

History 4790

American Religions:

Faith and Film

Summer Semester 2011

I. Contact Information

Location: Irish Building 101

Time: T TH 10:00 – 1:00 Office Hours: after class

Dr. Colleen McDannell

Professor of History and Sterling M. McMurrin Professor of Religious Studies

Office: 245 Irish Building

Contact me by phone 581-4748 **not by email**. Leave a message on my answer machine.

Or email a TA: Dai Newman david.h.newman@utah.edu or Jen Meredith jen.meredith@utah.edu

II. Introduction and Background

Religion is a complex and vibrant phenomenon that influences every aspect of society and culture. This advanced undergraduate course focuses on the interactions between religion and American popular culture. Specifically it asks: how do commercial filmmakers (collectively called “Hollywood”) understand religion? How does Hollywood call on religion to articulate various social, aesthetic, and economic concerns? Which social and cultural changes have made their impact on the movies?

This course considers how movies both create and maintain our culturally shared notions of what religion “is.” How do the movies define “good” religion and “bad” religion? Why do filmmakers privilege certain values over others? We will discuss how Hollywood presents religion and then contrast that with how documentary filmmakers see the same topics. Most importantly, we will examine how that presentation changes over time. To what extent do movies (rather than, say, Sunday School) teach us about what is *really* religious—what Americans are *supposed* to do in order to be religious.

As this course fulfills the Diversity General Education Requirement, it will pay particular attention how religions are shaped by--and in turn shape--categories of race, gender, sexual preference, and ethnicity. Hist 4790 also has a Humanities Designation and so you will be asked to take an analytical approach to religious history and to sharpen your communications skills through writing assignments and discussions.

This is an upper division history course and so students will be expected to be able to write, read, and discuss at an advanced level. While it is designed to introduce the non-major to the

Humanities, it requires students to work in a disciplined, focused, and involved manner. In addition, a full semester must be covered in six weeks—the pace is unrelenting.

Translation: this is a challenging course.

III. Objectives

To develop a more sophisticated understanding of how popular, visual culture is created and how it changes over time

To become more aware of how our definitions of reality and specifically *religious* reality, is created by forces outside of “normal” religious channels

To master the set of broad historical changes—in film, in religion, in politics—that influence what shows up “at the moves”

To develop communication and interpretive skills—both in written and verbal forms

To appreciate the diversity and unity of American society and culture

Buyer Beware! This is not:

A “gut” course where all you do is watch a bunch of movies in class.

A “world religions” course where you’ll *finally* get told what Catholics believe.

A “lecture” course where you’ll be quiet and memorize facts and dates.

A “super sensitive” course where humor or irreverence never touches religion.

All of the movies in this course deal with adult situations. Several movies are rated “R” and contain scenes of violence and sexuality as well as crude language. While I think that these are serious films that will enhance your intellectual understanding of the human condition, you may not. If you have problems with such films, please do not take this course. Likewise, if your religious commitments are such that you are sensitive to how religions are represented or discussed, I also would suggest you choose another course.

IV. Course Films [Streamed through Knowledge Commons and available in library as DVD]

| | |
|--|----------------------|
| <i>Jazz Singer</i> (88 mins 1927) | [In Class] |
| <i>Sister Aimee</i> (2007, 53 mins) | BX7990 I68 M323 2007 |
| <i>Miracle Woman</i> (1931) | [In Class] |
| <i>Going My Way</i> (1944, 126 mins) | PN1997 .G58 1986 |
| <i>Night of the Hunter</i> (1955) | [In Class] |
| <i>4 Little Girls</i> (1998, 102 mins) | F334.B69 N4124 1998 |

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Lilies of the Field</i> | [In Class] |
| <i>Pawnbroker</i> (1964) | [In Class] |
| <i>The Exorcist</i> (1973, 122 mins) | PN1997 .E95 2000 |
| <i>Malcolm X</i> (1992, 202 mins) | PN1997 .M25587 2000 |
| <i>New Muslim Cool</i> | [In Class] |
| <i>Santitos</i> (1997, 105) | PN1997 .S1776 2003 |
| <i>Jesus Camp</i> (2004, 84 mins) | BR1640 .J48 2006 |
| <i>Saved!</i> | [In Class] |

