Religion, Social Movements, and Progressive Reform in the Americas

Proposal for
A Mellon-LASA Seminar Grant

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Key Themes

As Latin Americans fight for social justice and meaningful citizenship, they also pursue active religious and spiritual lives, reshaping old religious practices or embracing new ones. These two processes intertwine, reinforcing one another or producing tension and conflict. Across the region, popular Catholicism and Evangelicalism have contributed energy, vocabulary and networks to progressive social mobilization and reform. At the same time, the Catholic Church and some Evangelical associations have become key opponents of reform in particular contexts of crisis and change.

Analyzing these processes is key to understanding a post-neoliberal Latin America in which efforts to combat inequality and marginalization increasingly work through cultural identities, discourses, and networks. Social movements and religion are rarely studied together in the Latin American context, however. Grassroots politics is analyzed largely without attention to religious belief, and religion is studied with minimal attention to the politics of progressive political and economic reform.

Our project, “Religion, Social Movements, and Progressive Reform in the Americas,” which began in 2010 and will continue through at least 2013, is bridging this divide by fostering an unprecedented analysis of the role of religion in Latin American social movements and progressive reform projects. Only by breaking down the conceptual and institutional barriers between these fields can we understand the prospects for significant reform and transformative social change in this hemisphere and the personal and spiritual dimensions of political transformation.

During the past two decades, Latin American and U.S.-based social scientists have carried out pioneering studies of progressive social movements (Doimo 1995, Escobar 1992, Eckstein 1989, Stahler-Sholk 2008, Wolford 2010), integrating the study of culture and politics (Alvarez 1998, Gilbert and Nugent 1994, Rubin 1997) and rethinking the meanings of citizenship, civil society, and the state (Holston 2009, Dagnino 2007, Coronil 1997). However, despite theoretical and empirical understanding of the importance of culture for political organizing – and despite the dramatic changes in the Catholic Church, the explosion of Pentecostalism across the hemisphere, and the hybrid growth of Afro-Latin American religions – scholars of social movements in Latin America rarely address religion (with some notable exceptions, such as Burdick 1996, 1998), beyond a relatively one-dimensional nod to the role of Liberation Theology in the 1970s and early 1980s.

Sociologists of religion have done pioneering work over the last twenty years in studying the multifaceted and rapidly changing nature of religion in the globalizing world. They have also begun to address the role of religious practices and spiritual narratives in social movements in the U.S. (Lichterman 2005, Williams 2007, Wood 2002, Hart 2001). However, only recently are sociologists of religion bringing these insights to bear on the interplay between religious culture and politics in Latin America. And they have only begun to incorporate into their analyses the post-structuralist understandings of culture.
that have long guided the study of Latin American social movements. (Smilde 2007, Miller 2007, Mackie 2005).

Our project is taking the study of religion, social movements, and progressive reform in the Americas in a critical new direction by bringing into dialogue scholars from several research projects and institutions at the cutting edge of their fields: the hemisphere-wide “Consortium on Social Movements and 21st Century Cultural-Political Transformations” which was formed at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst in 2007; the “Religion on the Edge” initiative, which held its founding conference at Princeton University in 2008, and the Institute on Culture, Religion, and World Affairs at Boston University, formed in 2004 with a grant from the Luce Foundation.

**Mellon-LASA Objectives**

Our proposal thus explicitly addresses the seminar objectives set forth by LASA. First, our project will promote substantive and lasting dialogue—both theoretical and methodological—between Latin American Studies researchers and scholars of religion, thus forging a new, Americas-wide perspective on religion, social movements, and progressive reform (Objectives 1 & 2). Second, our project will facilitate the integration of conceptual and methodological innovation regarding religion from across the social sciences and humanities (anthropology, history, philosophy, political science, and sociology) into contemporary Latin American Studies scholarship on politics (Objective 3).

