about-smith/title-ix>

**Work Expectations:** Students should expect nine to ten hours of outside preparation work for class each week. On written assignments, successful students distribute their workloads over the course of a week rather than cram their writing into the night before the due date. Be a successful student.

**General:** My goal is to create a classroom environment that fosters open inquiry, with engaged discussion and mutually respectful interaction. Let's all do our utmost to challenge and support one another in our work together. Along the way, if anyone has ideas about how the structure of the course and general classroom interactions could be altered to encourage greater inclusion and participation, please let me know.

**Land Acknowledgements:** Smith College is on the land of the Nonotuck people. To our East are the Nipmuc and Wapanoag. To the South are the Mohegan and the Pequot. To the West are the Mohican. And to the North are the Abenaki.

### **Required Texts for Purchase**

- Dan McKanan, *Prophetic Encounters: Religion and the American Radical Tradition* (Boston: Beacon, 2012).  
    **ISBN-13:** 978-0807013175
  
- Erin Pineda, *Seeing Like an Activist: Civil Disobedience and the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).  
    **ISBN-13:** 978-0197526422
  
- Melissa Wilcox, *Queer Nuns: Religion, Activism, and Serious Parody* (New York: NYU Press, 2018).  
    **ISBN-13:** 978-1479820368



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**WEEK 4**      **Spiritualists, Women's Rights, and Women's Suffrage**

(2/15 - 2/17)

**Map Due (2/15)**

Readings:      T: McKanan, "New Religions for Radicalism" and "Women's Rights, Women Ministers, and a Woman's Bible," in *Prophetic Encounters*, 84-111.

Th: Ann Braude, "Thine for Agitation," in *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America*, second edition (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2001), 56-81. (Moodle)

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**Unit II:**      The Twentieth Century and Radical Religion

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**WEEK 5**      **Labor Activists and Radical Religion**

(2/22 - 2/24)

Readings:      T: McKanan, "The Jesus of Labor," "Encountering the City," and "The Religion of Socialism," in *Prophetic Encounters*, 112-150. (Moodle)

Th: Arlene Sanchez-Walsh, "Emma Teneyuca, Religious Elites, and the 1938 Pecan Shellers' Strike," in *The Pew and the Picket Line: Christianity and the American Working Class*, ed. by Christopher D. Cantwell, Heath W. Carter, and Janine Giordano Drake (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2016), 145-166. (Moodle)

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**WEEK 6**      **Black Churches, Student Activists, and Civil Rights**

(3/1 - 3/3)

**Book Review Due, Group 1 (3/1)**

**Guest Speaker: Prof. Erin Pineda, Government Department, Smith College (3/3)**

Readings:      T: Erin Pineda, "Civil Disobedience and the Civil Rights Movement," in *Seeing Like an Activist: Civil Disobedience and the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 1-21.

Th: Erin Pineda, "Forcing the Better Argument," in *Seeing Like an Activist*, 127-158.

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**WEEK 7 Native Traditionalists and the Red Power Movement**

(3/8 - 3/10)

**Research Essay Due (3/10)**

**Guest Speaker: Nikki Cooley (Diné), Tribal Climate Change Program, ITEP, NAU (3/10)**

Readings: T: James Treat, "Intertribal Traditionalism and the Religious Roots of Red Power," in *Native American Spirituality: A Critical Reader*, edited by Lee Irwin (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 270-294. (Moodle)

Th: Vine Deloria, Jr., "The Theological Dimension of the Indian Protest Movement," "Religion and Revolution among American Indians," and "Nonviolence in American Society," in *For This Land: Writings on Religion in America* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 31-50. (Moodle)

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**SPRING BREAK (3/15 - 3/17)**

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**WEEK 8 Mormons, Catholics, and Feminist Activism**

(3/22 - 3/24)

**Guest Speaker: Carlotta Reinhardt, Interdisciplinary Studies Program, Smith College (3/24)**

Readings: T: McKanan, "A Women's Decade," in *Prophetic Encounters*, 243-254

T: Howlett, Ross, and Slosser, "Creating a Religious Counterpublic: RLDS Feminists and Women's Ordination Advocacy in America, 1970-1985" (link in email)

Th: Carlotta Reinhardt, "Religion and Feminist Activism: A Qualitative Analysis." (link in email)

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**WEEK 9 Radical Catholics, Liberal Protestants, and Anti-nuclear Activism**

(3/29 - 3/31)

**Interview Transcript Due (3/31)**

Readings: T: Kristen Tobey, "'Have We Made Ourselves Inaccessible?': Plowshares Disarmament Activists' Rhetoric of Marginality," *Political Theology* 13:1 (2012);, 76-92.

Th: Emily Welty, "The Theological Landscape of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty: the Catholic Church, the World Council of Churches and the Bomb," *Global Policy* 7, no. 3 (2016): 396-404.

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**Unit III: Contemporary Social Movements and Spirituality**

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**WEEK 10 Spirituality, HIV Activism, and LGBTQ Rights**

(4/5 - 4/7)

**Book Review Due, Group 2 (Wilcox) (4/7)**

Readings: T: Melissa Wilcox, "Introduction: 'Modern-Day Badass Drag Queen Superhero Nuns,'" in *Queer Nuns: Religion, Activism, and Serious Parody* (New York: NYU Press, 2018), 1-30.

Th: Melissa Wilcox, "We ARE Nuns, Silly!" in *Queer Nuns: Religion, Activism, and Serious Parody* (New York: NYU Press, 2018), 67-103.

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**WEEK 11 Latinx Christians, White Allies, and the Sanctuary Movement**

(4/12 - 4/14)

**In-class Podcasting Workshop with Dan Bennett, Smith LRT, Neilson 011 (4/14)  
Podcast Script Due (4/14)**

Readings: T: Grace Yukich, Brad R. Fulton, and Richard L. Wood, "Representative Group Styles: How Ally Immigrant Rights Organizations Promote Immigrant Involvement," *Social Problems* 67 (2020): 488-506. (Moodle)

Th: Lloyd D. Barba and Tatyana Castillo-Ramos, "Latinx Legacies and Leadership in the New Sanctuary Movement, 1980-2020," *American Religion* 3, no. 1 (2021): 1-24. (Moodle)

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**WEEK 12 The Food Justice Movement / The New Poor People's Campaign and Spiritual Coalitions**

(4/19 - 4/21)

**Guest Interview and Film Screening: Derrick Weston, Anna Woofenden, and Jason Chesnut,  
["A Wilderness Like Eden: Stories from the Christian Food Movement"](#) (4/19)  
Guest Interview: Dan McKanan, Emerson Senior Lecturer, Harvard Divinity School (4/21)**

Readings: T: Sarah E. Robinson, "Refreshing the Concept of Halal Meat: Resistance and Religiosity in Chicago's Taqwa Eco-Food Cooperative," in *Religion, Food, and Eating in North America*, eds. Zeller, et. al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 274-293.

Th: Valeria Sinclair-Chapman and Harry Targ, "Fusion Politics from the Poor People's Campaign to the Rainbow Coalition to the New Poor People's Campaign," *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology* 18.1-2 (2019): 24-35.

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**WEEK 13      The Future of Spirituality and Social Justice in an Age of Austerity**  
(4/26 - 4/28)

**Readings:**      T: Jack Jenkins, "The Future of Faith" and "Epilogue" in *American Prophets: The Religious Roots of Progressive Politics and the Ongoing Fight for the Soul of the Country* (New York: HarperOne, 2020), 253-285.

Th: Listen to your classmates' podcast episodes (they will not be the final versions).

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**FINAL PODCAST DUE – Thursday, May 5 by noon**