

RE220 Religion and Popular Culture, Fall 2011

Department of Religion and Culture
WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY

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Class: Tue/Thur 2:30-3:50pm, DAWB 2-104

Course Description

The relationships between religion and popular culture are numerous, diverse, sometimes problematic and sometimes controversial. RE220 uses a range of disciplinary perspectives to examine the ways religious themes, symbols, icons and language are used in expressions of popular culture and also how religion itself is influenced by popular culture. Using the 4-part typology found in Forbes' *Religion and Popular Culture in America* (2005), this course will survey several kinds of interactions between religion and popular culture from diverse cultural and religious examples and across many media platforms and forms of popular culture. RE220 will challenge students to read popular culture "texts" through a critical lens that takes into account issues such as orientalism, appropriation, and racial, gendered, and sexual identity.

This course will ask: what is the function of religion when it shows up in popular culture? How has popular culture shaped religion? How do people use popular culture like religion to make meaning in their lives? What, indeed, is religion and what is popular culture? Are there ethical implications when western popular and consumer culture adopts, parodies or even ridicules religion? How can an interrogation of this topic lead to a greater understanding of religion and religious people, of secular society and of popular culture itself?

Course Texts and Online Learning Tools:

Forbes, Bruce David, and Jeffrey H. Mahan. *Religion and Popular Culture in America*. Rev. ed. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2005.

MacDonald, Sarah. *Holy Cow: An Indian Adventure*. New York: Broadway Books, 2002.

*** Students will be expected to regularly check Mylearningspace for course content. Here I will post links to websites (that may include, for instance, videos, music, art, blogs), electronic readings and other materials.

Assignments

Pop reading quizzes: 4x 5% = 20%

There will be four short unannounced quizzes administered throughout the term and written in class. Quizzes are to ensure that students do not fall behind on readings and to discourage absenteeism.

Mid-term exam: 20% (written in class Thursday, October 20)

The mid-term will be on all readings and in-class material (lectures, films, guest speakers, etc) up until October 20.

Pop culture analyses 2 x 15 = 30%

Students will complete 2 assignments throughout the term. For each assignment students will analyze an example of religion and popular culture using Forbes' typology and address critical issues raised in class. Each assignment should be about 1200-1400 words (4-5 pages) long, submitted electronically using *Mylearningspace*.

1. Pop Culture Analysis #1: *Little Mosque on the Prairie* is due in your dropbox Sunday, October 9 by 11:59pm.
2. Pop Culture Analysis #2: Students may choose a topic. This assignment is due in your dropbox Sunday, November 27 by 11:59pm.

Final exam: 30%

The final is cumulative and will test students on all readings and lecture material.

LECTURE AND READING SCHEDULE

Section 1: Thinkers, Theories and Trajectories

<p>Week 1 Sept 13</p> <p>Sept 15</p>	<p>INTRODUCTION, HISTORICAL INTERSECTIONS OF RELIGION & POPULAR CULTURE</p> <p>Readings: none</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forbes, Bruce David. "Introduction" in <i>Religion and Popular Culture in America</i> • McCutcheon, Russell T. "What is the Study of Religion?" (p1-6) and "What's in a Name?" (p7-14).
<p>Week 2 Sept 20</p>	<p>THE VARIOUS RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE RELIGIOUS & THE POPULAR</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Michael J. Gilmour. "Arcade Fire's Parodic Bible." <i>Journal of Religion and Popular Culture</i> Volume 21: Special Edition – Religion and Popular Culture in Canada (2009). (Journal of Religion & Popular Culture articles are available online through Trellis) • Listen: Arcade Fire's <i>Neon Bible</i>. Specific tracks to make note of: "Neon Bible"; "The

Sept 22	<p>Well and the Lighthouse”; “Intervention” “(Antichrist Television Blues)”; “Keep the Car Running”.</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chidester, David. “The Church of Baseball, the Fetish of Coca-Cola, and the Potlatch of Rock ‘n’ Roll” in <i>Religion and Popular Culture in America</i>.
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Section 2: Working Through Forbes’ & Mahan’s Theory

