

HONS 175 Approaches to Religion (MW 2:00-3:15)
“In Search of the Sacred, the Strange, and the Substance of Faith”

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“Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry and narrow-mindedness—□all foes to real understanding.

Likewise, tolerance or broad wholesome charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by □vegetating in our little corner of the earth all one's lifetime.” Mark Twain

Course Description and Goals

This course is an introduction to the academic study of religion in general and a survey of different understandings of sacred place and pilgrimage found in America and India. The main theme of “searching for the sacred, the strange and the substance of faith” takes us away from mainstream organized religion to examine the religiosity of socially marginalized individuals, whose visionary experiences inspire the creation of religious art and monuments. We begin by reading the studies of three “Road Scholars” who seek to find and interpret unusual forms of American religiosity while they undertake a common ritual: the cross-country road trip. On their road trips they encounter religion on the margins of America, yet they reveal themes that are central to American religious life: creativity as religious devotion, pilgrimage and the desire to recreate sacred time and space, prophecy and apocalypticism, the tension between authenticity, kitsch, and spiritual materialism, and the relation between religious vision and social marginality. After visiting many eccentric visionaries and odd roadside religious attractions in the US, we travel to the ancient city of Varanasi in India. This sacred city steeped in history and Indian mythology will serve as a lens through which the worldview of Hindu pilgrims comes into focus. We will learn to see these strange and wondrous places as an expression of the religious imagination, where believers have sought to give outward form to their experiences and recreate the “substance of faith.”

The course presumes no previous experience in religious studies, but it has as a prerequisite the desire to read exotic and challenging materials about different religions and to engage in conversation about these readings. We will rely on texts that combine travel narrative, story telling and religious study, as well as films and images to gain insight into the sacred art, rituals, stories and landscapes that inspire pilgrims. One of the fun things about this course is that we get to do some “traveling” across the United States and to India through documentaries and films. You should consider these films as “texts,” for their content will be covered on exams.

The goals of this course are: 1) to enrich your knowledge of religions beyond your own experience and to foster critical thinking about religion; 2) to develop new ways of seeing what is “sacred”; 3) to make what is strange seem familiar, and what is familiar seem strange.

Course Requirements

- **Regular attendance at lecture and active participation in discussion (15% of grade)**
Attendance records will be kept for each class. There will be **3** allowed absences; **4** or more absences will negatively affect your grade. After **8** absences a student will be dropped. If you have excused absences please let me know and contact the Undergraduate Dean’s Office to document the reason for your absence. Whatever you get out of this course is directly related to how much you put into it. Please come to class with ideas and questions that can help our class engage in meaningful discussion. Asking questions, raising concerns, and offering your own ideas about the reading or films is an important part of this course.

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- **Completion of required reading assignments and weekly question cards (15% of grade)**
It is strongly recommended that you read the assignment **before** we study the topic in class. When there is an assignment from the material on Electronic Reserve you should bring it to class with you. There will be regular homework assignments. Every **Wednesday** (or day marked on syllabus with **QC due**) you are to bring to class a thoughtful, written question and/or reflection related to the assigned reading for that week. The question or reflection should be written on a 3x5 card, and be based on a topic or issue that you have found puzzling, thought provoking, challenging, or interesting. The questions should not simply ask for factual information, but express concerns about the reading that are important to you.
- **Four short essays of 2-3 pages (7.5% each, 30% of grade)**
Short essays will be based on the assigned reading. These essays will require that you analyze the text closely, formulate an interpretation, and express it concisely in less than three pages. The essays are due in class on the day when we will discuss the assigned topic. The questions that serve as the basis for the assignment are open to different interpretations without a single “correct” answer. Late essays are not accepted since the topic will be discussed in class.
- **Midterm and Final Exam (20% each, 40% of grade)**
Exams consist of multiple choice, short answer, explanation of passages excerpted from texts, and essays. Review sheets will be provided beforehand. If you miss an exam and provide a documented excuse, I do give makeup tests, but they are harder than the original exam. An unexcused missed exam counts as a **0**.

There are **Three Required Texts** available at the C of C Bookstore:

- 1) Timothy Beal, *Roadside Religion* (2006), \$10.50
- 2) Diana Eck, *Darshan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*, 3rd Ed. (1998) \$15.75
- 3) Diana Eck, *Banaras: City of Light* (1999) \$27.50

There is **one recommended text** available at the Bookstore or Amazon.com:

- 4) Greg Bottoms, *The Colorful Apocalypse: Journeys in Outsider Art* (2007) \$20

There is also a **Required Coursepack**, with articles, short stories, and selections from travelogues by pilgrims. It is available on Electronic Reserve at the CofC library and online: <http://ereserve.cofc.edu/eres/courseindex.aspx?&page=instr> under **Bjerken** and **HONS 175**.

