

## Women in Conservative Religion & Politics in Twentieth-Century America

---

Instructor: Natalie Rose  
Office: *TBA*  
Office Hours: *TBA*  
Email: rosenat3@msu.edu

### Course Description

---

The relationship between women and conservatism (in its many forms) is riddled with many complexities. In this class, we will study the interrelationships between American women, conservative religion, and conservative politics in the twentieth century to investigate the following themes/questions:

- The question of why do so many women become involved in religious traditions that seem to leave them “powerless”?
- The effect of feminism (and its variations) on women and religion
- What does an embrace of conservative religion illustrate about the broader relationship between politics and religion in the United States?
- How does the inclusion of women like Amy Semple McPherson, Phyllis Schlafly, and Sarah Palin alter the male-dominated history of conservative religions and politics in the United States?
- Different perspectives of studying ordinary and extraordinary women
- How does conservatism operate in religion and politics?

We will also consider how each term (gender, conservatism, religion, politics, and sexuality) is used within different (many times conflicting) contexts throughout the long twentieth century in the United States.

### Course Objectives

---

- Develop a facility with scholarly methods of investigating and interpreting religion in America (primarily various historical, ethnographic, and sociological approaches)
  - Analyze the author’s thesis, evidence, and employment of evidence to make an argument should be considered for each book, chapter, selection, or article
  - Synthesize and evaluate the reliability of the author’s argument, its convincing nature, and how it contributes to our understanding of women, religion, and politics
  - Clearly articulate your own scholarly analysis in writing and class discussion
-

## Course Material

---

### Readings

Margaret Bendroth, *Fundamentalism & Gender, 1875 to the Present*

Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade*

Kathleen S. Cummings, *New Women of the Old Faith: Gender and American Catholicism in the Progressive Era*

Marie Griffith, *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission*

Jamillah A. Karim, *American Muslim Women: Negotiating Race, Class, and Gender Within the Ummah*

Debra R. Kaufman, *Rachel's Daughters: Newly Orthodox Jewish Women*

The rest of the required readings, in the form of articles, primary documents, and selections or chapters from books on the course website. Sometimes we will be reading these documents in class together. I highly suggest you make sure to print out the articles/materials and bring them to each class.

## Course Requirements

---

*Weekly Readings:* Keep up with the weekly readings and come to class with the author's thesis and argument clearly in mind AND on paper. Attendance is mandatory.

*Discussion Leadership:* Each student will choose ONE week in which they will lead the class discussion over the assigned material. This entails starting and continuing the discussion and should include some form of background information or additional material concerning the chosen books/articles for the assigned week.

*Comparative Reviews:* Choose THREE (3) different weeks/topics in which you will turn in a comparative book review at the beginning of class. The book review must compare the two readings (book selections, articles) for the week/topic. The reviews should consist of a 3-4 page assessment of the book(s) and their arguments, their place in historiography, and an evaluation of how they dialogue with each other.

*Research Paper:* The research paper (10-12 pages) will be on a topic of your choice, but you must meet with me to discuss this topic.

Some sample topics can include

- Women's roles to the gay marriage debate
- Roots of antifeminism in a religious tradition
- Unexpected sources of religious agency

This assignment is broken in two parts: you will hand in a first draft halfway through the semester and the final version will be due the final week. We will review the assignment in further detail.

*Assessment:*

Attendance, Discussion Leading and Participation: 30%

Comparative Reviews: 30% (10% each)

Research Paper First Draft 20%

Research Paper Final Draft: 20%

---

## Course Schedule

---

### Week 1

---

*What is Women's Religion History? What is Conservatism?*

Class One:

- Ann Braude, "Women's History Is American Religious History," in *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, ed. Thomas A. Tweed
- Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* (1986)

Class Two:

- Selection from Corey Robin, *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Sarah Palin*
- Alan Brinkley, "The Problem of American Conservatism," *American Historical Review* 99, no. 2 (1994), pp. 409–429.

