



RELIGION IN THE AMERICAN WEST

This course explores the idea of “west” in North American religion. What “the West” is seems obvious, but if we consider the history of the republic, then “west” is not what we now regard as the locative “the West” or “West Coast.” Perhaps it is an idea or relationship to an “eastern” point of origin, value or reference. But west of what? We begin by complicating the moving target concept of “west” first as an historical trajectory that accompanies civilization (whose?) and related ideologies of “progress,” “technology,” and “frontier.” We will also attend to the socio-political contexts for assuming a regional position in American religion. What is distinctive, if anything, about religion in the American West? Is religion somehow transformed by the West? Finally we will look at how the broader metaphors of “west” and “frontier” are continued in contemporary expressions of U.S. religion and spirituality.

The class will be run as a “semi-seminar.” That is, while there will be plenty of lecturing, students will play an active role by working in small groups to present one of the texts / set of texts. It is assumed that students will be active participants in the course; one is not rewarded simply for showing up.

Requirements:

- Attendance/Participation/Citizenship – 10%
- Group Presentation & write up – 20%
- 4 Weekly Response Papers (4 x 5pts) – 20%
- Term Paper/Project (Due 3/18) – 50%

Texts

James S. Griffith, *Beliefs and Holy Places: A Spiritual Geography of the Pimería Alta*
Donald E. Miller, *Reinventing American Protestants: Christianity in the New Millennium*
Ernest Callenbach, *Ecotopia: The Notebooks and Reports of William Weston*
Michael Muhammad Knight, *The Taqwacores*
A Course Reader available at The Alternative Copy at the UCen

Schedule of Topics and Reading

I. Concepts and Contexts

Week 1

Tu 1.07 Introduction / Syllabus / Initial discussion

Th 1.09

The American “West”: Place/Map
Clyde Milner, “America Only More So”
Fei Xiaotong, “A World Without Ghosts”
Harry Harrison, “The Streets of Ashkelon”

Week 2

Tu 1.14

West as Frontier / Frontier as America
Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History”

Th 1.16

West as Frontier / Frontier as America
Victor Turner, “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*”
“Burned-Over District” (encyclopedia entry)
Dickson Bruce, *And They All Sang Hallelujah* (excerpts):
“Introduction” and “To Give Satan Another Round”

Week 3

Tu 1.21

Scholars consider “West” and “Frontier”
Clyde Hyde, “Cultural Filters: The Significance of Perception”
Reginald Horsman “Aryans Follow the Sun”
Patricia Limerick, “The Adventures of the Frontier in the Twentieth Century”

Th 1.23

The Pacific Northwest – What does it mean to be “West”? “Frontier”
Guest Lecturer: Dusty Hoesly
[READING: TBA]

II. Traditions

Week 4

Tu 1.28

Borderline Religion: Mormonism

“Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” (encyclopedia entry)

“Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” (encyclopedia entry)

“Joseph Smith Recounts his First Vision”

3 Nephi 21: 1 – 29, *The Book of Mormon*

“Joseph Smith’s Revelation on Plural Marriage, 1843”

Lawrence Foster, *Religion & Sexuality* (excerpt)

Jan Shipps, *Mormonism* (excerpt)

Th 1.30

Borderline Religion: Mormonism

P. Donan, “Utah: A Peep Into a Mountain-Walled Treasury of the Gods”

Helen Hunt Jackson, *Bits of Travel at Home* (excerpt)

Week 5

Tu 2.06

Religious Borderlands – Arizona/Mexico

James S. Griffith, *Beliefs and Holy Places*, Intro – Chapter 4

Th 2.08

Religious Borderlands – Arizona/Mexico

James S. Griffith, *Beliefs and Holy Places*, Chapter 5 – End

** STUDENT PRESENTATION I **

III. CALIFORNIA: America Only More So?

Week 6

Tu 2.11

The Return of Protestantism? – California Style

Donald E. Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism*, pp. 1-107

Th 2.13

The Return of Protestantism? – California Style

Donald E. Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism*, pp. 108 - end

** STUDENT PRESENTATION II **

Week 7

Tu 2.18

Religion At the “End of the World”?: IV?

Carmen Lodise, et al., *Isla Vista: A Citizen’s History* (excerpts):

“Introduction,” “From Indian Settlement to Student Ghetto,” “The Civil Disturbances of 1969-70,” and “The St. Athanasius Church and Saving Perfect Park”

Jason Lomelino, *Jesus Burgers: True Stories of Love, Redemption & Miracles in a College Town* (excerpt)

Th 2.20 Religion At the “End of the World”?: IV?
Bron Taylor, “Surfing into Spirituality and a New, Aquatic Nature Religion”
Adrian Maclain, “Playing on the Edge: Performance, Youth Culture, and the
U.S. Carnavalesque” (excerpts)
** STUDENT PRESENTATION III *

Week 8

Tu 2.25 The No–Religion Utopia?
Ernest Callenbach, *Ecotopia*, pp. 1 – 71

Th 2.27 The No–Religion Utopia?
Ernest Callenbach, *Ecotopia*, pp. 71 – end
** *STUDENT PRESENTATION IV* **

IV. The “West” as Idea / Metaphor / New Frontiers

Week 9

Tu 3.04 Wild West / Wild East?
“Buffalo Bill’s Wild West” (excerpts)

Th 3.06 Wild West / Wild East?
** *STUDENT PRESENTATIONS V* **

Week 10

Tu 3.11 America: The World Religion Frontier?
Michael Muhammad Knight, *The Taqwacores*

Th 3.13 America: The World Religion Frontier?
Michael Muhammad Knight, *The Taqwacores*
** *STUDENT PRESENTATION VI* **

Final Papers/Projects due: *Tuesday, 18 March by 5 pm in the box outside HSSB 3082 or 3086*