

Leonard Norman Primiano Course Syllabus

Prepared for the Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture by:

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The Center is pleased to share with you the syllabi for introductory courses in American religion that were developed in seminars led by Dr. Deborah Dash Moore of Vassar College. In all of the seminar discussions, it was apparent that context, or the particular teaching setting, was an altogether critical factor in envisioning how students should be introduced to a field of study. The justification of approach, included with each syllabus, is thus germane to how you use the syllabus.

I. Syllabus Justification

Cabrini College is a private four-year undergraduate institution serving about 1200 students from the Mid-Atlantic states. Many of the students are products of parochial schools, and it has been my experience that most of the students know very little about their own and other religious traditions.

Cabrini's Religious Studies Department has two full-time faculty members and a variety of adjunct faculty. What is particularly unusual about the two full-time faculty is that we are both Americanists, and both have an expertise in American Catholicism. Naturally, we need to offer a variety of courses. Among my offerings are "Contemporary Moral Problems," "Introduction to the Christian Tradition," as well as a first year seminar on critical thinking and writing called "Culture and Identity."

We share the duties of teaching courses on American religion. I have been teaching the courses on both historical and contemporary American Catholicism, and my colleague does the survey course on American religion. I also teach the course on American sectarian religion. Because I have a dual doctorate in Religious Studies and Folklore and Folklife, I have been searching for a way to integrate Folklife Studies into the curriculum.

It was only last year that the College instituted a religion requirement. Any course can be taken to fulfill that part of the core curriculum. I, therefore, am needed to teach Religious Studies courses, and cannot offer a Folklore/Folklife course per se, if it is devoid of religious content. I devised this course to view the richness of American religious history and culture from the perspective of the field of folklore and folklife, turning to its history, theory, and methods for assistance. If folklore can be defined as "artistic communication within small groups," then this is a course that seeks to explore the artfulness of religious belief and practice in America within historical and contemporary perspective with attention communities and individuals. The course is concerned with how believing is an artistic expression, as well as the artful expressions of American religion both within institutional parameters and, of equal importance, within the everyday lives of Americans.

The course seeks to combine introductory ideas on folklore/folklife with basic historical issues concerning American religion. I felt that it was necessary to have the students examine both historical and contemporary American religion, to gain some fieldwork experience exploring belief systems, and, especially, to make the Philadelphia area the class laboratory for experiencing both past and present resources of urban religiosity. The written assignments specifically deal with beliefs of college students about bodily marking, an assessment of family death rituals, and an analytical synthesis of Karen McCarthy Brown's *Mama Lola*. The course is assisted by the recent publication of texts such as McDannell's *Material Christianity*, which provocatively presents issues and research concerning the importance of the study of America's rich religious material culture; Brown's *Mama Lola* with its ethnographic approach to studying lived religion in North America; and Wojcik's *Punk and Neo-Tribal Body Art* which includes a stimulating essay on the topic of contemporary bodily markings within the youth sub-culture, as well as some colorful (and graphic) photographs.

II. Introductory Course Syllabus

Spring Semester 1998
Office Hours: Monday 12:30-1:30

Dr. Leonard Norman Primiano 3:30-5:30; Friday 4:30-6:30
Office: Grace Hall 250 - Other Times By Appointment
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American Religious Folklife

Religion 220 A (M,F 1:50-3:10; FH 201)

Course Description

Folklife Studies refers to the scholarly discipline which cultivates a sensibility and an appreciation for the culture of everyday life in complex societies. Religious folklife means specific cultural creations that express religious attitudes and beliefs. This course in American religious folklife will examine the history and culture of religion in America with specific reference to Christian and Christian-based systems, as well as believers' religious artifacts, art, craft, architecture, belief, customs, habits, foodways, costume, narrative, dance, song and other cultural expressions.

Course Requirements consist of in-class mid-term (25 points), and in-class final examinations (30 points) on all course materials, and three written essays on course readings (15 points each). Thorough attention to course readings; prepared, punctual, and consistent class attendance; and enthusiastic class participation are also required.

Attendance Requirement: If a student misses more than three regular class periods, the student's final grade will automatically be reduced by two letter grades. There are only three excused absences of any kind in this course, including all extracurricular activities such as journalism, student development projects, sports, etc. Exceptions due to health or other severe emergencies will be accepted **ONLY** with documentation (such as doctor's note, obituary notice) or evidence of natural disaster (earthquake, flood, tornado, blizzard, hurricane, Godzilla, asteroid.) It is your responsibility to make sure that I have a copy of this document for my files. Minor health problems, such as a cold, are inadequate excuses for being absent from class. A telephone call from a parent, loved one, or friend on the day of class explaining an absence does not constitute an acceptable excuse. If you engage in activities that force you to be absent for more than three classes of this course, **DO NOT ENROLL IN THIS COURSE!**

If a registered student for any reason misses six sessions of this course, the student must either **WITHDRAWAL** from the course or take an **INCOMPLETE**, at the discretion of the instructor. Any student found cheating, plagiarizing, or in any way violating basic academic honesty will receive a failing grade for the course and appropriate notification will be forwarded to the Academic Dean. Any mutilation or theft of library material is considered academic dishonesty.

