

# Religion 130: American Mythology and Film

Fall 2012

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Class times: MWF 12-1:10, STU 103  
Wed 6:30 - 9:30, Kirby 06

## Course Description:

Making the transition from high school and living at home to college and greater autonomy is challenging. This course will help you make this transition and develop skills for success at college and your post-college activity, whether in the job market or in graduate school. These skills include time-management and prioritization, how to take notes, how to read carefully, how to analyze arguments, how to formulate arguments, and how to express yourself persuasively in verbal and written modes of communication. Additionally, I will be introducing some technology tools to help with these goals.

We will develop these skills by thinking about the way Americans are socialized. Societies socialize their members through a variety of means, including foundation myths, stories of heroes and heroic actions, and selectively recalling history to emphasize values the society holds in high esteem. One of the most important means of socializing American citizens has been through religion, but not the religion of any specific church. Rather, Americans learn a civil religion, based on Protestantism and recalling the Puritan heritage of the early English colonies in North America.

In this class, we will first outline American "civil religion," and think about how it developed, especially in the late 19th and 20th centuries. Once we have a vague idea about American myth, we will examine one way it is transmitted: popular films. We focus on popular films, since these films are seen by more people and thus have a greater impact on society than do "good" films that rarely are shown outside of art houses. We will examine how films use, modify, or allude to "civil religion" and elements of American mythology.

Being aware of the socialization process and American mythology will contribute to fulfilling the college's mission statement:

True to its founding vision in 1829, Illinois College is a community committed to the highest standards of scholarship and integrity in the liberal arts. The College develops in its students qualities of mind and character needed for lives of leadership, personal fulfillment, and service.

Class members will learn what the standards are for scholarship and integrity in this class (see below); by examining the socialization process and development of American mythology they will develop the skills needed for leadership, service, and personal fulfillment.

**BluePrint Requirements** met with this course:

**Foundations:** First-Year Seminar (includes Writing Extensive, Speaking Extensive, Diversity elements).

This class is connected to EN 121 in a learning community.

## Required textbooks:

Isay, *Listening is an Act of Love* (NYC: Penguin, 2007).

Hacker, *A Pocket Style Manual* (2004). You will use this handbook for the rest of your college career (so don't sell it at the end of the semester!). It has lots of information about different citation styles, how to use punctuation correctly, and the like.

Miller, *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (1986) will illustrate how an iconic superhero can be re-envisioned by a sufficiently strong mythic narrative.

These books will be supplemented by readings from the on-line reserve system accessed via the course website.

**Course Requirements** (components of your semester grade):

1) Attendance & Participation

Not showing up for work will get you fired. Similarly, you are required to come to *all* ICC convocations and movie showings on Wednesday nights.

You may miss three of the morning classes during the semester without penalty. Additional unexcused absences will significantly affect your semester final grade. (See below for discussion of excused and unexcused absences.)

2) Notes

You will not remember materials if you don't take notes on them. You will submit notes for all convos and movie viewings for a grade. I will also ask to see the notes you take on readings occasionally.

3) Convocation Responses

a) We will be attending four (4) convocations during the semester. For each convocation, you will take notes on the presentation. From these notes, you will write a short paper (2 pages max) that addresses questions I will email immediately after the convo.

Your notes will be assessed based on how clear they are and whether they accurately reflect the author's arguments. Your style of writing (complete sentences, spelling, etc.), will not be assessed.

Your paper will be assessed based on how well you address the questions posed and incorporate the arguments of the convocation speaker. The paper needs to be written in standard paper form (i.e., formal language, correct spelling and punctuation, complete sentences, etc.).

These will be due the day after the convocation, when we will discuss the convocation.

4) One short paper (4-6 pages)

You will write two short papers, analyzing two or more movies, along with the articles read related to them. Each of these papers will be reviewed by your colleagues in class, who will offer you suggestions on how to improve them. You will then revise the paper, based on the feedback you receive from your colleagues, before submitting it for a grade.

5) Paper workshop

We will do two paper workshops. You will review the papers from two of your colleagues and offer them suggestions on how they can improve them.

5) Research Paper (10-12 pages)

Students will select a film or films to research; they will watch it several times, as well as find at least six (6) sources that discuss it. The calendar shows specific date by which you need to have completed 1) an annotated bibliography, 2) a thesis/opening paragraph, and 3) an outline of your argument. Your final draft of the paper will be submitted in lieu of a final exam.

6) Student Presentation

The final week of class will be used for student presentations. Each student will present their research paper, discussing the film they choose to study, and how their reading of the film differs from other scholar's readings of the film.

**Evaluation:**

10%	Attendance & Participation
10%	Notes
10%	Convo Responses
10%	Summer Paper
10%	Paper Workshops
5%	Oral Presentation of Research
15%	Short Paper

Research Paper

5%	Annotated Bibliography
5%	Thesis / Opening Paragraph
5%	Outline
15%	Final Draft