The Ford Foundation-funded Social Movement Consortium\(^1\) promotes research on Latin American social movements in the post-Washington Consensus world of “inclusive neoliberalism,” in which the proliferation of civil society participation programs coexist with the heightened visibility of more contentious collective action. At the 2008 international conference of the Consortium at UMass/Amherst, several participants noted the absence of discussion of religion in the group’s ongoing analysis of culture and politics. Reflecting back on fieldwork and writing experiences, these participants began to explore in more depth the religious aspects of each of their research topics. They looked not only at formal institutions, practices, and discourses, but also at the implicitly religious logics and symbols at play in both contentious social movements and participatory civic programs. The result (discussed in depth at our first conference in April 2010) revealed striking interactions between religion and progressive politics, from Pentecostal worldviews fragmenting a radical women’s movement in rural Brazil, to Catholic origins of civic participation initiatives in Venezuela, to competing Catholic and evangelical efforts to mobilize Indians in Bolivia, to parallels between religious faith and faith in participatory democracy initiatives in Porto Alegre.

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\(^1\)The Consortium involves faculty, graduate students, and activists linked to major research institutes at the Univ. of Massachusetts, Amherst; Brown Univ.; the Univ. of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Harvard Univ.; the Univ. of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras; the Univ. Federal de Minas Gerais (Brazil); the Univ. Estadual de Campinas (Brazil); the Univ. General San Martin (Argentina); the Univ. del Valle (Colombia); the Univ. Nacional de San Marcos (Peru); and the Univ. de Coimbra (Portugal).
Based on these insights, this social-movements-and-religion group secured an $11,000-start-up grant – from the larger Ford Foundation grant to the Consortium - for a collaborative effort on “Religion, Social Movements, and Progressive Reform,” and we initiated discussions with sociologists of religion.

The working group “Religion on the Edge” consists primarily of U.S. sociologists of religion who study issues and empirical domains outside of the traditional sociology of religion. Members of the group focus on religion outside of the US, on non-Christian religions, and on non-institutionalized religious practices, and they welcome engagement with religion on the part of scholars of other topics and disciplines. By extending sociological research on religion in these new directions, the “Religion on the Edge” initiative seeks to challenge existing understandings of religion as a set of deeply-held beliefs that determine action, an approach that sought to discern enduring affinities between particular religions and political forms. Religion on the Edge scholars are working toward an alternative framework influenced by practice theory and postcolonial scholarship, based on a more flexible, context-based approach to how religion affects social behavior.

The Institute on Culture, Religion, and World Affairs (CURA) examines the impact of religion on political life in democracies in North America, Europe, China, the Islamic World, and Latin America. Its researchers strive to connect macro-processes, such as economic globalization, the growth of new religious groups and trends, and political democratization, to the empirical study of religious practices in particular locations, such as Islamic schools, Chinese civic initiatives, everyday spiritual life in the US, and evangelical congregations in Latin American shantytowns.

The Accomplishments and Objectives of the Project

Together, members of these three groups have advanced the Religion and Social Movements Project significantly, in terms of funding; outreach to scholars, departments, and programs; and conferences and publications. We combined the 11,000 from the Ford Foundation Consortium grant with funds from CURA, the Latin American Studies Department, and the Department of Sociology at BU to organize our first conference in April 2010. We presented the results of this conference and entered into an unprecedented dialogue about religion with social movement scholars and activists at an international conference sponsored jointly by the UMass-based Consortium and the Programa de Democracia y Transformación Global of the Universidad Nacional de San Marcos in Lima in May 2010.

Following our inaugural conference in 2010, we secured funding from the BU Humanities Foundation for a second conference, to carry our work forward and bring in new participants, in May 2011, and from the BU Pardee Center for the Study of the Longer Range Future, toward a final, May 2012 conference. We are seeking a Mellon-LASA grant in order to fully fund this third conference, as well as to arrange two smaller
events, focused on the relationships between 1) religion and trade and 2) religion and mining, in the course of 2011-2012.

The 2012 conference will result in a short publication, in the Pardee Center series on global issues, presenting our results in accessible form for a broad audience. In addition, we have been selected by the Latin American Research Review to guest-edit a Special Issue, which will bring together the scholarly papers from our conferences, in 2013. In producing this volume, we will work together with two LARR editors who themselves study religion and progressive reform, historian Catherine LeGrand and anthropologist Kristin Norget. Finally, we have been invited by David Kim, the editor of the SSRC’s religion website, The Immanent Frame, to discuss our project and its findings on their site.

