

HIS 191, Cults, Chakras, & Crunchy Granola
Instructor: Daniel Gorman Jr.
Research Paper
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This course spotlights new religious movements in the United States. Although we have discussed developments in religious life that predate the 1900s, the religions associated with the “New Age” really proliferated in the last seventy years. For this assignment, you will select a New Age tradition from the second half of the twentieth century and write a **five-page, double-spaced research paper** about it. To narrow your focus, I recommend focusing on a person or a specific event associated with the New Age. Examples of individuals might include L. Ron Hubbard (Scientology), Father Divine (International Peace Mission), or Marianne Williamson (self-help). Examples of events might include the 1967 Human Be-In, the Nov. 18, 1978, “Jonestown” massacre, and the spring 1993 siege of the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas. Please confirm your topic with me before you dive into the research.

In writing this paper, you must cite at least five primary sources. Up to two of these sources can be primary sources from our class discussions. To find additional sources, you should consult the electronic primary source databases to which Rush Rhees Library has subscribed, in addition to books, articles, or films. YouTube features extensive news footage from the twentieth century, so searching there might be helpful. Aside from primary sources, your paper must cite secondary sources — histories and critical analyses of American religious life — to contextualize your research topic. You can use your homework readings as secondary sources, but you may have to use additional sources specifically about your topic.

History librarian Kristen Toleben has created a course guide (available at <http://libguides.lib.rochester.edu/his191cultschakras>) featuring databases that will help you. The databases include two collections of scholarly research (America: History and Life, and ATLA Religion), two visual media collections (Archival Films & Newsreels Video Collection, and Ethnographic Video Online), and two primary source collections (ProQuest Historical Newspapers and Religions of America). You may want to schedule a meeting with Kristen to discuss how to use these databases effectively. **Please use Chicago Style footnotes and include a bibliography.**

Your paper must include a clear **thesis** — a claim based on your research that summarizes your most important discovery or idea. You may wonder how a thesis is different from a “theme.” A theme is a main idea, often found in journalism and literature, that may not be stated explicitly. By contrast, a thesis uses specific details to make an analytical claim about a subject. Here are examples of a theme and a thesis, to help you differentiate them:

THEME: Miscommunication characterized the tragedy at Waco.

THESIS: Miscommunication between the Branch Davidians and federal law enforcement, combined with a simplistic understanding of “cults” and media hysteria, caused the Waco massacre.

Your paper is due by 1 PM on our last day of class, Thursday, July 25. Submit your paper via Blackboard. This paper counts for **30% of your semester grade**, so I encourage you to begin researching it ASAP. Visiting the Writing Center may help you to refine your argument. You can make an appointment with a writing tutor on the center's website.

You will present your findings during the last class. Since we have a small number of students, you do not need to make your presentation very formal, but I encourage you to rehearse it at least once in advance. You may include a slideshow or electronic media in your presentation, if you wish, but you do not need to. The presentation will not count toward your grade for the paper, but rather will count toward your course participation grade.

Possible Topics

Events

The alleged Roswell, New Mexico, UFO crash of 1947
Human Be-In, San Francisco, 1967
The Manson Family murders, Aug. 8–9, 1969
“Jonestown” massacre, Nov. 18, 1978
The Rajneeshee bioterror attack, Oct. 10, 1984
Nancy Reagan astrology controversy, 1988
Siege of the Branch Davidians, Waco, Texas, Spring 1993
Second Parliament of the World's Religions, Aug. 28–Sept. 5, 1993
Scientology earns tax-exempt status, 1993
The Heaven's Gate mass suicide, Mar. 26, 1997
Legal campaigns of the Satanic Temple (not the same as the Church of Satan) in the 2000s–10s

People

Stewart Brand (environmentalism, self-sufficient movement)
Youree Dell “Miss Cleo” Harris (psychic)
Phyllis Currott (Wicca)
Richard Alpert/Ram Dass (Hinduism)
Father Divine (International Peace Mission)
Bernie Glassman (Zen Buddhism)
Larry Harvey, John Law, and the other co-founders of the Burning Man Festival
Louise Hay (self-help)
L. Ron Hubbard (Scientology)
Jim Jones (Pentecostalism/People's Temple)
Philip Kapleau (Zen Buddhism)
Anton LaVey (Church of Satan)
Shirley MacLaine (combinative occultism)
Gwyneth Paltrow (self-help/founder of Goop)
Jack Parsons (Thelema)
Tony Robbins (self-help)
Marianne Williamson (self-help)
James Edward Baker/Father Yod (The Source Family)
Paramahansa Yogananda (Hinduism/Self-Realization Fellowship)