



UNION

Religious Worlds of New York • Curriculum Development Project

“So Help Me God”: The Religious Language of the Inaugural Address

SUMMARY: This lesson was designed for seventh grade American history students with the goal of building foundational knowledge of the religious landscape and demographics of the United States today. This lesson will be part of a unit of study examining the role of religion in American politics, both historically and in the upcoming 2012 election. Through the analysis of map and charts from The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life and excerpts from several Presidential inaugural addresses students will explore how religion influences American identity.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

What is the religious landscape of the United States?

What role does religion play in American politics?

What role has religion played in Presidential inaugurations?

Part 1

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Build understanding of the religious composition of the United States population by examining and analyzing charts and maps.

Materials: The Pew Forum maps and charts:

Party Affiliation for U.S. Religious Traditions
<http://religions.pewforum.org/comparisons#>

Religious composition of United States (as a whole and by state)
<http://religions.pewforum.org/maps>

DISCUSSION POINTS/QUESTIONS:

- What is the majority religious affiliation in the U.S.?
 - What percentage of the country identifies as Protestant? Catholic? Jewish? Muslim?
 - Which states have the largest percentage of adults who identify with the Jewish tradition? Evangelical Protestant tradition? People who do not affiliate with a religion?
 - If you were running for president would you consider this information as you planned your election campaign? If so, explain how it might inform your strategy?
 - What questions do you have that may not have been answered by looking at these maps and charts?
 - How many people were surveyed by The Pew Forum to compile this information?
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PART 2**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

Recognize a pattern of religious references in a variety of inaugural addresses (including terms, and phrases with religious connotations).

MATERIALS: Video of inaugurations and excerpts from inaugural addresses.

ACTIVITIES:

A) Brainstorm with students or introduce some of the aspects of religion that have been part of Presidential inaugurations. It may be helpful to watch part of President Obama's 2008 inauguration.

examples:

the oath (addition of "so help me God") use of bible or not?

religious content in the inaugural address

inaugural worship services

clergy-led inaugural prayers

B) Excerpts from inaugural addresses:

2008 President Obama

“We remain a young nation, but in the words of Scripture, the time has come to set aside childish things. The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit; to choose our better history; to carry forward that precious gift, that noble idea, passed on from generation to generation: the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness.”

“For we know that our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus -- and nonbelievers.”

2004 President Bush

“From the day of our founding, we have proclaimed that every man and woman on this earth has rights and dignity and matchless value, because they bear the image of the maker of heaven and Earth.”

“That edifice of character is built in families, supported by communities with standards, and sustained in our national life by the truths of Sinai, the Sermon on the Mount, the words of the Koran, and the varied faiths of our people.”

1976 President Carter

“Here before me is the Bible used in the inauguration of our first President, in 1789, and I have just taken the oath of office on the Bible my mother gave me just a few years ago, opened to a timeless admonition from the ancient prophet Micah: “He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.”

Discuss:

What does Scripture mean?

Share Biblical references to 1 Corinthians 13:11 *“When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.”*

What do you think President Obama means by “nonbelievers”?

Which sacred texts does President Bush reference?

CULMINATING PROJECT:

Students write their own inaugural speech. Include at least two major issues they will focus on during their term as president.

INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES:

CNN. “Politics”. Obama’s Inaugural Speech. January 20, 2009.

http://articles.cnn.com/2009-01-20/politics/obama.politics_1_nation-generation-president-bush?_s=PM:POLITICS

Los Angeles Times. “Obama’s religion-studded inauguration joins a long history”. January 19, 2009. <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/jan/19/local/me-beliefs19>

PBS. God in America: God in the White House

<http://www.pbs.org/godinamerica/god-in-the-white-house/>

The Guardian. “Bush’s Inauguration Speech”. January 20, 2005.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/jan/20/uselections2004.usa>