In addition to these efforts, and because we have been able to secure additional funding, we have used the initial Consortium grant to fund field research trips for the members of our collaboration, so that each of us can further our study of the impact of religion on social movement activism and incorporate our findings into the 2012 conference and the LARR Special Issue. We have used Consortium funds to hire research assistants to produce rapporteur's reports of our conferences and to assemble a complete bibliography on religion and social movements in Latin America. And finally, we have collectively produced accounts of our first conference, and a chapter for the a book emerging from the Lima conference, that identify and explore the multifaceted themes of our project as they are emerging.

The Cases and Themes of our Research

Thus we have put together a cohesive and continuing set of meetings, discussions, and papers to bring together scholars from across disciplines and across the hemisphere. At our first conference, in April 2010, participants spoke on black gospel music and anti-racism movements in Rio (John Burdick); evangelical indigenous movements in Bolivia (Tony Lucero); the Catholic origins of Hugo Chavez' participation projects in Venezuela (Margarita Lopez Maya); Catholic and Pentecostal support for and opposition to Chavez (David Smilde); and religious tropes and imagery in participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre (Ben Junge). In addition, to stimulate comparative discussion, CURA researcher Nancy Ammerman and director Bob Hefner spoke about spiritual narratives in everyday life in the US and religion-state ties in Asia, respectively.

This year’s conference will include speakers on religious cults and criminality in Mexico (Laura Roush), religion and armed groups in three Latin American cities (Desmond Arias), church-connected AIDS activism in Brazil (Fernando Seffner), religion and criminality in early twentieth century Brazil (Dylon Robbins) and the role of religion in reformist initiatives in mid-twentieth century Colombia (Mary Roldán). We will have comparative segments on religion and housing movements in the US (Paul Lichterman), on socially engaged religion in China (CURA researcher Robert Weller), and on religion, emotions, and social movements (David Kyuman Kim).
Noting the Mellon-LASA priorities, we underscore our inclusion of both Latin American scholars and junior scholars in both conferences.

Through exploration of these case studies and topics, as well as the further cases we will incorporate in 2011-2012, the Religion and Social Movements project will delineate the multiple ways in which religious beliefs, practices, leaders, and institutions shape the cultural and political practices of social movements and progressive reform in the Americas. The resulting geographic and thematic “map” of religious and political life – a map we have already begun to draw, but that needs considerable further work – will illuminate both the changing religious landscape in the Americas and the impact of diverse and rapidly changing religious institutions and experiences on the prospects for progressive reform in today’s democracies. This in turn will bring new insight to the study of democratic deepening in Latin America in the 21st century.

The Purposes of a Mellon-LASA Grant

A Mellon-LASA grant will enable us to continue and strengthen our project, and set the LARR volume on the path to completion, in two crucial ways:

First, it will provide us with sufficient funding, together with the BU Pardee Center grant, for our third conference, in May 2012. At this conference, we will bring in a new group of scholars whose case studies address the final round of themes and issues that have emerged in the course of the project. The Mellon-LASA funds will be particularly instrumental in allowing us to bring more scholars from Latin America than has been possible for the first two conferences, due to financial limitations. In addition, we will bring to the third conference participants from the first two meetings who have been engaged in the ongoing theoretical work of the project. This gathering, involving a larger group than the first two conferences, will complete the conceptual framework for the LARR volume as it incorporates new areas of research.

Second, a Mellon-LASA grant will enable us to hold two smaller events, involving two speakers each, in collaboration with the Global Development Policy Program, at Boston University. One of these events will focus on the role of religion in movements for fair trade, sustainable agriculture, and the newly emerging right to food (currently being debated under UN auspices). The second of these events will focus on the role of religion in movements that are mobilizing around mining issues in the Andes. The purpose of these stand-alone events is to deepen our knowledge of two areas we have identified as particularly significant intersections of religion and social movement activism. In addition, by focusing on areas at the center of the newly invigorated study of development, we build bridges to a Global Development constituency with a significant presence at BU and beyond.
Works Cited


Participants

(These are scholars already involved in the project and attending the 2010 and/or 2011 conferences. We will incorporate a new set of scholars from the US and Latin America for the proposed third conference and trade and mining events in 2011-2012)

From the Consortium on Social Movements Collaboration on Religion:

Jeffrey Rubin (Co-PI, History, Boston University, Associate Professor)
Benjamin Junge (Co-PI, Anthropology, SUNY New Paltz, Assistant Professor)
Margarita López Maya, (Centro de Estudios del Desarrollo, Universidad Central de Venezuela, Professor)
Alejandro Velasco (History, NYU, Assistant Professor)
Tony Lucero (Int’l Affairs, University of Washington, Assistant Professor)

