

Seeing and Believing: Women, Religion and Film

Religion 136 A and B; spring '08

Monday nights, 6:30 PM, and Tuesday or Thursday, 2:20 – 3:30 PM, Main Reeve, 212

Instructor: Kelly Denton-Borhaug Office: Comenius 214; phone: 610-625-7104; kdenton@moravian.edu; office hours:
Monday, 4-6; Thursday, 2-3 PM

You may also make an appt with me outside these hours by emailing or calling – I invite all students to seek me out at least one time over the course of the semester!

Course Description: “A film invites interrogation” (Makarushka: 1998). Over the course of this semester, we will view, study, think about and discuss American film. We’ll pay close attention to film’s appropriation of religious imagery and beliefs in the service of the cultural production of images of women and women’s lives and in the production of gender generally speaking; and will investigate the ways the creation and viewing of film may share similarities with the construction and practice of religion. In particular, this semester our study will focus on the theme of *war* in film; various film critics have noted that this past year the theme of war has become ubiquitous in American films over the past year or more – and at the same time also have underscored that most Americans have chosen *not* to view movies with this theme. This is a curious conundrum that begs further inquiry. We will learn about the classic construction of “war films” in American film history and explore especially the periods of WWII, Vietnam, and the post 9/11 period. As we view and study both fictional and “documentary” films, we especially will consider connections between religion and war, and the way war films utilize notions of “the sacred” for various purposes. We will approach our films as “texts” that invite a critical reading and develop skills to enable our increased thoughtful, deliberate, intelligent viewing. On Monday evenings both sections of the course will gather together to view the film for the week. Each section will meet one more time during the week for lively discussion, brief lecture and thinking further regarding the connective themes between our films, readings, and our own cultural observations.

Course Objectives:

- 1) We will gain a heightened awareness of the ways we approach/absorb films, especially commercial films, and become better able to distinguish intra and extra-filmic strategies that encourage various interpretive schemes. We will become better versed in methods such as cultural criticism to interrogate as well as appreciate film.
- 2) We will develop and introductory understanding of some of the complex relationships between portrayals and questions of religion, and constructions of religion, gender, race and class.
- 3) We will also gain an introductory understanding of the complex relationship between religion and the passions that lead to and support war-culture, and explore war films’ embrace and critique of war-culture.
- 4) We will improve our critical thinking, speaking, research and writing skills.

Course Books:

The War Film, Ed. Robert Eberwein, Rutgers University Press, 2003.

Blood Rites: Origins and History of the Passions of War, Barbara Ehrenreich, Henry Holt and Co., 1997.

Additional articles, book chapters and essays will be assigned and will be available at Reeve’s on reserve or through Blackboard.

Course Films: Each week we will focus on a different film that we will view during class time (listed below according to schedule). You are responsible for having intelligently and carefully viewed all the films in the course, including any that you miss because of an excused absence. Speak with me about how best to gain access to any film you may miss in this regard.

Requirements:

