

RELIGION AND POPULAR CULTURE
SPRING 2012
SETH M. WALKER

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I. COURSE INFORMATION

REL3101.001-18463

Location: Cooper Hall (CPR), Room 115

Time: MWF 11:50 a.m. – 12:40 p.m.

Office Hours: MW 10:45 a.m. – 11:45 a.m., Room 470, CPR

The instructor is always available via email and encourages students to swap email addresses with at least two of their classmates to keep communication about the course as open as possible.

II. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores the intersection of religion and contemporary popular culture in America. This is an upper division course and will be dealing with theoretical and methodological frameworks pertinent to an advanced study in religious discourse. Various approaches to understanding certain concepts in the field of religious studies will be examined (e.g., ritual, myth, secularization thesis, rational choice theory, etc.) in order to properly frame and analyze their interaction with popular culture; this will include inquiry into the definition and meaning of both religion and popular culture, the impact of secularization on traditional religious systems, and the widely diverse expressions of religion in contemporary popular culture.

Required Text:

Forbes, Bruce David, and Jeffrey H. Mahan, eds. *Religion and Popular Culture in America*, revised ed. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005. ISBN: 978-0-520-24689-8

Mazur, Eric Michael, and Kate McCarthy, eds. *God in the Details: American Religion in Popular Culture*, 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2010. ISBN: 978-0-415-48537-1

Coursepack for REL3101.001-18463.

*The Coursepack is available at both the USF Campus Bookstore (813-974-2631) and Gray's Bookstore (813-971-2665).

Attendance Policy: Students are required to attend the first class meeting of undergraduate courses for which they registered **prior** to the first day of the term. Students having extenuating circumstances beyond their control and who are unable to attend the first class meeting must notify the instructor or the department prior to the first class meeting to request waiver of the first class attendance requirement. Students who add courses or late-register during the first week of classes will not be on the first class roll and, therefore, **will not** be dropped for non-attendance by the instructor. To avoid fee liability and academic penalty, the student is responsible for insuring that he or she has dropped or been dropped from all undesired courses by **Friday, January 13th**.

It is expected that students will arrive on time and be prepared to learn. If class must be missed, **it is the student's responsibility** to a) make up the reading assignments and obtain copies of any handouts that may have been distributed, and to b) **notify the instructor** beforehand or immediately thereafter (given the circumstance). Absences that are not *approved* by the instructor will be considered unexcused. **Each unexcused absence** will result in a **deduction of two points from the student's final grade**. **Leaving class early**, unless otherwise noted or approved, will result in a **deduction of one point from the student's final grade**.

Withdrawal Deadline for "W" Grade: Saturday, March 24th. Students who withdraw may not continue to attend class. Please note that it is the student's responsibility to be aware of how a withdrawal will affect scholarships/financial aid.

The **use of cell phones** during class is **prohibited** (this includes "texting"). Students are required to either turn their phone(s) off or set to "silent"; even "vibrate" modes can be disruptive. This is a college-level course and students are expected to demonstrate professionalism and respect their fellow classmates and instructor. If it is necessary for the student to use a phone in an emergency situation, he or she is required to quietly leave the classroom during the duration of the call. Failure to abide by this will negatively affect the student's participation in the course (see Grading Scale below).

Grading Scale:

A = 90-100

B = 80-89

C = 70-79

D = 60-69

F = 59 and below

Participation: 10%

Short Papers: 25%

Cultural Investigation: 25%

Critical Analysis: 40%

III. ASSIGNMENTS

Assigned Readings: **Must be completed prior to class**. This course is designed to be interactive on part of the students and the instructor. The class will engage in discussions about the topics under investigation, as well as any relevant material encountered. Students are required to participate in these discussions, and at times, facilitate them. A student's level of participation during class lectures has a direct effect on his or her grade (see Grading Scale above), as determined at the discretion of the instructor.

Short Papers: Each student will be required to complete **two** short papers. See "Paper Guidelines" and "Short Paper Topics" on pages 7 and 9 for more details.

