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# **PROPOSAL NARRATIVE**

## **I. Abstract**

This project will explore the unique religious diversity of Los Angeles in the 1920s through both the production of a Master's thesis for Cal Poly's History Graduate program, and the contribution of material content to the California Pluralism Project, a NEH-funded program supporting California's Religious Studies curriculum. This project will focus on two case studies as representative examples of Southern California's progressive tolerance in the period of the 1920s: The Pentecostal mega-church of Aimee Semple-McPherson, and the Vedanta Ashram of Swami Paramananda. Both religious institutions opened in Los Angeles in 1923, just thirteen miles away from each other, and continued to thrive side-by-side throughout the twentieth century until today, as both institutions continue to operate in their original locations. Beyond the exploration of these two institutions, this project will also approach the broader topics of religious pluralism in 1920s Los Angeles, the impact of immigration and urbanization on the religious diversity of Southern California, and the shifting religious climate of post-WWI America generally. Though it will focus on two religious institutions specifically, it is more broadly an examination of the potential for religious pluralism, and even religious redefinition, in areas of rapidly-growing, diverse populations. The final outcome of this project will include not only a Master's thesis, but a case study that can be converted into educational models for distribution through the California Pluralism Project.

## **II. Introduction**

This project proposes to examine the factors leading to the emergence of the Los Angeles metropolis as a truly multicultural, multi-religious environment. This analysis has implications for the present, as American cities continue to struggle with managing diversity of religious beliefs and expressions. The example provided by Los Angeles in the 1920s, and specifically the case studies of Aimee Semple-McPherson's Angelus Temple and Swami Paramananda's Ananda Ashrama, offer

insight into successful navigating of multiple religions within a relatively small space. Each of these religious institution offered different (and generally opposed) messages to their followers, yet both fulfilled the needs of different religious seekers in Los Angeles in the 1920s. McPherson's staunchly Christian, emotionally-driven, Hollywood-style ministry appealed to a large number of Los Angeles natives and newly-arrived immigrants, rocketing the emerging Pentecostal denomination into nationwide fame. Swami Paramananda's message, conversely, offered a universalistic tolerance, appealing to those struggling to grasp America's continued attachment to a strictly Christian message in a rapidly expanding world. Both institutions offer insight into the ability of distinct religions to co-exist peacefully within a shared space.

This project will span across the fields of History, Religious Studies, Sociology, and Psychology. It will apply urban sociological theory and postcolonial thought to analyze the effects of population shifts, technological advancement, and the development of mass urban culture on religious environments. Specifically, this project proposes to contribute to the California Pluralism Project, which includes among its academic team Cal Poly Religious Studies professor, Dr. Stephen Lloyd-Moffett. In spring 2014, the California Pluralism Project received funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities to map California's extraordinary religious diversity and develop cutting-edge curriculum for high schools and junior colleges. Through in-person interviews and archival research, the goal of the project is to map religious diversity and then develop case study modules that can be used for Religious Studies curriculum through both the California Pluralism Project and the National Pluralism project, as well as have uses for the Cal Poly Religious Studies curriculum. If successful, my study on Los Angeles could act as a case study that would be incorporated into the California Pluralism Project's online modules.

An abundance of research has been done on the religious diversity of Los Angeles during the post-war period of the 1920s. Kevin Starr, California's most prominent historian, has literally written volumes, most specifically *Material Dreams: Southern California through the 1920s*, which highlights

the cultural changes, including religious shifts, emerging in Los Angeles during the 1920s. The Blackwell companion to Los Angeles describes the city in the 1920s most colorfully, referring to its ever-changing identity as akin to “a kaleidoscope of multiple images” (272). The Blackwell Companion to the American West agrees, labelling Los Angeles a historically unique place in America where “diversity is often celebrated, not just tolerated” (295). Celebrated Religious Studies scholar Wade Clark Roof reiterates the unique position of Los Angeles in American religious history, particularly as it compares to less diverse American cities. For Roof, “Southern California relations between faith communities were negotiated in a context where, first, religious custom played much less of a role and, second, no one tradition exercised a strong dominance over the culture” (85-86). This unique time and place in America offers a glimpse into a pluralistic phenomenon critical to the study of America’s historical approach to religion.