- Prompt attendance at every class period is a must. The only excused absences will be for serious illness, religious observance or a family emergency (unexcused absence will mean a serious detraction in this part of your grade). I ask you to inform me AHEAD of class time if you need to miss as a result of one of these reasons stated above (please email or call me at my office, at x7104). In order to participate fully and with intelligence in our class discussions, students also will have thoughtfully and deliberately read all the required readings before class; and will have dedicated enthusiastic energy and time to the writing of response papers. **Bring whatever text we are reading for the day with you to class!** All students are expected to regularly participate in our class discussions with intelligence, responding to one another thoughtfully, raising good questions and new ideas, etc. Push yourself (even if this makes you uncomfortable) to grow as a liberal arts learner who can speak seriously and intelligently in public, and come meet with me individually if you need help in this area. Class participation represents 1/3 of the overall grade. Students who do not engage in class discussion at least one or two times each class session can expect to see their participation grade much lower as a result. *Special note to athletes! With advance notice, you may miss up to (and no more than) two classes if you experience a conflict with an athletic game. You are responsible for alerting me to any such conflicts by week two of our course, and/or with one week's notice should there be a weather cancellation. Additional absences will be reflected in a lower course grade. Absences due to athletic conflicts will not excuse you from turning in your response papers on time.*
- **Important note on required time you should allot for this course. The minimum expectation of the college is that students should expect to spend 2 outside hours in study and preparation for every 1 hour in class. You should plan now on including in your schedule at least six outside hours every week for reading, thinking (don't forget to allow yourself time to think!), response papers, research and writing. Take time to discuss our films and readings with others!**
- Each week students will write a two-page, double-spaced response paper. Papers will be due at the professor's office mailbox every week on Wed. by midnight (be aware that the building may close earlier). Please do not email papers to me – I will only accept your hard copy. I will assign questions for you to be addressing in these papers, listed either in your syllabus or on Blackboard. Be creative and use these papers to further your own integrative thinking about our readings and film! No additional outside resources are required for these short papers (but if you wish to consult additional reviews/resources, you may). In these short papers you will use your own best critical thinking to address the required readings in connection with a given film, and your own developing response and awareness. They will be typed, well-written, free of mechanical errors, and represent your best work and thinking. Do NOT use these papers to “retell the narrative” of our films. Students who take the opportunity to come and see me early in the semester to talk about their short papers invariably improve their writing – make sure you do this! These papers combined will represent 1/3 of the overall grade. See the guidelines in Blackboard Assignments for further suggestions on writing superb response papers.
- Each student will choose *one* course film for the purpose of more in-depth research and analysis. You will consult at least five additional resources beyond those in the required readings, think through all the issues carefully, and write a 8 -9 page paper, to be submitted in class on April 28 in hard copy. The only acceptable excuses for requesting an extension on this paper are the same listed for excused absence above. Your paper will include proper footnotes and bibliography (check MLA style if you're not sure how to go about this); and will in some way focus on the intersection of gender, war and religion in the film you have chosen – other than that you are free to explore and dig in whatever direction you wish.
- *Note on requirements for your research bibliography: Your bibliography should include at least two resources that specifically address your film in a rigorous intellectual fashion (such as you will find in academic books on film, and in academically-oriented journals such as The Journal of Film and Religion). Popular reviews/articles about films will not be acceptable, nor articles in such periodicals as Time/Newsweek, nor “googled” or*

“Wikipedia” material, etc. Two additional bibliographic resources will be academic resources that help you to more deeply explore a particular issue in light of your film. For instance, a student choosing to research race, religion and film in Glory will seek resources investigating Hollywood film and race/racism in America. Your additional resource(s) are open for you to choose in the way that makes best sense for your own research purposes. Be ready to utilize Reeve’s excellent resources for inter- library loan resources from other libraries! This will mean that you need to utilize your time wisely and get started early.

- --On Mar. 11/13 both sections will meet in Reeve’s Library for Research Workshops.
- --On Mar. 17 you will hand in a one-paragraph statement regarding your research intentions, including the film you intend to research, the themes you wish to explore and why. **Important Key! Choose a film and theme/thesis that interests you personally! You will be much better invested in your work!**
- --On Mar. 31, I will ask you to hand in a 1 paragraph second draft (now that you have made progress on your research!) of the thesis you are interrogating in your paper, and your annotated bibliography. Please consult the Cornell University website on how to put together an annotated bibliography (<http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/skill28.htm>), and please note that this means you will need to have completed your research in advance of this date.
- --The week of April 14 students will meet in small groups with me for research/writing evaluations of progress, to give one another feedback and support in this important process.
- --The week of April 21 we will begin our “Research Roundtable,” at which every student will have a 7 minutes to professionally present the results of his/her research to the rest of the class. Our last evening class together will be an opportunity to complete the Roundtable and celebrate with a potluck dinner. Your paper and oral presentation represent 1/3 of your total grade. Additional instructions for your oral presentation are available on Blackboard.
- *Students are advised to review the Academic Honesty Policy in the Student Handbook (available online) and required to follow the guidelines therein.*

Use of Paper Policy for this course

In order to promote more responsible and sustainable use of paper, in this course we will adopt two practices.

First, please change the set margins in your computer: Here's how to do it on your own. It should take no more than twenty seconds and just a few clicks of the mouse. On your WORD screen, go to FILE, then PAGE SET UP. Once on PAGE SET UP, click the DEFAULT key, and you'll be offered "Do you want to change the default settings for the page set up? This change will affect all new documents based on the normal template." Then set your margins to whatever preferred new width you'd like. I'm suggesting setting each margin to .7" which will save an immense amount of paper.