The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life

<http://www.pewforum.org>

Trends in Party Identification by Religion

Among registered voters

	2008		2011		Rep gain
	Rep/ Lean Rep	Dem/ Lean Dem	Rep/ Lean Rep	Dem/ Lean Dem	
	%	%	%	%	
All voters	39	51	43	48	+4
Protestant	45	46	50	43	+5
White Protestant	55	36	61	31	+6
Evangelical Prot.	65	28	70	24	+5
Mainline Prot.	45	45	51	39	+6
Black Protestant	5	89	6	88	+1
Catholic	37	53	43	48	+6
White Catholic	41	49	49	42	+8
Mormon	68	19	80	17	+12
Jewish	20	72	29	65	+9
Unaffiliated	25	64	27	61	+2
Atheist/Agnostic	18	72	21	71	+3
Nothing in particular	27	60	30	56	+3

Based on registered voters. Source is aggregated surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. Figures read across, with the percentage not identifying with or leaning toward either party not shown.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S FORUM ON RELIGION & PUBLIC LIFE

A new analysis shows that the share of voters identifying with or leaning toward the GOP has either grown or held steady in every major religious group. This includes both religious groups that are part of the GOP's traditional constituency as well as some groups that have tended to be more aligned with the Democratic Party, including Jewish voters. In general, the pattern among religious groups mirrors that among the electorate as a whole; the number of voters who identify as a Democrat has declined, while the number saying they lean toward the GOP has risen.

How the 112th Congress (2011-2012) Compares With the American Public

Religion	Number in Congress	% Congress	% American adults
Protestant	304	56.8%	51.3%
Baptist	68	12.7%	17.2%
Methodist	51	9.5%	6.2%
Presbyterian	45	8.4%	2.7%
Anglican/Episcopal	41	7.7%	1.5%
Lutheran	26	4.9%	4.6%
Restorationist	3	0.6%	2.1%
Congregationalist	3	0.6%	0.8%
Nondenom. Prot.	2	0.4%	4.5%
Holiness	2	0.4%	1.2%
Adventist	2	0.4%	0.5%
Reformed	2	0.4%	0.3%
Friends/Quakers	1	0.2%	<0.3%
Pentecostal	0	0.0%	4.4%
Anabaptist	0	0.0%	<0.3%
Pietist	0	0.0%	<0.3%
Unspecified/Other	58	10.8%	5.1%
Catholic	156	29.2%	23.9%
Mormon	15	2.8%	1.7%
Jehovah's Witness	0	0.0%	0.7%
Orthodox	5	0.9%	0.6%
Other Christian	3	0.6%	0.3%
Jewish	39	7.3%	1.7%
Buddhist	3	0.6%	0.7%
Muslim	2	0.4%	0.6%
Hindu	0	0.0%	0.4%
Other World Religions	0	0.0%	<0.3%
Other Faiths	2	0.4%	1.2%
Unaffiliated	0	0.0%	16.1%
Don't Know/Refused	6	1.1%	0.8%
Total	535	100%	100%

Source: Data for Congress from CQ Roll Call and Pew Forum; data for American public from the Pew Forum's *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey*, conducted in 2007 (Muslim data from *Muslim*

Religious Tradition

Evangelical Protestant Tradition **26%**
Mainline Protestant Tradition **18%**
Historically Black Protestant Tradition **7%**
Catholic Tradition **24%**
Mormon Tradition **2%**
Orthodox Tradition **1%**
Jehovah's Witness Tradition **1%**
Other Christian Traditions **< 0.5%**
Jewish Tradition **2%**
Muslim Tradition **1%**
Buddhist Tradition **1%**
Hindu Tradition **< 0.5%**
Other World Religions **< 0.5%**
Other Faiths **1%**
Unaffiliated **16%**
Don't know/ refused **< 0.5%**

National: ± 0.6% margin of error, 35,556 cases

*For information about the
Religious Worlds of New York summer institute for teachers,
and many more resources to enrich your teaching on
religious diversity, see:*

www.religiousworldsnyc.org