

Meeting Mormons Through Movies

REL 320, section 002

Monday/Wednesday, 2:15-3:35

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Office hours (HL 514): Wednesday 1:00-2:00 and by appointment

"It is almost impossible to write fiction about the Mormons, for the reason that Mormon institutions and Mormon society are so peculiar that they call for constant explanation."

-Wallace Stegner

Course Description

Despite their relatively small numbers, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints hold a potent place in the American cultural imaginary. As a homegrown, seemingly secretive, and aggressively evangelical faith with a history of deviant social practices, Mormons have aroused suspicion and curiosity from outsiders. This course will traverse the history of Mormons in movies and use film to explore key elements of Mormon thought and practice. Rather than moving strictly chronologically, we will consider how insiders and outsiders have crafted the image of Mormons around specific types (the pioneer, the missionary, the polygamist) and have used these types to explore issues of gender and sexuality. We will refract this history and these images through the consideration of film as a medium to explore how its formal elements assist or disrupt the representation of minority groups.

Course Objectives

Over the course of the semester we will:

- Introduce the the beliefs and practices of Mormonism
- Explore the place of Mormons in American cultural imagination
- Use films as a means to reflect on the difference between insider presentation and outsider perception of religion
- Build abilities to view and discuss film analytically
- Develop critical skills for reading, writing, and thinking

Required Texts

Ryan, Michael and Melissa Lenos. *An Introduction to Film Analysis*. Bloomsbury, 2012. (ISBN: 9780826430021)

Elsaesser, Thomas and Matle Hagener, *Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses*. Routledge, 2015 (ISBN: 9781138824300)

Readings posted to Blackboard

Films listed on syllabus will be available for viewing

Assignments and Grading

Critical Reflections/Examples

For each film, you will be responsible for either examples of film form or a written reflection on the critical readings. These will serve as starting points for our discussions. You will alternate between these two tasks by being assigned to a group (A or B) for the length of the semester. As shown on the syllabus, each group will alternate responsibility for examples one week and reflections the next.

For Mondays that are assigned to your group, you will come to class with **one or two examples from the film we watched** of the **formal elements** discussed in that week's chapter of Ryan and Lenos. You should write these down (timestamp plus one sentence, brief description) to be handed in.

For Wednesdays that are assigned to your group, you will write a 250 word (1 page, double-spaced) reflection tying the **film to one of the readings for that day**. These are **not** summaries of the film or the readings or reviews of either, but arguments where you synthesize the reading and the film. These are due via email by 6am on the Wednesday of the class.

Presentation and Scene Analysis

Each student will view one film dealing with Mormons not listed on the syllabus and offer a brief 5-8 minute presentation to the class on it. These presentations should provide a relatively brief summary of the film's plot and a critical analysis of a single scene that you feel best showcases the ways in which Mormons are presented in the film. You will sign up for the film and date you wish to present on by the third week of class. In addition to the oral presentation, you will hand in a written version (500-750 words, 2-3 pages) of your scene analysis. Because formal film analysis might be a new undertaking for you, you will have an opportunity to rewrite the scene analysis after receiving feedback.

Mid-Semester Essays

You will write two essays for this course. For each, you will be given a prompt and expected to write approximately 1000 words (4 pages). These essays will rely on course materials and should not require additional research. Rather, they will ask you to apply our readings and discussions to a film we have watched. These are meant to be creative engagements that highlight your ability to craft and argue a position in relation to the prompt. These essays should rely on both narrative (story) elements and formal elements from films to make your argument. You will email these to dnewma03@syr.edu

Final Exam

Our final exam will take place during the final exam period. There will be some identifications of film terminology, Mormon terms, and three short essays that ask you to agree or disagree with a statement made about Mormons by using filmic examples. Your critical reflections and notes taken while watching films or discussing them in class will be very useful in reviewing for the exam.

Final Reflection

The final written assignment for the course will be a personal reflection rather than a research essay. It should be about 700 words long. Details of the assignment will be explained as we approach the end of the semester. This will be due on Wednesday 7 December, our last day of class.

