

Religion 130: American Mythology and Film

Fall 2011

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Class times: T-F 11 AM, Bruner 3140
Wed 7:00 pm - 9:30 pm (approx), Bruner 3140

Course Description:

Making the transition from high school and living at home to college and greater autonomy is challenging. This course will help you make this transition and develop skills for success at college and your post-college activity, whether in the job market or in graduate school. These skills include time-management and prioritization, how to take notes, how to read carefully, how to analyze arguments, how to formulate arguments, and how to express yourself persuasively in verbal and written modes of communication. Additionally, I will be introducing some technology tools to help with these goals.

We will develop these skills by thinking about the way Americans are socialized. Societies socialize their members through a variety of means, including foundation myths, stories of heroes and heroic actions, and selectively recalling history to emphasize values the society holds in high esteem. One of the most important means of socializing American citizens has been through religion, but not the religion of any specific church. Rather, Americans learn a civil religion, based on Protestantism and recalling the Puritan heritage of the early English colonies in North America.

In this class, we will first outline American "civil religion," and think about how it developed, especially in the late 19th and 20th centuries. Once we have a vague idea about American myth, we will examine one way it is transmitted: popular films. We focus on popular films, since these films are seen by more people and thus have a greater impact on society than do "good" films that rarely are shown outside of art houses. We will examine how films use, modify, or allude to "civil religion" and elements of American mythology.

Being aware of the socialization process and American mythology will contribute to fulfilling the college's mission statement:

True to its founding vision in 1829, Illinois College is a community committed to the highest standards of scholarship and integrity in the liberal arts. The College develops in its students qualities of mind and character needed for lives of leadership, personal fulfillment, and service.

Class members will learn what the standards are for scholarship and integrity in this class (see below); by examining the socialization process and development of American mythology they will develop the skills needed for leadership, service, and personal fulfillment.

Academic Integrity

We will study academic integrity and discuss what constitutes plagiarism and cheating and how to avoid it during the semester. After studying this, students will sign the *Academic Integrity Oath*, which will be collected and kept by the Dean's office.

All students at IC are bound by the IC Academic Honor Code (<http://www.ic.edu/academics/academichonesty.asp>). Since this class requires mostly written work, the most relevant portion of the Honor Code is the portion that notes that:

In papers, each student must acknowledge sources when using:

Direct quotations, Paraphrases, Summaries, and Specific ideas or concepts.

As required by the Honor Code, students found to be violating the Honor Code will receive an "F" in the course.

Course Requirements (components of your semester grade):

1) Attendance & Participation

Not showing up for work will get you fired. Similarly, you are required to come to *all* ICC convocations and movie showings on Wednesday nights.

You may miss three of the morning classes during the semester without penalty. Additional unexcused absences will significantly affect your semester final grade. (See below for discussion of excused and unexcused absences.)

2) Notes

You will not remember materials if you don't take notes on them. Hence, you need to learn to take notes quickly and accurately, both in class (for lectures) and on materials you read. At least once per week, I will ask you to hand in the notes you have taken.

3) Convocation Responses

a) We will be attending four (4) convocations during the semester. For each convocation, you will take notes on the presentation. From these notes, you will write a short paper (2 pages max) that addresses questions I will email immediately after the convo.

Your notes will be assessed based on how clear they are and whether they accurately reflect the author's arguments. Your style of writing (complete sentences, spelling, etc.), will not be assessed.

Your paper will be assessed based on how well you address the questions posed and incorporate the arguments of the convocation speaker. The paper needs to be written in standard paper form (i.e., formal language, correct spelling and punctuation, complete sentences, etc.).

These will be due the day after the convocation, when we will discuss the convocation.

4) Two short papers (4-6 pages)

You will write two short papers, analyzing two or more movies, along with the articles read related to them. Each of these papers will be reviewed by your colleagues in class, who will offer you suggestions on how to improve them. You will then revise the paper, based on the feedback you receive from your colleagues, before submitting it for a grade.

5) Paper workshop

We will do two paper workshops. You will review the papers from two of your colleagues and offer them suggestions on how they can improve them.

5) Research Paper (10-12 pages)

Students will select a film or films to research; they will watch it several times, as well as find at least six (6) sources that discuss it. By Oct 1, you should have selected a film and started to look for sources that discuss it. By Oct 25, you will have an annotated bibliography. The paper will be workshopped in EN 121 on 11/21. The final version of the paper will be submitted in lieu of a final exam.

6) Student Presentation

The final week of class will be used for student presentations. Each student will present their research paper, discussing the film they choose to study, and how their reading of the film differs from other scholar's readings of the film.

