

MONEY, MEDIA, AND RELIGION (RELS 1380A)

Spring 2014

Professor Daniel Vaca

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Office: Shirley Miller House, Room 200

Office hours: Wednesdays, 3.15-5.15

Class meetings: T, 4-6.20

Class location: Wilson 205



Course Description

This course explores the relationship between religious life, forms of capitalism, and media technologies in the history of the United States. From constructing buildings and printing texts to disseminating teachings and communicating with members: essential aspects of religious life require both money and media. Yet forms of money and media continually have changed, and those changes not only have shaped the possibilities of religious life but also have taken shape in dialogue with religious beliefs, practices, and sensibilities. This seminar examines this dialogue by visiting such varied sites as Puritan marketplaces, Santa Claus displays, Bible factories, television talk shows, and Occupy protests. By interrogating religion's relationship with successive forms of capitalism and media in American history, students will become familiar with many of the persistent problems in the study of religion and culture as well as in the history of American society.

This seminar is reading-intensive and discussion-driven. It is open to both undergraduate and graduate students. Although it has no specific course prerequisites, students who have taken at least one course in Religious Studies, History, American Studies, or a related discipline will benefit from that background. Please consult with the professor for additional guidance.

Course Objectives

This course's readings, discussions, and assignments are designed to work toward the following objectives:

1. Introduce students to the histories of capitalism, media, and religion in the United States.
2. Deepen students' understanding of how the category of "religion" works in both colloquial and scholarly contexts
3. Challenge students to see media and money not just as things that people use but also as things that shape how people understand and engage themselves and each other
4. Enable students to recognize and interpret depictions of religion, media, and money in their everyday lives and in popular media
5. Enhance students' ability to ask and answer critical questions about complex historical trends and cultural tensions

Course Requirements

1. Attendance and class participation (15%)

Both in lectures and in discussion sections, our collaborative conversations about the readings and issues at hand represent the heart of this course. Your presence is essential to its success. You should read the assignments with care and reflection. Recurring (unexcused) absences and lack of preparation will be penalized. If you are uncomfortable talking in class or otherwise concerned about your participation, please consult with Professor Vaca by the second week of the course and we will find alternative means for you to participate.

2. Discussion starters and discussion leading (35%)

Every week, every student will prepare a "discussion starter" that performs two tasks. First, you will identify a passage (or set of passages) from the readings that you find particularly important, compelling, troubling, or perhaps even wrong. Second, in 350-500 words (1-2 double-spaced pages), you will reflect upon your selections, explaining their significance and raising questions for your fellow students to consider. In addition to allowing you to engage critically with course readings and conversations, this exercise will help prepare you to complete your longer writing assignments and to participate in class. You are allowed to skip one discussion starter without any effect on your grade.

Every week, two or three students will be responsible for sharing their discussion starters at the beginning of class (to open up the conversation) and for helping guide class conversation, in collaboration with each other and Professor Vaca. On your assigned week, students also will prepare a slightly longer reading response, of 500-700 words (2-3 double-spaced pages). Students will sign up for weeks on February 4 (the second day of class).

In preparing your discussion starters, you should focus on explaining what you feel is at stake in your selections, and why that matters. Why does your selection--as you interpret it--matter to the rest of the reading, to the themes that organize our course, to other readings that we have encountered in our course, or to the course as a whole? Note that you should not merely summarize your reading selection. Instead, you should attempt to identify the argument that your selection makes, reflect upon its implications or complications, and invite your classmates to think about your selection alongside you.

For the sake of making our selections and reflections available to each other before class, you will post them to Canvas (in the "Discussion" section) by 8pm on the evening before class (Monday). You should bring your discussion starters to class, so that you might introduce them into our conversation.

3. Media analyses (10% each; 20%)

Twice during the semester (due March 4 and April 15), you will prepare a four-to-five-page, double-spaced essay that describes and analyzes the use of a form of media for religious purposes.

Note that you may interpret the words "use," "media," and "religious purposes" in whatever way you would like, so long as you make clear what you mean. That is, "use" might refer to use for religious ritual, or use as a carrier of doctrine; "media" might refer to varied media forms and modes of mediation, including television, print, art, radio, social media, websites, and sermons; and, finally, "religious purposes" might include a wide range of activities, depending upon what kind of "religion" you have in mind.

In identifying, describing, and analyzing your media, you should reflect especially upon situating it within the social and economic contexts that make it possible. In what ways do uses of media and religious activity depend upon those contexts? Your analyses should help answer this question, using your selected media as a kind of case study.

4. Final take-home exam or research paper (30%)

On the last day of class (April 22), students will receive writing prompt that will provide an opportunity to reflect on what we have read and discussed together. You will answer this question in 6-8 double-spaced pages. It will be due by email on the day that the registrar has established for the final examination (Wednesday, May 7).

Students (*especially graduate students*) have the option of writing a research paper in lieu of taking this final exam. Please consult with Professor Vaca if you are interested in writing a research paper.

Readings and Recommended Books to Purchase

Recommended books to purchase are listed below and designated in the course schedule as "(P)". All other course readings are available on OCRA and designated as "(OCRA)" in the course schedule.

Valeri, Mark R. *Heavenly Merchandize: How Religion Shaped Commerce in Puritan America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.

Peters, John Durham. *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication*. Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Walton, Jonathan L. *Watch This!: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Black Televangelism*. New York: New York University Press, 2009.

Taylor, Mark C. *Confidence Games: Money and Markets in a World without Redemption*. Religion and Postmodernism. Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Schneider, Nathan. *Thank You, Anarchy: Notes from the Occupy Apocalypse*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California, 2013.

