

Seminar in American Studies
Reading the Visual Cultures of American Religions
AMST 809b/REL 735
Th 3:30-5:20
Spring 2008

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I. Course Description

The course invites students to explore recent interdisciplinary literatures on the subject of the visual cultures of religions in the United States and to present work that takes shape around critical readings of texts and/or objects related to this subject.

II. Course Opportunities and Requirements

A. Readings: This class is designed to address interdisciplinary research (in history, folklore, literary theory and criticism, religious studies, American studies) in the scholarship of the visual culture of religions. A key requirement for this course is the student's critical engagement of assigned readings. Every student in the class is responsible for completing each week's reading assignment before the class meeting. Individual students will lead discussion of texts; all class participants will contribute to analysis and discussion each week. Assignment of discussion leadership and specific readings will be made on the first day of class. *In order to facilitate discussion of a broader range of materials, for some class sessions reading responsibilities will be distributed, with some students assigned to one text and some to another. In such cases, all students may be asked to read the introductory material for each assigned text.*

B. Discussion Leadership: Students assigned to leadership roles for each week's readings will come to class prepared to facilitate discussion. It may be useful to think of this task as, in part, a critical review of the reading in question. In addition to summarizing and critiquing key aspects of the author's argument, discussion leaders will be expected to engage the class in conversation on closely related subjects. Students in leadership roles will arrange to make available in class, and when relevant, *reproductions of major images under discussion.*

C. Annotated Bibliography: Over the course of the semester, each member of the class will be expected to produce an annotated bibliography of course readings and other course-related materials. Each student's bibliography will include, in addition to the readings that student is assigned, at least twenty selections of the student's own choosing. Annotations may vary in length for different items but should represent assessment and description of key content and arguments, including a statement of the author's thesis. Two paragraphs is a reasonable average length for required annotations. You may also wish to annotate other relevant books and articles you have read in a more summary fashion for inclusion in this bibliography. At the end of the semester, we will share these files so that all students have access to material assembled over the course of the semester.

D. Object(s) Assignment (Paper): In addition to participating in explorations of weekly readings, and producing an annotated bibliography, each student is expected to select an object, monument, or performance and to apply the semester's experience by producing a 10-12 page

analysis/historical study of the object/subject they have selected. These may be short polished research pieces that present a specific interpretation and thesis or they may be refined outlines of the archival and methodological challenges presented by a particular object. Students will meet individually with the professor, once before spring break, and once after, to discuss progress on these projects.

III. Course Grades

Grades will be earned for performance in three areas:

Discussion leadership and overall class participation (one third)

Annotated bibliography (one third)

Final paper (one third)

IV. Course Calendar and Readings

Th 17 Jan. Introduction to the Course

Th 24 Jan. Defining Terms

Readings:

- Jonathan Z. Smith. "Religion, Religions, Religious," in Mark C. Taylor, ed. *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 269-84.
 - Gregory Schapen, "Relics," "Religion, Religions, Religious," in Mark C. Taylor, ed. *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 256-68.
 - Bill Brown, "Introduction: The Idea of Things and the Ideas in Them," *A Sense of Things* (University of Chicago Press, 2003), 1-19.
 - Sally M. Promey, "Situating Visual Culture," in Karen Haltunnen, *Blackwell Companion to American Cultural History* (Blackwell, 2007).
 - Jules David Prown, "The Truth of Material Culture: History or Fiction," in *Art as Evidence: Writings on Art and Material Culture* (Yale University Press, 2001), 220-234.
 - Colbert, Charles, "A Critical Medium: James Jackson Jarves's Vision of Art History," *American Art* 16, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 18-35.
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Th 31 Jan. The Visual Cultures of Religions in Public

Readings:

- Wayne Swanson, *The Christ Child Goes to Court* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).
- Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom* (Princeton University Press, 2007).
- Sally M. Promey, "The Public Display of Religion," in *Arts of Democracy*, Casey Blake, ed. (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 305-342.
- Laurie Maffly-Kipp, "Engaging Habits and Besotted Idolatry: Viewing Chinese Religions in the American West," *Material Religion* 1, no. 1 (March 2005): 72-97.
- Jennifer L. Connerley, "Quaker Bonnets and the Erotic Feminine in American Popular Culture," *Material Religion* 2, no. 2 (July 2006): 174-203.

Th 7 Feb. The “Popular” Cultures of Religions
Readings: ●David Chidester, *Authentic Fakes: Religion and American Popular Culture*.
(Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
●Kathryn Lofton, “Practicing Oprah; Or, The Prescriptive Compulsion of a
Spiritual Capitalism,” *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 39:4 (August 2006): 599-
621.
●Erika Doss, *Elvis Culture: Fans, Faith, and Image* (Lawrence: University Press
of Kansas, 1999).
●Annabel Jane Wharton, *Selling Jerusalem: Relics, Replicas, Theme Parks*
(University of Chicago Press, 2006), read introduction and conclusion, as well as
chapters four and five.

Th 14 Feb. Representations of Muslim America
Readings: ●Barbara Daly Metcalf, ed, *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe*
(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).
●Evelyn Alsultany, “Selling American Diversity and Muslim American Identity
through Nonprofit Advertising Post-9/11,” in *American Quarterly* special issue on
Religion and Politics in the Contemporary United States, R. Marie Griffith and
Melanie McAlister, 59 (September 2007), 593-622.
●Jodi Eichler-Levine and Rosemary R. Hicks, “As Americans Against Genocide”:
The Crisis in Darfur and Interreligious Political Activism,” in *American Quarterly*
special issue on *Religion and Politics in the Contemporary United States*, R. Marie
Griffith and Melanie McAlister, 59 (September 2007), 711-735.
●Edward Curtis, “Islamizing the Black Body: Ritual and Power in Elijah
Muhammad’s Nation of Islam,” *Religion and American Culture* 12:2 (Summer
2002): 167-196.