Evaluation:

10%	Attend & Participation
10%	Notes
10%	Convo Responses
25%	Short Papers
10%	Workshops
25%	Research Papers

Grading:

Final grades will be assigned as follows:

90-93.3 A - 93.4-100 A

80-83.3 B- 83.4-86.6 B 86.7-89.9 B+

70-73.3 C- 73.4-76.6 C 76.7-79.9 C+

60-63.3 D- 63.4-66.6 D 66.7-69.9 D+
59.9 and lower: F

Textbooks:

Kristoff & WuDunn, *Half the Sky* (2009), the summer reading. You have already thought about how this book relates to the American Monomyth; we will be returning to examples from this book periodically throughout the semester.

Hacker, *A Pocket Style Manual* (2004). You will use this handbook for the rest of your college career (so don't sell it at the end of the semester!). It has lots of information about different citation styles, how to use punctuation correctly, and the like.

Miller, *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (1986) will illustrate how an iconic superhero can be re-envisioned by a sufficiently strong mythic narrative.

Larewnc and Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero* (2002) will provide the scholarly language and framework for the analysis of popular culture.

These books will be supplemented by readings from the on-line reserve system accessed via the course website.

On-Line Reserve System

Most readings other than those from the required books can be accessed via the course webpage.

To ensure compliance with copyright law:

► You must have an IC TCP/IP address. You will not be able to access these documents from home or via another ISP (like Verizon or Comcast). You must access them from an IC computer lab or dorm room.

If you have difficulties accessing the on-line readings, please call the computer help desk (x3416).

E-mail

Students are required to check their IC e-mail accounts regularly. If I need to contact you, I will do so via your IC e-mail address. Failure to read your email will not be considered a legitimate excuse for not receiving these messages.

Attendance Policy: As noted in the "Requirements" section above, attendance at all classes is expected. There are only four types of absences that will be considered excusable:

Unexpected absences

- *unexpected* hospitalization
- bereavement due to the death of an immediate family member

You will need to show documentation for this category of absences. For the former, a note/letter from your doctor explaining the circumstances of your admission; for the latter, a death certificate or obituary. For these two types of absences, you will be allowed to makeup quizzes and/or exams and I will consider granting an extension to turn in work late.

"Unexpected" doesn't include dental checkups, physical exams, plastic surgery procedures, etc., that you scheduled during class time – if you have scheduled it, it is, by definition, not "unexpected."

Anticipated absences

- participation in activities for another class
- participation on a varsity sport team

If you plan to miss class for one of these reasons, **you must notify me via e-mail as early in the semester as possible. You need to tell me what class or team is requiring your absence and list the date(s) that you will not be present in class.**

Failure to notify me **before** your trip will result in it being recorded as an unexcused absence.

You are expected to turn in papers and/or other material ahead of time or make provision to have one of your classmates turn it in for you.

All other absences, for whatever reason (personal trips, work for other classes, a hot date, massive hangover, *et cetera*) will not be excused.

Whether your absences are excused or not, you are responsible for all assigned readings and for material discussed in class. You need to get notes from your classmates and talk to them about what you missed.

Late Paper Policy

Papers are due at the beginning of class on the dates indicated on the syllabus. You can submit paper copies during class time (recomomded). Papers that are submitted late should be sent via e-mail in RTF format. They will be penalized one letter grade (starting immedately) for each 24 hour period they are late (based on the date/time stamp from the mail server).

- Hence: if your paper is due at 11 AM Friday
- and you turn it in at 5 PM, it goes down one letter grade (A to B).
- and you turn it in on 11:30 Saturay, it goes down two letter grades (A to C).
- and you turn it in on 11:30 Sunday, it goes down three letter grades (A to D)
- and you turn it in on 11:30 Monday, it goes down four letter grades (A to F)

Remember, it is better to turn in a paper late than none at all. An F counts 50 points in my grade calculations, which is a lot better than 0!

If you know you will be absent (for example, if you are going to be travelling because of participation in a sport and will miss class on Friday), you must turn your paper in early.

Papers may be submitted via e-mail, as attachments in the RTF format, if desired. No other formats will be accepted. If you don't know how to save a paper as an RTF file, call the help desk (x3416) and they will help you.

This policy is based on fairness: if you have longer to produce your paper, it should be better than your colleagues. Hence, it is not fair for you to have more time than they do and not be penalized somehow. It is also not fair to the professor, who arranges his schedule carefully so as to be able to return papers promptly.

Are these policies so draconian?

College prepares you for life. After you graduate, you will penalized for submitting materials late. The IRS will slap a large financial penalty on you for not meeting the April 15 deadline. If you don't meet a deadline set up by your employer, you may be fired or receive a poor performance evaluation (and a smaller raise). If you don't show up, you will get fired.