Your perfect attendance in this course, does **NOT** assure you a passing grade. Your completion of all assignments in this course also does not assure you of a passing grade, if the quality of those assignments is poor/inadequate/careless.

Books

The following course books may be purchased at the Cabrini College Bookstore:

Required:

- Elliott Oring, ed., *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres* (Utah State Univ. Press, 1986)
- Colleen McDannell *Material Christianity* (Yale Univ. Press, 1995)
- David G. Hackett, ed. *Religion and American Culture* (Routledge, 1995)
- Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess In Brooklyn* (Univ. of California Press, 1991)
- Daniel Wojcik, *Punk and Neo-Tribal Body Art* (Univ. Press of Mississippi, 1995)
- Martha Cooper and Joseph Sciorra, *RIP: Memorial Wall Art* (Henry Holt and Co., 1994)

Recommended Text:

Winthrop S. Hudson/John Corrigan, *Religion in America* (Macmillan Pub. Co., 1992)

Reserved Readings will be placed in Holy Spirit Library.

Sign-In Sheet : Each student is responsible personally to sign the sheet at the beginning of each class. Designating friends to sign you in or coming in at the end of class to sign in also constitute academic dishonesty and will result in failure and a notice to the Academic Dean.

Course Outline

Friday 16 January What Is Folklore As A Discipline and As A Subject of Inquiry? The Mystery of the Red Church Doors

Monday 19 January Martin Luther King Holiday. NO CLASS

Friday 23 January What Is Folklife As A Discipline and As A Subject of Inquiry?

Reading: Elliott Oring, pp. 1-22, "On the Concepts of Folklore"

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Don Yoder, pp. 25-42, "The Folklife Studies Movement" (from *Discovering American Folklife* UMI Press, 1990)

David Wills, pp. 30-41, "The Central Themes of American Religious History: Pluralism, Puritanism, and the Encounter of Black and White," (from *Religion and Intellectual Life* 5:1 Fall 1987)

Jon Butler, pp. 286-309, "Historiographical Heresy: Catholicism as a Model for American Religious History," (from *Belief In History: Innovative Approaches To European and*

American Religion, Thomas Kselman, ed., Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1991)

Video: The Stone Carvers

Monday 26 January What Is Religious Folklore and Folklife?

Reading: L.N. Primiano, "Folklife" (from *Folklife: An Encyclopedia of Beliefs, Customs, Tales, Music, and Art*, Thomas A. Green, ed., ABC CLIO, 1998)

Larry Danielson, pp. 45-71, "Religious Folklore" (in Oring)

Friday 30 January Fieldwork Within Religious Communities

Reading: William Wilson, pp. 225-254, "Documenting Folklore" (in Oring)

Monday 2 February Religious Verbal Lore I: America As Source of Myth, Legend, and Sacred Narrative

Reading: Elliott Oring, pp. 121-146, "Folk Narrative" (in Oring)

Ramon A. Gutierrez, pp. 5-25, "The Pueblo Indian World In the Sixteenth Century" (in Hackett)

Albert J. Raboteau, pp. 74-86, "African Americans, Exodus, And American Israel" (in Hackett)

Friday 6 February Religious Verbal Lore II: Shaping America As A Sacred Territory

Reading: Jan Shipps, pp. 169-184, "The Genesis of Mormonism" (in Hackett)

Monday 9 February American Religious Folk Song and Spirituals

Reading: Barre Toelken, pp. 147-174, "Ballads and Folksongs" (in Oring)

Charles Joyner, pp. 186-207, "'Believer I Know': The Emergence of African-American Christianity" (in Hackett)

Don Yoder, pp. 1-40, "The Spiritual Tradition In America" (from *Pennsylvania Spirituals* Pennsylvania Folklife Society, 1961)

Video: Amazing Grace

Friday 13 February MID-TERM EXAMINATION

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Monday 16 February Which Americans Have Religious Folklore? The Religious Lives of American Regional, Immigrant, and Ethnic Groups

Reading: Elliott Oring, pp. 23-44, "Ethnic Groups and Ethnic Folklore"; Robert McCarl, pp. 171-89, "Occupational Folklore"; Jay Mechling, pp. 91-120, "Children's Folklore" (in Oring)

David Hall, pp. 29-51, "A World of Wonders: The Mentality of the Supernatural in Seventeenth-Century New England" (in Hackett)

Friday 20 February American Religion and Costume Research: Ritual Dress and Daily Dress

Reading: Don Yoder, pp. 143-171, "Sectarian Costume Research in the United States" (from *Discovering American Folklife* UMI Research Press)

Daniel Wojcik, Punk and Neo-Tribal Body Art

ESSAY #1 IS DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS

Monday 23 February Embodying the Sacred in America I: Clothing the Living

Reading: Colleen McDannell, pp. 198-221, "Mormon Garments: Sacred Clothing and the Body"