From the Consortium on Social Movements, Executive Committee
Sonia Alvarez (Political Science, UMass, Professor)
Millie Thayer (Sociology, UMass, Assistant Professor)

From Religion on the Edge:

David Smilde (co-PI, Sociology, University of Georgia, Associate Professor)
John Burdick (Anthropology, Syracuse University, Professor)
Paul Lichterman (Sociology, University of Southern California, Associate Professor)

Additional Scholars of Religion and Social Movements in the Americas:

Fernando Seffner (Porto Alegre)
Maria das Dores Campos Machado (Universidade Federal Rural do Rio de Janeiro, Professor)
Laura Roush (Colegio de Michoacán, Assistant Professor)
Desmond Arias (John Jay College, Associate Professor)
Mary Roldán (Hunter College)

From the Institute on Culture, Religion, and World Affairs, Boston University:

Nancy Ammerman (Sociology, Boston University, Professor)
Robert Hefner (Anthropology, Boston University, Professor)
Robert Weller (Anthropology, Boston University, Professor)

From the Global Development Policy Program, Boston University
Kevin Gallagher (International Relations, Boston University, Associate Professor)
Budget

Third Conference, Religion, Social Movements, and Progressive Reform in the Americas, May 2012

- 6 Latin American participants @ 1900/person  = 11,400
- 11 US participants @ 1000/person  = 11,000
- Rapporteur  = 600
- Conference lunch, supplies, student help  = 800

Based on actual expenses for the Religion and Social Movements Conference, Boston University, April 2010:

- Latin America participants: 1200 airfare, 600 three nights hotel + airport transfers, 100 food
- US participants: 500 airfare, 400 two nights hotel + airport transfers, 100 food

$23,800 Total Workshop


Each event will include a public lecture and a group seminar and dinner

- Seminar on Religion, Trade, and Right to Food in the Americas
  - One Latin American participant @ 1900/person
  - One US Participant @ 1000/person
  - One Project participant from outside Boston @ 1000/person

- Seminar on Religion and Mining in the Andes
  - Two Latin American participants @ 1900/person
  - One Project participant from outside Boston @ 1000/person

$8,700 Total Boston University Seminars

Conference Travel

- 3,000 toward expenses for select participants to attend LASA in San Francisco, May 2012

$3,000 Total Travel to Conferences

Grand Total: $35,500

- Pardee Center Funding (already secured): $10,500
- CURA Funding (already secured): $1,500
- Latin American Studies Program funding (already secured): $1,500

Requested from Mellon-LASA: $22,000
Jeffrey W. Rubin (jwr@bu.edu)

EDUCATION
Harvard University  Ph.D.  Political Science  1991
Harvard College  A.B.  Social Studies  1978

CURRENT EMPLOYMENT
Associate Professor of History, Boston University, 2000-present
Research Associate, Institute for Culture, Religion, and World Affairs, Boston University, 2000-present

FELLOWSHIPS AND GRANTS (SELECTED)
Open Society Institute, Research Grant (Principal Investigator), 2007-2009
Ford Foundation, Project Grant (Co-Principal Investigator), 2008 – 2010,
American Philosophical Society, Sabbatical Research Fellowship, 2007-2008
MacArthur Foundation Research and Writing Grant, 2001-2002
Fulbright Fellowship, 2001-2002
Center for the Critical Analysis of Contemporary Culture, Rutgers, Fellow 1998-99
Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, Member, 1997-98
Rockefeller Fellowship, UNICAMP, Brazil, Spring 1997
Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, UCSD, Fellow, 1993-94
Center for International Studies, MIT, Visiting Researcher, 1990-91
Center for U.S.–Mexican Studies, Fellow, Spring 1987
Inter-American Foundation, Doctoral Research Fellowship, Mexico, 1985-1986
Doherty Foundation, Doctoral Research Fellowship, Mexico, 1984-85
Social Science Research Council, Doctoral Fellowship, Mexico, 1984-85

