

**RELS162, *Religion and Political Controversy in the U.S.*
Summer Session 2012**

FINAL RESEARCH & ANALYSIS PAPER DIRECTIONS

(Note: I may tinker with these instructions & will announce any major changes in class.)

DUE: MONDAY, JULY 2

(20% of your final grade)

At the conclusion of our course, you will complete a 5-7 page paper on a current American religious & political controversy, putting these issues in historical, cultural, and theoretical context. You will need to research the topic using the readings from our course as well as outside research (both online media & library-based).

Suggested topics include:

- gender & sexuality (i.e., same-sex marriage, abortion, women's issues)
- race, ethnicity & economic issues (i.e., immigration, labor, civil rights, the occupy movement)
- science, nature & ecology (i.e., climate change, evolution, creationism & intelligent design)
- liberal/conservative political alignments (i.e., as reflected in the current presidential race &/or other elections historically; also challenges within & between diverse religious/cultural ideologies & groups)
- other issues, such as: pacifism and war; the death penalty; terrorism; atheism (& others possible in consultation with your professor)

These papers should demonstrate your accurate understanding of the material studied, accurately describe multiple perspectives on the issue, and also think analytically, critically, and independently about the intersection of religion and politics. In so doing, address the following questions/dimensions:

- History: What historical backgrounds can help us understand this issue/controversy/discussion today?
- Culture: What cultural identities & cultural forces are involved (i.e., race/ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, privilege, discrimination, etc.?)
- Religion: What religious ideologies & identities are involved in & inform this issue (i.e., evangelical, Catholic, Muslim, etc.)
- Social Contexts: How have these dynamic religious/cultural/social contexts produced & challenged structured equality/inequality, privilege/discrimination in American society?
- Media Discourse: How is this issue generally portrayed in the media? Are there multiple perspectives discernable in media representations of these issues? (incorporate material from your presentations here)
- Theory: What theories discussed in *Chapter 12* can help us understand the dynamics behind these issues and put them in broader contexts? Can McGraw's concept of "American Sacred Ground" be useful here, & if so how? Are there other social theories that might also be helpful?

In your conclusion, you should consider/describe:

- How understanding these backgrounds and dynamic intersections can serve the broader American quests for equality and social justice among relevant social/cultural groups (i.e. religious, gender, ethnic, racial, class, sexual orientation)?
- And how can these (or other?) ideas & insights help us bridge misunderstandings and contribute to constructive interactions between people from different cultural/social/racial/ethnic/religious groups in the U.S.?

A few things not to forget:

- FOLLOW: Criteria & Guidelines for Written Assignments and Professor's Pet Peeves (see syllabus)
- BASICS: type, double-space, use 12-point type, & 1-inch margins. MLA/APA/Chicago/Turabian okay. (see: <http://library.sjsu.edu/citing-writing-0>)
- UPLOAD: to turnitin.com and turn in on paper by 9am MONDAY, JULY 2.