

## RELS 210 Theories of Religion (Spring 2019)

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*There is a sense in which every man's Religion is unique, separate, and sui generis. At the same time, in every man, Religion in its essence is one and the same thing.* – Louis Jordan (1905)

*Religion is solely the creation of the scholar's study. It is created for the scholar's analytic purposes by his imaginative acts of comparison and generalization. Religion has no independent existence apart from the academy. For this reason, the student of religion must be relentlessly self-conscious.* – Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion* (1982)

*When a thing ceases to be a subject of controversy, it ceases to be a subject of interest.*

– William Hazlitt (1830)

### Course Description

What is “religion?” How do you know, and why do you care? Is every human being a religious being—*homo religiosus*? What stereotypes do Americans have about religions and where do they come from? Is participation in a religion necessary for being able to understand it? Or is objectivity necessary in order to avoid religious bias? Is anything or everything sacred? Or is one person's sacred another person's profane? How can you study those religious practices and ideas with which you personally disagree?

These and other questions will not be answered definitively but they will be explored in this class, which will introduce you to some of the leading scholars who have engaged them. As a survey of theories and methods, the course will examine some of the controversial debates that have animated the discipline, such as the insider/outsider problem, explanations for the origins of religion, the value of description versus explanations for religion, the manner in which human communities authorize systems of behavior, and religion's psychological, social, and political functions. As we move through this course it is hoped that we will learn to articulate and pursue our questions with greater intellectual precision, complexity, and depth. At the end of the course, you will have gained a working knowledge of the theoretical tools used by scholars who analyze and compare religions. We will also develop an awareness of how our own presuppositions—as well as those of the scholars we read—inform the way in which religion is studied and understood. Although we will make an effort to apply each theory to various religious phenomena, ranging from Cherokee prayers to Buddhist beliefs, from Pentecostal preachers to New Age shamans, this course is **not** a survey of specific religions, but a “meta-course” about the academic study of religion.

### Course Goals and Student Learning Outcomes

1. To become familiar with the development of the discipline of religious studies by surveying some of its most provocative theories about the nature, function, and value of religion
2. To evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of individual theories, grasp the fundamental assumptions on which each theory depends, and apply each theory to specific data
3. To foster a critical and self-conscious awareness of how scholars' presuppositions and biases (including your own) have informed the way in which religion is understood
4. To demonstrate effective writing skills with the ability to craft an argument in defense of a thesis statement using and analyzing supporting evidence from primary & secondary sources
5. To prepare students to succeed in 200- and 300-level classes in the RELS department at CofC.

This course satisfies the **General Education Student Learning Outcomes:**

1) Students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted, or valued in various disciplines of human culture; 2) Students examine relevant primary sources materials as understood by the discipline and interpret the material in written assignments. Both of these two General Education SLO will be demonstrated on the three-page **essay #3** due on **4/12** (worth 7.5% of the overall grade).

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### Course Requirements

This course presumes no previous study of specific religions or coursework in RELS. However, this course does require a willingness to read challenging theoretical and methodological articles by scholars of religion and to engage in conversation and writing about these required readings.

There is one **Required Text** available for purchase at the CofC Barnes and Noble Bookstore:

- ***Stereotyping Religion: Critiquing Clichés***, edited by Brad Stoddard & Craig Martin (2017)
- There are also **required Electronic Readings (ER#1-42)** available on **OAKS** under **RELS 210**, which registered students can access after they login to **MyCharleston** (<http://my.cofc.edu>). Please **print out each article, put it in a course binder** and **bring it to class** on the day that it will be discussed.

We pay close attention to these **ER** readings and spend much time in class “unpacking” their content.

- **Completion of required reading assignments prior to class**

You should read the assignment *before* we review and discuss it in class. This will help you understand lectures in class, absorb new ideas, and participate in class discussions and debates in an informed way.