Second, please a) use double-sided printing or b) print with used paper (make sure you x-out the pre-used side of your paper). Thank you!

Schedule of Classes:

Note: Movie notes are taken from the great resource that you will wish to consult regularly during this course, the Internet Movie Data Base (IMDb.com).

Week One: *Why We Fight: War Comes to America*, Frank Capra, 1945 In this final installment of the "Why We Fight" propaganda series, the subject focuses on the United States of America. We learn of its good qualities and the things worth fighting for. With that established, we learn of the history of the United States' population shifting opinion towards siding with the Allies against the Axis until the attack on Pearl Harbor which brought America into full scale involvement in the war. *Written by [Kenneth Chisholm](mailto:fkchishol@execulink.com)*

Readings: Selections from Margaret Miles, *Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies*, Preface, Chapter One, Chapter Nine, Appendix. **Note: This resource will be on library reserve. Go early, make**

your own copy of these pages so that you can underline important passages, write notes in the margins, and otherwise utilize this resource. Remember to bring it with you to class!

[Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* film series and our American dream.](#) By: Rollins, Peter C. Journal of American Culture (01911813), Winter96, Vol. 19 Issue 4, p81, 6p available through Reeve's Library Databases. Find this, print out your own copy, and bring it to class with you!

Monday, Jan. 14 Introduction to our course, viewing of our first film

This week students may turn in their response paper on Friday, in order to give you sufficient time for reading, thinking, and participating in your first class discussion: First response paper due at Comen 214 by midnight. Questions for your paper: What is the "cultural studies method" that Miles utilizes to analyze film? What "three queries" have focused her writing of this book? Apply Miles' questions and method to your viewing of Frank Capra's "documentary" – what does this example reveal about America in the 1940's? What questions does all this raise for you?

T/R, Jan. 15/17 class discussion

Week Two *Why We Fight*, Jarecki, 2006 A documentary that examines America's policies regarding making war, most recently the Iraq war and what is termed "the Bush doctrine" that includes pre-emptive strikes. The author suggests that this policy has been in the works for many years, reviewing past wars in the 20th century. A variety of individuals are asked "Why We Fight?" with, predictably, a variety of answers. This is followed by a look at today's U.S. military/industrial complex via interviews with individuals involved with it.

Readings: Selections from John Lyden, *Film As Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals*, Introduction, Chapter One and Chapter Two. **Note: This book is on library reserve. Make your own copy of these pages and remember to bring them with you to class!**

Special Note!! Sunday night, Jan. 20th, I will offer a special venue for a viewing of our film, due to our celebration on Monday of this week for Martin Luther King Jr. Day. We will meet in Main Reeve 212 at 6:30 pm. Those students who do not wish to view the film on Sunday night (or are unable to come) are responsible for viewing the film on their own BEFORE Tuesday (and you'll need to view the film in order to have your response paper ready for this week!).

Monday, Jan. 21 No class, MLK holiday

Wed. Response paper due. Questions: Briefly explain two of the most compelling of Lyden's approaches for relating film and religion and say why you think these make most sense. Then use Clifford Geertz' definition of religion to help you think through the documentary we viewed this week. What is his definition and how would you put it in your own words? What are the large "meaning-of-life," even "religious" questions being raised by this film, according to Geertz' definition? What is your response to this approach?

T/R, Jan. 22/24 Class discussion

Week Three *All Quiet on the Western Front, 1930* This is an English language film (made in America) adapted from a novel by German author Erich Maria Remarque. The film follows a group of German schoolboys, talked into enlisting at the beginning of World War 1 by their jingoistic teacher. The story is told entirely through the experiences of the young German recruits and highlights the tragedy of war through the eyes of individuals. As the boys witness death and mutilation all around them, any preconceptions about "the enemy" and the "rights and wrongs" of the conflict disappear, leaving them angry and bewildered.