Grading Scale:	A	92-96 (4.0)	B-	79-81 (2.7)	D+	66-68 (1.3)	
	A-	89-91 (3.7)	C+	76-78 (2.3)	D	62-65 (1.0)	
	B+	86-88 (3.3)	C	72-75 (2.0)	D-	59-61 (.70)	
A+	97-100 (4.0)	B	82-85 (3.0)	C-	69-71 (1.7)	F	below 59

Academic Integrity and the Honor Code: There is a zero-tolerance policy toward plagiarism or any other form of academic dishonesty in this course. This means that anyone caught taking credit for work that is not his or her own, or cheating in any other way, will receive a **failing grade for the entire course**. A student found responsible for academic dishonesty will receive a **XF** in the course, indicating failure of the course due to academic dishonesty.

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Lecture Topics and Reading Schedule for HONS 175

Note on Abbreviations used in Assigned Reading:

The following abbreviations will be used in listing the required reading. Selections from the books *Roadside Religion* (RR), *Colorful Apocalypse*, *Darsan* and *Banaras* list the chapters or page numbers; selections from the sources on Electronic Reserve (ER) are numbered sequentially. For a complete list of the sources of the assigned readings found on Electronic Reserve, see below p. 6.

Introduction: What is Religion? How do we study Religion in the secular academy?

- 1/9 Organization of Course and Introduction to the Academic Study of Religion
- 1/14 Ways of Exploring Religion: Who are the Nacirema?
(ER #1-3: “Thinking about Being a Student of Religion,” “Body Ritual Among the Nacirema” and “Religious Studies and Heaven’s Gate”) **Question Card #1 due**

Part I American Religious Diversity and the Sacred in Roadside Attractions

- 1/16 Surveying the Sacred from Outside: What is “Outsider” Religion?
(RR: “Introduction” & Chapter 6) **QC #2 due**
- 1/21 **Martin Luther King Holiday—no class!**
But do read MLK’s famous speech “I have a dream” (ER #4)
What allusions to religion do you find in it? What clues do you find about King’s understanding of the relationship between religion and social justice?
- 1/23 Now-a-day Noahs: What Would Noah Do?
(RR: Chapters 3-5) **QC #3 due**
Film: *Searching for the Wrong-Eyed Jesus*; Audio: Bill Cosby on Noah
- 1/28 Re-creating the Holy Land in Virginia and Orlando: Magic Kingdom Come?
(RR: Chapters 1-2)
- 1/30 The Substance of Faith: Sentimental Kitsch or Pious Prayers in Stone?
(RR: Chapters 7-8) **QC#4 due**
- 2/4 Paradise Gardens, a Folk Art Church: Is Creativity the Substance of Faith?
(RR: Chapter 10 & Conclusion)
1st essay due: Beal presents many examples of places and creations that embody the “substance of faith.” Drawing upon places described in his book, explain why Beal values personal creativity so highly and how it informs his judgments about what he deems spiritually “authentic.” Do you find Beal’s evaluation of creativity and his judgments about authenticity persuasive?
- 2/6 Outsider Art and Visions from Paradise Gardens, Revisited
(ER #5: *The Colorful Apocalypse*— Prologue, chapters 1-3) **QC#5 due**
Film: *Searching for the Wrong-Eyed Jesus*, pt II
- 2/11 The Frontier of Rationality: Divine Inspiration or Insane Delusions?
(ER #6: *The Colorful Apocalypse*, chapters 4-7) Film: excerpts from *Junebug*