- **Regular attendance and civil conduct code**

There will be **4** allowed absences; **5 or more** absences will negatively affect your grade. After **9** absences, you will be **dropped** from the course and earn a **WA grade**. If you have a legitimate excuse (illness, emergency) please contact the **Absence Memo Office** in the Lightsey Center, Suite 101, to document the reason for your absence. You are responsible for making up any absences; please ask a classmate for any notes on missed classes before you approach me with questions about missed content. Students are expected to conform to the guidelines put forth in the CofC ***Student Handbook***, which covers **principles of civil conduct** expected in the classroom including: *Do not come in to class late or leave early. And never leave during class unless you absolutely must; leaving for a short break and then returning is unacceptable. And turn off cell phones, pagers and other electronic devices before class. Visible and noisy signs of restlessness are disruptive to others.*

- **Weekly Reflection Cards and Participation in Class Discussion (25% of grade)**

Every class day marked **RC#1-15** you are to bring to class a thoughtful written reflection and/or question related to the assigned reading for that week. The reflection or question should be written on a 3x5 or 5x7 card and be based on an issue that you have found puzzling, thought provoking, or interesting. Questions should not simply ask for factual information but raise questions of interpretation, while your reflections should explore significant issues or express concerns about the topic that are important to you.

**Grades for RC** are: **+** (100); **√+** (90); **√** (80); **√-** (75); and **-** (70)

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, responding to others, and offering your own ideas about the reading assignments or your interpretation of the film clips is an important part of this course.

- **Midterm on 2/25 (15% of grade) and Final Exam on 4/26 (20%) (= 35% of total grade)**

The two exams will consist of explanations of key passages from theorists, short answer questions, and take-home essays. If you miss an exam and provide a legitimate excuse, I do give makeup tests, but they are harder than the original tests. An unexcused missed exam counts as a **0**.

- **Term Paper of 6 pages (20% of grade)**

This paper will be based upon a theoretical analysis of a documentary film, either *Devil's Playground* (2002) or *Jesus Camp* (2004). It is due on **3/15**.

- **3 Short Essays** due on **1/25 (5%)**, on **2/15 (7.5%)** and on **4/12 (7.5%) (20% of total grade)**

The 3 essays will be based upon prompts found on the syllabus. Each essay will require that you analyze the text or film closely, formulate an interpretation, and express it concisely in less than 2 or 3 pages.

<b>Grading Scale:</b>	A	96-93	(4.0)	B-	82-80	(2.7)	D+	69-67	(1.3)	
	A-	92-90	(3.7)	C+	79-77	(2.3)	D	66-63	(1.0)	
	B+	89-87	(3.3)	C	76-73	(2.0)	D-	62-60	(.70)	
	A+	100-97	(4.0)	B	86-83	(3.0)	C-	72-70	(1.7)	F

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### Academic Integrity and Course Resources

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 due to academic dishonesty.

I encourage you to utilize the academic support services offered by the **Center for Student Learning** for assistance in study strategies and essay writing consultation. Students of all abilities have become more successful using these programs through their academic career and the services are available to you at no additional cost. For more information on the Center for Student Learning: <http://csl.cofc.edu>

**SNAP students:** If you have a disability that qualifies you for academic accommodation, please provide me with a letter from the Center for Disability Services at the beginning of the semester. For more information on the SNAP program, see: <http://disabilityservices.cofc.edu>

### Lecture Topics, Reading Assignments, and Abbreviations

The following schedule of topics (with the required readings in parentheses) is provisional, but the writing assignments are due in class on the day designated. **Abbreviations:** **ER#1** refers to the first **E**lectronic **R**eadings assignment available on OAKS in pdf format; **RC#1** refers to when the first **R**eflection **C**ard is due in response to the reading assigned for that class.

#### I. Locating “Religion” & Scholars of Religion: What is Religious Studies?

**1/9 Introduction to the Themes of the Class**  
(Review syllabus and course requirements)

**1/11 The Blind Men & the Elephant Parable: Plural & Partial Perspectives on Religion**  
(ER#1-3: “Blind Men & Elephant,” “Elephant in the Dark,” & “Interpretive Frames”) **RC#1 due**  
**Discussion topics:** In ER#1-3 each author mentions the parable of the blind men and the elephant, but they interpret its religious meaning (or meaning for religious studies) differently. What are the parable’s meanings? If the elephant is understood as a metaphor for religion, what does this assume about the nature of religion? Can religion be understood holistically? If so, who isn’t “blind” but has the holistic vision that we can trust?