Cultural Investigation: Each student will be required to reflect, outside of class, on a particular popular cultural phenomenon and demonstrate how it relates to either Religion in Popular Culture or Popular Culture in Religion, as presented in class. A brief writing assignment is associated with this exercise, and a discussion will be held in class on the designated due date. See "Paper Guidelines" and "Cultural Investigation" on pages 7 and 10 for more details.

Critical Analysis: Each student will be required to complete a critical analysis in order to demonstrate his or her level of understanding of concepts and theory covered earlier in the semester, as well as how they relate to the article and argument being examined. See “Paper Guidelines” and “Critical Analysis” on pages 7 and 11 for more details.

Please note that the instructor is, in addition to other elements, grading the *content* of each assignment. If there are too many punctuation or syntax-related, as well as grammatical, errors to the point where the instructor cannot adequately read or understand the content of the assignment, it will be returned to the respective student without a grade; the assignment may be revised and resubmitted with a deduction of one letter grade. In other words, the assignment is designated as being one day late and will follow the policy regarding late work (outlined below). That said, students are encouraged to proofread their assignments closely, and, if need be, seek assistance from the University Writing Center; LIB 109, (813) 974-2713.

IV. LATE WORK

Assignments must be submitted at **the beginning of class** on the designated due date. Failure to turn in the assignment **on time** will result in a deduction of one letter grade for each class meeting it is late (late arrival and immediately after class are both considered one day late); **electronic copies of assignments will not be accepted**. Every effort is taken to grade late assignments in a timely manner, but late assignments receive secondary priority behind those submitted on time.

V. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The instructor **cannot** provide technical support. If students are experiencing problems with Blackboard or OASIS, they will need to contact the appropriate department. The IT Help Desk can be reached at (813) 974-1222, help@usf.edu, and LIB 117.

Even though computers and word processing software are marvelous time and energy-saving devices, they can and do cause problems from time to time. Please be aware that a broken or malfunctioning computer, or the inability to retrieve, produce, or submit assignments from a computer will not be accepted as a valid excuse for a document that is submitted late. It is advised that students make sure their work is saved appropriately, and in more than one location (such as a USB flash drive, external hard drive, CD/DVD, online storage, or even emailing a copy to oneself).

Student Conduct procedures are followed when a student fails to exercise his or her responsibility in an acceptable manner or commits an offense as outlined in the student planner <http://www.sa.usf.edu/srr>.

Violations of Academic Integrity, as outlined in the university’s Undergraduate Catalog, **will not go unpunished**. These violations include, but are not limited to: (a) Cheating, (b) Plagiarism, (c) Fabrication, Forgery, and Obstruction, (d) Multiple Submissions, (e) Complicity, (f) Misconduct in Research and Creative Endeavors, (g) Computer Misuse, and (h) Misuse of Intellectual Property.

This course maintains a **zero tolerance** policy regarding **plagiarism** and **cheating**. If the student is caught cheating or is guilty of plagiarism, he or she will receive a failing grade in the course and be reported to the appropriate authority. If there is any concern about the citation of a source, please contact the instructor before submitting the assignment. See “Plagiarism” on page 8.

In accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, The Americans with Disabilities Act and The ADA Amendments Act, the University of South Florida provides reasonable classroom accommodations for otherwise qualified students who have documented disabilities. Students seeking accommodations must register with the Services for Students with Disabilities Office. See <http://www.sds.usf.edu> for a list of common accommodations and more information on the accommodation process; SVC 1133, (813) 974-4309.

Only officially registered students or students approved to audit a class are entitled to attend class meetings. It is university policy that student absences will be excused for military duty, jury duty, and religious days (as set forth in University policy 10-045). If a student serves as a juror, class absences will be considered excused when the student provides **advance notice** to the instructor, the instructor acknowledges the request, and the student provides **written verification** of jury selection and proof of service. No student shall be compelled to attend class or sit for an examination at a day or time prohibited by his or her religious belief. **Students are expected to notify their instructors at the beginning of each academic term** in accordance with this policy. It is important to note that excused absences only apply to physical presence, and not to academic work missed; reasonable opportunities will be given to turn in work collected when absent for these circumstances.

