

RELIGION AND AMERICAN CONSUMERISM, Fall 2015

NAT 348 (28017) & REL 348 (27926); sec M001

MW 6:45-8:05 PM; 215 Hall of Languages

All class materials on Blackboard: (<http://blackboard.syr.edu/>)

Professor Philip P. Arnold (pparnold@syr.edu) w: 315-443-3861

Office hours: MW 4-5 PM, and by appointment. Office: 508 Hall of Languages

Teaching Assistant: Seren Elizabeth Gates Amador (segatesa@syr.edu), w: 315-443-3861

Office hours: MW 5:30-6:30 PM, and by appointment. Office 514 Hall of Languages

Introduction

Currently we are experiencing a failure of the Global economic system. For all of its promise, consumerism has led us all to the brink of social and environmental disaster. In my view, the proposed solutions to these intractable cultural problems fall far short. Many academics working on changing our relationship to the environment, for example, neglect addressing WHY we have gotten ourselves in to this situation. To answer these *why* questions one must utilize religious perspectives—that is to say, to address the *significance* of consumerism and ask why is it a meaningful marker of cultural identity. To answer these questions we will bring together contact between Indigenous and Immigrant peoples, business history, and history of the industrial revolution as they all go in to crafting our American cultural relationship with the world.

This class will explore the material phenomena of America after 1830—Consumerism. We will be thinking about consumerism as the dominant ‘religion’ since that time. Usually religion has been defined as a feature of human belief. In contrast, Historians of Religions, like myself, have emphasized the ‘materiality’ of religion in cultures—particularly among Indigenous peoples. We will extend this view to the American landscape by focusing on an understanding of religion in two ways; as habitation, or how human groups meaningfully inhabit the land; and as exchange, or the media by which human communities interact with other living beings. Nothing has been more contested than the meanings of land between Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples and this will focus our reflections on the religious dimensions of American consumerism.

The historical period highlighted in this course (1830 to present) is materially defined by the industrial revolution, which had dramatic consequences for religious existence in America. The religious consequences of American industrialism will be assessed by examining its consequences for European and Native American groups through their distinctive understandings of land, and material life, in both Central and North America. First we will forge an interpretation of religion that can encompass Indigenous and Immigrant religious understandings of how human beings meaningfully inhabit the Americas. There are dramatic differences in how this is understood in each cultural context, which is characterized as locative (for Native Americans) and utopian (for Americans of largely European descent). Rather than a denominational history of the spread of Christianity, we will seek a more inclusive way of understanding of religion in the phenomenon of modern material existence.

Required Texts (available at SU Bookstore and Bird Library 2-hour reserve):

1. Philip Arnold, *The Urgency of Indigenous Religions* (pdf)
2. Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate*
3. William Leach, *Land of Desire*
4. Rigoberta Menchú, *I Rigoberta Menchú*
5. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*
6. John Perkins, *Confessions of an Economic Hitman*

Date	Topics	Assignments
<u>August</u>		
31	Introductions	
<u>September</u>		
2	What is religion?	Arnold Definitions
7	Labor Day—no classes	
9	Religion as Exchange	Arnold, Chapters 3 & 4
13	Discussion paper #1—Religion as Habitation and Exchange	
14	The machine ensemble	Schivelbusch, Chapters 1 & 2
16	Railroad space and time	Schivelbusch, Chapters 3-4
18-27 World Indoor Lacrosse Championships @ Onondaga Nation—volunteers needed		
21	Fear of the machine	Schivelbusch, Chapters 7-8
23	Traumatic neurosis	Schivelbusch, Chapters 9-13
27	Discussion paper #2—Industrial religion: What is our place?	
28	Color, glass and light	Leach, Chapters 2 & 3
30	Fashion and Service	Leach, Chapters 4 & 5
<u>October</u>		
5	New Age of Merchandising	Leach, Chapters 7 & 8
7	Indigenous materiality	Menchú, Chapters I-VII
11	Discussion paper #3—Religion as Consumerism	
12	Life on the <i>Altiplano</i>	Menchú, Chapters VIII-X
14	In the city	Menchú, Chapters Xi-XIV
18	Outline of Final project due on Blackboard	

Date	Topic	Assignment
<u>October</u>		
19	Defending the village	Menchú, Chapters XVII-XVIII
21	Torture	Menchú, Chapters XXIII-XXXIV
25	Discussion paper #4—Indigenous Peoples and Capitalism	
26	This Changes Everything	Klein, Introduction
28	Bad Timing	Klein, Part One
<u>November</u>		
2	Magical Thinking	Klein, Part Two
3	Naomi Klein Lecture	
4	Starting Anyway	Klein, Part Three, Conclusion
9	EHM is born	Perkins, Preface & Chapters. 1-11
11	Conversations with the General	Perkins, Chapters. 12-21
15	Posted on Blackboard: Discussion paper #5—Money and Planetary Abuse	
16	Battles with Big Oil	Perkins, Chapters. 22-29
18	September 11, 2001	Perkins, Chapters. 30-35 & Epilogue
21	Opening of Skä·noñh—Great Law of Peace Center	
23 & 25 Thanksgiving Break—no classes		
30	Project presentations and responses	
<u>December</u>		
2	Project presentations and responses	
7	Project presentations and responses	
9	Project presentations and responses	

Final papers must be posted to Blackboard by Friday 11 December

Grading

Final grades will be based on 5 discussion topic papers posted on Blackboard and responses, a Final Project presented and turned in at the end of the class, and attendance and class participation.