**1/14 Theory as a Tool and Introducing the Insider/Outsider Dilemma**  
(ER#4-5: “Why Theory?” and “Fessing Up in Theory”)  
**Discussion topics:** Does the Gang of Four song “Why Theory?” (analyzed in ER#4) help us better understand the value of theory for comparing religions? What does Jaffee mean (in ER#5): “There is no theory-free study of anything?” How might this relate to the parable about the blind men and the elephant? Why does he insist that he himself is not an “authentic” interpreter of Judaism even though he is an observant Jew?

**1/16 Locating Scholars of Religion: Does a Scholar’s Identity Matter?**  
(ER#6: “Identity and the Work of the Scholar of Religion”)  
**Discussion topics:** How does concern about “authenticity” inform Cabezón’s analysis of scholars’ identities and authority (in ER#6)? Do you agree with Cabezón that no aspect of *anyone’s* identity privileges or undermines their authority as a scholar? To whom do scholars of religion answer: insiders or outsiders?

**1/18 Getting Inside the Heads of Others: Empathy and Objectivity**  
(ER#7: “Other Scholars Myths: The Hunter and the Sage”) **RC#2 due in class**  
**Discussion topics:** Doniger presents an Indian myth about a hunter and a sage, and she suggests that this story can be interpreted as a metaphor for scholars of religion. What does she mean when she writes: “The hunting sage is my

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idea of the right sort of historian of religion?” Should scholars use both their “heads” and their “hearts” in their scholarship? Why does she criticize scholars who study others’ myths in order to promote them as “true stories?” Is objectivity a desirable goal for the student of other religions or is it a “myth” that should be abandoned?

**1/21 MLK holiday—no class!**

**1/23 Cultural and Historical Perspectives on the Study of Religion**

(*Stereotyping Religion* chapter 1: “Religions are Belief Systems;” on OAKS as ER#8)

**Discussion topics:** Why is “Belief” such a problematic category for understanding all religions?

What features of the Protestant Reformation in Europe have endured in modern scholarship in Religious Studies?

How do various religions in America illustrate how problematic it is to interpret them as “belief systems?”

**1/25 Critiquing Our Cliché about Religion as a “Belief System”**

(ER#9: “Belief”)

**Essay topic 1:** Why is “belief” or “belief systems” such a problematic category for classifying religions? According to Lopez (in ER #9), how has “belief” (understood as an inner state of mind in Christian history) served as a “surrogate” for material interests? Does the “ideology of belief” distort how we study and understand non-Christian religions, such as Buddhism?

## II. Religion Explained: Religion as Reducible to Something Else

**1/28 Frazer on Religion, the Progress of Reason, & the Survival of “Their” Magic**

(ER#10-11: “Sympathetic Magic” and “Body Ritual of the Nacirema”) **RC #3 due**

**Discussion topics:** Does Frazer subscribe to an “ideology of belief” when he makes distinctions between magic, science and religion? Does his characterization of magic, science, and religion help us understand better their essential differences, or do these categories overlap in practice? Are the “rituals” and “magic” of the so-called “Nacirema” accurately described? How does ER#11 help us better grasp the challenge of studying other religions?

**1/30 A CofC RELS Student Provides a Critique of Frazer after Studying Cherokee Songs**

(ER#12: “Songs of Power and Appeasement”; optional: “Trump’s Magical Appeal”)

**Discussion topics:** Are Frazer’s distinctions between magic, science and religion tenable when applied to Cherokee songs? Drawing upon Frazer’s insight that the human mind organizes experiences by similarity and contact, can you imagine how scholars of comparative religion might also be engaged in “magical thinking” in their scholarship?