An “I” (Incomplete) may be awarded to the student in consultation with the instructor only when a small portion of the student’s work is incomplete and only when the student is otherwise earning a passing grade. Until removed, the “I” is not computed in the GPA for the student; time until removal is limited to within two academic semesters, whether or not the student is in residence, and/or graduation – whichever comes first. “I” grades not removed by the end of the time limit will be changed to “IF” or “IU,” whichever is appropriate.

The University of South Florida now affords students the right to limit data usage and the sharing of their information, without having to request non-disclosure of directory information under the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). If the student has not requested privacy or non-disclosure, aside from Name, Date of Birth, Address, Telephone, Major, Dates of Attendance, Enrollment Status, Degrees, and Prior Institutions Attended, all other student data is considered to be protected. Without prior written consent from the student, this information will not and cannot be released to any non-university officials. For more information, see: <http://www.registrar.usf.edu/privacy/>.

Children are not permitted in the classroom. It is the student’s responsibility to make arrangements in advance for childcare.

Please make note of the evacuation route from the classroom in case of an emergency. Interpret all alarms as valid and act accordingly. Students are encouraged to sign up for MoBull Plus <http://www.mobull.usf.edu>.

Course Calendar

****THE COURSE SCHEDULE MAY BE CHANGED AT THE DISCRETION OF THE INSTRUCTOR****

Date	Topic	Assignment
<u>Week 1</u> January 9 th – 13 th	-Introduction and Syllabus -Religion, Ritual, and Myth -Popular Culture	-Introduction (F&M); pg. 1-7
<u>Week 2</u> January 16 th – 20 th	-Secularization and Rational Choice Theory	-Davie, "Secularization" (CP) -Davie, "Rational Choice Theory" (CP) No Class 1/16
<u>Week 3</u> January 23 rd – 27 th	-Characteristics of Ritual	-Bell, "Characteristics of Ritual-like Activities" (CP) -Video Clip: <i>School of Rock</i> -Miner, "Body Ritual Among the Nacirema" (CP)
<u>Week 4</u> January 30 th – February 3 rd	-Religion in Popular Culture	-Introduction (F&M); pg. 7-18 -Thompson, "Consecrating Consumer Culture" (F&M) -Hulsether, "Like a Sermon" (F&M) Short Paper #1 Due 2/3
<u>Week 5</u> February 6 th – 10 th	-Popular Culture in Religion	-Peterson, "The Internet and Christian and Muslim Communities" (F&M) -Hoover, "The Cross at Willow Creek" (F&M)
<u>Week 6</u> February 13 th – 17 th	-Class Discussion	Cultural Investigation Due 2/13
<u>Week 7</u> February 20 th – 24 th	-Popular Culture as Religion	-Jindra, "It's about Faith in Our Future" (F&M) -Film: <i>Trekkies</i>
<u>Week 8</u> February 27 th – March 2 nd	-Popular Culture as Religion	-Film: <i>Trekkies</i> -Sylvan, "Eyes of the World" (CP) No Class 3/2
<u>Week 9</u> March 5 th – 9 th	-Popular Culture as Religion	-Sylvan, "Eyes of the World" (CP) -Film: <i>Tie-Died</i>
<u>Week 10</u> March 12 th – 16 th	Spring Break	
<u>Week 11</u> March 19 th – 23 rd	-Popular Myth	-Introduction (M&M) -McCarthy, "Deliver Me From Nowhere" (M&M) -Stone, "A Fire in the Sky" (M&M) Short Paper #2 Due 3/19