V. Scheduled Topics -- All Lectures are Available on Web CT

| | Tuesdays | Thursdays |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| Week 1 May T17 TH19 | <p>Introduction</p> <p>Lecture Immigrants and the Movie Craze</p> <p>In Class <i>Jazz Singer</i> (88 mins 1927)</p> | <p>Have Read McDannell, ch. 1 Feingold, "Acculturation and its Discontents"</p> <p>Discussion Religion and Assimilation</p> <p>Lecture Depression Era Fundamentalists</p> |
| Week 2 T 24 TH 26 | <p>Have Viewed <i>Sister Aimee</i> (2007, 53 mins)</p> <p>Have Read Opp, "Healing Hands, Healthy Bodies" Balmer, "The Varieties of Protestantism"</p> <p>In Class <i>Miracle Woman</i> (90 mins 1931)</p> <p>Discussion History and Film</p> | <p>Have Viewed <i>Going My Way</i> (1944, 126 min)</p> <p>Have Read McDannell, chs. 4 and 5</p> <p>Discussion Leading the Flock</p> <p>Lecture War Cold Religion</p> |
| Tuesday May 31 | Unit #1 Analytical Essay Due in class | |
| Week 3 June T 31 TH 2 | <p>Have Read McDannell, ch 6 Murphy, "Ugly Americans in Togas" Briley, "Reel History and the Cold War,"</p> <p>In Class <i>Night of the Hunter</i> (1955, 93 mins)</p> <p>Discussion Lurking Evils</p> | <p>Have Viewed <i>4 Little Girls</i> (1998, 102)</p> <p>Have Read McDannell, ch. 7 Sullivan, "Cracks in the Cloister"</p> <p>In Class <i>Lilies of the Field</i> (1962, 94 mins)</p> <p>Discussion Negotiating Race</p> |
| Week 4 T7 TH9 | <p>Have Read Leff, "Hollywood and the Holocaust"</p> <p>Lecture Existential Reality and Urban Angst</p> <p>In Class <i>Pawnbroker</i> (1964, 116 mins)</p> | <p>Have Viewed <i>The Exorcist</i> (1973, 122 mins) <u>NOTE: Watch ORIGINAL version</u></p> <p>Have Read McDannell, ch. 9</p> <p>Discussion Horror: Jewish and Catholic</p> <p>Lecture New Directions</p> |
| Tuesday June 14 | Unit #2 Analytical Essay Due in class | |

| | | |
|--------------------|--|---|
| Week 5 T14 TH16 | <p>Have Viewed <i>Malcolm X</i> (1992, 202 mins)</p> <p>Have Read Smith, “Islam in the African American”</p> <p>In Class: <i>New Muslim Cool</i> (2009, 75 mins)</p> <p>Discussion Devoted Men</p> | <p>Have Viewed <i>Santitos</i> (1997, 105 mins)</p> <p>Have Read \ McDannell, ch. 12</p> <p>Discussion Devoted Women</p> <p><i>Lecture Spiritual but Not Religious</i></p> |
| Week 6 T21 | <p>Have Viewed <i>Jesus Camp</i> (2004, 84 mins)</p> <p>Have Read McDannell, ch. 13 McDannell, “Christian Retailing”</p> <p>In Class <i>Saved!</i> (2004, 92 mins)</p> <p>Discussion Religious Futures</p> | <p>Unit #3 Analytical Essay Wednesday 6-22-2011 at 5 PM</p> |

Textbook

[“McDannell”] Colleen McDannell, *Catholics in the Movies* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008)

Articles Posted on Web CT

Randall Balmer and Lauren F. Winner, “The Varieties of Protestantism in America,” *Protestantism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

Ronald Briley, “Reel History and the Cold War,” *OAH Magazine of History*. 8 (Winter, 1994), pp.19-22.

Henry L. Feingold, “Acculturation and its Discontents” in *The Jewish People in America: A Time for Searching: Entering the Mainstream, 1920 – 1945* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1992).

Leonard J. Leff, “Hollywood and the Holocaust,” *American Jewish History* 84.4 (1996) 353-376.

Colleen McDannell, “Christian Retailing,” in *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

Geraldine Murphy, “Ugly Americans in Togas: Imperial Anxiety in the Cold War Hollywood” *Journal of Film and Video*, 56 (Fall 2004), pp. 3-19.

James W. Opp, “Healing Hands, Healthy Bodies: Protestant Women and Faith Healing in Canada and the United States, 1880-1920,” in Margaret Lamberts Bendroth and Virginia Lieson Brereton, *Women and Twentieth-Century Protestantism* (Urban: University of Illinois Press, 2002).

