**Course Overview, Fall 2020**

**Readings, Presentations, & Due Dates**

**Week One, September 14 - 18, Getting Started**

**Tuesday,** We will 1) introduce ourselves, and 2) view a brief video in which Professor Mahan introduces *some* possible interactions of religion and popular culture.

Supplemental Preparation: I encourage you to pay attention to the way you and others in your household engage with popular culture this week. What do you read, watch, follow, listen to, and play? Are religious practices or images included? What satisfactions does it provide? What generational, gendered, racialized, or cultural differences do you observe in your own, your household or extended family’s relationship to popular culture? Where appropriate, bring your reflections into the class discussion.

**Wednesday,** Read and discuss: Religion and Popular Culture in America, *third edition* (hereafter, RPCA) Forbes, “Introduction: Finding Religion in Unexpected Places" (22 pages)

Supplemental Preparation: Consider watching a TV show from your childhood, or playing a video game or listening to music from your teen years, reading a popular novel that was once important to you, or visiting online fan sites for a celebrity you were once interested in. Were religious practices, concepts, or images included? Think about how this is like and different from the popular culture you engage today. What satisfactions did it provide? What cultural norms and attitudes did it portray and what values did it encourage? Are there things about this material that continue to engage you? Are there things about it that distress you? Where appropriate, bring your reflections into the class discussion.

**By Friday,** Return to the discussions and make at least two further substantive responses to others posts, responses to your posts, or by introduce a new topic.

**Week Two, September 21 - 25, What do we mean by “religion” and by “popular culture?”**

**Tuesday,** Read and discuss: Chidester, “The Church of Baseball, The Fetish of Coca-Cola, and Potlatch of Rock and Roll” (17 pgs.) [available on Canvas]

Reading note: This is a provocative and entertaining essay. It is also complex and at points not as clear as I think it might be. Notice that the author using popular culture examples to explore what we might mean by "religion." So, ask yourself how a space like a ball park, a fetish object like a coke bottle, and a bodily activity like a potlatch might lead us to think about religion in different ways. Why is it helpful to use these examples rather, for example, than “actual” religions or religious institutions? As an extension, think about the range of things the author considers to be popular culture and think about what you generally mean by the term.

**Wednesday,** Choose one of the three supplemental readings.

View and discuss the instructor’s remarks on the social function of popular culture.

**Thursday,** 1**0:30 – 11:45 MST,** Synchronous Zoom check in re class questions. If you haven’t yet done so, be sure to review the syllabus/Canvas site and bring any questions about assignments and expectations.

**By Friday**, Return to the discussions and make at least two further substantive responses to at least two other posts, responses to your posts, or introduce a new topic.

**Week Three, Sept 28 – Oct 2, Jesus in Popular Culture and in Popular Practice**

**Tuesday,** Read and discuss: Mahan, Jeffrey, “Celluloid Savior: Jesus in the Movies,” in The Journal of Religion and Film, April, 2002, (8 pgs.) available on Canvas

Supplemental Preparation: I encourage you to supplement your reading by watch a film or television show about the life of Jesus. There are of course many. Among them: King of Kings (silent 1927, or 1961), The Gospel According to Saint Matthew (Italian, 1964), Jesus Christ Superstar (1973), Monty Python’s Life of Brian (1979), The Last Temptation of Christ (1988), The Passion of the Christ (2004), or perhaps one of Jesus appearances on the South Park TV show. Alternatively, you might visit a church and look for pictures of Jesus. Where does he appear, what sort of pictures are used? In either case, think about how Jesus is presented. What material from the gospel accounts is included and what is left out? What is the message of this Jesus? What do people need to do to follow him? Where appropriate, bring your reflections into the class discussion.

**Reminder:**  Organize your additional reading panel and set a meeting soon to discuss the text and plan for your upcoming presentations. Finish reading your book before that meeting.

**Wednesday**, Due in Canvas: Research Proposal

**Thursday,** Read and discuss: Morgan, David, “Reading the Face of Jesus,” in Visual Piety, (27 pages) [pdf in Canvas]

Supplemental Preparation: Think about images of Jesus that appear in social media and popular culture – perhaps particularly in discussions of the death of George Floyd and the demonstrations and expressions of public anger that followed, how is the image of Jesus (or other religious images and symbols) used and what political and religious functions does it serve, consider the implicit assumptions about race and gender in the image.

**By Friday**, Return to the discussions and make at least two further substantive responses to at least two other posts, responses to your posts, or introduce a new topic.

**Week Four, Oct 5 - 9, Religion, sex, gender, and race in popular culture.**

**Tuesday,** Read and discuss: Hulsether, “Like a Sermon” (15 pgs.) [pdf on Canvas.]

Supplemental activity: Watch the Madonna video "Like a Prayer" on Youtube and reflect on it in light of the readings for today and tomorrow.

**Wednesday**, Read and discuss: bell hooks, “Madonna: Plantation Mistress or Soul Sister” [pdf on Canvas]

**Thursday,** **Supplemental Reading Presentation and Discussion**: Arjana, Veiled Superheroes: Islam, Feminism and Popular Culture

**By Friday,** Return to the discussions and make at least two further substantive responses to at least two other posts, responses to your posts, or introduce a new topic.