Treat college like a job: Show up (critical for any employment), do the work you are assigned (also critical), and meet deadlines. If you put in 40 hours a week on your classes and homework, you will succeed academically.

Have some fun (play sports, go to parties), do some volunteer work, or get a part-time job. But don't let these interfere with your main job: succeeding academically.

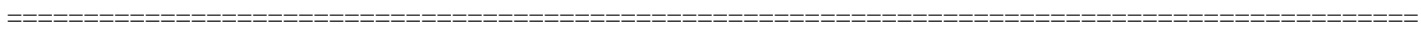
Schedule:

Note that the reading load varies considerably and students should schedule their time accordingly.

All readings, unless otherwise noted, are from the assigned textbooks OR can be found on the course website (www2.ic.edu/aporter/130.html).

Abbreviations:

- MAS = Myth of the American Superhero
- SS = Success strategy / learning tip
- Technology = Technology strategy / tip



- Aug
- 27 Introduction & Name Game; Advising, Gen-Ed overview; summer writing assignment due
- 28 Service Day
- 29 Name game (2)
Discussion: what are American values? Which characters in Half the Sky exhibit them? One of the goals for the First Year Seminars is to help students succeed at Illinois College. Think about what “success” means for you. What do you hope to accomplish while at IC?
- 30 **SS:** Reading, talking notes, textbooks. OLR: Note taking examples.
Technology: Dropbox!
- 31 No class: schedule meetings to discuss summer paper with instructor.
No movie
- Sept
- 1 Hirsch, “The Formation of National Culture”
Is Hirsch’s argument that we should have a national canon of literature persuasive? Who gets to determine it? In our contemporary setting, what, besides literature, should be included in the canon?
6 PM Dinner @ Barnes House
- 2 Bellah, “Civil Religion in America.”
Bellah argues for a non-religious civil religion in the US. Does his argument persuade you? Why or why not?
- 4 CONVO: Seven (staged reading)
- 5 CONVO: Randall Kennedy, “The Race Line in American Life”
- 6 Kennedy convo paper due (No paper for Seven convo!)
Discussion of Kennedy & Seven convos
- 7 No Class
6:30 PM *Crash* (2004)
- 8 Movie discussion: How do you imagine Kennedy would comment on this film? How does it “fit” the Monomyth and how does it challenge it?
- 9 Boyd, “Collateral Damages Sustained in the Film Crash.”
Souls 9.3 (2007): 253–65
Prendergast, Villaneuva, Ray, and Farris. “Symposium: Short Takes.” *College English* 69.4 (Mar 2007): 347–59.
- 12 Add/Drop Day
CONVO: Phoebe Eng, “Cultural Fluency: Creating Dialogues that Lead to Change”
- 13 Convo paper due. Discussion of Eng convo.
- 14 MAS: Overture, Chapters 1 & 2. Pay special attention to pp. 26-28 -- can you think of recent examples of America’s seeing its problems as coming from the “intruding, evil other”?
6:30 PM: *Die Hard* (1988)
- 15 Movie discussion: How well does this movie fit the Am. Monomyth?
- 16 Parshall, “Die Hard and the American Mythos,” in *J. of Popular Film and Television*, 18/4 (1991): 134-144.
- 20 Revised Summer Paper Assignment Due.
Tompkins, *West of Everything*, pp. 23-45.
- 21 Banks, “The Drama of Salvation in George Stevens’s *Shane*,” in *Explorations in Theology and Film*, Marsh & Ortiz (eds.), (Blackwell, 1997): 59-65.
6:30 PM: *Shane* (1953)
- 22 Movie discussion: does this fit the monomyth?
- 23 **SS:** Introduction to the Library. Class will meet in Schewe Library, Room 210.
- 27 Research Project Begins! Pick out at least three movies that you are considering analyzing for your research project. For each, find out the year they were released, their director, and their box-office success. This information can be found at www.imdb.com. Type up this information and bring it to class (you will hand it in to the instructor).
We will discuss the different movies in class, so bring your list of movies and be prepared to discuss what elements of American mythology they reflect or refute.
- 28 **Technology:** How to use Zotero to make research easier (Meet in Computer Lab, location TBA). Bring your laptop; if you don’t have one, bring a USB/Thumb drive.
6:30 PM *Unforgiven* (1992)
- 29 No class: Rosh Hashanah
- 30 No class: Rosh Hashanah
- Oct
- 4 MAS, chapter 8; OLR - Armando J. Prats, “Back from the Sunset: The Western, the Eastwood Hero, and *Unforgiven*” in *J. of Film and Video* 47/1-3 (1995): 106-23.
- 5 **Technology:** How to organize your data (meet in Computer Lab, location TBA). Bring Laptop.
6:30 PM *Dances with Wolves* (1990)
- 6 Movie discussion.
Dan Georgakas, “Dances with Wolves,” *Cineaste* 18/2 (1991): 51-54
Seals, “The New Custerism,” *Nation* 252/18 (1991): 634-40
Ostwalt, “Dances with Wolves: An American Heart of Darkness”
- 7 **SS:** Time Management. Class will meet in Kirby 06
Paper #1 Due (Western Analysis)
- 10 CONVO: Nickolas Kristof, “Half the Sky”
- 11 Convo paper due. Discussion of Kristof convo.
- 12 Paper Workshop #1
- 13 Fall Break: During the break, watch the movie you doing for your research project. You should try to watch it several times, following the guides on “How to watch movies.”

