

## Robert A. Yelle

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### Education

2002 Ph.D. in the History of Religions, University of Chicago  
1993 J.D., Boalt Hall School of Law, University of California at Berkeley  
*Order of the Coif* (class rank: 8 out of 300 (top 3%))  
1988 A.B. in Philosophy, Harvard University, *cum laude* in General Studies  
1984 Phillips Academy, Andover, MA (Cum Laude Society)

### Professional Experience

2008- Assistant Professor, Department of History  
and the Helen Hardin Honors Program, University of Memphis  
2010- Program Advisor, Minor in Religious Studies, University of Memphis  
2006-08 Research Assistant Professor, Department of History, University of Memphis  
2005-06 Postdoctoral Fellow, Illinois Program for Research in the Humanities  
and Visiting Assistant Professor, Program for the Study of Religion,  
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign  
2003-05 Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of History, University of Toronto  
2001-03 Lecturer, Department of Philosophy, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale  
1993-94 Corporate Attorney, Milbank, Tweed, Hadley & McCloy, Los Angeles  
1989-90 Legal Assistant, Thelen, Marrin, Johnson & Bridges, San Francisco

### Academic Awards

2012 Professional Development Assignment (sabbatical leave award), Fall Semester 2012,  
University of Memphis College of Arts and Sciences  
2008-09 Collaborative Research Grant, American Academy of Religion, for "The Sacred/Secular  
Divide: The Legal Story II" conference, under Project Director Winnifred Sullivan  
2006-07 Fellow, John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation  
2003 Participant, Erasmus Institute Summer Faculty Workshop on "Religious Hermeneutics  
and Secular Interpretation," College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, MA  
2001-02 Committee on Southern Asian Studies Dissertation Fellow, University of Chicago  
2000-01 Martin Marty Center Junior Fellow, University of Chicago Divinity School  
1999-2000 Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Fellow, Calcutta, India  
1998 Social Science Research Council Predissertation Fellow, Dhaka, Bangladesh  
1996-98 Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellow in Bengali  
1992-93 Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellow in German  
1992 Scholarship to the Hague Academy of International Law from the Ford Foundation  
Program in Public International Law at Boalt Hall School of Law  
1990-93 Jurisprudence Awards (1st in class or section): Civil Procedure, Contracts,  
Comparative Law, International Law, International Trade Law,  
Law and Modern Social Thought, Professional Responsibility  
1990-93 Prosser Prizes (2nd in class or section): Conceptions of Punishment, Jurisprudence

## **Publications**

### Monographs and edited volumes

*The Language of Disenchantment: Protestant Literalism and Colonial Discourse in British India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

*Semiotics of Religion: Signs of the Sacred in History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

*After Secular Law*, ed. Winnifred F. Sullivan, Robert A. Yelle, and Mateo Taussig-Rubbo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

*Explaining Mantras: Ritual, Rhetoric, and the Dream of a Natural Language in Hindu Tantra* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

### Articles and book chapters

“Christian Genealogies of Religious Freedom.” In *Politics of Religious Freedom*, ed. Peter Danchin, Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, Saba Mahmood, and Winnifred Fallers Sullivan (proposal submitted).

“Religion and History.” In Robert A. Segal, ed., *Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, under contract).

“Secular Blasphemies” In *Profane: Sacrilegious Expression in a Multicultural Age*, ed. Chistopher S. Grenda, Chris Beneke, and David Nash (Berkeley: University of California Press, submitted).

Review Article on Brad Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society*, in *Church History* 81 (2012): 918-24.

“Comparative Religion as Cultural Combat: Occidentalism and Relativism in Rajiv Malhotra’s *Being Different*.” Review Article on Rajiv Malhotra, *Being Different: An Indian Challenge to Western Universalism*, in *International Journal of Hindu Studies* (December 2012).

“What Did Religious Freedom Mean in Ancient India?: Spiritual Economies beyond the Sacred/Secular Paradigm.” In *Varieties of Religious Establishments*, ed. Lori Beaman and Winnifred Sullivan (Farnham, Surrey, UK: Ashgate, forthcoming).

“Semiotics.” In *Handbook of Research Methods in Religious Studies*, ed. Michael Stausberg and Steven Engler (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 355-65.

“Introduction” (with Winnifred Fallers Sullivan and Mateo Taussig-Rubbo). In *After Secular Law*, 1-19.

