

College of Charleston  
Department of Religious Studies  
Fall 2015

**FYSM 134: THE MYTH OF THE AMERICAN HERO**  
**Synthesis Seminar: Monday 6-6:50- Maybank 105**  
**Film Introduction Mon 7:00-7:15 PM- Ed Center 118**  
**Film Screening Mon 7:15 -? - Ed Center 118**  
**Discussion and Analysis Wed & Fri 9:00-9:50 AM- Ed Center 103**

### **Teaching Team**

*Instructor: Dr. Elijah Siegler*

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Office: 4 Glebe St. #206; Office Hours: Wednesday 1-3 and Friday 10-12 or by appt.

*Peer Facilitators: Jule Lane [laneja@g.cofc.edu](mailto:laneja@g.cofc.edu) 908-489-2045*

*Megan Carpenter [carpentermh@g.cofc.edu](mailto:carpentermh@g.cofc.edu) 410-409-1771*

Office: Ed Center 106; Office Hours: Jule- Mon 12:15-1:15 and Thurs 12:30-1:30;

Megan- Mon & Fri 10-11AM

*Librarian: Burton Callicott*

Email: [callicottb@cofc.edu](mailto:callicottb@cofc.edu) Office phone: 953-0016

Office: Addlestone Library

What is a hero? Is a hero a (wo)man of violence or of peace? Are heroes necessary or dangerous? In this class we will critically examine the myth of the American hero through weekly viewings of important and entertaining American movies.

There are two required books:

***Religion and Film: Cinema and the Re-Creation of the World*** by S. Brent Plate  
ISBN-13: 978-1905674695

***Ethan Coen and Joel Coen: Collected Screenplays 1: Blood Simple, Raising Arizona, Miller's Crossing, Barton Fink***

ISBN-13: 978-0571210961

There are also required readings on OAKS. Print these out! Please bring the relevant book or printout to class.

Films will be at the circulation desk at Addlestone a few days after they are screened in class. You can watch them in the library on your laptop or on a library computer. Personal screenings are meant to supplement not to replace the classroom viewings.  
**Warning: Films and readings may be violent or otherwise offensive.**

**Course requirements:**

Participation and Attendance (including synthesis seminar): 15%  
Practice Writing Portfolio: 4 short assignments, plus one rewrite: 20%  
Open-book essay midterm exam: 10%  
Closed-book objective midterm exam: 10%  
7-9 pp. term paper (including drafts and in-class presentation): 25%  
Take-home essay final exam: 20%

**Grading Scale:** A: 93-100; A-: 90-92; B+: 87-89; B: 83-86; B-: 80-82; C+: 77-79; C: 73-76; C-: 70-72; D+: 67-69; D: 63-66; D-: 61-62 F: 60 or below.

The university's **Honor Code** will be strictly enforced. Students can find a complete version of the Honor Code and all related processes in the Student Handbook, available online. *All work must be original and all sources correctly cited.*

**SCHEDULE OF CLASSES**

Wed Aug 26: What is this class about?

Fri Aug 28: What is myth?  
Read: Useful Terms (Handout); Ellwood (OAKS)

Mon Aug 31: *High Noon* (Zinneman, 1952) 85 mins  
Read: "Basic Glossary" (OAKS); Coen 113-122

Wed Sept 2: How do we talk about film?  
Read: Voytilla I (OAKS); Plate 18-23

Fri Sept 4: Who is Joseph Campbell?  
Read: Campbell (OAKS)  
[Watch excerpt from *Big Fish* (Burton, 2003)]  
**PW in formal film analysis due in class**

Mon Sept 7: *Platoon* (Stone, 1986) 120 mins  
Read: Voytilla II (OAKS)

Wed Sept 9: Mythological, Theological and Political Film Criticism  
Read: Beck (OAKS)

Fri Sept 11: Political Film Criticism  
Read: Pippin (OAKS)  
**PW in diagramming the Hero's Journey due in class**

Mon Sept 14: *The Matrix* (Wachowski Bros., 1999) 136 mins  
Read: Holroyd (OAKS)

Wed Sept 16: What is Gnosticism?

Read: Wagner (OAKS)

Fri Sept 18: How does film create myth and ritual?