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- 2/13 Raging against Organized Religion: Right-wing Tribal Paranoia or Revelation Revealed?
(ER #7: *The Colorful Apocalypse*, chapters 9-11, 16-17, 19)
Essay #2 due: William Thompson’s life and paintings reveal an apocalyptic worldview and an ambivalent imagination, where terror and tolerance, creativity and chaos, joy and pain seem conjoined. How does Bottoms make sense of (or “narrativize”) Thompson’s life? Does Thompson’s religious art bring him meaning and spiritual renewal or does it imprison him? What is so “tragic” about his work being celebrated by the American Visionary Art Museum?
- 2/18 *Road Scholar*: A Romanian Immigrant’s Ironic view of Driving and the American Dream
(ER #8-9: “Sacred Rac;” *Road Scholar* “Carless in America...New York”) **QC #6 due**
Documentary: *Road Scholar*, pt. I
- 2/20 Utopian Communities and Religious Communes in the US
(ER #10: excerpts from *Road Scholar* “Chicago...Taos Pueblo”) *Road Scholar*, pt. II
- 2/25 New Age Religion in New Mexico; New Americans at Land’s End
(ER #11: excerpts from *Road Scholar* “Friends I lost to Gurus...San Francisco”) **QC #7**
Road Scholar, pt. III
- 2/27 **Midterm Test on American Religions**
(No reading due, study review sheet for exam)
- 3/3-5 **Spring Break!**
- Part II Hinduism in India: Seeing the Divine in Varanasi, City of Life & Death**
- 3/10 Introducing Hinduism and the City of Varanasi
(ER #12: “Introduction: Varanasi”)
- 3/12 Hindu Beliefs about Life & Death, Karma & Rebirth
(ER#13 excerpts from *Climbing Chamundi Hill*) **QC #8 due**
- 3/17 Darshan: Learning to See the Sacred like a Hindu
(*Darshan*: chapter 1) **QC #9 due**
- 3/19 Hindu Image Veneration and Devotion: Gods of Flesh, Gods of Stone
(*Darshan*: chapter 2)
3rd short essay due: In *Roadside Religion* Beal offers his new understanding of “faith” as a religious value that has less to do with “belief” and more to do with relationship. He describes faith as a “leap of hospitality” and vulnerability, an “opening of oneself to the other” (RR: 213). How does Beal’s understanding of faith apply to Hindu devotion towards their gods that are embodied in images? In what way does the Hindu creation of and interaction with divine images confirm and undermine Beal’s aesthetic judgments about creativity and spiritual “authenticity?”
- 3/24 Seeing the Gods of the Hindu Pantheon: How many Gods are there *really*?
(*Darshan*: chapter 3) Documentary: *330 Million Gods*
- 3/26 Varanasi Seen through Western and Hindu Eyes
(*Banaras*: chapter 1: pp. 3-27, 34-42) **QC#10 due**

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- 3/31 Varanasi as the Center of the Universe for Hindu Pilgrims
(ER #14: “The Centre of the World”) Documentary: *Short Cut to Nirvana*
- 4/2 Varanasi as City of the Good Life with Three Aims (Piety, Profit, Pleasure)
(*Banaras*: chapter 8; ER #15: “Hinduism in Practice”) **QC #11 due**
Documentary: *Short Cut to Nirvana*
- 4/7 Varanasi as City of the Gods including Shiva and Ganga, the Mother Goddess
(*Banaras*: chapter 3: pp. 94-109; chapter 4: 146-160; chapter 5: 211-221) **QC#12 due**
Documentary: *Ganges: River to Heaven*
- 4/9 Varanasi as City of Death and Liberation
(*Banaras*: chapter 9)
Essay #4 due: In *Banaras* Diana Eck notes that for the Hindu who travels to this sacred city, “dying a good death is as important as living a good life.” What makes a “good death” for Hindus? How does dying in Varanasi both uphold and undermine traditional Hindu morality (Dharma), family bonds, and belief in karma?
- 4/14 Varanasi as Pilgrimage Site for the Grateful Dead and other Western Seekers
(ER #16: “Death Lives in Varanasi”) **QC #13 due**

Part III “What a long strange trip its been”: Gaining darshan, practicing yoga in America

- 4/16 The transgressive sacrality of the Grateful Dead: Are Deadheads really religious?
(ER #17: “Eyes of the World: The Grateful Dead and the Deadheads”) **QC #14 due**
Documentary: *Tie-Dyed: Rock ‘n Rolls Most Deadiated Fans*
- 4/21 American Hindus: the Ganges and the Mississippi
(ER #18: “American Hindus”) Documentary: *Miss India Georgia*
- 4/23 The Practice of Yoga in America: Cultural Clash of East vs. West?
(ER#19-20: “Breathing” and “Yoga for Skeptics”) **QC#15 due**
- 4/28 12-3:00 pm Final Exam**

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SOURCES FOR ARTICLES ON ELECTRONIC RESERVE (ER#1-20)

