

# CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

## DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

### COURSE OUTLINE 2003

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*“The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. . . Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” —Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

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#### **RS 311: Religion and Film**

Sierra Hall 192

Thursdays, 7:00 to 9:45 pm, Ticket No. 74511

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#### **Professor:**

Amir Hussain

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Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:30 to 10:30 am, and 6:30 to 7:00 pm

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#### **Course Description:**

This course is as much about the use of film to study religion as it is about the use of religion to study film. In other words, we will use different films to facilitate discussion about various dimensions of and issues in religion. And conversely, we will use images, metaphors, and teachings found in religion to discuss the layers and elements visually and audibly portrayed on screen. Through different critical approaches, this course will examine how religion, as variously defined, pervades the modern cinema and how one may engage in dialogue with this phenomenon. Goals for students enrolled in this course include:

1. To think and discuss critically about film from a religious studies perspective;
2. To broaden understanding of the term “religious” and then to realize its significant role in film plot, narrative, and imagery;
3. To foster insight into other perspectives through a careful examination of one’s own thinking.

***WARNING: Some of the films viewed in this course contain scenes of explicit violence, sexuality, sexual brutality, and offensive language. It is not my intent to de-sensitize students, but rather to enable them to discuss the relevant issues that these films introduce.***

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### **Required Text:**

S. Brent Plate, editor, *Religion, Art, and Visual Culture: A Cross Cultural Reader* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

A copy of the book is on reserve in the Reserve Book Room of the Oviatt Library.

### **Relevant Web Sites:**

- The Internet Movie Database <http://us.imdb.com>
  - All Movie Guide <http://www.allmovie.com>
  - Complete Film Listing <http://www.corona.bc.ca/films>
  - Roger Ebert Film Reviews <http://www.suntimes.com/index/ebert.html>
  - The *Journal of Religion and Film* <http://www.unomaha.edu/~wwwjrf/>
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### **Evaluation:**

**It is important for each student to know at the outset that this course requires daily reading, journal writing, six written assignments and a take home final examination.** Moreover, regular class attendance and participation are required. Clear, grammatically correct composition and standard spelling are expected on all written assignments. Written assignments should be proofread and edited before being submitted for grading.

The final examination will be cumulative. The exam will be graded on a) familiarity with the readings and films, and b) independent questioning and reflection elicited by journal writing, written assignments and classroom discussions. Methodical reading, conscientious writing of the assignments, and participation in class discussion will prepare students for the exam.

Regular attendance and timely handing-in of the written assignments are mandatory. The dates for handing-in each assignment are given below. Active class participation will positively affect the student's final grade. More than one unexcused absence during the semester will negatively affect the student's grade. The University's grading policy, including the plus/minus system, will be used. The University's cheating policy will be followed in this course.

Grades will be determined as follows:

60% Written Assignments (6 assignments, worth 10% each)

10% Class Participation

30% Final Exam Given on December 4 and Returned by December 11

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### **Schedule of Lectures and Films:**

Aug. 28: Introductory meeting: What are we doing in this course and why? Methodological and other issues in this course. Reading: Introduction. John R. Cash, *Hurt*. *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, *Darmok*.

Sept. 4: Discussion about *Darmok*. Christianity, capitalism and indigenous traditions: *Dead Man*. Reading: Section One.

Sept. 11: Discussion about *Dead Man*. Judaism and Christian origins: *Jesus Christ Superstar*. Reading: Section Two.

Sept. 18: Discussion about *Jesus Christ Superstar*. Jesus, another look: *Jesus of Montreal*.

Sept. 25: Discussion about *Jesus of Montreal*. Taoist and Buddhist elements: *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai*. Reading: Section Four.

Oct. 2: Discussion about *Ghost Dog*. Love and compassion: *Kundun*.

Oct. 9: Discussion about *Kundun*. The poetry of ordinary Muslim lives: *Children of Heaven*. Reading: Section Three.

Oct. 16: Discussion about *Children of Heaven*. American religious leaders: *The Apostle*.

Oct. 23: Discussion about *The Apostle*. Apocalypse and religious pluralism: *The Matrix*.

Oct. 30: Discussion about *The Matrix*. Death and dying in America: *The Sixth Sense*. Reading: Section Six.

Nov. 6: Discussion about *The Sixth Sense*. Hinduism in the diaspora: *Mississippi Masala*. Reading: Section Five.

Nov. 13: Discussion about *Mississippi Masala*. Religion, violence and colonialism: *Once Were Warriors*.

Nov. 20: Discussion about *Once Were Warriors*. Religion in Los Angeles: *Santitos*.

Nov. 27: No class due to Thanksgiving Day holiday.

Dec. 4: **Take Home Final Examination to be Distributed.** Discussion about *Santitos*. Overview and review.

Dec. 11: **Final Examination to be Returned by 8:00 p.m.**

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### **Journal Writing and Dates for Handing in Written Assignments:**

For this course, you will be asked to keep a learning journal. This journal is intended to 1) improve your writing fluency, 2) increase your recall and comprehension of the readings and films, and 3) help you to articulate the ideas that you develop during the course. **How you keep this journal is up to you.** Many students prefer a spiral-bound notebook, others a looseleaf binder that they can divide into sections, and others an electronic journal. However you keep it, this journal is meant to be a personal record of your learning in this course. **As such, you are the only person that will ever read your journal.**

At times in the course (such as after viewing each film), I will ask you to take out your journals and write in them. In addition to these opportunities to write in your journal during class time, you should write in your journal after you have done the reading for a particular section. You should write about 2-3 pages per week in your journal. Some topics you might address are:

1. What were the important points of this reading (or lecture, or film, or class discussion)?
2. Do you agree or disagree with those points? Why?
3. What questions do you have about the reading (or lecture, or film, or class discussion)?
4. How does the reading (or lecture, or film, or class discussion) relate to your own experience, or to other outside reading/research that you have done?

For six of the films that we study, I will ask you to select from your journal the piece that you consider to be the most important to you, revise it, and submit it as a formal written assignment. This assignment should not be simply a summary of your notes, but your own reflection on what you have learned. **Be sure to discuss how the film relates to the reading for that week.** Each assignment should be about 2 to 3 typed, double-spaced pages in length. These assignments will be graded on such things as spelling, punctuation, grammar, word precision and style, in addition to content. Journal assignments will be collected at the beginning of the classes indicated below. **No late assignments will be accepted.**

September 11: Assignment on *Dead Man* and Section One

September 25: Assignment on *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Jesus of Montreal* and Section Two

October 2: Assignment on *Ghost Dog* and Section Four

October 16: Assignment on *Children of Heaven* and Section Three

November 6: Assignment on *The Sixth Sense* and Section Six

November 13: Assignment on *Mississippi Masala* and Section Five

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