“Moses’ Veil: Secularization as Christian Myth.” In *After Secular Law*, 23-42.

“The End(s) of Sacrifice: Mel Gibson’s *Apocalypto* as a Christian Defense of Colonialism.” *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 23 (2011): 82-89.

“The Trouble with Transcendence: Carl Schmitt’s ‘Exception’ as a Challenge for Religious Studies.” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 22 (2010): 189-206.

- “Hindu Law as Performance: Ritual and Poetic Elements in *Dharmasastra*.” In *Hinduism and Law: An Introduction*, ed. Timothy Lubin, Donald R. Davis, Jr., and Jayanth K. Krishnan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 183-192.
- “Punishing Puns: Etymology as Linguistic Ideology in Hindu and British Traditions.” In *Religion and Identity in South Asia and Beyond: Essays in Honor of Patrick Olivelle*, ed. Steven E. Lindquist (New York, London, Delhi: Anthem Press, 2010), 129-46.
- “The Hindu Moses: Christian Polemics against Jewish Ritual and the Secularization of Hindu Law under Colonialism,” *History of Religions* 49 (2009): 141-71.
- “To Perform or Not to Perform?: A Theory of Ritual Performance versus Cognitive Theories of Religious Transmission.” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 18 (2006): 372-91.
- “The Rhetoric of Gesture in Cross-Cultural Perspective.” In Paul Bouissac, ed., “Gesture, Ritual and Memory,” special issue of *Gesture* 6 (2006): 223-40.
- “Law’s Trouble with Images: Fetishism and Seduction from Athens and Jerusalem to Madison Avenue.” In *Images in Law*, ed. Anne Wagner and William Pencak (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006), 267-79.
- Editor, “The Spaces and Places of Law,” special issue of *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law* 19, no. 3 (2006).
- “Bentham’s Fictions: Canon and Idolatry in the Genealogy of Law.” *Yale Journal of Law & the Humanities* 17 (2005): 151-79.
- “Images of Law and its Others: Canon and Idolatry in the Discourses of British India.” *Culture and Religion* 6 (2005): 181-99.
- “Poetic Justice: Rhetoric in Hindu Ordeals and Legal Formulas.” *Religion* 32 (2002): 259-72.
- “Rhetorics of Law and Ritual: A Semiotic Comparison of the Law of Talion and Sympathetic Magic.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69 (2001): 627-47.
- “The Rebirth of Myth?: Nietzsche’s Eternal Recurrence and its Romantic Antecedents.” *Numen* 47 (2000): 175-202.
- “Discord and Concord in Buddhist Perspective,” with Frank Reynolds and Jason A. Carbine. In *Research in Human Social Conflict*, ed. Joseph B. Gittler. Vol. 2, *Ideas of Concord and Discord in Selected World Religions* (Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000), 21-58.
- “Mantrasamskara: Tantric Rites for Making Mantras Effective.” *Journal of the Sanskrit Department of Rabindra Bharati University* 9 (2000): 10-25.

### Encyclopedia articles

- “Criticism and Critique (in, among and of Religions),” *Brill Vocabulary for the Study of Religion*, ed. Robert Segal and Kocku von Stuckrad (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).
- “Law and Religion.” In *International Encyclopedia of Legal History*, ed. Stanley N. Katz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
- “Mantra.” In *Encyclopedia of Religion, Communication, and Media*, ed. Daniel Stout (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 232-34.
- “Ritual and Religious Language.” In *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*, second revised edition, ed. Keith Brown (Oxford: Elsevier, 2005), 633-40.
- Consultant, articles on Law and Religion, *Encyclopedia of Religion*, second edition (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005).
- “Law, Religion, and Punishment.” In *Encyclopedia of Religion*, second edition (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 5371-5375.
- (With Winnifred Fallers Sullivan.) “Law and Religion: An Overview.” In *Encyclopedia of Religion*, second edition (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 5325-5332.
- “Utilitarianism and J. S. Mill.” In *Encyclopedia of Religious Freedom*, ed. Catharine Cookson (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 497-99.
- “Mantra,” “Mandala,” and “Tantricism.” In *Banglapedia: National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh*, ed. Sirajul Islam (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2003).