While Southern California, and Los Angeles specifically, experienced concentrated shifts in expansion, migration, and urbanization, the country at large was also experiencing cultural shifts in the 1920s. The most definitive study on these shifts culminated in the well-known and widely-acclaimed work by Robert and Helen Lynd, *Middletown*. Focusing on the Midwestern American town renamed “Middletown,” the Lynds recorded the changes in technology, education, religious adherence, and urbanization occurring across American towns at the turn of the twentieth century. This foundational work was followed by many future analyses on cultural change in America. Ronald Goldberg describes the shift of the 1920s as primarily one from a majority rural culture to a majority urban one. Before the 1920s, the white, rural values that represented the American majority were primarily Protestant, self-denying, thrifty and sober-- at least in principle. By the 1920s, a mass urban culture was quickly overtaking those rural values, creating a new majority view that stood in contrast to the principles of the past: leisure, glamour, fame, and indulgence were now the fad (pg. 83). Gilman Ostrander reiterates the changes that caused the shift: After WWI women fought to maintain the increased employment they had grown used to while the male workforce fought overseas; increased

access to automobiles and leisure time meant more freedoms; and both of these changes meant increased migration to cities. By 1930, America was “statistically an urban nation” (341).

The changes occurring in American culture, and their unique focal point in Southern California, have been recognized for their significance in America’s religious history. Further study of this time and place through the two distinct case studies of a Vedanta Temple and Pentecostal mega-church will provide a unique understanding to this shift, and an important contribution to this area of study.

### **III. Objective(s)**

1. Isolate and analyze the stages of development of Los Angeles, particularly in the 1920s, which led to eclecticism, religious diversity and an environment where “diversity is often celebrated, not just tolerated.”
2. Develop a case study of two distinct religious communities, Ananda Ashrama and Angelus Temple, that represent different manners of principled yet non-aggressive development within a religiously pluralistic environment.
3. Contribute to the academic study of religious pluralism generally, especially within California, as part of the California Pluralism Project.

### **IV. Methodology**

To accomplish these objectives, the history of Los Angeles must first be uncovered and deciphered. This will require collaboration with the Los Angeles Public Library in addition to the archival collections held at USC and UCLA. Censuses and data on religious affiliation across class and origin must be deciphered. This data, which will reveal what people from each socioeconomic class (as well as immigration or migration status) were part of which religious communities over the course of the 1920s. Did those religious affiliations shift? Among which people did they shift most?

To fully determine the role of the case study institutions in the project, in-person interviews will be conducted at both Angelus Temple and Ananda Ashrama. These will provide invaluable information as to the perception of the institution by its members, as well as to its neighboring religious groups. These perceptions provide crucial insight into the level of conscious tolerance vs.

necessary cohabitation between religious groups.

## **V. Timeline**

To take full advantage of research trips to Los Angeles, much preliminary research must be done in preparation. Census data and other population records from Los Angeles that can be found online must be fully siphoned through to determine what data can only be found by travelling to the Los Angeles area. While a preliminary interview was performed at Ananda Ashram in May of 2014, a detailed questionnaire needs to be developed to ensure a full and comparable study. As the thesis process in the History department is spread over three academic quarters, the first quarter is naturally suited for this kind of research. It is in Winter quarter 2015, therefore, that these research trips should be taken. Mid-January, after the holiday events are completed in the religious institutions, the representatives will have more time to participate in interviews and research assistance as well. Two trips of two days each will suffice.

## **VI. Final Products and Dissemination**

The final result of this project will be a Master's Thesis, including a 50-100 page paper and an oral thesis defense. The findings of the thesis will also contribute to the California Pluralism Project in various ways, including a website, and potentially an online teaching module.

## **VII. Budget Justification**

The Budget is primarily made up of travel fees, including two two-day trips to Los Angeles for Archival research and interviews. These expenses include hotel fees and other travel costs such as food and gas. Gas fees are calculated through the State of California travel standards (<http://www.calhr.ca.gov/employees/Pages/travel-personal-vehicle.aspx>) as 56 cents per mile. Costs calculated from San Luis Obispo to La Crescenta (location of Ananda Ashrama, the furthest location from SLO) =196.9 miles, or \$110.26. Round-trip gas costs for two trips are therefore \$441. The average hotel cost in Los Angeles is estimated at \$150 per night, for 2 nights total= \$300. Food costs are calculated by the State of California at \$55 per day, with four days total= \$220. Copying costs at archives are estimated at \$25 per trip, totaling \$50. Total cost: \$1,011.