**2/1 “Our” Magic: Is There Magic in Comparing Religions?**

(ER#13: “In Comparison a Magic Dwells”) **RC #4 due**

**Discussion topics:** How has the “law of association” influenced western thinking about memory, magic, and comparison in the “human sciences?” Is it possible to compare religions or religious themes without relying on the “magical thinking” that identifies and then explains some “similarities” between religions? Do you see how your own desire to understand an unfamiliar religion in terms of a more familiar religion fits Frazer’s model of “magic?”

**2/4 Freud on Nature & God the Father: Is Religion a Psychological Projection?**

(ER#14: *The Future of an Illusion*, pt. I) Clips from extra scenes in *Jesus Camp*

**Discussion topics:** What does Freud mean when he says that religion is an “illusion” and the “universal obsessional neurosis of humanity?” Is your own interest in the study of religion informed by “wish fulfillment?”

**2/6 Freud on Religion as Wish Fulfillment: Is Religion an Irrational Illusion?**

(ER#15-16: *The Future of an Illusion*, pt. II; “Clinging to God & Guns, Obama & Freud”)

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### 2/8 Critiquing a Common Cliché of the New Atheists: Is Religion Really B.S?

(*Stereotyping Religion* chapter 10: “Religion is Bullshit”) **RC#5 due** Clips from film *Religulous*

**Discussion topics:** Do you recognize the student described at the outset of this article as “Mr. Bullshit?” Did King convince you that the desire to correct Mr. Bullshit’s claim is itself B.S.? How do scholars like Frazer and Freud fit different forms of skepticism about religion and its moral value? In what ways does Bill Maher’s film *Religulous* (which rhymes with “ridiculous”) present stereotypical views of religious “beliefs” or religion as B.S?

### 2/11 Durkheim on the Soul of Religion is Society

(ER#17-18: *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*; “Religious Sociology”)

**Discussion topics:** What makes something “sacred” according to Durkheim? Does the sacred have any intrinsic quality that sets it apart as special? Using Durkheim’s analysis of totemism, would the American flag serve as the “totem” for America today?

### 2/13 Durkheim on Seeing the Social with a Religious Eye

(ER #19-20: “Society as Sacred” and “Religious Sentiment at the Present Time;” optional: “Is Trumpism a religion?”)

**Discussion topics:** Does “Clyde the Cougar” serve as our “totemic emblem” at CofC sporting events? When, if ever, have you felt “Cougar Pride?” Does Durkheim’s theory of the sacred help you better understand moments of self-transcendence while part of a large crowd? If religion serves the function of upholding social norms, then what would society be like without religion? Does religion promote social cohesion or can it be socially disruptive?

### 2/15 The Collective Experience of Ecstatic Excitement: Grateful Deadheads on Tour

(ER#21: “Collective Effervescence”) Clips from *Tie-Dyed: Rock 'n' Rolls Most Dedicated Fans*

**2<sup>nd</sup> short essay due:** The documentary *Tie-Dyed* introduces viewers to the tie-dyed, die-hard fans of the jam band the Grateful Dead. Known as “Deadheads” these fans share a strong sense of family and community. Some Deadheads describe their community as a “church;” many of them also describe shared ecstatic experiences while listening and dancing to the music, variously described as “magic,” “group-mind,” and experiencing the “zone.” *Drawing upon Durkheim’s theory of religion, briefly describe his notion of “collective effervescence” and then apply it to the film. Does Durkheim’s collective effervescence adequately describe and explain their experiences? Can you discern a strong “sacred” vs. “profane” distinction in Deadhead beliefs, rituals, or discourse in the parking lot? Are Deadheads really worshipping themselves as a sacred “clan” or “tribe?”*

### 2/18 Victor Turner on Rites of Passage: Living on the Liminal Edge

(ER#22: “The Ritual Process”)

**Discussion topics:** What are some of the “liminal” states of reversal identified by Turner? How might his interpretation of the ritual process be applied to Deadheads? Does this RELS 210 class (or any other RELS courses that you’ve taken) foster an experience of liminality and/or *communitas*?