Date	Topic	Assignment
Week 12 March 26 th – 30 th	-Popular Ritual	-Video Clip: <i>Beyond Black Rock</i> -Pike, "Desert Goddesses and Apocalyptic Art" (M&M) -Gilmore, "Fires of the Heart" (CP)
Week 13 April 2 nd – 6 th	-Popular "Churches"	-Ingersoll, "The Thin Line Between Saturday Night and Sunday Morning" (M&M) -Mazur and Koda, "The Happiest Place on Earth" (M&M)
Week 14 April 9 th – 13 th	-Popular Spirituality	-Carrette and King, "Spirituality and the Re-Branding of Religion" (online) -Masters, "Spiritual Bypassing" (online)
Week 15 April 16 th – 20 th	-Popular Spirituality	-Price, "Naturalistic Recreations" (online) -Taylor, "Focus Introduction: Aquatic Nature Religion" (CP) -Taylor, "Surfing into Spirituality and a New, Aquatic Nature Religion" (CP)
Week 16 April 23 rd – 27 th	-Popular Spirituality	-Film: <i>Step Into Liquid</i> Critical Analysis Due 4/27: 12:00 p.m. – 12:30 p.m. (CPR 115)
Final Exam Week April 28 th – May 4 th	N/A	N/A

Paper Guidelines

Due Date: At the beginning of class (hard copy) on each designated due date; a deduction of one letter grade will be given for every class meeting the paper is late (late arrival and immediately after class on the designated date counts as being late); **electronic copies of assignments will not be accepted.** Assignments must be submitted electronically through SafeAssign (via Blackboard) prior to the due date/time; you will be required to print out the results of your submission and attach it to the hard copy being turned in (your print-out must contain the percentage matching). Please note that **I will not accept your paper without the SafeAssign attachment;** if you have any questions about how to utilize this Blackboard feature, seek out your answer(s) well before the due date. **Your first paper submission must have the plagiarism contract attached to it or it will not be accepted.** See “Plagiarism” on page 8.

Length: Each paper must abide by the designated page length required (page length excludes title page and/or bibliography), be double-spaced, with 1-inch margins, and printed with a 12-point, **Times New Roman** font.

Format: Each paper submitted will be treated as a formal writing assignment; in other words, students must maintain a formalized writing structure and style (e.g., do not use contractions, colloquial language, etc.). Students are required to use Chicago Manual of Style (CMS) for their papers. This style of writing requires the use of **footnotes and/or endnotes** and a **bibliographic reference list.** Sources need to be properly cited throughout the text of the paper, as well as on the reference page. The instructor will accept either a title page or a heading on the first page of text, but the paper **must have page numbers** at the **top right corner** of each page (excluding a title page). The information on the title page (or in the heading) must include: the student’s full name, the course number, the instructor’s name, and the date. If students choose to do any additional research outside of the assigned readings in class, they are **not allowed to use any Internet sources;** the only exceptions are those obtained from academic journals. Examples of both an in-text citation and bibliographic reference entry are provided below.

Please note that **individual articles/chapters in the Coursepack must be independently cited;** a generic Coursepack citation is not acceptable (see “Citation Information” on page 12).

In-text: Robert J. Thompson, “Consecrating Consumer Culture: Christmas Television Specials,” in *Religion and Popular Culture in America*, revised ed., ed. Bruce David Forbes and Jeffrey H. Mahan (California: University of California Press, 2005), 48.

*For consecutive citations of the same source, use either: *Ibid.* (for the same page) or *Ibid.*, 48. (for a different page).

*For all subsequent citations (separated by different sources), use: Thompson, 48.

Bibliography: Thompson, Robert J. “Consecrating Consumer Culture: Christmas Television Specials.” In *Religion and Popular Culture in America*, edited by Bruce David Forbes and Jeffrey H. Mahan, 44-55. California: University of California Press, 2005.

For more information visit: http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html.

The University Writing Center is available for assistance during the writing process. Visit the Writing Center at LIB 109, (813) 974-2713.

To avoid accidental plagiarism, please contact the University Writing Center (or the instructor) for any questions regarding citations and formatting before submitting the assignment.