**Week Five, Oct 12 - 16, Supplemental Reading Presentations and Discussion**

**Tuesday**, Student Presentation and discussion: Klassen, Religion and Popular Culture: A Cultural Studies Approach

**Wednesday,** Student Presentation and discussion: Floyd Thomas, et.al, Altars Where we Worship

**Thursday, 10:30 – 11:45 MST,** Synchronous Zoom session, integrating what we are learning

**By Friday**, Return to the discussions and make at least two further substantive responses to at least two other posts, responses to your posts, or introduce a new topic.

**Week Six, Oct 19 - 23, Religion in Popular Culture**

**Tuesday,** Read and discuss: (RPCA) Mahan, "Religion in Popular Culture, Section Intro." (5 pgs.)

(RPCA) Iwamura, “The Oriental Monk in American Popular Culture.” (14 pgs.)

**Wednesday,** Read and discuss: (RPCA) Arjana, "Monstrous Muslims: Anxieties and Future Trends" (12 pgs.)

**Thursday,** This week’s readings have addressed the way that religious and racial types and stereotypes are used in popular culture. Discuss the way you see your own identity normalized or exoticized in popular culture and/or what popular culture has taught you about the religious and racial other.

**By Friday**, Return to the discussions and make at least two further substantive responses to at least two other posts, responses to your posts, or introduce a new topic.

**Week Seven, Oct 26 - 30, Popular Culture in Religion**

**Tuesday,** Read and discuss, (RPCA) Intro, Popular Culture in Religion (5 pgs.)

(RPCA) Peterson and Echchaibi, “Mipsterz: Hip, American, and Muslim” (14 pgs.)

**Wednesday**, Read and discuss: (RPCA) Grieve, “Meditation on the Go: Buddhist Smartphone Apps” (25 pgs.)

Supplemental Activity: Reflect on a specific local religious community, the way they organize and decorate their space, worship, teach children, invite new participants, and engage their community. Do you see ways that their practice is shaped by their interactions with popular culture? Where appropriate, bring your reflections into the class discussion.

**Thursday,** This week’s readings discuss two different examples of religion or religious identity being expressed or practiced through social media and apps. In recent months we have all seen the Covid19 pandemic close f2f religious spaces and the way that religious figures, communities, and institutions have moved their practice and performance into digital culture. Discuss what you have observed and/or how your own practice has changed, and how this has affected your thinking about religion and these communications technologies.

**By Friday**, Return to the discussions and make at least two further substantive responses to at least two other posts, responses to your posts, or introduce a new topic.

**Week Eight, Nov 2 - 6, Popular Culture as Religion**

**Tuesday**, Instructor remarks, Consumption and Prosumption

**Wednesday**, Read and discuss: (RPCA) Intro, Popular Culture as Religion (2 pgs.)

(RPCA) Jindra, “It's About Faith in Our Future” (14 pgs.)

Supplemental activity: Reflect on your own relationship with popular culture, that of your family and friends. Can you identify places where people relate to popular culture as though it were a religion they practice or believe in? What is added to our understanding of both religion and popular culture by thinking about them in this way? Does this seem an adequate understanding? Why so, or why not? Where appropriate, bring your reflections into the class discussion.

**Thursday,** Read and discuss: (RPCA) Lelwica, “Losing Their Way to Salvation: Weight loss, and the Religion of Thinness” (25 pgs.)

**By Friday**, Return to the discussions and make at least two further substantive responses to at least two other posts, responses to your posts, or introduce a new topic.

**Week Nine, Nov 9 - 13, Religion and Popular Culture in Dialogue**

**Tuesday,** Read and discuss: (RPCA) Intro, Religion and Popular Culture in Dialogue (2pgs)

(RPCA) Pinn, “Rap Music and Its Message” (17 pgs.)

Supplemental activity: Think of religious critiques of popular culture that you have observed in your life. What concerns were being raised? What understanding of religion and its role in society was being enacted? Have such critiques been effective? Why or why not? Where appropriate, bring your reflections into the class discussion.

**Wednesday**, Read and discuss: (RPCA) Brehm and Rees, "Mirror, Mirror on Ourselves: Disney as a Site of Religio-Cultural Dialogue"

**Thursday**, **10:30 – 11:45 MST** Synchronous Zoom check in re final projects and integration

Due in Canvas: Research papers

By Friday, Return to the discussions and make at least two further substantive responses to at least two other posts, responses to your posts, or introduce a new topic.

**Week Ten, Nov 16 – 20, Christmas as Popular Culture - Closing Discussions**

**Tuesday**, Read and discuss (RPCA) Forbes, "Christmas is Like a Snowball" (14 pgs.)

Supplemental activity: Reflect on your own Christmas practices, both in your childhood and today? What is religious about your holiday practices? How does this season help us think about the complex relationships between religion and popular culture?

**Wednesday**, Gathering insights and conclusions

**Thursday**, Application paper due

**By Friday**, Return to and extend the discussions.