<p>Week 3 Sept 27</p> <p>Sept 29</p>	<p>THE MONOMYTH (RELIGION IN POPULAR CULTURE)</p>
	<p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> McCutcheon, Russell T. “Myth” Read the Wikipedia entry for Joseph Campbell’s monomyth theory (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Campbell#Monomyth) Surf the web: Search for film clips on Youtube.com of <i>Star Wars</i>. <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Iwamura, Jane Naomi. “The Oriental Monk in American Popular Cinema” in <i>Religion and Popular Culture in America</i>. http://english.emory.edu/Bahri/Orientalism.html (this is a brief overview of Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism)
<p>Week 4 Oct 4</p> <p>Oct 6</p> <p>PAPER #1 DUE OCT 9</p>	<p>THE USE OF POP CULTURE BY RELIGIONS (POPULAR CULTURE IN RELIGION)</p>
	<p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Romanowski, William D. “Evangelicals and Popular Music: The Contemporary Christian Music Industry” in <i>Religion and Popular Culture in America</i>, p103-122. Start reading Sarah MacDonald’s <i>Holy Cow</i> (Chapters 1-2) <p>Guest Speaker: Claire Morrison</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Zine, Jasmin; Taylor, Lisa K.; Davis, Hilary E. “An Interview with Zarqa Nawaz.” <i>Intercultural Education</i>; v18 n4 p379-382 Oct 2007. <i>Holy Cow</i> (Chapters 3-4)
<p>Week 5 Oct 11</p> <p>Oct 13</p>	<p>THE AUTHENTIC SWING (POPULAR CULTURE AS RELIGION)</p>
	<p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Holy Cow</i> (chapters 5-6) Recommended: We will be talking about the Hindu text <i>The Bhagavad Gita</i> this week, particularly the dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna. You may want to spend some time familiarizing yourself with this story. You can do that here: http://www.bhagavad-gita.org/ <p>In class film: <i>The Legend of Bagger Vance</i></p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Price, Joseph L. “An American Apotheosis: Sports as Popular Religion” in <i>Religion and Popular Culture in America</i> “Holy hockey sticks!” http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/article718919.ece

<p>Week 6 Oct 18</p> <p>Oct 20</p>	<p>POP MUSIC'S MORAL IMPERATIVE (RELIGION & POPULAR CULTURE IN DIALOGUE)</p> <p><i>Readings:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pinn, Anthony. "Rap Music and its Message: On Interpreting the Contact between Religion and Popular Culture" in <i>Religion and Popular Culture in America</i>. • <i>Holy Cow</i> (chapters 7-8) <p style="text-align: center;">MID-TERM EXAM (IN CLASS)</p>

Section 3: Critical Issues: Nationalism, orientalism, appropriation, decolonization, identity politics (representing race, gender, sexuality), globalization, transnationalism and diaspora.

<p>Week 7 Oct 25</p> <p>Oct 27</p>	<p>HINDUISM IN INDIAN AND WESTERN POPULAR CULTURE</p> <p><i>Readings:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • McLain, Karlina. "Sequencing the Tales of Goddess Durga" in <i>India's Immortal Comic Books: Gods, Kings, and Other Heroes</i>. Indiana University Press: Bloomington. 2009. pp87-113. • <i>Holy Cow</i> (chapters 9-10) <p><i>Readings:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Holy Cow</i> (chapters 11-12)
<p>Week 8 Nov 1</p> <p>Nov 3</p>	<p>WESTERN COUNTERCULTURE</p> <p><i>Readings:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The Hare Krsna Mantra: 'There's Nothing Higher': A 1982 Interview with George Harrison." You can read this online at http://members.fortunecity.com/pattiboyd/linx/divine/welcome.html • <i>Holy Cow</i> (chapters 13-14) <p><i>Readings:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pike, Sarah M. "Desert Goddesses and Apocalyptic Art: Making Sacred Space at the Burning Man Festival" • <i>Holy Cow</i> (chapters 15-16)
<p>Week 9 Nov 8</p> <p>Nov 10</p>	<p>THE DISNEYIFICATION OF RELIGION</p> <p><i>Readings:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pinsky, Mark I. <i>The Gospel According to Disney: Faith, Trust and Pixie Dust</i>. • Finish <i>Holy Cow</i> <p><i>Readings:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long, Carolyn Morrow. "Perceptions of New Orleans Voodoo: Sin, Fraud, Entertainment, and Religion," <i>Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions</i>, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 86-101, Oct 2002.