### 2/20 Mary Douglas on Religion, Purity & Pollution: Religion as a Symbolic System

(ER#23: “The Bounds of Hierarchy: Mary Douglas”) **RC#6.** Clips from *A Life Apart*

**Discussion topics:** How does reading Douglas help you better understand your own ideas about “dirt” or what is gross, contagious, or polluting? Does she provide a convincing critique of earlier scholars like Frazer, Freud, and Durkheim who wrote about religion or magic in “primitive” societies? What similarities can you detect between the theories and methods used by Turner and Douglas, both of whom are trained as anthropologists?

### 2/22 Peter Berger on Religion’s Role in the Social Construction of Reality

(ER#24: “The Sacred Canopy”) Clips from *The Truman Show*

**Discussion topics:** How might we apply Berger’s explanation of social legitimation to interpret “reality” TV shows?

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Does an analysis of the process of religious legitimation demystify (or de-legitimize) religion? Imagine that there were only one authorized religion in the US; how might our society's "plausibility structure" be strengthened?

**2/25 Midterm Exam** (Study Review Sheet for midterm exam, bring take-home essay to class)

### III. Religion Revealed: Religion as *Sui Genesis*, Utterly Unique and Autonomous

**2/27 William James on the Varieties of Religious Experience**

(ER#25: Selections from *The Varieties of Religious Experience*)

**Discussion topics:** What kinds of Christianity illustrate James' generalizations about the "healthy-minded" and "sick-minded" religious temperaments? Does James' focus on private, personal and extraordinary religious experiences provide a sound basis for critique of scholars like Durkheim, Douglas, and Berger, who focus on the social, the public, and the ordinary? Why would James' approach to religious experience appeal to people who describe themselves as "spiritual but not religious?"

**3/1 Convicted by the Holy Spirit: The Role of Rhetoric in Converting to the Word**

(ER#26: "Speaking is Believing") **RC#7**

**Discussion topics:** How does Harding differ from James in her understanding of religious conversion? How formative is language (or rhetoric) in shaping religious experiences and expression? Is Harding an "insider" or an "outsider" in relation to her fundamentalist subjects? Or does her ethnography undermine this clear distinction? How do you respond to door-to-door proselytizers and their attempt to refashion yourself in their own image?

**3/4 Eliade on Sacred Space and Place: Unveiling the Sacred in the World**

(ER#27: "When the Sacred Manifests Itself")

**Discussion topics:** How does Eliade's discussion of the sacred differ from earlier scholars like Durkheim, Freud, or Douglas? What can Eliade teach us about how to recognize sacred space? How does the sacred provide orientation in the world? Speculate on why nostalgia for origins and the primitive archaic is such a powerful force in Eliade's work; what is the effect of this nostalgia on his evaluation of history?

**3/6 Eliade's Religious Humanism: Is man really *homo religiosus*? What about women?**

(ER#28-29: "New Humanism;" "Feminist Anthropology & Gendering Religious Studies") **RC#8**

**Discussion topics:** Who is *homo religiosus*? How does Eliade's "creative hermeneutics" reveal *homo religiosus* and promote a new humanism? Why does Shaw (in ER#29) claim that "the *sui generis* approach [to religion that Eliade champions] stands in contradictory relationship to the premises of feminist scholarship?" Is a feminized *homo religiosus* (*femina religiosa*) a worthwhile solution? What is constructive about the "gendering of religious studies?"

**3/8 Writing the Term Paper**

(Handout on "Writing About Religion") **Term paper prospectus due**

**3/11 Critiquing a Cliché about Religion: Religion is Ultimately About Transcendence**

(*Stereotyping Religion* chapter 4: "Religion Concerns the Transcendent") **RC#9**

**Discussion topics:** Is the appeal to the "transcendent" dimension of religion only effective because it is so vague? What kind of religions or specific religious phenomena serve as exceptions to the claim that "transcendence" is the highest common denominator of all religions? If one rejects the idea (advanced most effectively by Eliade) that the essence of religion is an experience of transcendence, then what makes the discipline of religious studies distinctive, or set apart as special from other humanities and social science disciplines?