Attendance and Participation

This class will work best if you come to class with the films viewed and the readings read, prepared to engage fully in the discussion. If the class's preparation seems to be slipping, I will resort to using unannounced content quizzes to incentivize your viewing and reading (though I would prefer to not use these). If we do end up with quizzes these will be incorporated as part of your participation grade.

Attendance is **required** and **expected**. For each unexcused absence beyond 2, you will lose 2 points from your final grade. If you must miss class, contact me as soon as possible. Leaving early for Thanksgiving or semester end does **not** qualify as an excused absence.

Grade Breakdown

Reflections/Examples	20%	A	93-100
Presentation & Scene Analysis	12%	A-	90-92
Mid-Semester Essay 1	15%	B+	87-89
Mid-Semester Essay 2	15%	B	83-86
Final Exam	15%	B-	80-82
Final Reflection	8%	C+	77-79
Participation	15%	C	73-76
		C-	70-72
		D	60-69
		F	below 60

Use of Electronic Devices

Notes should be taken by hand with paper and pen/pencil unless you have an ODS accommodation or other prior approval to use a different method. It is vastly preferred that you come to class with our readings printed out on the day they will be discussed. However, you may also use a computer, tablet or e-reader for pdfs as long as you are able to avoid using them for non-course related activities. If having a device leads to your distraction, you will be asked to turn it off and bring in print outs from then on. Cellphones should not be used and safely stowed away (and silent) during the entire class period.

Viewing of Films

Most of the films we are viewing are *not* readily available on streaming services. As such, you will need to make slightly more effort and time to view the films. Not watching a film is unacceptable and the equivalent of not turning in an assignment. I will explain the process for watching films, but you will need to set aside a couple hours each week for this. You should watch them without distractions (put phone away, do not multitask, find a place you can watch uninterrupted, watch from start to finish in one sitting).

Introductions and Orientations

Week 1

M 8/29 Introductions, Syllabus

W 8/31 Mormonism's place in America

Read Shipp's "Mormon, Gentiles, and the History of the American West."
Kirn, "Confessions of an Ex-Mormon."

Week 2 Mormon Aesthetics, Film aesthetics

M 9/5 No class (Labor Day)

W 9/7 Mormonism and Film

Read Givens, *People of Paradox* (selection)

Pioneers

Week 3 *Wagonmaster* (Ford, 1950)

M 9/12 (A) **Read** Ryan and Lenos, Introduction
Ryan and Lenos, Chapter 1 Composition

W 9/14 (B) **Read** Thompkins, *West of Everything* (selections)

Week 4 *17 Miracles* (Christensen, 2013)

M 9/19 (B) **Read** Ryan and Lenos, Chapter 3 Editing
Elaesser and Hagener, "Cinema as Window and Frame"

W 9/21 (A) **Read** Bagley "One Long Funeral March"
Sanborn Jones "(Re)living the Pioneer Past: Handcarts, Heritage, and Mormon Youth Culture."

Week 5 *Legacy* (Merrill, 1993)

M 9/26 (A) **Read** Ryan and Lenos, Chapter 2 Camera Work
Lefler and Burton, "Film Styles in Legacy"

W 9/28 (B) **Read** Hall "Melodrama on a Mission: Latter-Day Saint Film and the Melodramatic Mode"

ESSAY #1 due via email by Saturday October 1st at noon**Pivot: Mormon Sexuality****Week 6**

M 10/3 **Read** The Family: A Proclamation to the World
 “Embodiment and Sexuality in Mormon Thought”

W 10/5 **Read** Petrey, “Towards a Post-Heterosexual Mormon Theology”

Missionaries**Week 7 *States of Grace* (Dutcher, 2005)**

M 10/10 (B) **Read** Ryan and Lenos, Chapter 4 Art Direction
 Elsaesser and Hagener, “Cinema as Door”

W 10/12 (A) **Read** Duffy, “Elders on the Big Screen”
 Pace, “Wiggle Room for the Mormon Soul”

Week 8 *Latter Days* (Cox, 2003)