Discussion Topic Papers: You are required to post 5 papers on Blackboard (<http://blackboard.syr.edu>). They are based on the reading and class discussion. Due dates for the papers are clearly marked on the syllabus. The days after the papers are due are days when there is class discussion. Discussion topic papers will not be accepted late. In class you will present your paper to the class. For this you will receive an additional 2 points. Each paper is to be 500 to 1000 words long, which is about 2 to 4 pages.

Your papers will be graded on a sliding scale. Exceptionally well crafted papers that are equivalent to the letter grade 'A' are worth 8 points each; 'B' papers are worth 6 points; 'C' papers are worth 4 points; and 'D' papers are worth 2 points. You will receive a failing grade, of 0 points, if you do not hand the papers in on time or if your paper fails to address the issues presented in the reading.

In addition, you will be presenting your papers in class. You will receive 2 additional points for well conceived presentations. You can receive up to 10 points for each paper submitted for a possible semester total of up to 50 points for 5 papers (up to 40 for the paper and 10 for your in-class presentations).

Outline, Presentation and submission of Final Project: You will be responsible for developing an outline, presenting and handing in a final project of your choosing. It can be on any aspect of the reading or your independent work. The date for posting an outline is marked on the syllabus. You will get up to 5 points for the outline. These are to be more than just a 'bare-bones' outline. They should be an explanation of what you will be doing for the final project, how you are doing it and why it is important. You will be required to respond to at least 2 other outlines on the discussion board a week after the posting date for which you will get another 5 points.

The presentation of your project takes place during the last 2 weeks of the semester. You will have approximately 5 minutes to present your project to the class. One student will be selected from class to respond to your project and ask you a short question. You will receive up to 5 points for your presentation and the respondent will receive up to 5 points for their question.

The final project is due to be posted on Blackboard on or before the day of our final exam. It is to be 1000 to 1500 words (4-6 pages long), 12 point, double-spaced. In addition to the narrative you may want to include photos, videos or other media in the project. You will receive up to 20 points for your final project. All totaled the final project outline, presentation, responses, and project itself is worth 40 points. I encourage you to contact me via email with ideas for the final project as soon as possible. I can make suggestions on how to do an effective final project. Good luck!

The criteria listed below are used when assessing your written work:

- **Clarity.** The viewpoints you present in your writing must be clearly conceived and well argued. Your writing style should be straight-forward, easy to read and should be clearly related to the issues you wish to address. Topic sentences at the beginning of each paragraph are helpful in establishing the issue and argument for the reader at the outset. (40%)
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- **Engagement with the material.** Entries are to be related to the reading material. They are *not reviews* of what has been stated in the book but are your *critical analysis* of the reading. Avoid direct quotes. Instead seriously take-up what you consider to be the 'key' issues for the study of religion in the reading. An analysis of the issues discussed in the course become clearer the closer your writing is to the texts used in class. (40%)
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- **Creativity.** The 'work' of Religious Studies, and perhaps the Humanities in general, is essentially creative. Interpretation of religious phenomena requires that you come to some meaningful relationship with your object of study. This is one of the defining characteristics of creativity. You have a unique and important contribution to make to our collective understandings. There are no predetermined experts in the area of interpretation, only well refined and well argued positions. Your interpretations will be dealt with as importantly as you regard them yourself. (20%)

Attendance and class participation: Attendance is mandatory for this class. Lectures and reading will be intimately related but quite different. It is therefore in your own best interest to do the reading and attend class as both will reflect on your performance on discussion topic papers, and final. You will be given regular opportunities to participate in class either by asking questions, making comments, and interacting with other students in discussion in class or on Blackboard.

Final grades will be determined as follows:

Discussion topic papers	50 points
Outline and responses	10 points
Presentation and responses	10 points
Final project/paper	20 points
<u>Attendance and class participation</u>	<u>10 points</u>
	100 points

Final Grades will be assigned according to the following points value:

A	94-100 points
A-	91-93 points
B+	87-90 points
B	84-86 points
B-	81-83 points
C+	77-80 points
C	74-76 points
C-	71-73 points
D	60-70 points
F	59 points and below

Course Goals, Academic Integrity and Disabilities Services

The Department of Religion has articulated three goals that shape its teaching and its expectations of what students in its courses and programs may expect to gain from this study:

1. To understand better the nature and diversity of religious expressions in the contemporary world and in history, and their power in peoples' personal and collective lives;
2. To think more deeply and critically about religious experience and its modes of expression and forms of interpretation;
3. To recognize and appreciate the difficulties and possibilities in a disciplined study of religion; and to become aware of a diversity of approaches and methods within that study.

Faith Traditions Observances

Syracuse University does not have non-instructional days for any religious holiday and students must notify instructors by the end of the second week of classes when they will be observing their religious holiday(s). SU's religious observances policy, found at http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm, recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holy days 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 no later than the end of the second week of classes. Student deadlines are posted in My Slice under Student Services/Enrollment/My Religious Observances/Add a Notification.

Academic Integrity

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 Services:

Our community values diversity and seeks to promote meaningful access to educational opportunities for all students. Syracuse University and I are committed to your success and to supporting Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended and the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990). This means that in general no individual who is otherwise qualified shall be excluded from participation in, be denied benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity, solely by reason of having a disability.

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

Class Courtesy

All students are expected to follow simple rules of academic courtesy with respect to fellow students and instructors. Please come to class on time to avoid disrupting the class. Once class begins, you must refrain from personal conversations. You must put away all non-course reading materials (e.g. newspapers). Turn off and put away all cell phones and electronic devices. **No laptops will be allowed in class unless cleared as part of a disability accommodation.** Notes need to be taken with pen and paper. Please avoid premature preparations to leave class; your instructor will let you know when class is over. Eating is not allowed during class. You may be asked to leave the class for the day if you do not follow these rules.