Plagiarism

University of South Florida – Undergraduate Catalog

Definition:

Plagiarism is intentionally or carelessly presenting the work of another as one's own. It includes submitting an assignment purporting to be the student's original work which has wholly or in part been created by another person. It also includes the presentation of the work, ideas, representations, or words of another person without customary and proper acknowledgement of sources. Students must consult with their instructors for clarification in any situation in which the need for documentation is an issue, and will have plagiarized in any situation in which their work is not properly documented.

Clarification:

- 1) Every direct quotation must be identified by quotation marks or appropriate indentation and must be properly acknowledged by parenthetical citation in the text or **in a footnote or endnote**.
- 2) When material from another source is paraphrased or summarized in whole or in part in one's own words, that source must be acknowledged **in a footnote or endnote**, or by parenthetical citation in the text.
- 3) Information gained in reading or research that is not common professional knowledge must be acknowledged in a parenthetical citation in the text or **in a footnote or endnote**.
- 4) This prohibition includes, but is not limited to, the use of papers, reports, projects, and other such materials prepared by someone else.

Fill out the form below, cut along the dotted line, and attach to your first paper submission. Keep the above "Definition" and "Clarification" for your records.

I, _____ (print name), have read and understand the policy regarding plagiarism, and understand that if I am found guilty of plagiarism I will receive a failing grade in this course ("FF"), denoting academic dishonesty on my university transcript.

Signature

Date

Short Paper Topics

Please read the directions carefully and complete ALL parts of the assignment.

Each paper must abide by the guidelines outlined in “Paper Guidelines” on page 7.

Short Paper (1): Using Miner’s article and the Nacirema as a reference point/model/guide, as well as your own personal touch of creativity, construct your own satirized version of a phenomenon in contemporary popular culture, in terms of ritual. You must provide an “anthropological” description of a particular group of individuals (for instance, players of a particular sport, attendees at a festival, fans at a show, consumers at a mall/shopping center, etc.), mimicking the style of Miner’s article; a simple way to approach this is to simply frame the group as a sub-group of Nacirema and appropriate various terms in a similar fashion. Remember, this is an “anthropological” account, just like Miner’s, so you need to distance yourself from the group as you present it; in other words, you do not want it to be explicitly clear to your reader who it is you are actually describing.

Due 2/3; 3 pages in length

Short Paper (2): Both Jindra and Sylvan’s articles had films to accompany them in class, depicting certain features of their arguments. Pick one of these articles and the accompanying film and evaluate how illustrative the film was, in regard to points made by the author in his argument; in other words, does the film corroborate the author’s claims? If so, how? If not, why not? Be specific with correlations made between scenes in the film and elements in the article. Stronger papers will also address the film in its entirety, noting whether or not a perceived agenda, on part of the film-makers, can be perceived (i.e., whether or not material is being presented objectively); implications of this would be addressed, as well as whether or not this appears to contribute to the manner in which it was shot, and/or if included scenes appear selective in this regard.

Due 3/19; 3 pages in length

The University Writing Center is available for assistance during the writing process. Visit the Writing Center at LIB 109, (813) 974-2713.

To avoid accidental plagiarism, please contact the University Writing Center (or the instructor) for any questions regarding citations and formatting before submitting the assignment.

“Wikipedia is the best thing ever. Anyone in the world can write anything they want about any subject. So you know you are getting the best possible information.” – Michael Scott, *The Office*

No Internet and absolutely NO WIKIPEDIA!

Cultural Investigation

Please read the directions carefully and complete ALL parts of the assignment.

Due: **February 13th** at the beginning of class.

Length: This assignment contains a written component that must be 1 page in length and abide by the guidelines outlined in the “Paper Guidelines” on page 7.