M 10/17 (A) **Read** Ryan and Lenos, Chapter 5 Narration
 Elsaesser and Hagener, “Cinema as Mirror”

W 10/19 (B) **Read** Lugones, “Purity, Impurity, and Separation”
 Williams, “Mormon and Queer at the Crossroads”

Week 9 *Missionary* (DiBlasi, 2013)

M 10/24 (B) **Read** Ryan and Lenos, Chapter 6 Metaphor, Character, Structure, Motif
 Elsaesser and Hagener, “Cinema as Eye”

W 10/26 (A) **Read** Martin, *Sexy Thrills* (selection)

ESSAY #2 due via email by Saturday October 29th at noon**Pivot: Mormon Ethnicity****Week 10**

M 10/31 **Read** Campbell, Green, Monson “The Sacred Tabernacle”
 Sorenson, “Toward a Characterization of Mormon Personality”

W 11/2 **Read** Pace, “After the (Second) Fall: A Personal Journey to Ethnic
 Mormonism”
 Sorensen, selection from *The Evening and the Morning*

Polygamists

Week 11 *Trapped by the Mormons* (Parkinson, 1922)

M 11/7 (A) **Read** Ryan and Lenos, Chapter 7 Film Style

W 11/9 (B) **Read** Givens *Viper on the Hearth* (selection)
Benshoff and Griffin, "The Concept of Whiteness and American Film"

Week 12 *Electrick Children* (Thomas, 2012)

M 11/14 (B) **Read** Bordwell, "The Art Cinema as a Mode of Practice,"
Elsaesser and Hagener, "Cinema as Ear"

W 11/16 (A) **Read** White and White, "Polygamy and Mormon Identity"
Bradley, "Cultural Configurations of Mormon Fundamentalist Polygamous Communities"

THANKSGIVING BREAK

Crypto-Mormons

Week 13 *Pride and Prejudice: A Latter-day Comedy* (Black, 2003)

M 11/28 (A) **Read** Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody* (selection)

W 11/30 (B) **Read** Woolston, "'It's not a put-down, Miss Bennet; it's a category': Andrew Black's Chick Lit *Pride and Prejudice*"
Wells, "Jane Austen in Mollywood: mainstreaming Mormonism in Andrew Black's *Pride & Prejudice*"

Week 14 *Napoleon Dynamite* (Hess, 2004)

M 12/5 **Read** Buchbinder, "Enter the Schlemiel"
Mink, "A (Napoleon) Dynamite Identity: Rural Idaho, the Politics of Place, and the Creation of a New Western Film"

W 12/7 **FINAL REFLECTION DUE**

12/14 Final Exam, 5:15-7:15

Academic Integrity Policy

Syracuse University's academic integrity policy reflects the high value that we, as a university community, place on honesty in academic work. The policy defines our expectations for academic honesty and holds students accountable for the integrity of all work they submit. Students should understand that it is their responsibility to learn about course-specific expectations, as well as about university-wide academic integrity expectations. The university policy governs appropriate citation and use of sources, the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments, and the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verification of participation in class activities. The policy also prohibits students from submitting the same written work in more than one class without receiving written authorization in advance from both instructors. The presumptive penalty for a first instance of academic dishonesty by an undergraduate student is course failure, accompanied by a transcript notation indicating that the failure resulted from a violation of academic integrity policy. The presumptive penalty for a first instance of academic dishonesty by a graduate student is suspension or expulsion. SU students are required to read an online summary of the university's academic integrity expectations and provide an electronic signature agreeing to abide by them twice a year during pre-term check-in on MySlice. For more information and the complete policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu/>.

Disability-Related Accommodations

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu>, located in Room 309 of 804 University Avenue, or call (315) 443-4498, TDD: (315) 443-1371 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented Disabilities Accommodation Authorization Letters, as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.

Religious Observances Notification and Policy

SU religious observances notification and policy, found at <http://hendricks.syr.edu/spiritual-life/index.html>, recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holidays according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes for regular session classes and by the submission deadline for flexibly formatted classes.