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**3/13 Critiquing Another Cliché about Religion: “Everyone in America Has a Faith”**  
(*Stereotyping Religion* chapter 9: “Everyone Has a Faith”)

**3/15 Theorizing about Films: *Jesus Camp* and *Devil’s Playground***

**Term paper due in class:** *Drawing upon the theories of religion that we’ve studied this semester, pick two theories and apply them to one of the following two documentary films: “Jesus Camp” or “Devil’s Playground.” You should explain your choice of the two theories in terms of what you see as the most important “lenses” for interpreting, re-describing, and explaining the religious phenomena found in “Jesus Camp” or “Devil’s Playground.”*

**3/18-22 Spring Break!**

### **IV. Re-describing and Reinterpreting Religion: Race & Gender, Myth, Ritual & “Cults”**

**3/25 Reconsidering the Dichotomy between “Primitive” vs. Civilized” Religion**  
(ER#30: “Primitive/Civilized: The Locus of a Problem”)

**Discussion topics:** How did images and rhetoric about “the primitive” inform the representation of indigenous peoples in the “New World” of America? What does Long mean by his call to demythologize the “symbol of civilization?” What difficulties emerge in attempting to study a religious tradition before colonial contact? Is this even a possible goal, and, if so, what would a study entail in such a pursuit?

**3/27 Reconsidering African-American Religion in order to Rethink RELS as a Discipline**  
(ER#31: “Perspectives for a Study of Afro-American Religion in the US”)

**Discussion topics:** According to Long, why does black religion need to be analyzed as its own specific religion? How did the land of Africa become a religious image in African-American religion? Do these two articles by Long convince you that the category of “religion” is an invention that emerges from conquest of the “Other?”

**3/29 The Feminist Method and the Critique of Androcentrism**  
(ER#32: “Here I Stand: Feminism as Academic Method and as Social Vision”) **RC#10**

**Discussion topics:** How might scholars replace an androcentric model of religious humanity with an androgynous one? Why does this feminist author (Gross in ER#33) insist that her method makes the history of religions approach inseparable from the practice of theology? Does her approach contradict Shaw’s claim (in ER#29) that feminist scholarship is incompatible with the *sui generis* approach to religions? In what ways does the feminist critique draw upon the social constructivist theory articulated by Berger (in ER#24)?

**4/1 Myths as Mirrors and Lenses for Scholars of Religion**  
(ER#33: Myths as Microscopes and Telescopes”) **RC#11**

**Discussion topics:** Do you agree with Doniger that the purpose of myths is to challenge us to see our lives differently or do myths demand that we accept their view of reality? How do you assess her claim that “We are always in danger of drawing our own eye, for we depict our own vision of the world when we think we are depicting the world; often when we think we are studying an other we are really studying ourselves through the narrative of the other.” Would scholars like Long and Gross agree with this statement?

**4/3 Myths as Maps for Utopian and Locative Religions**  
(ER#34: “Map is Not Territory”)

**Discussion topics:** ER#35 opens with Smith contrasting the roles of the theologian and the historian; what are the salient differences? Why does Smith value “incongruity” so highly? How does an awareness of incongruity in sacred narratives (e.g. in the story of Hainuwele) restore the humanity of the “primitive” or “noble savage?” What are some

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good religious examples of a “utopian” vs. a “locative” map? What are we to conclude about the statement: “map is not territory, but maps are all that we possess?”

### 4/5 **Ritual as Imaginative Work: Bear Hunting Rituals**

(ER#35: “The Bare Facts of Ritual”)

**Discussion topics:** Do you find Smith’s theory convincing that a sacred place serves as a “focusing lens” of values, a place of clarification of what is significant? Do you agree that “there is nothing inherently sacred or profane” or that “there is nothing sacred in itself, only things sacred in relation?” If ritual is a strategy of choice that struggles with incongruity, then where is the “magic” found in hunting rituals? How can we differentiate between this magic and the “sympathetic magic” of Frazer? Are both theories based on the “ideology of belief?”