Jane I. Smith, “Islam in the African American Community,” in *Islam in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

Rebecca Sullivan, “Cracks in the Cloister: The Changing Cultural Role of Nuns” in *Visual Habits: Nuns, Feminism, and American Postwar Popular Culture* (University of Toronto Press, 2005).

VI. Grading

Attendance (100 points)

Attendance in this class is mandatory and is factored into your grade. As an intense, 6 week summer class that grants the same credit as a 15 week semester-long class, every minute counts-- especially minutes watching movies and discussing. Attendance will be taken for the ten class sessions. Students are expected to arrive on time and to stay the full three hours. If you have work or personal commitments that require missing class or coming late, consider the impact it will have on your grade.

No misses: 100 points. One miss 85 points. Two misses 70 points. Three misses 60 points.

Analytical Essay (2 of 3 possible; 100 points each; 200 points total)

Students will write two analytical essays of a standard length of five pages each. They will write on two of the three units of the class: early twentieth-century through World War II, the fifties through the seventies, and turn-of-the-21st century America. Each essay will respond to one of several topics handed out in class and discussed in weekly small group sessions. These interpretive essays will be evaluated on analysis, content, organization, and mechanics.

Students who are concerned about either their writing or hope to achieve a certain grade should write on the first unit so they can have time to learn from their mistakes by going over their essay with me. Only two essays will be graded (not best of three), so make sure you present your finest work.

An “essay writing review session” will be held on Thursday, May 26th at 8:30 (before class) and 1:15 (after class). If you think you might need some writing pointers, turn up for a help session. My “Ten Commandments of Writing” and the evaluation form I use are posted on Web CT.

Pop Quizzes (4 quizzes, 50 points each; 200 points total)

It is essential in this intense summer class that you stay current with the reading and the movie viewing. To help motivate you to stay focused, there will be a series of short quizzes prior to the discussion sessions. These unannounced tests will occur on discussion days. They will take a maximum of 15 minutes to complete. They will be information-based and cover the lectures, assigned readings, and all films from the point of the last quiz.

Students may use any notes they have taken but not printed or e-materials.

Grading Scale (total of 500 divided by 5):

| | | | | | |
|----|--------|----|-------|----|-------|
| A | 93-100 | C+ | 77-79 | D- | 60-62 |
| A- | 90-92 | C | 73-76 | E< | 60 |
| B+ | 87-89 | C- | 70-72 | | |
| B | 83-86 | D+ | 67-69 | | |
| B- | 80-82 | D | 63-66 | | |

VII Classroom Policies

It is expected that students will attend all classes, having read the assigned reading and prepared for careful listening and discussion. Because students get easily distracted by computers, I ask you to only bring pen/pencil and paper for note taking. Turn off your cell phones and do not engage in any electronic distraction. Students who are called on cell phones during class risk public embarrassment. Since this is an extended class, it is assumed students will take care of the necessities (coffee, bathrooms, telephone calls) **before** they enter the classroom. There will be one 15 minute break mid-way in the class. Please show respect for your instructor and fellow classmates by being on time, paying attention, and being civil during our discussions.

Students who are absent, come late, or leave early need to discuss their attendance with me, not the TAs.

Cheating or plagiarism will result in failing the assignment and the class. If you do not know what constitutes such misconduct, check with me and read the Student Code.

If you have any problems leaving your computer or cell phone off, speaking up in class or arriving on time please tell me within the first week of class. If you don't talk with me immediately, I will assume that all students can meet these basic expectations.

ADA Statement

University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in the class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability Services, 162 Olpin Union Building, 581-5020 (V/TDD). CDS will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations.

Student/Faculty Responsibilities:

All students are expected to maintain professional behavior in the classroom setting, according to the Student Code, spelled out in the Student Handbook. Students have specific rights in the classroom as detailed in Article III of the Code. The Code also specifies proscribed conduct (Article XI) that involves cheating on tests, plagiarism, and/or collusion, as well as fraud, theft, etc. Students should read the Code carefully and know they are responsible for content. According to Faculty Rules and Regulations, it is the faculty responsibility to enforce responsible classroom behaviors, and I will do so, beginning with verbal warnings and progressing to dismissal from class and a failing grade. Students have the right to appeal such action to the Student Behavior Committee.