PUBLICATIONS (SELECTED)
Decentering the Regime: Ethnicity, Radicalism, and Democracy in Juchitán, Mexico, Duke
Also in Tedesco and Pastore, eds., Ciências sociais, temas contemporâneos: Trabalho e movimentos Sociais, Editora Universidade de Passo Fundo, 2007.
“Meanings and Mobilizations: A Cultural Politics Approach to Social Movements and States.”
The Enchantment of Activism: A Women’s Movement in Southern Brazil and a Father-Daughter Collaboration, (w/ Emma Sokoloff-Rubin) under review at Duke University Press
Enduring Reform: Progressive Activism and Business Visions of Change in Latin America’s Democracies (co-ed w/ Vivienne Bennett), under review at Penn State Press
David Smilde (dsmilde@uga.edu)

EDUCATION:
2000  Ph.D., Sociology, University of Chicago.

CURRENT EMPLOYMENT
Associate Professor of Sociology, University of Georgia, (2001-present)
Consultant, Latin America Program, Open Society Institute.

FELLOWSHIPS AND GRANTS (SELECTED)
2006-07  Fulbright Scholar Program, Council for International Exchange of Scholars,
Lecturing/Research Award, Universidad Central de Venezuela.
2001 Residential Fellowship, Kellogg Institute for International Studies, University of Notre
Dame, Spring Semester.
1999  Latin American Social Science Council (CLACSO), Second Research Project Competition:
Democracy at Century’s End: Promises, Results, and Challenges “The Cultural Frame of Popular
Protest in Venezuela” (with Margarita López Maya).
1993-94  International Predissertation Fellowship of the Social Science Research Council.

PUBLICATIONS (SELECTED):
2009  Smilde, David and Daniel Hellinger (eds). Participation, Politics and Culture in
Democracy: Catholics, Evangelicals and Political Polarization." In David Smilde and
Daniel Hellinger (eds). Participation, Politics and Culture in Venezuela’s Bolivarian
1, pp. 38–43.
Berkeley: University of California Press. [2008 Distinguished Book Award, Sociology of
Religion Section, American Sociological Association.]
2006  Levine, Daniel H., and David Smilde. The Church and the Chávez Government in
2005  Smilde, David. “A Qualitative Comparative Analysis of Conversion to Venezuelan
Evangelicalism: How Networks Matter.” American Journal of Sociology v111n3
(November). [2006 Honorable Mention, Distinguished Article Award, Collective
Behavior and Social Movements Section, American Sociological Association]
2004  Smilde, David. "Los Evangélicos y La Polarización: La Moralización de la Política y la
Politización de la Religión" Revista Venezolana de Economía y Ciencias Sociales, 2004,
2002  López Maya, Margarita, David Smilde, and Keta Stephany. Protesta y Cultura en
/ FONACIT.
1999  Smilde, David A. “El Clamor Por Venezuela: Latin American Evangelicalism as a
Collective Action Frame,” in Latin American Religion in Motion. Christian Smith and
Benjamin Junge, PhD, MHSC

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EDUCATION
PhD, Department of Anthropology, Emory University, 2007
  Areas: Citizenship, Democracy and Social Movements; Ethnographies of Latin America; Gender and Sexuality from Queer Theory/Lesbian & Gay Studies

Master of Health Science, International Health, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, 1994
BA, Wesleyan University, East Asian Studies, 1988

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE
Assistant Professor of Anthropology, State University of New York-New Paltz, 2007-present
Evaluation Director, Baltimore Needle Exchange, Johns Hopkins Department of Epidemiology, 1994-98
Intern Ethnographer, Aymará communities, Plan International/Altiplano; La Paz, Bolivia, 1993-94
Director of Community Relations, VII International Conference on AIDS; Florence, Italy, 1990-91

RESEARCH GRANTS, FELLOWSHIPS & PRIZES
SUNY-New Paltz Provost’s Creative Projects Award for Summer Research, 2008
Emory University: Dean’s Teaching Fellowship, 2005-2006
Emory University: Internationalization Fund Award for Dissertation Research, 2003
Fulbright Foundation, Institute of International Education: Dissertation Research Award, 2001-02
Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research: Individual Research Grant, 2001-03
Emory Univ./Ford Foundation “Crossing Borders: Revitalizing Area Studies” initiative: Fellow, 2000-01
Emory University, President’s Commission on LGBT Concerns: Winner, 2000 Essay Contest

PUBLICATIONS
Anthropology/Brazil/Gender

Public Health