Topic: After having read the articles associated with the sections on Religion in Popular Culture and Popular Culture in Religion, you are to reflect on a particular phenomenon in contemporary culture and relate it to either of these categories. In other words, how does your chosen phenomenon relate to either Religion in Popular Culture or Popular Culture in Religion, as presented in this course? You must explicitly reference the categorical breakdown outlined by Forbes and Mahan. This is a brief writing exercise, but will have an accompanying **discussion component** in class. On the designated day, we will have a class discussion regarding the exercise. We will discuss the class’ findings and evaluate their relation to the material gone over in the preceding class lectures. Your grade for this assignment is not only based on the brief, written exercise; a significant portion will be dependent upon your contribution to the discussion.

The University Writing Center is available to assist you during the writing process. Visit the Writing Center at LIB 109, (813) 974-2713.

To avoid accidental plagiarism, please contact the University Writing Center (or your instructor) if you have any questions regarding your citations before submitting the assignment.

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Critical Analysis

Please read the directions carefully and complete ALL parts of the assignment.

This assignment WILL NOT be accepted late.

Due: April 27th, 12:00 p.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Length: This assignment must be 4-6 pages in length and abide by the guidelines outlined in the “Paper Guidelines” on page 7.

Topic: Select **one** of the articles read in class pertaining to the categories in the anthologies by Forbes/Mahan and Mazur/McCarthy, and provide a critical analysis of the author’s argument, assessing its strengths and weaknesses; you may draw on any relevant video clips and films, but only for support. You must mention the relevance of the secularization thesis and/or rational choice theory to the author’s argument in your analysis. Additionally, you must draw on and mention at least one of the following, framed within the appropriate theoretic context encountered in the course: religion, ritual, or myth. A significant portion of your grade will be dependent upon the manner in which you effectively employ the aforementioned concepts and terms in the context of the article you are analyzing. Please note that **a critical analysis is not a summary or description** of the article. A cogent, well-articulated paper will clearly identify important features of the argument and analyze them in an insightful manner. You must pick apart the argument, not only pointing out strengths and weaknesses, in terms of the framework and structure, but also noting why these are strengths and weaknesses, and what would make particular weaknesses stronger for the overall argument.

The University Writing Center is available for assistance during the writing process. Visit the Writing Center at LIB 109, (813) 974-2713.

To avoid accidental plagiarism, please contact the University Writing Center (or the instructor) for any questions regarding citations and formatting before submitting the assignment.

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Citation Information

Below is the citation information for the articles/chapters in the Coursepack (see page 1 of the syllabus for the textbooks). This information must be utilized for citation purposes; **the Coursepack itself is not to be cited.**

Films:

Burning Man: Beyond Black Rock. DVD. Directed by Damon Brown, 2005. Texas: Gone Off Deep Productions, 2006.

School of Rock. DVD. Directed by Richard Linklater, 2003. California: Paramount Pictures, 2004.

Step Into Liquid. DVD. Directed by Dana Brown, 2003. California: Lions Gate, 2004.

Tie-Died: Rock 'n' Roll's Most Deadiated Fans. DVD. Directed by Andrew Behar, 1995. New York: Fox Lorber, 1999.

Trekkies. DVD. Directed by Roger Nygard, 1997. California: Paramount Classics, 1999.

Articles:

Bell, Catherine. *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Davie, Grace. *The Sociology of Religion*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2007.

Gilmore, Lee. "Fires of the Heart: Ritual, Pilgrimage, and Transformation at Burning Man." In *AfterBurn: Reflections on Burning Man*, edited by Lee Gilmore and Mark Van Proyen, 43-62. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005.

Miner, Horace. "Body Ritual among the Nacirema." *American Anthropologist* 58, no. 3 (1956): 503-507.

Sylvan, Robin. *Traces of the Spirit: The Religious Dimensions of Popular Music*. New York: New York University Press, 2002.

Taylor, Bron. "Focus Introduction: Aquatic Nature Religion." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 75, no. 4 (2007): 863-874.

Taylor, Bron. "Surfing into Spirituality and a New, Aquatic Nature Religion." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 75, no. 4 (2007): 923-951.