

ANTH 322: Anthropology of Religion
Spring 2023; T R 11-12:15 pm, WALNT 108

Dr. Jeffrey G. Snodgrass
Dept. of Anthropology and Geography, Colorado State University
Jeffrey.Snodgrass@Colostate.edu

Anthropology Main Office/ My mailbox: Clark B219
Office Hours: Tuesday/ Thursday 1-2:15 (Office: Clark B219a or via Zoom)

Research: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jeffrey_Snodgrass

This course will train students to analyze religions as cultural and psychosocial phenomena. This will be achieved by: 1) exploring major anthropological and social scientific theories of religion; 2) familiarizing students with various forms of the sacred in both Western and non-Western contexts, as well as how these forms both mirror and impact the societies in which they are found; 3) applying social theory in such a way as to do justice to the complexities of religious forms as found in their ethnographic contexts; 4) questioning the manner to which religions of traditional small-scale societies might differ from religion in modern industrial societies, as well as how classic theories do or do not enable us to comprehend these differences; 5) and, finally, engaging these issues in ways which are evocative and relevant to contemporary society.

We will be primarily concerned with religious traditions referred to variously as *primal*, *tribal*, *indigenous*, *animistic*, and *shamanistic*. However, we will also consider case studies from the major world religions, and especially as the beliefs, values, and institutions of such religions are reformulated in folk or popular consciousness. In all cases, as anthropologists, we will be more interested in *actual religious practices* rather than in the textual or orthodox doctrines of these religions, though the latter can also importantly inform religious thought and practice.

Topics include shamanism, trance and spirit possession, witchcraft & sorcery, ritual vow fulfillment, and the body in religious experience, as well as modern religious protest movements, the inflection of religion by colonialism and the global economy, and the religious aspects of seemingly secular phenomena such as political institutions. Students should note that this is a course in *social theory*. We will consider many fascinating wisdom traditions from places distant from the United States. However, if you are only interested in learning about neat exotic religions, and not about classical and contemporary social theorizing on these religious forms, then this is *not* the course for you.

Assignments and evaluation of student work:

Weekly in-class activities (you must be in class to complete these; you can drop your lowest *4* grades on these activities): 15%
Midterm Exam 1: 15%
Midterm Exam 2: 20%
Paper (on the book *Living Buddhism*): 25%
Final Exam: 25%

All graded assignments demand a critical engagement with class material. Class films will be incorporated into written material. Active attendance and participation in class is strongly encouraged and may be taken into account in calculating final grades—for example, in cases where a student is on the borderline between two grades.

Readings: The following books can be purchased at [The University Bookstore](#) (in the Lory Student Center) or online (at a vendor of students' choice):

1. *Ten Theories of Religion* (Pals; **10 Theories**)
2. *Living Buddhism: Mind, Self, and Emotion in a Thai Community* (Cassaniti; **LB**)

Additional PDF texts can be found on **Canvas**. All readings are required unless otherwise noted.

Weekly reading assignments should be pursued conscientiously and *before* Tuesday that week, as this will greatly contribute to an appreciation of lecture material as well as to the ability to participate in class discussions. Readings are typically organized on the syllabus in the order that they should be read for the week. Each week entails both a discussion of theories of religion as well as the application of these theories to ethnographic case studies. Note that this syllabus may be revised, *including paper and exam dates*, and it is the student's responsibility to keep abreast of these developments. Finally, the course adheres to the Academic Integrity Policy of the General Catalog and the Student Conduct Code. Any breach of these policies and codes will be taken seriously.

Topics, Readings, & Schedule

I. Theoretical Foundations

Week 1: Introduction: Defining Religion (Jan. 17, 19)

10 Theories: "Introduction"; **Canvas:** Conceptualizing Religion: Some Recent Reflections (Saler)

Week 2: Anthropological & Religious Roots (Jan. 24, 26)

10 Theories: Ch. 1: "Animism and magic: E.B. Tylor and J.G. Frazer"; **Canvas:** "The Shaman: A Siberian Specialist" (Howells), "Dark side of the shaman" (Brown)

Film: *Magical Death* (Chagnon & Asch, 1973)

Week 3: Religion & Personality (Jan. 31, Feb. 2)

10 Theories: Ch. 2: "Religion and personality: Sigmund Freud;" **Canvas:** "Medusa's hair" (Obeyesekere) [Recommended: **Canvas:** "World Religions: Ch. 13, Hinduism"]

Film: *Kataragama: A God for All Seasons* (Nairn & Obeyesekere, 1973)

Week 4: Society as Sacred: Moved by the Spirit (Feb. 7, 9)