- 14 Fall Break
- 18 **Paper #1 Revision Due**
Technology: How to use Zotero generate citations and bibliographies for you
- 19 No class: Meet with instructor to show how your data is organized / discuss Zotero / other issues
6:30 PM *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008)
- 20 Movie discussion
- 21 OLR: Sengupta, "A Million Dollar Exit from the Anarchic Slum-world..." *Third World Quarterly*, 31.4 (2010): 599-616
- 25 NO CLASS: **Annotated bibliography due.** Email your annotated bibliography to instructor and bring a copy to discuss. For each article / review / book / chapter, provide a short summary (1-3 sentences) of the author's argument.
Start a time diary: how are you spending your time, hour by hour?
- 26 No class. Meet with instructor to discuss research project / progress
6:30 PM *Pretty Woman* (1990)
- 27 Movie Discussion.
Kelly, "A Modern Cinderella," *J. of American Culture* 17.1 (1994): 87-92
Greenberg, "Rescrewed: *Pretty Woman's* Co-opted Feminism," *J. of Popular Film and Television* 19.1 (1991): 9-13
Miner, "No Matter What They Say, it's all about Money," *J. of Popular Film and Television* 20.1 (1991): 8-15
- 28 SS: Writing Well. Class will meet in Kirby 06
- 1 No Class: Meet with Instructor to go over time diary; discuss next semester's classes, etc.
- 2 No Class: Meet with Instructor to go over time diary; discuss next semester's classes, etc.
6:30 PM *Glory* (1989)
- 3 Movie discussion
- 4 Cripps, "The Absent Presence in American Civil War Films," *Historical Journal of Film Radio and Television* 14/4 (1994): 367-77
- 8 **Technology:**
a) The importance of super strong passwords and how to keep track of them
b) Portable Apps
- 9
6:30 PM *Schindler's List* (1993)
- 10 Movie discussion
- 11 Bartov, "Spielberg's Oskar: Hollywood Tries Evil"
Doneson, "The Image Lingers"
- 15 **Paper #2 Due** (Other Mythologies?)
- McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, chapter 2
- 16 McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, chapter 6
6:30 PM *Batman* (1966)
- 17 Movie discussion.
Medhurst, "Batman, Deviance and Camp," in *The Many Lives of the Batman*, Pearson & Uricchio, eds. (NY: Routledge, 1991), 149-163
Hajdu, "Comics on the Stand." *On the Media*, New York Public Radio, 25 April 2008.
- 18 SS: Planning for the Future. Class will meet in Crispin 220.
- 22 Self-run class meeting to return and discuss reader responses for paper #2.
Read (and/or re-read) *Dark Knight* during this week.
- 23 No Class: SBL Meeting
- 24 No Class: TG Break
- 25 No Class: TG Break
- 29 **Revised Paper #2 Due**
Discussion of Miller, *Dark Knight*, books 1 & 2
- 30 Discussion of Miller, *Dark Knight*, books 3 & 4
6:30 *Batman Begins* (2005)
- 1 Movie discussion.
Killian, "Batman (and World War III) Begins: Hollywood Takes on Terror," *J. of Feminist Family Therapy* 19/1 (2007): 77-82
Sweet, "Profile Batman," *New Statesman*, 27 June 2005, 28-29.
- 2 SS: Healthy Choices. Class will meet in Sibert Auditorium.
- 6 **Technology** Round Table: extra credit for telling the class *your* favorite trick with Google Mail, Apps, Facebooks, word processors, etc.
- 7 No class: work on your research paper
6:30 PM *BladeRunner* (1982)
- 8 Movie Discussion.
- 9 Lev, "Whose Future? Star Wars, Alien, and Blade Runner," in *Literature Film Quarterly* 26: 30-38 (1998);
Ruppert, "Blade Runner: The Utopian Dialectics of Science Fiction Films," in *Cineaste* 17/2 (1989): 8-13.
- 13 No Class: Presentations @ 8 AM