

REL 246: Religion and Popular Culture
Spring 2009

Monday/Wednesday 3:45 - 5:05
Hall of Languages 114

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"...[I]t is Disneyland that is authentic here! The cinema and TV are America's reality! The freeways, the Safeways, the skylines, speed, and deserts - these are America, not the galleries, the churches, and culture ..." - Jean Baudrillard

"If our thinking is not to be pseudo-thinking, we must think about life; for such a thinking is a thinking about God. And if we are to think about life, we must penetrate its hidden corners, and steadily refuse to treat anything - however trivial or disgusting it may seem to be - as irrelevant." - Karl Barth

REQUIRED TEXTS (available in the SU Bookstore)

Bruce David Forbes & Jeffrey Mahan, *Religion and Popular Culture in America (RPCA)*

Richard Santana & Gregory Erickson, *Religion and Popular Culture (RPC)*

Dominic Strinati, *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture (Strinati)*

John Berger, *Ways of Seeing (Berger)*

*Articles and chapters available on Blackboard (BB)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides an introduction to critical issues and approaches to the study of religion and popular culture in America. We will explore the complexity of the concepts of "religion" and "culture" and "popular culture," as well as the multiple ways American religion and popular culture represent, critique, and shape each other. As we think through these questions, we will identify cultural factors that shape how we "see" and do not "see" religion in America.

ASSIGNMENTS

40% - 4 Quizzes: Worth 10% each

You will be asked to demonstrate your understanding of the readings by applying them to the popular culture you currently are consuming.

Quiz Dates: Feb 2, Feb 23, March 23, April 13

60% - 4 Papers (4-6 pages each): Worth 15% each

Paper Dates: Feb 11, March 4, April 1, April 27

Paper 1: Fair World Marketplace (E. Genesee St.) vs. Around the World (Carousel Mall)

Paper 2: Kanye West's 3 *Jesus Walks* Music Videos

Paper 3: Reality TV vs. Authenticity TV

Paper 4: The Celebrity as Cultural Saint

* Participation & Attendance will be factored into the final grade at instructor's discretion

* No late work will be accepted

SCHEDULE

Week 1 - Introduction & Perspectives

Mon. Jan. 12 - Course Overview

Wed. Jan. 14 - RPCA: "Introduction: Finding Religion in Unexpected Places"

JZ Smith: "Religion, Religions, Religious" (BB)

Week 2 - Introduction & Perspectives (continued)

Mon. Jan. 19 - No Class (Martin Luther King Jr. Day)

Wed. Jan. 21 - RPC: "Popular Culture and Popular Religion in America"

Strinati: Introduction & "Mass Culture and Popular Culture"

Week 3 - Seeing Culture, High & Low

Mon. Jan. 26 - Berger: 7-33; 83-112

Wed. Jan. 28 - Meet at SU Art Galleries

Strinati: "Marxism, Political Economy and Ideology"

Week 4 - Consumer Culture - Advertising, Shopping Malls, & *The Secret*

Mon. Feb. 2 - Berger: 45-64; 129-154

Quiz 1

Wed. Feb. 4 - Pahl: "The Shopping Mall as Stairway to Heaven" (BB)

RPCA: "The Cross at Willow Creek: Seeker Religion and the Contemporary Marketplace"

Selection from *The Secret* (BB)

Week 5 - Consumer Culture - American Religion as Consuming
"Others"

Mon. Feb. 9 - RPCA: "The Oriental Monk in American Popular
Culture"

Selection from Carrette & King, *Selling
Spirituality* (BB)

Wed. Feb. 11 - **Paper 1 - Fair World Marketplace vs.
Around the World**

Week 6 - The Internet - Communities & Rituals Online

Mon. Feb. 16 - Ramji: "Building Community Word by Word:
Religion in the Virtual World" (BB)

Wed. Feb. 18 - RPCA: "Internet Christian and Muslim
Communities"

Strinati: "The Frankfurt School and the Culture
Industry"

Week 7 - Music - From Jimmy Swaggart to CCM to the
U2charist

Mon. Feb. 23 - RPCA: "Evangelicals and Popular Music: The
Contemporary Christian Music Industry"

Quiz 2

Wed. Feb. 25 - RPCA: "Like a Sermon: Popular Religion in
Madonna Videos"

RPC: "Absolute Contradictions: Perceptions of
the Spiritual and the Religious in
Popular Music"

Week 8 - Music - Lauryn Hill & Kanye West

Mon. March 2 - RPCA: "Rap Music and Its Message: On
Interpreting the Contact between Religion
and Popular Culture"

Sylvan: "Rap Music, Hip-Hop Culture, and 'The Future
Religion of the World'" (BB)

Wed. March 4 - **Paper 2 - Jesus Walks Video x3**

Week 9 - READ TWILIGHT

Mon. March 9 - No Class (Spring Break)

Wed. March 11 - No Class (Spring Break)

Week 10 - Popular Literature - Twilight

Mon. March 16 - Strinati: "Feminism and Popular Culture"

Wed. March 18 - RPCA: "Re-Mythologizing the Divine Feminine
in *Secret Life of Bees*"

RPCA: "Gender Dynamics of the *Left Behind*
Series"

Week 11 - Television - *Lost*

Mon. March 23 - Strinati: "Structuralism, Semiology and Popular Culture"

Quiz 3

Wed. March 25 - RPC: "Television Drama, Fan Communities and Theology"

Week 12 - Television - *Reality TV*

Mon. March 20 - Primiano: "Oprah, Phil, Geraldo, Barbara, and Things that Go Bump in the Night:

Negotiating the Supernatural on American Television" (BB)

Wed. April 1 - **Paper 3 - Reality vs. Authenticity TV**

Week 13 - Film - *V for Vendetta* & *The Dark Knight*

Mon. April 6 - Strinati: "Postmodernism, Contemporary Popular Culture and Recent Theoretical Developments"

Wed. April 8 - Press & Film Reviews (BB)

Week 14 - Film - *March of the Penguins* & *An Inconvenient Truth*

Mon. April 13 - Stone: "A Fire in the Sky: Apocalyptic Themes on the Silver Screen (BB)

Quiz 4

Wed. April 15 - Press & Film Reviews (BB)

Week 15 - Celebrity & Cultural Saints - *The Curious Case of Angelina Jolie*

Mon. April 20 - Anuar: "Selena - Prophet, Profit, Princess: Canonizing the Commodity" (BB)

Wed. April 22 - Angelina Photo Gallery (BB)

Week 16 - Conclusion

Mon. April 27 - RPCA: "Conclusion: Establishing a Dialogue about Religion and Popular Culture"

Paper 4 - The Celebrity Saint

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The Syracuse Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the policy and know it is their responsibility to learn about instructor and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of

sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort.

For more information, see Academic Integrity Office,
<http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>

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Syracuse University's Office of Disability Services (ODS) authorizes special accommodations for students with disabilities. Students who believe they may need academic accommodations due to a disability must register with ODS at 804 University Ave., Rm. 309, 443-3398 or 443-1371. Any such student should see the instructor as soon as possible to discuss their needs.

For more information, see Office of Disability Services,
<http://disabilityservices.syr.edu>