### 4/8 **New Age Bears: Playful Rituals or “Fictive” Religion?**

(ER#36: “Parashamanism”) **RC#12**

**Discussion topics:** According to Grimes, what makes New Age shamanism or “parashamanism” a “fictive” religion? What does he mean by “fictive?” Is it fair to consider rituals as performances based on “serious play” (e.g. eating wafers and drinking wine *as if* they were the body and blood of Christ)?

### 4/10 **Teddy Bears and Grizzly Bears in Alaska**

(ER#37: Notes on Werner Herzog’s film *Grizzly Man*) Clips from the film *Grizzly Man*

### 4/12 **Please Don’t Squeeze the Shaman!**

(ER#38: “Wanting to be Indian”) Film: *White Shamans, Plastic Medicine Men*

**3<sup>rd</sup> essay due:** How useful is Grime’s category of “fictive” religion for identifying the innovative features of parashamanism? Drawing upon Smith’s chapter the “Bare Facts of Ritual,” do the bears featured in traditional Siberian rituals seem “fictive” too? Are you persuaded by Johnson’s ethical critique (in ER#38) that the appropriation of Native American rituals by white Americans is exploitative? Or would you defend the right of New Age practitioners to borrow Native American symbols and practice some version of their rituals?

### 4/15 **Indian Gurus and Western Seekers in the Southwest: Kumaré, a “Virtual Oriental Monk”**

(ER #39: “Introduction” to *Virtual Orientalism*) **RC#13**

Film in class: *Kumare: the True Story of a False Prophet* part I (dir. by Vikram Gandhi, 2011)

### 4/17 **The Ethics of Ethnography: Engaging Folks with Religious Experiences**

(ER #40: “Doing Religious Studies with your Whole Body”)

Film in class: *Kumare* part II

### 4/19 **Making the Strange Familiar: Religious “Cults” in America**

(ER #41-42: “The Devil in Mr. Jones” and “Religious Studies and ‘Heaven’s Gate’”—**RC#14**)

**Discussion topics:** How successful is Smith in making the foreign features of Jonestown seem more familiar? Does the comparative method used by Smith and Muesse, which interprets the “cult-like” behavior at Jonestown and Heaven’s Gate as intelligible by relating it to well-known religious behavior, make it easier to understand but even more difficult to judge? What is the proper balance between empathy and critical judgment for the scholar?

### 4/22 **Critiquing Another Cliché about Religion (and especially “Cults”): “Religion is Violent”**

(*Stereotyping Religion*, chapter 2: “Religions are Intrinsically Violent”) **RC#15** *Religulous* clips

### 4/23 **Final Review/Makeup Class**

4/26 (Friday) **Final Exam @ 8:00 am!**

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### SOURCES FOR THE ELECTRONIC READINGS FOUND ON OAKS

Please make use of this list of ER readings when you cite any of these sources for your essays or term paper.

1. John Godfrey Saxe, "The Blind Men and the Elephant" in *Communications, the Transfer of Meaning* by Don Fabun. New York: Macmillan, 1968, p. 13.
2. Catherine L. Albanese, "An Elephant in the Dark" from *American Religions and Religion*. 3rd ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1999, pp. 1-4.
3. William Paden, "Preface" and "Interpretive Frames" from *Interpreting the Sacred: Ways of Viewing Religion*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992, pp. ix-14.
4. Jeffrey Nealon and Susan Searls Giroux, "Why Theory?" from *The Theory Toolbox*, 2nd edition. Lanham, UK: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2012, pp. 1-8.
5. Martin S. Jaffee, "Fessing Up in Theory: On Professing and Confessing in the Religious Studies Classroom," from *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion* ed. by Russell McCutcheon. New York: Cassell 1999, pp. 274-286.
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7. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, "Other Scholars' Myths: The Hunter and the Sage" from *Other Peoples' Myths: The Cave of Echoes* New York: Macmillan, 1988, pp. 7-24.
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