1. Gary E. Kessler, “Thinking about Being a Student of Religion” from *Studying Religion*, 3rd edition (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2008), pp. 1-13.
2. Horace Miner, “Body Rituals Among the Nacirema,” *American Anthropologist*, LVIII (1956), pp. 503-507 .
3. Mark W. Muesse, “Religious Studies and ‘Heaven’s Gate’: Making the Strange Familiar and the Familiar Strange” in *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion*, ed. by Russell McCutcheon (London: Cassell, 1999), pp. 390-394.
4. Martin Luther King, Jr. “I Have a Dream” from *Sociology of Religion: A Reader*, ed. by Susanne C. Monahan et al. Prentice Hall, 2001, pp. 404-406.
5. Greg Bottoms, *The Colorful Apocalypse: Journeys in Outsider Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. xi-xv, 5-35.
6. Greg Bottoms, *The Colorful Apocalypse*, pp. 37-66.
7. Greg Bottoms, *The Colorful Apocalypse*, pp. 67-98, 109-115, 121-122.
8. Patricia Hughes, “The Sacred Rac,” *Focusing on Global Poverty and Development*, ed. by Jayne C. Millar (Washington D.C. Overseas Development Council, 1974), p. 357-8.
9. Andrei Codrescu, *Road Scholar: Coast to Coast Late in the Century* (New York: Hyperion, 1993), pp. 1-17, 27-41, 51-65.
10. Andrei Codrescu, *Road Scholar*, pp. 91-101, 116-124, 156-165.
11. Andrei Codrescu, *Road Scholar*, pp. 125-156, 183-193.
12. David R. Kinsley, *Hinduism: A Cultural Perspective* 2nd Edition (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993), pp. 2-10.
13. Ariel Glucklich, *Climbing Chamundi Hill: 1001 Steps with a Storyteller and a Reluctant Pilgrim* (London: Bantam Books, 2003), pp. vii-23, 31-45.
14. Richard Lannoy, “The Centre of the World” from *Benaras a World within a World: The Microcosm of Kashi Yesterday and Today* (Varanasi: Indica Books, 2002), pp. 35-48, 79-96.
15. Richard Lannoy, “Hinduism in Practice” from *Benaras a World within a World*, pp. 113-121.
16. Jerry Pinto, “Death Lives in Varanasi” from *The Penguin Book of Indian Journeys*, ed. by Dom Moraes (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2004), pp. 70-77.
17. Robin Sylvan, “Eyes of the World: The Grateful Dead and the Deadheads” from her *Traces of Spirit: Religious Dimensions of Popular Music* (NY: NYU Press, 2002), pp. 83-116.
18. Diana Eck, “American Hindus: the Ganges and the Mississippi” from her *A New Religious America* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002), pp. 80-93; 112-127; 134-140.
19. Reetika Vazirani, “The Art of Breathing,” from *Prairie Schooner* Vol.75.3 (Fall 2001), pp. 63-75.
20. Elizabeth Kadetsky, “Yoga for Skeptics” (2004) from the website:
http://www.killingthebuddha.com/dogma/yoga_skeptics.htm

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Web Resources for the Virtual Pilgrim

*Interested in learning more about the topics and places that we explore in HONS 175?
Check out these sites for a virtual visit!*

I. American Religious Diversity

Photo Gallery of America’s Roadside Miracles, from Tim Beal’s *Roadside Religion*
www.beliefnet.com/story/168/story_16875_1.html

NPR Interview with Tim Beal on *Roadside Religion*:

www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4711466

Bill Rice and Cross Garden:

www.thecross-photo.com/William_C._Rice%27s_Cross_Garden.html

Holy Land Orlando Website: www.theholylandexperience.com/

Rebuilding Noah’s Ark: www.godsark.org

Paradise Garden, Summerville Georgia:

www.pbs.org/independentlens/offthemap/html/travelogue_artist_5.htm?true#

Howard Finster’s biography: www.finster.com/HFBiography.htm

The apocalyptic artwork of William Thomas Thompson: www.arthompson.com

Andrei Codrescu’s webpage: <http://codrescu.com/bio/index.html>

Interview with Andrei Codrescu on *Road Scholar* and popular spiritualism in America:

www.wie.org/j12/codrescu.asp

Searching for the Wrong-Eyed Jesus Website:

www.searchingforthewrongeyedjesus.com/

www.bbc.co.uk/bbcfour/documentaries/features/wrong-eyed-jesus.shtml

II. Hinduism and Varanasi

Meeting God: Elements of Hindu Devotion

<http://kaladarshan.arts.ohio-state.edu/exhib/meetgod/open.htm>

Hindu pilgrimage to the Ganges in Varanasi:

<https://re-xs.ucsm.ac.uk/re/pilgrimage/hinduism.htm>

Varanasi in text and images:

http://www.vaisnava.cz/clanek_en.php3?no=194

The Kumbha Mela pilgrimage, the largest pilgrimage site in the world:

<http://courses.missouristate.edu/JLlewellyn/kumbhmela.html>

Lecture by Diana Eck on the “Manifestations of Shiva” on pilgrimage and Shiva mythology:

<http://athome.harvard.edu/programs/mos/mos1.html>

III. American Hindus and the American Practice of Yoga

Diana Eck’s Pluralism Project at Harvard University—on American religious pluralism:

<http://www.pluralism.org>

The Council of Hindu Temples of North America: <http://www.councilofhindutemples.org/>

Hindu America Foundation: <http://www.hinduamericanfoundation.org/>

Hindu Temple of South Carolina: <http://www.hindutemples.org/new/>

Integral Yoga International: <http://www.yogaville.org/>

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Key terms to learn for HONS 175

These are technical terms that you must know in order to do well on the two exams. Keep this list handy as you read the assignments and write down their definitions and meanings.

Part I: Key terms in American Religions and in the Academic Study of Religion

Theology, Insider’s vs. Outsider’s perspectives on religion, empathy, bracketing
Ethnocentrism, “making the strange seem familiar and the familiar seem strange,” body rituals
Orthodox vs. “Outsider” religion, sacred vs. profane, rite of passage, pilgrimage, sacred stories
Narrative arrangement of space, transgression of the sacred, religious re-creation, nostalgia
Protestant concerns about idolatry & material religion, faith vs. irony & cynicism
Apocalypse, eschatology, cosmic dualism, proselytize, Book of Revelation, New Jerusalem
Pentecostal, speaking in tongues, gift of the Holy Spirit, social marginality & religious vision
Pastoral care, rosaries as prayer devices, cabinet of curiosities, fetishism, paradox of the sacred
Creativity as religious devotion, production vs. sacred creation, “spiritual authenticity”
Madness & ecstasy, dark night of the soul, postmodern cult of the Other, psychedelic Baptists
Mystification of religious visionaries, narrativizing experience vs. pastiche, therapy culture
Masons, ecumenical “one-world” Church, religion as “opiate,” fundamentalist critique of culture
Etymologies of religion: *re-legere* vs. *re-ligare*, surrealism, simulacra and speed, kitsch
Utopian communities in America, Bruderhof, asceticism, new religious movements, “cults”
Taos Pueblo, “the land is an Indian thing,” Chimayo’s holy dirt, Sikhism
Immigration and Nationalities Act, xenophobia, cultural assimilation, nationalism as a “religion”
New Age religions, spiritual materialism, America as melting pot or quilted mosaic

Part II: Hinduism in India

Hindu/Hinduism, Hindutva, *Vedas*, caste system, Four Classes, “twice-born” castes, Dharma
Sanskrit, social stratification, iconography, visual hermeneutic, consecration, transubstantiation
Upanishads, guru, reincarnation/transmigration, samsara, karma, yoga, moksha, Brahman/Atman
Chamundi/Kali, didactic stories, frame narrative, spiritual merit, karmic calculations
Bhakti, prasad, darshan, “gape” vs. “gaze,” kaleidoscopic vision, aniconic, puja, avatara
Monotheism of consciousness, polytheism, monism, kathenotheism, asceticism
Trimurti (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva = G.O.D.), 330 Million gods, Sarasvati, Ganesha
Four Stages of Life, Four Aims of Life, Dharma vs. Moksha, sannyasin renunciant
Mandala, tirtha, Varanasi (Varana + Asi), Kashi, Banaras, transposition of the sacred
“Sacred” as auspicious or as holy, Shiva, lingam, yoni, shakti, Vishvanatha, Mata Ganga
Microcosm/macrocosm, axis mundi, androgyny, transgressive sacrality, iconoclasm, cosmology
Ghat, cremation pyres, Dom caste, liminality, Kashi Labh Mukti Bhavan, Hare Ram mantra
Sacred as “Wholly other” vs. Immanent, materialized spirituality vs. spiritual materialism
Filial piety, taraka mantra, sinners and death in Kashi, Jerry Garcia’s ashes

Part III: “What a long strange trip its been...”

Countercultural movement, “stealie” totemic symbol, Spinners, *communitas*, shamanic journey
Psychedelic sacrament, expansion of self, disintegration/death/rebirth, improvisational worship
E pluribus unum, Hare Krishna, Hindu diaspora, transposition of the Hindu sacred to America
Cyber communities, bhajan, Penn Masala: facebook darshan, power yoga, oamkar, yoga sutra
Los Angelization of yoga, asana, Orientalist idealizations of India, ersatz vs authentic yoga