Deidre Sklar, pp. 9-22, "Can Bodylore Be Brought to Its Senses?" (from *Journal of American Folklore* 107:423 Winter 1994)

Friday 27 February Embodying the Sacred in America II:

Clothing The Dead; Rituals of Victorian Culture

Reading: McDannell, pp. 103-131, "The Religious Symbolism of Laurel Hill Cemetery"

Mark Carnes, pp. 317-326, "Manmade religion: Victorian Fraternal Rituals" (in Hackett)

Monday 2 March-Friday 6 March SPRING BREAK

Monday 9 March American Embodying the Sacred in America III: Memorializing the Dead; Contemporary Death Memorials

Reading: Gary Laderman, pp. 157-175, "Abraham Lincoln's Hallowed and Hallowed Body," "The Business of Death in the Late Nineteenth Century," (from *The Sacred Remains: American Attitudes Toward Death, 1799-1883* Yale University Press, 1996)

Cooper and Sciorra, RIP: Memorial Wall Art

ESSAY #2 IS DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS

Friday 13 March American Religious Material Culture and Folklife

Reading: Simon Bronner, pp. 45-69, "Folk Objects" (in Oring)

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McDannell, pp. 1-16, "Material Christianity"

SATURDAY 14 March Fieldtrip to Laurel Hill Cemetery

Monday 16 March American Catholics and their Religious Material Culture: European Roots

Reading: McDannell, pp. 17-66, "Piety, Art, Fashion: The Religious Object"

(Lecture on Catholic Art and Architecture with Slides)

Friday 20 March American Catholics and their Religious Material Culture: American Expressions

Reading: McDannell, pp. 132-162, "Lourdes Water and American Catholicism"

McDannell, pp. 293-313, "Catholic Domesticity, 1860-1960" (in Hackett)

(Lecture and Slides on the Holy Card Phenomenon in American Catholicism)

Monday 23 March Class Fieldtrip to the St. Jude Religious Store

Friday 27 March Sexism, Contemporary American Catholic Material Culture, and Popular Devotions

Reading: McDannell, pp. 163-197, "Christian Kitsch and the Rhetoric of Bad Taste"

(Visit to Cabrini College Chapel, and conversation with Cabrini Campus Ministers on changes in Catholic ecclesiastical art and architecture)

Monday 30 March American Protestants and their Religious Material Culture I: The Question of Bibliolatry

Reading: McDannell, pp. 67-102, "The Bible in the Victorian Home"

Friday 3 April American Protestants and their Religious Material Culture II: Contemporary Expressions

Reading: McDannell, pp. 222-269, "Christian Retailing"

Eric Leigh Schmidt, 249-269, "The Easter Parade: Piety, Fashion, and Display" (in Hackett)

Monday 6 April Class Fieldtrip to the Mustard Seed (Christian Bookstore)

Friday 10 April GOOD FRIDAY NO CLASSES

Monday 13 April EASTER MONDAY NO CLASSES

Friday 17 April American Religious Foodways

Reading: Don Yoder, pp. 325-350, "Folk Cookery" (from *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction*, Richard Dorson, ed., Univ. of Chicago Press, 1972)

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Sharon Sherman, pp. 27-42, "The Passover Seder: Ritual Dynamics, Foodways, and Family Folklore" (from *We Gather Together: Food and Festival in American Life*, Theodore C. Humphrey and Lin T. Humphrey eds., Utah State Univ. Press, 1991)

Monday 20 April Towards A Theory of Vernacular Religion in America

Reading: L.N. Primiano, "Folk Religion" (from *Folklore: An Encyclopedia of Beliefs, Customs, Tales, Music, and Art*, Thomas A. Green, ed., ABC CLIO, 1998)

L.N. Primiano, pp. 89-104, "I Would Rather Be Fixated on the Lord": Women's Religion, Men's Power, and the 'Dignity' Problem" (from *New York Folklore XIX:1-2* 1993)

Robert Wuthnow, pp. 369-382, "Old Fissures and New Fractures in American Religious Life" (in Hackett)

Friday 24 April Towards A Theory of Vernacular Religious Art in America: The Case Of Newfoundland's Sister Ann Ameen

Monday 27 April The Arts of Syncretic Religion in America I: Haitian Vodou

Reading: McCarthy-Brown, pp. 1-381

Friday 1 May The Arts of Syncretic Religion in America II: Haitian Vodou

Reading: Laennec Hurbon, pp. 181-197, "American Fantasy and Haitian Vodou"

Elizabeth McAlister, pp. 305-324, "A Sorcerer's Bottle: The Visual Art of Magic in Haiti"

Patrick Polk, pp. 325-356, "Sacred Banners and the Divine Cavalry Charge" (all articles from *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*, Donald J. Cosentino, ed., UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1995)

ESSAY #3 IS DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS

Monday 4 May LAST DAY OF CLASS

Reading, McDannell, pp. 270-276, "Epilogue"

Tuesday 5 May READING DAY

FINAL EXAMINATION WEDNESDAY 6 MAY 1998, 1:00PM