<p>Week 10 Nov 15</p> <p>Nov 17</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">THE JOHNNY CASH HYMNAL</p> <p>Guest Lecture: Ryan Weston</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reed, Teresa L. <i>The Holy Profane: Religion in Black Popular Music</i>: "Introduction" (1-14). <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clapp, Rodney. P 43-62 in <i>Johnny Cash and the Great American Contradiction: Christianity</i>.
<p>Week 11 Nov 22</p> <p>Nov 24</p> <p>Paper #2 due Nov 27</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">MYTHOLOGIZING CANADA</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Francis, Daniel. "The Ideology of the Canoe: The Myth of Wilderness" in <i>National Dreams: Myth, Memory, and Canadian History</i> (1997) (available electronically through Trellis) <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MacLennan, JM and John Moffat. "An Island View Of The World: Insularity In The Popular Writing Of Stompin' Tom Connors" in <i>The Rhetoric of Canadian Writing</i>, edited by Conny Steenman-Marcuse. Rodopi: New York. 2002.
<p>Week 12 Nov 29</p> <p>Dec 1</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">THE POLITICS OF APPROPRIATION / WRAP UP</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Root, Deborah. "'White Indians': Appropriation and the Politics of Display" in <i>Borrowed Power: Essays on Cultural Appropriation</i>, edited by Bruce Ziff and Pratima V. Rao. Rutgers University Press: New Jersey. 1997. (225-233). <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conclusion of Forbes. <i>Religion and Popular Culture in America</i>

CALENDAR DATES, SERVICES AND REGULATIONS

September 18: Last day to drop or change courses with no tuition charge

September 25: Final day to add a course
Final day to drop courses at 10 percent tuition charge

November 7: Final day to drop a course without failure and for possible tuition adjustment

Undergraduate calendar: <http://www.wlu.ca/calendars/index.php?cal=1&y=49>

Foot Patrol: After class call 886-FOOT for a walk or drive home - No Walk is Too Short or Too Long!

The Writing Centre provides access, free of charge, to individual writing instruction. To make an appointment, just drop by the office (Library 2-213), contact them by phone (519-884-0710, ext. 2220), or contact the Manager, Emmy Misser (emisser@wlu.ca): www.wlu.ca/writingcentre.

The Accessible Learning Office provides information for, and assists students with, disabilities at this university. Staff at the Office are committed to assure students equal access and support services for programs, facilities and services in the university community. These disabilities include, but are not limited to: sight, hearing, learning, chronic pain, head injuries, mobility, and psychological/psychiatric matters. Do not hesitate to consult with them, preferably early in the term. The Office is located in 1C11 on the bottom floor of the Arts building (519-884-0710, ext. 3086; Accessible_Learning@wlu.ca). You can review the services at www.mylaurier.ca/accessible/info/home.htm. Students with disabilities or special needs are advised to contact Laurier's Accessible Learning Office for information regarding its services and resources. Students are encouraged to review the Calendar for information regarding all services available on campus.

The Information Technology Services Help Desk, situated in the Library, is there to help you with your computer account, and with Internet access (519-884-0710, ext. 4357; help@wlu.ca).

Academic Misconduct at Laurier can have serious repercussions. If you are unclear about what constitutes plagiarism and other forms of cheating, for example, speak with the course instructor, or consult the appropriate section of the undergraduate calendar: www.wlu.ca/calendars/section.php?cal=1&s=95&sp=342&ss=327&y=12.

Wilfrid Laurier University uses software that can check for plagiarism. Students may be required to submit their written work in electronic form and have it checked for plagiarism.

Privacy: Students' names may be divulged in the classroom, both orally and in written form, to other members of the class. Students who are concerned about such disclosures should contact the course instructor to identify whether there are any possible alternatives to such disclosures. Additional information on the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act at Laurier is available at the Privacy Coordinator Office.