

Dr. Mark Hulsether
University of Tennessee
Spring Semester 2006

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Office hours: TR 9:30 – 10:30, McClung 507

American Studies/Religious Studies 355: Religion and Culture in America
Theme: US Cultural Identity in Global Perspective

This is not a survey of all aspects of religion and US culture, but rather a variable-topics course on selected issues and problems within this field. (Students who have taken other versions of AS/RS 355 may take it again.) Our focus this term is on understanding the US in the context of globalization and empire. Since this topic is too ambitious to explore comprehensively, we will approach it through analyzing five books that address it from various angles, using disciplinary tools with a center of gravity in cultural and social history, cultural anthropology, American Studies, media studies, and global studies.

The course gives enough attention to where religion fits within this field—for example, to religious dimensions of global conflicts, the claims by some people that the US has a special religious destiny, and religious opposition to empire—that it makes sense to cross-list the class in both American Studies and Religious Studies. However, it leans toward the American Studies side of this divide. Likewise, it gives enough attention to people from beyond the US—or, more precisely, to relationships between people from the US and other places—that it counts toward the Global Studies major, although it tilts toward American Studies in the sense that it starts from where we live and looks outward. It intends to complement and enable dialog with—without substituting for—studies that are grounded in other parts of the world. Thus it contributes to UT’s QEP initiative that seeks to improve international and cross-cultural understanding. Students who need to arrange credit in Global Studies will be able to do so.

Skills for critical thinking about our case studies will translate smoothly into skills for understanding other cultural-political issues in the contemporary world. Therefore, this course can help you build a toolbox of critical skills that you can use for the rest of your life, even after you have forgotten many of the details that we will cover.

Required Readings

Tom Engelhardt, *The End of Victory Culture*
Manfred Steger, *Globalization: a Very Short Introduction*
Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and US Interests in the Middle East*
Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins, *Reading National Geographic*
Cornel West, *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight Against Imperialism*
Supplementary Readings for AS/RS 355 (Available via Blackboard)

Expectations and Evaluation

The course has two major expectations. The first is preparing the readings and coming to class prepared to discuss them actively and critically. Class sessions will *presuppose* a reading of the assignments; they will not *substitute* for this. I will evaluate whether you are keeping up through classroom discussions, quizzes on basic terms and concepts from the readings, and short reflection papers that I will assign on a regular basis. The second expectation is writing two short papers—a midterm and final synthetic essay—that stress comparison and analysis of course materials, plus a research project on a subject of your choice. Near the end of the term we will schedule sessions in which students may, if they choose, present their research to the class.

We have scheduled a series of films (mainly from Hollywood) related to themes of the course. These are optional but highly recommended. Up to 6% extra credit (maximum two points per film) is available for reports on them. To get full credit for any given film, turn in a two-page reflection of “A” quality within a week of its scheduled showing; use half your space to summarize the film’s key themes and half to make explicit connections between the film and at least one required reading from our syllabus. You may view these films individually in the library if you cannot attend at scheduled times; some are also available to rent.

Grades for late papers are lowered 10% per class meeting. You are responsible for understanding UT policies regarding plagiarism; plagiarized papers will receive a zero for the assignment plus a penalty of at least two letter grades for the course. After two unexcused absences, each additional absence lowers your course grade by 2%. Up to 4% extra credit is available for participating in an online discussion, which is described at the end of this syllabus.

Assignments are weighted as follows:

Weekly quizzes and/or brief reflection papers	30%
Mid-term and final exams (4-5 page take-home essays)	30%
Research Project (10-15 pages)	30%
Class participation	10%
Extra credit categories (refer to blackboard for grading procedures):	
Regular participation in an on-line discussion	Up to 4%
Reports on extra credit films and/or lectures	Up to 6%

Weekly Agenda (May Be Revised or Supplemented)

- 1/12 R Read: Boyer, “Foreign Policy Meets Prophecy”
- 1/17 T Read: Appiah, “Case for Contamination” with critical responses
One page response due: Which critical response is smartest and why?

Triumphalist Despair and Victory Culture

- 1/19 R Read: Engelhardt, 1-65.
- 1/24 T Read: Engelhardt, 69-132
- 1/26 R *Dr. Hulsether at Wabash Center Consultation*
 Meet in Library Room 253 for required film: *Color Adjustment*
 Read: Read: Engelhardt, 133-201
- 1/31 T Read: Engelhardt, 202-259
- 2/2 R Read: Read: Engelhardt, 260-304
One page response due: Did victory culture really end?
 Extra Credit Film Series, 7:00 PM in Library Room 212: *Three Kings*
- 2/7 T Read: Engelhardt, “Withdraw from Iraq”; Frank, *What’s the Matter With Kansas?*