Classroom Requests and Guidelines

1. If any student has any concerns about accessibility and would like to discuss accommodations to disabilities, impairments, or other limits, please bring your concerns to Professor Vaca over email or during office hours.
2. Laptops are allowed in the classroom, but use of them is discouraged for any purpose other than taking notes or consulting course readings. As [research on learning outcomes](#) demonstrates, laptops present problems largely because the tendency to multitask is difficult to resist, yet multitasking disrupts concentration and distracts others in ways that hinder conversation.
3. The use of the internet during class for browsing and messaging on laptops/phones/tablets is very highly discouraged.

Course Schedule

January 28: Introduction: Why Money and Media?

February 4: What Is Money? What is Media? What is Religion?

(OCRA) Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (London: Routledge, 2001), "The Medium Is the Message" (7-23); "Money" (142-156).

(OCRA) David Chidester, "Economy," in *Key Words in Religion, Media and Culture*, ed by. David Morgan (New York: Routledge, 2008), 83–95.

(OCRA) Birgit Meyer, "Religious Sensations: Why Media, Aesthetics, and Power Matter in the Study of Contemporary Religion," Free University of Amsterdam, 2006.

February 11: Selling (for) God?

(OCRA) Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, ed by. Anthony Giddens, trans by. Talcott Parsons (London: Routledge, 2001), Selections TBD.

(P) Mark R. Valeri, *Heavenly Merchandize: How Religion Shaped Commerce in Puritan America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), Selections TBD.

February 18: No class. Long weekend.

February 25: Market Transformations and the Birth of Mass (Print) Media

(OCRA) John Lauritz Larson, "The Market Revolution in Early America: An Introduction," *OAH Magazine of History* 19, no. 3 (May 2005): 4–7.

(OCRA) John Lauritz Larson, *The Market Revolution in America: Liberty, Ambition, and the Eclipse of the Common Good* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), Chapter 2 ("Marvelous Improvements Everywhere," 46-90).

(OCRA) David Paul Nord, *Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of Mass Media in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), Introduction ("The Finger of Providence, 1815," 3-12); Chapter 2 ("Millennial Print," 27-40); Chapter 3 ("The New Mass Media: Economic Foundations," 41-60); Chapter 4 ("The New Mass Media: National Institutions," 61); Chapter 5 ("The New Mass Media: Systematic Distribution," 89).

(OCRA) Mark S. Schantz, "Religious Tracts, Evangelical Reform, and the Market

Revolution in Antebellum America,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 17, no. 3 (October 1, 1997): 425–466.

* *First media analysis due on March 4* *

March 4: Consumption and Consumer Capitalism

- (OCRA) R. Laurence Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), Chapter 5 ("The Market for Religious Controversy," 118-145)
- (OCRA) Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Consumer Rites: The Buying and Selling of American Holidays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), Introduction (3-16); Chapter 3 ("Christmas Bazaar," 105-175).
- (OCRA) William R. Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), Introduction ("The Land of Desire and the Culture of Consumer Capitalism," 3-14); Chapter 7 ("Wanamaker's Simple Life and the Moral Failure of Established Religion," 191-224); Chapter 8 ("Mind Cure and the Happiness Machine," 225-262).

March 11: New Frontiers of Sound and Sensibility

- (P) John Durham Peters, *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 1999). Skip chapters 1 and 6.
- (OCRA) Pamela E. Klassen, "Radio Mind: Protestant Experimentalists on the Frontiers of Healing," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 75, no. 3 (2007): 651–683.

March 18: Race, Representation, and Film

- (OCRA) Judith Weisenfeld, *Hollywood Be Thy Name: African American Religion in American Film, 1929-1949* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007). Skip chapter 1.

March 25: No class. Spring break.

April 1: Revival and Prosperity, Seen and Heard

- (P) Jonathan L. Walton, *Watch This!: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Black Televangelism* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), Selections TBD.
- (OCRA) Randall H. Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America*, Fourth Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), Chapter 10 ("Bible Bazaar," 193-208); Chapter 15 ("Prime Time," 277-292); Chapter 16 ("Sound Check," 293-309).

April 8: Money as (Intangible) Media

- (P) Mark C. Taylor, *Confidence Games: Money and Markets in a World Without Redemption, Religion and Postmodernism* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2004), Selections TBD.
- (OCRA) James David Hudnut-Beumler, *In Pursuit of the Almighty's Dollar: A History of Money and American Protestantism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), Chapter 9 ("In America You Can Have as Much Religion as You Can Pay For, 1980 to the Present," 199-227).

* Second media analysis due on April 15 *

April 15: Assessment: Religion and/in/of Capitalism

(OCRA) Kathryn Lofton, *Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), Selections TBD.

(OCRA) Bethany E. Moreton, "The Soul of Neoliberalism," *Social Text* 25, no. 3 92 (September 21, 2007): 103–123.

April 22: Assessment: Critics

(OCRA) Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" (1944), marxists.org/reference/archive/adorno/1944/culture-industry.htm

(OCRA) Theodor Adorno, "Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?" (1968), marxists.org/reference/archive/adorno/1968/late-capitalism.htm

(OCRA) Pope Francis, "Evangelii Gaudium," esp. Chapter 2, vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium_en.html

(OCRA) Harvey Cox, "The Market as God," *The Atlantic Monthly*, March 1999.

April 29: Assessment: Pasts and Futures

(P) Nathan Schneider, *Thank You, Anarchy: Notes from the Occupy Apocalypse* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California, 2013).

(OCRA) Upton Sinclair, *The Profits of Religion: An Essay in Economic Interpretation* (Pasadena, Calif: The author, 1918), Introduction (11-20) and Book Seven ("The Church of the Social Revolution," 281-314).

* Final exam or research paper due on May 7, 2pm *