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Public Lecture Offerings

How To Build An American Religion

Religion is a word to describe how people organize to worship something. In the rich history of religion in the United States, there is a wide array of instances where social movements alter how collectives of people structure their relationship to the world. This talk offers a series of recommendations, drawn from the history of religion, about how to launch such a successful movement. Religion is not limited to organizations that encourage the worship of gods; it includes a variety of efforts for social change, market manipulation, and entertainment.

Celebrity, Politics, Power

This talk uses celebrity to think about political power. It explains how any analysts of American politics need to understand, among many other politically consequential facts, what Kanye West is saying and why Madison Cawthorn's marriage matters. Thinking about celebrity allows us to consider how individuals may deploy their stories to purposes bigger than mere ratings, how popularity is a resource to be molded as much as it is chased. Popularity can alter the social situation where it transpires; studying celebrity culture can help us to see how the world may be influenced within and beyond elections.

Sensitive People: Cancel Culture and Other Myths

In the contemporary United States, the word “sensitive” can be found as a positive label for new scientific instruments and as a negative epithet for millennial students judged to be too reactive to their surroundings. To survive in late modernity, individuals are expected to develop increased technical acuity and to be readily mobile; we are expected to specialize and to multitask; we need to be mindful of regulations yet take nothing too seriously. This talk considers how the fear of cancel culture comprises a significant expression of technological and epistemic risk.

Classroom Discussion Topics

Religion in U.S. History

Popular Culture and Political Theory

Religion and Social Change