### Book reviews

- Review of André Padoux, *Tantric Mantras: Studies on Mantrasastra*, in *Religious Studies Review* 38 (2012): 257.
- Review of *The Spirit of Hindu Law*, by Donald Davis, Jr. In *History of Religions* 51 (2011), 183-85.
- Review of *A Cognitive Theory of Magic*, by Jesper Sørensen. In *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76 (2008): 527-31.
- Review of *Raja Nal and the Goddess: The North Indian Epic Dhola in Performance*, by Susan Snow Wadley. In *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 11 (2007): 347-48.
- Review of *Christians and Missionaries in India: Cross-Cultural Communication Since 1500*, ed. Robert Eric Frykenberg. In *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 35 (2005): 681-83.
- Review of *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor. In *Journal of Religion* 80 (2000): 360-61.
- Review of *The Golden Yoke: The Legal Cosmology of Buddhist Tibet*, by Rebecca Redwood French. In *Journal of Religion* 77 (1997): 343-44.

### Online publications

“Christian Genealogies of Religious Freedom.” *The Immanent Frame* (accessed 4/06/2012 at <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2012/04/06/christian-genealogies-of-religious-freedom/>).

“The Semiotics of Religion.” *Semiotix Bulletin* XN-1 (New Series) (2010) (accessed 1/13/2012 at <http://www.semioticon.com/semiotix/issues/semiotix-xn-1-2010>).

### **Conference Presentations**

Respondent, panel on “Religion-Making, Secularism, and Reform in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Bombay.” Association for Asian Studies, San Diego, March 2013 (proposal accepted).

Participant, Luce Foundation Workshop on “Politics of Religious Freedom in South and Southeast Asia: Contested Norms and Local Practices.” Chiang Mai, Thailand, December 2011.

Respondent, panel on “Law, Legislation, and Religious Formations in South Asian Nation-States.” American Academy of Religion, San Francisco, November 2011.

Respondent, panel on *After Secular Law*, edited by Winnifred F. Sullivan, Robert A. Yelle, and Mateo Taussig-Rubbo. North American Association for the Study of Religion, San Francisco, November 2011.

Roundtable Respondent and Panel Chair, conference on “Rethinking Religion in India III: European Representations and Indian Responses.” University of Pardubice, Czech Republic, October 2011.

“Redeeming the Land.” Conference on Religious Freedom and Indigenous Land Rights, Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, NC, April 2011.

“What Did Religious Freedom Mean in Ancient India?: Beyond the Sacred/Secular Paradigm.” Workshop on “Varieties of Religious Establishments.” St. Thomas University, Fredericton, New Brunswick, November 2010.

Panelist, “Antisemitism and Its Afterlives: Christian Studies of Judaism and the Construction of Modernity.” American Academy of Religion, Atlanta, November 2010.

“Sacred Arbitrariness: The Antinomian Holy and its Exclusion under Natural Law.” International Association for the History of Religions XXth Quinquennial Congress, Toronto, August 2010.

“Christian, but How Modern?: A Critique of Webb Keane’s *Christian Moderns*.” International Association for the History of Religions XXth Quinquennial Congress, Toronto, August 2010.

“Spiritual Economies: The Myth of the Religious Neutrality of the Secular and the Question of Indian Secularism.” Panel on “Is There a Religious-Secular Divide in the Indian Traditions?” Association for Asian Studies, Philadelphia, March 2010.

“Biblical Studies in the Postcolony: The Implications for Religious Studies.” Panel on “The Bible in the Study of Religion.” Co-sponsored by the North American Association for the Study of Religion, Society of Biblical Literature, New Orleans, November 2009.

“Liberalism Has No Charisma: Judaism and the Critique of Modernity According to Max Weber, Philip Rieff, and Carl Schmitt.” Panel on “Disenchantment and Reenchantment in Political Theology: Diagnosing the Crisis of Liberalism.” North American Association for the Study of Religion, Montreal, November 2009.

“The Scandal of Transcendence and the Spiritual Economy of Modernity.” Roundtable on Theoretical-Critical Issues in the Study of Religion. Co-sponsored by the North American Association for the Study of Religion and the Critical Theory and Discourses on Religion Group of the American Academy of Religion, Montreal, November 2009.

Co-organizer (with Winnifred Sullivan and Mateo Taussig-Rubbo), presenter, and moderator, conference on “Re-describing the Sacred/Secular Divide: The Legal Story II.” Baldy Center for Law and Social Policy, University at Buffalo, NY, April 29-May 3, 2009.