Th 21 Feb. Shaping an Interdiscipline(?)
Readings: ●Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity* New Haven: Yale University Press,
1995.
●David Morgan and Sally M. Promey, eds., *The Visual Culture of American
Religions*, University of California Press, 2001.
● David Morgan and Sally M. Promey, *Exhibiting the Visual Culture of American
Religions*, exhibition catalogue, Valparaiso, IN: Brauer Museum of Art, 2000.
●David Morgan, *Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice*,
University of California Press, 2005.

Th 28 Feb. Construing Imagination(s)
Readings: ●Eleanor Heartney, *Postmodern Heretics: Catholic Imagination in
Contemporary Art*. Midmarch Arts Press, 2004
●Sally M. Promey, “Mirror Images: Framing the Self in Early New England
Material Piety,” in *Figures in the Carpet: Finding the Human Person in the
American Past*, ed. Wilfred McClay, Eerdmans, 2007, 71-128.
●Robert Blair St. George, *Conversing by Signs: Poetics of Implication in Colonial*

New England Culture, University of North Carolina Press, 1998, Introduction (“On Implication”) and Chapter 2 (“Embodied Spaces.”)

●Katherine Haas, “The Fabric of Religion: Vestments and Devotional Catholicism in Nineteenth-Century America.” *Material Religion* 3, no. 2 (July 2007): 190-217.

Th 6 Mar. Visual/Material Tradition and Innovation

Readings:

●Richard Brilliant, *Facing the New World: Jewish Portraits in Colonial and Federal America*, exhibition catalogue, New York: The Jewish Museum, 1997.

●Jenna Weissman Joselit, *The Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture 1880-1950*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1995.

●Myer Myers: *Jewish Silversmith in Colonial New York*, exhibition catalogue for traveling exhibition, organized by David L. Barquist, Yale University Art Gallery, with essays by Barquist, Jon Butler, and Jonathan D. Sarna.

●Andrea Pappas, “The Picture at Menorah Journal: Making “Jewish Art,” *America Jewish History* 90, No. 3 (September 2002): 205-238.

●*Material Religion, Special Issue: Material Cultures of American Jewry*, Volume 3, Number 3 (November 2007).

Th 13 Mar. SPRING BREAK; No Class Session.

Th 20 Mar. SPRING BREAK; No Class Session.

Th 27 Mar. Between and Beyond “Arts”

Readings:

●Claire Farago, et al, *Transforming Images: New Mexican Santos In-Between Worlds*, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006.

●Terrence Winch, ed., *All Roads are Good: Native Voices on Life and Culture*, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995.

●Pemina Yellow Bird and Katheryn Milun, “Interrupted Journeys: The Cultural Politics of Indian Reburial,” in Angelika Bammer, ed., *Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, 3-24.

Th 3 Apr. Attend “Visual Exegesis” Exhibition Opening (part of Middle Passage Conversations: On Black Religion in the African Diaspora)

Th 10 Apr. Buildings, Space, and Place

Readings:

●Louis P. Nelson, *American Sanctuary: Understanding Sacred Spaces*, Indiana University Press, 2006.

●Robert S. Nelson, *Hagia Sophia, 1850-1950: Holy Wisdom, Modern Monument*, University of Chicago Press, 2004, especially the final chapter on appropriation of the building in the United States.

●Samuel Y. Edgerton, *Theaters of Conversion: Religious Architecture and Indian Artisans in Colonial Mexico*, University of New Mexico Press, 2001.

●Jeanne Halgren Kilde, “Material Expression and Maternalism in Mary Baker Eddy’s Boston Churches: How Architecture and Gender Compromised Mind,” *Material Religion* 1, no. 2 (July 2005): 164-197.

- Th 17 Apr. Religion, Film, and Media Studies
Readings:
- Judith Weisenfeld, *Hollywood Be Thy Name: African American Religion in American Film, 1929-1949*, University of California Press, 2007.
 - Ann Pelligrini, "Signaling Through the Flames": Hell House Performance and the Structures of Religious Feeling," in *American Quarterly* special issue on *Religion and Politics in the Contemporary United States*, R. Marie Griffith and Melanie McAlister, 59 (September 2007), 911-936.
 - Jane Naomi Iwamura, "Critical Faith: Japanese Americans and the Birth of a New Civil Religion, in *American Quarterly* special issue on *Religion and Politics in the Contemporary United States*, R. Marie Griffith and Melanie McAlister, 59 (September 2007), 937- 968.
 - Diane Winston, "Religion, Politics, and the Media," in *American Quarterly* special issue on *Religion and Politics in the Contemporary United States*, R. Marie Griffith and Melanie McAlister, 59 (September 2007), 969- 990.
 - Jolyon Mitchell, "Posting Images on the Web: The Creative Viewer and Nonviolent Resistance Against Terrorism," *Material Religion* 2, no. 2 (July 2006): 146-173.
 - Stewart M. Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age*, Routledge, 2007.
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- Th 24 Apr. Aesthetic Hierarchies
- Rachael Ziady DeLue, *George Inness and the Science of Landscape*, University of Chicago Press, 2005.
 - Kristin Schwain, *Signs of Grace: Religion and American Art in the Gilded Age*, Cornell University Press, 2007.
 - Sally M. Promey, *Painting Religion in Public: John Singer Sargent's Triumph of Religion at the Boston Public Library*, Princeton University Press, 1999, especially chapters four and seven.

7:00 PM Summary Session and dinner at promey/fallot home—Annotated Bibliographies and Papers Due