# Warren J. Baker Endowment for Excellence in Project-Based Learning Robert D. Koob Endowment for Student Success

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## PROPOSAL BUDGET

<b>Student Applicant(s): Amy Hart</b>	
<b>Faculty Advisor: Matthew Hopper</b>	
<b>Project Title: Religious History in California: Los Angeles' Pluralistic Past</b>	<b>Requested Baker Endowment Funding</b>
<b>Travel</b> <i>subtotal</i>	<b>\$</b>
Travel: In-state	\$ 961
Travel: Out-of-state	\$
Travel: International	\$
<b>Operating Expenses</b> <i>subtotal</i>	<b>\$</b>
Non-computer Supplies & Materials	\$
Computer Supplies & Materials	\$
Software/Software Licenses	\$
Printing/Duplication	\$ 50
Postage/Shipping	\$
Registration	\$
Membership Dues & Subscriptions	\$
Multimedia Services	\$
Advertising	\$
Journal Publication Costs	\$
<b>Contractual Services</b> <i>subtotal</i>	<b>\$</b>
Contracted Services	\$
Equipment Rental/Lease Agreements	\$
Service/Maintenance Agreements	\$
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 1,011</b>



October 23, 2014

Dear Selection Committee,

I am writing to recommend Ms. Courtney Hart as a recipient of the Baker and Koob Endowments. Courtney is a Master's candidate who has been working in my research lab now for a year. In our time together, she has proven herself to be an extremely self-motivated, eager and capable graduate student. She has naturally assumed a number of leadership roles within the graduate student body of our Biological Sciences department, and is relatively fearless when it comes to tackling each new step of her academic program.

I accepted Courtney into my lab – as my first graduate student, in fact – to participate in a CA Sea Grant funded project aimed at determining the effects of a locally pervasive chemical pollutant on the ability of commercially farmed oysters to fight disease. This compound, 4-nonylphenol (4-NP), is a known endocrine disrupting agent, and as such its presence in our coastal waters is particularly troublesome. As the lead PI on this project I sought out an independent, talented graduate student to carry out much of this work, and was very fortunate to have Courtney join my lab in this capacity. Courtney is an *integral* part of this project and for her Master's work is specifically looking at the gene and protein level responses of the Pacific oyster, *Crassostrea gigas*, to an experimentally induced bacterial challenge under varying exposure levels of 4-NP. This species of oyster is of extreme economic importance not only here locally (there are two commercial farmers harvesting this oyster species in Morro Bay), but worldwide. The results of her work have the potential to inform scientists, farmers and policy makers of the negative health effects, in this case via immune function inhibition and increased disease susceptibility, of yet another anthropogenic pollutant. In light of the recent, unexplained decline in the survival of oyster larvae, this data could prove to be particularly beneficial. As such, I see tremendous merit in this project.

I am hopeful that Courtney will be able to secure this endowment funding, which will be used to send her to the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory (PNNL) in Sequim, WA. At the PNNL she will be trained by a professional toxicologists – our collaborator Dr. Irv Schultz - on how to measure 4-nonylphenol levels in tissue and water samples. Once trained, Courtney will be performing these measurements herself on the samples she collected as part of these experiments last fall. These data are a critical component of a thorough toxicological study, and without them our study will lack the scientific rigor that I demand of our research. The CA Sea

Grant award that we obtained to carry out this work is not sufficient for us to fund the 4-NP measurements on our samples, much less to send one of our own students to be trained in these high-caliber, hands-on techniques. I am confident that Courtney has both the academic ability and personal skills to represent my lab in a facility as highly regarded as the PNNL. Furthermore, she has proven herself to be extremely confident in her interactions with other professional scientists here at Cal Poly and has shown herself to be a very fast learner and able scientist in the lab.

For these reasons, I strongly support Courtney's efforts to obtain this endowment funding, and I encourage you to give full and careful consideration to her application. Please feel free to contact me personally if you have any additional questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'KM Hardy', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Kristin M. Hardy, Ph.D.  
kmhardy@calpoly.edu