# Fall 2021 // RELS 499 Bachelor’s Essay Sarah Rosenfeld with Dr. Lenny Lowe

**Project Title:** Finding Religion on January 6th, 2021: Understanding the Icons, Symbols, and Language of the Capitol Insurrection

# Project Description:

On January 6th, 2021, the nation watched in horror as President Trump’s supporters breached the US Capitol Building in an attempted coup against the constitutionally-mandated process of certifying the Electoral College’s votes for the presidency. These self-styled “patriots” broke into and damaged a federal government building, forced members of Congress into hiding, and caused the death of five individuals, including a Capitol Police Officer. The average viewer of this horrific event would not necessarily realize how religion plays a role in these rioters' belief systems, yet the imagery presented by this mob was riddled in religious symbols and testaments that help us understand this as a religious event.

The Republican Party and those that identify as Conservatives have historically deemed themselves the party of traditional family values, of law and order, and in many ways the party of modesty. How, then, have white Evangelical Christians statistically not wavered in their support of President Trump, a president who three years ago called white supremacists, neo- Nazis, and the KKK “very fine people,” a president who bragged about grabbing women by their p\*ssys, publicly mocked a disabled reporter, and belittled American hero and Senator John McCain and other war veterans? What is it about Trump that Evangelicals cling to despite his failures to measure up to Evangelical moral standards? Furthermore, how do they perceive his rhetoric and policies as aligning with their values when they’ve historically supported progressive movements such as abolition? **This project will seek to explore how the Religious Right, mainly Evangelical and Reconstructionist Christians have evolved into and embraced Trumpism and how the Capitol insurrection on January 6, 2021 needs to be understood as a key moment in a religious movement through the icons and images presented by the rioters on that day.**

For my Bachelor’s Essay project, I will examine the shift of Evangelicalism towards a more conservative leaning in the 70s and 80s and how that evolved to Evangelical support of Trump as President and as a religious figure. More specifically, I will examine the icons and images of the Capitol Insurrection and how they can be understood as part of the religious movement to keep Trump in power. A main source of exploration with be the Christian Reconstructionist movement, examining how this group hopes to create God’s Kingdom on Earth with the help of Trump’s administration and policies. Trump’s “Make America Great Again” rhetoric will also be a focus, examining what concrete historical conditions this phrase asks us to recall, how it engages with Christianity, and why some believe America’s greatness has been lost and needs to be re-achieved. Some of the themes and questions we will explore in this course are **How has Evangelicalism evolved over time in its political engagement? What is the historical relationship between Evangelicalism, whiteness, and privilege? How has**

# the concept of “spiritual warfare” affected these historical shifts in Evangelical political engagement? How have the elements of “dominionism” that characterize the New Apostolic Reformation and Christian Reconstructionism transformed white Evangelical political engagement during the Trump era? My research will examine the icons and images displayed and used in the Capitol Insurrection, how these images came about, and how they have entered parts of mainstream Christianity in the U.S, such that on January 6th, 2021, they have almost become normalized.

We will use each of these questions to help us understand key moments in Evangelical Christian history. By exploring this topic historically, we will be able to gain a better understanding of American society today and how politics in the Trump era, Evangelicalism, and whiteness engage with each other.

Some of the main authors I will use to answer these questions are Julie Ingersoll, Kristin Kobe De Mez, John Fea, and Sarah Posner, all of whom have explored Christian, specifically Evangelical and Reconstructionist Christian interactions with politics and modernity historically and at present, looking particularly closely at the Trump Administration years. By looking at all of these questions, we will be able to piece together the historical timeline of Evangelical Christianity’s relationship with politics and whiteness and how it has evolved with Trumpism.

Dr. Lowe and I will meet weekly to discuss the writing material completed. In these meetings, we will connect the readings to modern-day issues through the writing and discuss what comes next.

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