Approaches to Globalization

- 2/9 R Read: Steger, chap. 1-2; supplement TBA
- 2/14 T Read: Steger, chap. 3-4
Due: one page proposal of theme and tentative bibliography for research paper
- 2/16 R Read: Steger, chap. 5-6
Extra Credit Film Series, 7:00 PM in Library Room 212: *The Yes Men*
- 2/21 T Read: Steger, chap. 7-8

National Geographic and How It Teaches Us to See the World

- 2/23 R Read: Lutz and Collins, chap. 1-2; Miner, "Body Ritual Among the Nacimera"
- 2/28 T Read: Lutz and Collins, chap. 3-4.
- 3/2 R Read: Lutz and Collins, chap. 6 and 197-214; "Chiapas: Rough Road to Reality"
- 3/7 T Read: Haraway, "Teddy Bear Patriarchy"; Schudson, "Paper Tigers"
- 3/9 R Read: Lutz and Collins, 217-247 and chap. 9.
Midterm synthetic essay assignment due.

Media, Religion, and US Middle Eastern Policy

- 3/14 T Read: McAlister, introduction
- 3/16 R Read: McAlister, chapter 1-2
Meet in Library Room 253 for required film: *Control Room*
- 3/21-3/23 HAPPY FALL BREAK
- 3/28 T Read: McAlister, chap. 3-4
Extra Credit Film Series, 7:00 PM in Library Room 212: TBA
- 3/30 R Read: McAlister, chap. 5-6
- 4/4 T Read: McAlister, chap. 7 and conclusion
*Due: Revised abstract of paper with two page annotated bibliography.
(Please incorporate earlier suggestions of Dr. Hulsether or explain why you did not.)*

Religion, Democracy, and Empire

- 4/6 R Read: West, chap. 1-2; supplement TBA
Student Presentations I (Tentative)
- 4/11 T Read: West, chap. 3-4
Extra Credit Film Series, 7:00 PM in Library 251: *Romero*
- 4/13 R Read: Loy, "Religion of the Market"

Student Presentations II (Tentative)

4/18 T Read: West, chap. 5; McCarragher Vs. Webb debate from *Anxious About Empire*

4/20 R Read: West, chap. 6-7
Tentative Student Presentations III (Tentative)

Final Thoughts: Conclusions, Syntheses, and Open Questions

4/25 T Read: supplement TBA
Student Presentations IV (Tentative)

4/27 R *Research Papers Due. Final synthetic essay assignment distributed.*

5/3 W *Day of scheduled final exam. Final Synthetic Papers Due at 2:45 in McClung 501*

On-Line Reserves and Blackboard Site

We will use blackboard (<http://online.utk.edu/>) to access readings, and share information. You need a UT username and password to access blackboard, and *Acrobat Reader* software (free at www.adobe.com) to open files posted there. If I email you through blackboard, the message goes only to your university account (the one ending in utk.edu or tennessee.edu); please forward your mail if you use a personal account such as hotmail. We will maintain an online discussion within blackboard. Regular participation in this forum is worth up to 4% of extra credit for the most active participants, with others receiving less credit on a sliding scale. This forum is for open discussion of issues related to our course. Feel free to start your own threads; I will edit as necessary. Personal opinions are welcome, but posts that engage with course materials receive substantially greater consideration for extra credit.

Full Citations for Supplementary Readings

- Paul Boyer, "When U.S. Foreign Policy Meets Biblical Prophecy," posted to Altnet.org (2/20/2003)
- Kwame Anthony Appiah, "The Case for Contamination," *New York Times Magazine* (1/1/06).
- Critical responses to Appiah's "Case for Contamination" from Cultural Studies List-serv, January 2006.
- Tom Engelhardt, "How (Not) To Withdraw from Iraq" posted on <http://www.tomdispatch.com> (12/1/05)
- Thomas Frank, excerpts from *What's the Matter With Kansas* (New York: Henry Holt, 2004)
- Horace Miner, "Body Ritual Among the Nacirema," *American Anthropologist* 58 (1956), 503-507.
- Donna Haraway, "Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden," *Culture/Power/History: a Reader in Contemporary Social Theory* ed. Dirks et. al. (Princeton University Press, 1994), 49-95
- Michael Schudson, "Paper Tigers: A Sociologist Follows Cultural Studies into the Wilderness." *Lingua Franca* (August 1997), 49-56.
- "Chiapas: Rough Road to Reality," *National Geographic* (August 1996)
- Eugene McCarragher, "'The Most Intolerable of Insults': Remarks to Christian Infidels in the American Empire," in *Anxious About Empire: Theological Essays on the New Global Realities*, ed. Wes Avram (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004), 103-115
- Stephen Webb, "On the True Globalism and the False, or Why Christians Should Not Worry So Much About American Imperialism," in *Anxious About Empire: Theological Essays on the New Global Realities* ed. Wes Avram (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004), 119-
- David Loy, "Religion of the Market," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 65 #2 (1997), 275-90