### Week 2

---

*The Roots of Fundamentalism*

*Aimee Semple McPherson: Friend and Foe*

Class One:

- Bendroth, *Fundamentalism & Gender*, chapter 1 & 2

Class 2

- "The Foursquare Gospel" from Matthew Avery Sutton, *Aimee Semple McPherson and the Resurrection of a Christian Nation*

### Week 3

---

*The Surrender of Evangelical Women?*

Class One:

- Griffith, *God's Daughters*, chapter 1

Class Two:

- Griffith, *God's Daughters*, chapter 2

#### **Week 4**

---

##### *Creating their Own World? Pentecostal Women*

###### Class One:

- Selection from Anthea Butler, *Women in the Church of God in Christ: Making a Sanctified World*

###### Class Two

- “Jesus Made a Feminist out of Me” and “Reclaiming the Church Ladies” in Sarah Bessey, *Jesus Feminist: An Invitation to Revisit the Bible's View of Women*

#### **Week 5**

---

##### *Suffrage, Religion & Rights*

###### Class One:

- Evelyn A. Kirkley "This Work Is God's Cause": Religion in the Southern Woman Suffrage Movement, 1880-1920 *Church History*, Vol. 59, No. 4 (Dec., 1990)

###### Class Two

- Kathleen M. Blee, "Women in the 1920's Ku Klux Klan Movement." *Feminist Studies* no. 17, no. 1. . (1991)

#### **Week 6**

---

##### *Paradox of Conservatism: Catholic Sisters in the Progressive Era*

###### Class One:

- Cummings, *New Women of the Old Faith*, introduction, chapter 1 & 2

###### Class Two:

- Cummings, *New Women of the Old Faith*, chapter 4

#### **Week 7**

---

##### *Early Politics of Reproductive Choice*

###### Class One:

- Melissa R. Klapper, "The Drama of 1916: the American Jewish Community, Birth Control, and Two Yiddish Plays." *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*. 12.4 (2013): 502-534

###### Class Two:

- Melissa J. Wilde and Sabrina Danielsen “Fewer and Better Children: Race, Class, Religion, and Birth Control Reform in America” *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 119, No. 6 (May 2014), pp. 1710-1760

#### **First Draft of Research Paper Due**

## Week 8

---

*Family, Women, and Christianity in the Great Depression and World War Two*

Class One:

- Bendroth, *Gender & Fundamentalism*, chapter 3

Class Two:

- Michelle Nickerson, “Patriotic Daughters and Isolationist Mothers: Conservative Women in the Early Twentieth Century,” from *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right*

## Week 9

---

*The Turning of the 1960s*

*Stirrings of the Christian Right*

Class One:

- Betty Friedan, “The Problem with No Name” from *The Feminine Mystique*
- “Brinkmanship: Sexual Containment on the Homefront” from Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*

Class Two:

- Kristin Luker, “The Emergence of a Right to Life Movement” from *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*
- Lisa McGirr, “The Setting” from *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New Right*

## Week 10

---

*Phyllis Schlafly, “The Sweetheart of the Silent Majority” and the Emergence of the Christian Right*

Class One:

- Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*, chapter 1 – 3

Class Two

- Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*, chapter 9 -11

## Week 11

---

*Mormons become “Normal”:* *Mormon Women and the ERA*

Class One:

- *Jennifer Huss Basquiat*, “Reproducing Patriarchy and Erasing Feminism: The Selective Construction of History within the Mormon Community,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* Vol. 17, No. 2 (Fall, 2001), pp. 5-37

Class Two:

- Selections from Sonia Johnson, *Housewife to Heretic: One Woman's Struggle for Equal Rights and Her Excommunication from the Mormon Church*
- Neil J. Young, "The ERA Is a Moral Issue": The Mormon Church, LDS Women, and the Defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment" *American Quarterly* Volume 59, Number 3, (September 2007)

## **Week 12**

---

### *Contemporary Evangelicals*

Class One:

- Griffith, *God's Daughters*, chapter 5 & 6

Class Two:

- Derogatis, "What Would Jesus Do? Sexuality and Salvation in Protestant Evangelical Sex Manuals" *Church History* Volume 74, Issue 01 (March 2005)

## **Week 13**

---

### *Post-Feminism and the Return to Orthodox Judaism*

Class One

- Kaufman, Rachel's *Daughters*, introduction, chapter 1 & 2

Class Two:

- Kaufman, *Rachel's Daughters*, Chapter 4 & 6

## **Week 14**

---

### *Contemporary Muslim Women in America*

Class One:

- Karim, *American Muslim Women*, introduction & chapter 2

Class Two

- Karim, *American Muslim Women*, chapter 4 & 6

## **Week 15**

---

### *Twenty-First Century Conservative Women: Ordinary and Extraordinary*

Class One:

- "The Family in the Store" from Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise*

Class Two:

- D. Porpora Larson, "The Resistible Rise of Sarah Palin: Continuity and Paradox in the American Right Wing" *Sociological Forum*, 2011 Vol. 26. No. 4 (2011)

**Week 16**

---

**Final Draft of Research Paper Due**

*Note: the syllabus is subject to change by instructor*