Read: Plate 23-24, 27-31, 38-43

**PW in theological film criticism due in class**

Mon Sept 21: *Star Wars* (Lucas, 1977) 121 mins

Read: Gordon (OAKS)

Wed Sept 23: Criticizing the Monomyth

Read: Plate 24-27, 31-37; Lawrence (OAKS);

[Watch excerpt from *Triumph of the Will* (Riefenstahl, 1934)]

Fri Sept 25: In Class Exercise

**PW in political film criticism due in class**

Mon Sept 28: *Seven Years in Tibet* (Annaud, 1997) 136 mins

Read: Iwamura (OAKS); "White Savior" (OAKS)

Wed Sept 30: The Orientalist Critique

Read: Mullen (OAKS)

Fri Oct 2: Film, Religion and Fan Culture

Plate 78-91; Lyden (OAKS)

**PW Portfolio, including one rewrite, due in class**

Mon Oct 5: *The Big Lebowski* (Coens, 1998) 117 mins

Read: Siegler (OAKS)

Wed Oct 7: The Myth of Authenticity

Read: Andrus (OAKS)

Fri Oct 9: The Critique of Capitalism

Read: Martin-Jones (OAKS)

Mon Oct 12: Midterm Exam film screening

Read: Midterm exam material

Wed Oct 14: **Open Book Essay Midterm Exam**

Fri Oct 16: **Closed Book Objective Midterm Exam**

**Term Paper Guidelines Handed Out**

Mon Oct 19: FALL BREAK

Wed Oct 21: Jesus as American Hero

Read: TBA

[Watch excerpt from *The Passion of the Christ* (Gibson, 2004)]

Fri Oct 23: Researching Film and Film Criticism with Burton Callicott

Meet in Addlestone Library, Room 122

Mon Oct 26: *Miller's Crossing* (Coens, 1990) 115 mins

Read: Mitchell (OAKS); Coen 249-396

Wed Oct 28: Death and the Hero Myth

Read: Plate 59-61, 69-77;

[Watch excerpt from *Act of seeing with one's own eyes* (Brakhage, 1971)]

Fri Oct 30: Revisiting the Mythic West

Read: Altman (OAKS)

[Watch excerpts from *True Grit* (Coens, 2010)]

Mon Nov 2: *Dead Man* (Jarmusch, 2000) 121 mins

Read: Rickman (OAKS)

Wed Nov 4: The Female Hero

Read: Schubart (OAKS);

Fri Nov 6: Irony versus Sincerity in American Myth

Read: Carter (OAKS); Beavis (OAKS)

Mon Nov 9: *Fargo* (Coens, 1996) 98 mins

Read: Amesbury (OAKS)

Wed Nov 11: Race and Class in the American Hero Myth

Read: TBA (OAKS)

Fri Nov 13: Paper Writing Workshop

Mon Nov 16: *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (Coens, 1999) 106 mins

Read: Seales (OAKS)

Wed Nov 18: The Homeric Hero Revisited

Read: Roberts (OAKS)

[Watch excerpt from *The Hudsucker Proxy* (Coens, 1994)]

Thurs Nov 19 7:30 p.m: Field Trip (and Dinner?)

C of C's production of *Ajax in Iraq*, Emmet Robinson Theatre

Fri Nov 20: American Myth in Film and Theatre

Mon Nov 23: Class cancelled

**Final Paper Due by Tues Nov 24**

Wed Nov 25: THANKSGIVING BREAK

Mon Nov 30: *Barton Fink* (Coens, 1991) 116 mins

Final exam review handed out

Wed Dec 2: Conclusion I— Film and Religion as World Creation

Read: Plate 1-13

Fri: Conclusion II— The Artist as Hero and World- Creator

Read: Plate and Siegler (OAKS); Coen vii-xi, 397-521

Mon Dec 7: Final film screening

**Take home exam and reading assignment handed out**

Mon Dec 14: **Take Home final exam due**

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Students with documented disabilities who have been approved to receive accommodation through SNAP should feel free to discuss this during office hours. For more information, contact Disability Services at 953-1431.

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Visit the **Center for Student Learning** for help with study strategies, speaking & writing skills, and course content. They offer tutoring, Supplemental Instruction, study skills appointments, and workshops. Students of all abilities have become more successful using these programs throughout their academic career and the services are available to you at no additional cost. For more information regarding these services please visit the CSL website at <http://csl.cofc.edu> or call (843)953-5635.

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### **Technology policy**

Let's face it: technology breaks. **An issue you may have with technology is no excuse for late work.** You need to protect yourself by managing your time and backing up your work. **Turn your cell phone on silent when you come into class. Do not text in class.** If you bring a laptop to class, use it for class. I reserve the right to ask anyone with a laptop or tablet to use it to lookup something to help our class discussion. I also might check your screen to make sure you are not checking your friend's Instagram, etc.