

College of Charleston
Department of Religious Studies
Spring 2019

RELS 120-02: RELIGION, ART, AND CULTURE
RELIGION AND POPULAR CULTURE IN AMERICA
MWF 10-10:50; ECTR 118

Instructor: Dr. Elijah Siegler
Email: sieglere@cofc.edu Office phone: **953-3910**
Office: 4 Glebe St. Room #206
Office Hours: **Mondays 11-1, Wednesdays 1-3 or by appointment**

This course examines religion through the lens of popular culture, and popular culture through the lens of religion. Focusing mainly on examples from contemporary America, including but not limited to music, TV shows, social media, and sports, this course will help students become critical consumers of popular culture. We will analyze, appreciate, and articulate deeper meanings of mass forms of entertainment. We will also understand how religion in our society manifests itself beyond its traditional sectarian venues.

This course will fulfill the **General Education Student Learning Outcomes:**
Student Learning Outcome #1: Students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted or valued in various expressions of human culture.
Student Learning Outcome #2: Students examine relevant primary source materials as understood by the discipline and interpret the material in writing assignments. These two learning outcomes will be assessed in the second essay (worth 20%), which will ask students to analyze primary sources in terms of their religious ideas.

Required texts:

1. *Religion and Popular Culture in America, Third Ed.* Bruce David Forbes and Jeffrey H. Mahan (Editors) (**Forbes**) ISBN: 0520291461
(Note: Each chapter ends with discussion questions. Be prepared to discuss in class.)
2. *God in the Details: American Religion in Popular Culture, Second Ed.* Eric Mazur and Kate McCarthy (Editors) ISBN: 0415485371 (**Mazur**)

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

Course Requirements:

- Participation and attendance including small group discussion, random attendance checks, and in-class writing assignments: **10%**
- One 3-4 pp. paper due in class 2/18: **15%**
- One 4-6 pp. paper due in class 4/8: **20%**

- Two out of three “surprise” quizzes, which will be announced the class before. (The lowest quiz will be dropped.): **2 x 5% =10%**
- An oral presentation on 4/22: **5%**
- A midterm exam on 3/1: **15%**
- A final exam on 4/27: **25%**

We will review and discuss each assignment before it is due.

Lying, cheating, attempted cheating, and plagiarism are violations of our Honor Code that, when identified, are investigated. A student found responsible by the Honor Board for academic dishonesty will receive a XF in the course, indicating failure of the course due to academic dishonesty. Students can find a complete version of the Honor Code and all related processes in the Student Handbook, available online.

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.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

INTRODUCTION

Wed 1/9: What is this class about?

Fri 1/11: How do we define religion?

Read: Studyreligion.org

Mon 1/14: What is the American context?

Read: TBA

Wed 1/16: How do we define popular culture?

Read: Forbes 1-22; Mazur 4-11

Fri 1/18: Two Case Studies: A Madonna video and a Title Sequence

Read: Mazur 41-61 (please read the endnotes)

HOW POPULAR CULTURE REPRESENTS RELIGION

Mon 1/21: MLK Day- no class

Wed 1/23: Depicting Religion on TV: Why Mainstream Rule

Read: Bird (on OAKS)

Fri 1/25: Islam: The “Dangerous” Other

Read: Forbes 85-98

Mon 1/28: Islam, Continued (Special Guest: Dr. Shyam Sriram)
Read: Forbes 144-157

Wed 1/30: The Oriental Monk: The "Mystic" Other
Read: Forbes 51-66

Fri 2/1: Jewish Women in Popular Culture (Special Guest: Dr. Shari Rabin)

Mon 2/4: Catch-up and Discussion

HOW RELIGION USES POPULAR CULTURE

Wed 2/6: Introduction to Evangelical pop culture
Read: Radosh (on OAKS)

Fri 2/8: How Megachurches Sell Religion
Read: Forbes 159-175

Mon 2/11: True Love Waits? Selling Christian Abstinence
Read: Mazur 197-218

Wed 2/13: Varieties of Popular Evangelical Music
Read: Sullivan (on OAKS)

HOW POPULAR CULTURE CREATES THE RELIGIOUS

Fri 2/15: Celebrities as Popular Gods
Read: Forbes 313-325

Mon 2/18: Screening of *Trekkies*
Paper #1 Due in Class

Wed 2/20: Fandom as Church: The Case of *Star Trek*
Read: Forbes 223-238

Fri 2/22: Popular Rituals: The Case of Sports
Read: Forbes 288-307; (recommended: Mazur 120-139)

Mon 2/25: New Rituals: The Case of Burning Man
Read: Mazur 154-173

Wed 2/27: Mid-term Review and Catch-Up Discussion

Fri 3/1: Midterm exam

Mon 3/4: Shopping as Sacred
Read: Forbes 242-257

Wed 3/6: Virtually Sacred Part I: Social Media
Read: Mazur 219-236

Thurs 3/7 at 3:30: Extra Credit opportunity—Lecture on Cyber Lamas

Fri 3/8: Virtually Sacred Part II: Meditation Apps (Special Guest: Dr. Gregory Grieve)
Read: Forbes 195-211

Mon 3/11: Superheroes as Popular Myths (Special Guest: Sam Page)
Read: Forbes 33-47

Wed 3/13: Kids' Cartoon as Popular Myths
Read: Forbes 71-82

Fri 3/15: Myth, Ritual and the Sacred in Disney World
Read: Mazur 307-321; Forbes 351-367

SPRING BREAK

Mon 3/25: Morality in *The Simpsons*
Read: Mazur 237-254

Wed 3/27: Morality in Cop Shows
Read: Mazur 179-196

Fri 3/29: Paper Workshop
Outline of Paper #2 Due in Class

BLURRING THE BOUNDARIES I: FOOD

Mon 4/1: Southern Rituals: The Case of Barbecue
Read: Mazur 108-119

Wed 4/3: Vegetarianism as Religion
Read: Zeller (on OAKS)

Fri 4/5: Thinness as Religion
Read: Forbes 262-282

BLURRING THE BOUNDARIES II: MUSIC

Mon 4/8: Sacred Music: From Bach to the Blues to The Dead
Read: Laderman (on OAKS)
Paper #2 Due in Class

Wed 4/10: From African Polyrhythm to Hip-Hop Culture
Read: Sylvan (on OAKS); Mazur 291-306; (recommended: Forbes 390-408)

Fri 4/12: Heavy Metal
Read: Forbes 100-116

Mon 4/15: Bruce Springsteen as American Prophet
Read: Mazur 20-40

Wed 4/17: Catch-up discussion and Listening Party

Conclusions

Fri 4/19: Applying what we've learned
Read: Class Choice!

Mon 4/22: **Student Presentations**

Tues 4/23: Final Discussion and Exam Review

Sat 4/27 9am-11am: Final Exam

Note: 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.

A good resource for how to write a religious studies paper:
<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/religious-studies/>

*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.*