Panelist, “Lost in Translation? Comparing Local and Global Interpretations of Religious Freedom.” Baker Center for Public Policy, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, February, 2009.

Co-organizer (with Winnifred Sullivan) and conference participant, conference on “Re-describing the Sacred/Secular Divide: The Legal Story.” Baldy Center for Law and Social Policy, University at Buffalo, NY, March, 2008.

Panelist and organizer, panel on “The Relevance of Hindu Law for Religious Studies.” Hinduism Group, American Academy of Religion, San Diego, November 2007.

Chair, panel on “Critical Cultural Studies of Western Law and Political Theology.” Law, Religion, and Culture Group, American Academy of Religion, San Diego, November 2007.

“Hindu Law as Performance: Ritual and Poetic Elements in *Dharmashastra*.” Law and Hinduism: A Pre-Conference Workshop of the 36<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference on South Asia, University of Wisconsin, Madison, October 2007.

“Public Laws, Private Religions: The Secularization of Hindu Dharma in Colonial India.” Conference on the Politics of Religion-Making, Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY, October 2007.

“The Hindu Moses: Christian Representations of Judaism and the Secularization of Hindu Law under Colonialism.” Law and Society Association Annual Meeting, Berlin, Germany, July 2007.

“‘The Christian Character of the North-West Provinces’: Roman Transliteration and the Linguistic Reformation of Colonial India.” American Academy of Religion, Washington, DC, November 2006.

“Christian Polemics against Jewish Ritual Law as a Precursor of Religious Freedom in Modern Law.” Law and Society Association, Baltimore, July 2006.

Respondent, Panel on “Testing Secularism.” Law, Religion, and Culture Group, American Academy of Religion, Philadelphia, November 2005.

“A Separate Place, A Separate Peace?: Law and Literature in Historical Perspective.” International Roundtable for the Semiotics of Law, McGill University, Montreal, April 2005.

“Idols of the Tongue: Literalism versus Poetry in the Laws of Reformation England and Colonial India.” Association for the Study of Law, Culture and the Humanities, Austin, TX, March 2005.

“The Trouble with Images.” Association for the Study of Law, Culture and the Humanities, Austin, TX, March 2005.

“Rhetorical, Communicological, and Other Semiotic Approaches to Religion and Ritual.” North American Association for the Study of Religion, San Antonio, November 2004.

“The Idolatry of Language: Max Müller’s Literalism and Monotheism.” American Academy of Religion, San Antonio, November 2004.

“Toward a Natural History of Rhetoric: Textual Economies and the Rise of the Literal in the Age of Globalization.” 8th Congress of the International Association for Semiotic Studies, Lyon, France, July 2004.

“Gesturing at Nature: The Rhetoric of Gestures, Ritual and Memory in Cross-Cultural Perspective.” Gestures, Rituals and Memory: A Multidisciplinary Symposium on Patterned Human Movement Across Time. Victoria College, University of Toronto, May 2004.

“Monological Gods, Dialogical Selves: Canon and Monotheism as Strategies for Interreligious Debate in Nineteenth-century India.” American Academy of Religion, Atlanta, November 2003.

“Bentham’s Fictions: Canon and Idolatry in the Genealogy of Law.” American Academy of Religion, Atlanta, November 2003.

“Chanting the Cosmogony: Hindu Tantric Rituals for Making Mantras Effective.” American Oriental Society, Nashville, April 2003.

“Images of Law and its Others: Law, Religion, and Idolatry in British India.” Association for the Study of Law, Culture and the Humanities, New York, March 2003.

Respondent, Panel on “Multiplying and Dividing: Pluralism and Transformation in Law and Religion.” Law, Religion, and Culture Group, American Academy of Religion, Toronto, November 2002.

“What Makes a Mantra Effective?: Diagrams of Creation.” 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference on South Asia, Madison, October 2001.

“Poetic Justice: Magic and Rhetoric in Hindu Ordeals.” International Association for the History of Religions XVIIIth Quinquennial Congress, Durban, South Africa, August 2000.

“Relativity Reconsidered: Whorf and the Structural Analysis of Mantras.” Society for Indian Philosophy and Religion, Calcutta, India, August 2000.

“Rhetorics of Law and Ritual: A Semiotic Comparison of the Law of Talion and Sympathetic Magic.” American Academy of Religion, Orlando, November 1998.

"The Global Ethic Document and International Law." Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies Conference, DePaul University, Chicago, July 1996.