10 Theories: Ch. 3: "Society as sacred: Emile Durkheim;" **Canvas:** "Quantifying collective effervescence: Heart-rate dynamics at a fire-walking ritual" (Xygalatas); "Festive Fighting and Forgiving: Ritual and Resilience among Indigenous Indian 'Conservation Refugees'" (Snodgrass)

Film: *Holy Ghost People* (Adair, 1967)

Midterm exam 1 review

Midterm exam 1 due: Sat., Feb. 11, 6pm

Week 5: Religion as Ideology: Sacralizing Kurdish Sheikhs & Challenging U.S. Elites (Feb. 14, 16)

10 Theories: Ch. 4: "Religion as alienation: Karl Marx"; **Canvas:** "Dervishes" (Stewart); "Saint Tupac" (Ralph et al.)

[Recommended: **Canvas:** "World Religions: Ch. 17, Islam"]

Film: *The Dervishes of Kurdistan* (Moser, 1987)

Week 6: Religion, Motivation, and Action: Islamic Veiling (Feb. 21, 23)

10 Theories: Ch. 5: "A source of social action: Max Weber"; Ch. 10: "Sexism and the sacred: Mary Daly";
Canvas: "Hegemonic relations and gender resistance: The new veiling as accommodating protest in Cairo" (MacLeod); "Citizens and Suspects" (Khabeer)
Film: *A Veiled Revolution* (Gaunt & Fernea, 1982)

II. Interlude, *Living Buddhism*

Week 7: Religion, Self, and Social Identity: *Living Buddhism* (Feb. 28, March 2)

LB: pp. 1-59

[Recommended: **Canvas:** "World Religions: Ch. 14, Buddhism"]

Film: *Nang Nak* (Nimibutr, 1999)

Week 8: Religion, Self, and Social Identity: *Living Buddhism, cont.* (March 7, 9)

LB: pp. 60-117

Meet Tuesday for midterm exam 2 review; no class Thursday

****Midterm exam 2 due: Friday, March 10, 6pm****

Week 9: **Spring Recess, No Class Meeting** (March 11-19)

Week 10: Religion, Self, and Social Identity: *Living Buddhism, cont.* (March 21, 23)

LB: pp. 118-185 (finish book)

Film: *Ghosts and Numbers* (Klima, 2009)

III. Religion, Culture, and Mind

Week 11: Religious Experience (March 28, 30)

10 Theories: Ch. 6: "The verdict of religious experience: William James"; **Canvas:** "Building on William James" (Luhmann); "The Cultural Kindling of Spiritual Experiences" (Cassaniti and Luhmann)

Film: *Jathilan: Trance and Possession in Indonesia* (Lemelson, 2011)

Week 12: Religious Realities (& Fictions) in Archaic Societies & the Contemporary U.S. (April 4, 6)

10 Theories: Ch. 7: "The reality of the sacred: Mircea Eliade"; **Canvas:** "Stride Toward Freedom" (King); "How Howard Thurman met Gandhi and brought nonviolence to the civil rights movement" (Fluker)

[Recommended: **Canvas:** "World Religions: Ch. 16, Christianity"]

Film: *Backs Against the Wall: The Howard Thurman story* (Doblmeier, 2020)

****Living Buddhism paper due: Friday, April 7, 6pm****

Week 13: Rationalizing Belief: Zande Witchcraft & Divination Beliefs (April 11, 13)

10 Theories: Ch. 8: "Society's 'construct of the heart': E.E. Evans-Pritchard"; **Canvas:** "Consulting the Poison Article among the Azande" (Evans-Pritchard); "Religious thought and behaviour as by-products of brain function" (Boyer)

Film: *Witchcraft among the Azande* (Ryle & Singer, 1982)

IV. Religion and the Politics of Representation

Week 14: Religion as a Cultural System (April 18, 20)

10 Theories: Ch. 9: "Religion as a cultural system: Clifford Geertz;" **Canvas:** "The moral logic and growth of suicide terrorism" (Atran); "The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category" (Asad)
Film: *The Terrorist* (Sivan, 1998)

Week 15: Religion & Resistance to Colonialism: Niger's Hauka Movement (April 25, 27)

Canvas: "Horrorific comedy: Cultural resistance and the Hauka movement in Niger" (Stoller); **Canvas:** "Toward a genealogy of morals" (Nietzsche); "Western Film Images of Africa" (Ukadike)

Film: *Les Maitres Fous* (trans: *The Mad Masters*, Rouch, 1955)

Week 16: Anthropology and "Orientalism" (May 2, 4)

10 Theories: Ch. 10: "Conclusion"; **Canvas:** Orientalism (Said); "The Hall of Mirrors" (Sax)

Final exam review

****Final exam due: Wed., May 10, 6pm****