### **Invited Presentations**

"The Hindu Moses: The Secularization of Hindu Law under Colonialism." South Asia Institute, University of Heidelberg, Germany, April 2008.

"Toward a Genealogy of Ritual Performance: The Protestant Critique of Vain Repetitions in Prayer and its Causes and Consequences." Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago, April 2007.

"Two Competing Linguistic Ideologies: Hindu Mantras and the Protestant Critique of Vain Repetitions in Prayer." Department of Communication, University of Memphis, March 2007.

"Iconoclasm and Modernity: Western Tradition against Itself." Phi Alpha Theta Series on Counterculture, Department of History, University of Memphis, February 2007.

"Toward a Genealogy of Human Rights: Christian Polemics against Jewish Ritual Law as a Precursor of Religious Freedom in Modern Law." Speaker Series on Law, Religion, and Secularism. American Bar Foundation, Chicago, April 2006.

"An Indian Linguistic Reformation: The Disenchantment of South Asian Languages under Colonialism." Department for the Study of Religion, University of Toronto, November 2005.

"What is Hinduism? And Who Says So?" Department of Historical Studies, University of Toronto at Mississauga, November 2005.

"Toward a Theory of Performance: The Rhetoric of Ritual and the Reasons for its Decline." Faculty Colloquium, Program for the Study of Religion, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, October 2005.

"What Lawyers Can Learn from the Study of Rhetoric." University of Toronto Law School, April 2005.

"Poetry on Trial: Law versus Literature, or Two Chapters in the History of Legal Literalism." Toronto Legal History Seminar, University of Toronto Law School, February 2005.

"Poetry on Trial: Toward a Genealogy of Legal Literalism." Rhetoric Department, University of California, Berkeley, January 2005.

"Rhetoric on Trial: The Case for and against Rhetoric in the Law." Osgoode Hall Law School, York University, Toronto, February 2004.

"The Meaning of Mantras." Semiotix Café, Toronto, December 2003.

"Explaining Mantras." Faculty Colloquium, Department for the Study of Religion, University of Toronto, November 2003.

"Bentham's Fictions: Canon and Idolatry in the Genealogy of Law." Toronto Legal History Seminar, University of Toronto Law School, October 2003.



Respondent to Martha Minow, *Engaging Cultural Differences*. Brauer Seminar, University of Chicago Divinity School, May 2003.

“Legal Fictions: Canon, Idolatry, and Rhetoric in the Genealogy of Law.” Department of Law, Jurisprudence, and Social Thought, Amherst College, November 2002.

“An Emic Pragmatics of Mantra, Part Two: Diagrams of Creation.” History of Religions Workshop, University of Chicago Divinity School, May 2001.

“What Makes a Mantra Effective?” Asiatic Society, Calcutta, India, May 2000.

“Verbal Icons: A Comparative Semiotic Analysis of Mantra.” Center for Advanced Research in the Humanities, Dhaka University, Dhaka, Bangladesh, August 1998.

Panelist, Conference on the Future of the History of Religions, University of Chicago Divinity School, November 1996.

## Academic Service

2012-17	Editor, <i>Religion, Culture, and History</i> book series, American Academy of Religion/Oxford University Press
2013-15	Steering Committee, Secularisms and Secularities Group, American Academy of Religion
2011-13	Editorial Board, <i>Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses</i>
2010-13	Steering Committee, Religion and Colonialism Consultation, American Academy of Religion
2007-11	Executive Secretary and Treasurer, North American Association for the Study of Religion
2005-07	Executive Council, North American Association for the Study of Religion
2005-08	Chair, Law, Religion, and Culture Group, American Academy of Religion
2002-05	Steering Committee, Law, Religion, and Culture Group, American Academy of Religion

## Courses Taught

University of Memphis	Ancient India; Introduction to Religion; Perspectives on Religion; History of Religion; Religion and the Modern World; Good Lives; The Global Challenge; Religious Diversity in America (spring 2013)
University of Illinois	Theories of Religion
University of Toronto	Classical Indian History; Law and Religion in India and the West; Issues in South Asian Studies
Southern Illinois University	Asian Philosophy; Philosophy of Language

## Association Memberships

American Academy of Religion; North American Association for the Study of Religion; Association for Asian Studies; Law and Society Association; Association for the Study of Law, Culture and the Humanities; American Association of University Professors