Readings: Lyden, *Film as Religion*, Chapter Five

Robert Eberwein, *The War Film*, Introduction and "The Greatness and Continuing Significance of *All Quiet on the Western Front*"

Monday, Jan. 28 Viewing of the week's film

Wed. Response paper due. Questions: Why does Lyden use the model of interreligious faith dialogue to develop a model for analyzing film as religion? What is the model he arrives at? Use his model to think through this week's film and the chapter by Andrew Kelly. What is "the religious power" of this film? What is your own reaction to Lyden's model?

T/R, Jan. 29/31 class discussion

Week Four *Bataan, 1943* Japan has just invaded the Philippines and the US Army attempts a desperate defense.

Thirteen men are chosen to blow up a bridge on the Bataan peninsula and keep the Japanese from rebuilding it. *Written by* khunt@eng.morgan.edu

Readings: Selections from *The War Film*, "The World War II Combat Film: Definition,"

Barbara Ehrenreich, *Blood Rites: Origins and History of the Passions of War*, forward and Chapter One

Monday, Feb. 4 Viewing of our film

Wed. response paper due: Questions: How does this week's film exemplify the classic elements of a WWII combat film? Contrast the "theory of war" presented by this film with the theory Ehrenreich articulates in Chapter One of her book. By "theory of war" I mean: what motivates humans to go to war? Why are humans war-making beings? What does war have to do with religion, according to Ehrenreich?

T/R, Feb. 5/7 class discussion

Week Five *The Thin Red Line, 1998* In World War II, the outcome of the battle of Guadalcanal will strongly influence the Japanese's advance into the Pacific. A group of young soldiers is brought in as a relief for the battle-weary Marine units. The exhausting fight for a key-positioned airfield that allows control over a 1000-mile radius puts the men of the Army Rifle company C-for-Charlie through hell. The horrors of war form the soldiers into a tight-knit group, their emotions develop into bonds of love and even family. The reasons for this war get further away as the world for the men gets smaller and smaller until their fighting is for mere survival and the life of the other men with them. *Written by* [Julian Reischl {julianreischl@mac.com}](mailto:julianreischl@mac.com)

Readings: *The War Film*, "Auterism and War-teruism: Terrence Malick's War Movie," (*note: look up the words in this title that you do not know!!*)

Robert Eberwein, "as a mother cuddles a child: sexuality and masculinity in world war II combat films," *Masculinity: bodies, movies, culture*, Ed. Peter Lehman (*on library reserve – make your own copy and remember to bring it to class!*)

Ehrenreich, Chapter Two

Monday, Feb. 11 Viewing of our film

Wed. response paper. Questions: Compare and contrast Malick's portrayal of WWII with that of Garnet in Bataan. Use Margaret Miles' cultural studies method to analyze the different cultural assumptions (about the nature of war, about masculinity, etc) and anxieties each of these films responds to in these portrayals of the same time period (WWII) made almost 50 years apart.

T/R, Feb. 12/14 class discussion

Week Six *Glory*, 1989 Based on the letters of Colonel Robert G. Shaw. Shaw was an officer in the Federal Army during the American Civil War who volunteered to lead the first company of black soldiers. Shaw was forced to deal with the prejudices of both the enemy (who had orders to kill commanding officers of blacks), and of his own fellow officers. *Written by [Murray Chapman](mailto:muzzle@cs.uq.oz.au) muzzle@cs.uq.oz.au*

Readings: *The War Film*, "Race and Nation in *Glory*," Robert Burgoyne

Ehrenreich, Chapter Three

Monday, Feb. 18 viewing of our film

*Wed., response paper: Compare and contrast your own first reaction to *Glory* with the analysis of Burgoyne. Why is he troubled by this film? In what way is it "a continuation of racial stereotypes"? What are the two different paradigms used in this film to define racial identity? Use your ongoing reading in Ehrenreich to comment on the film's "mystic nationalism that is only revealed in the battlefield," through the sacrifice of blood. What is your reaction to all this?*

T/R, Feb. 19/21 class discussion

Week Seven *The Fog of War*, 2003 Robert S. McNamara discusses his experiences and lessons learned during his tenure as Secretary of Defense under John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson. He talks about his work as a bombing statistician during World War II, his brief tenure as president of Ford Motor Company, and the Kennedy administration's triumph during the Cuban Missile Crisis. However, the film focuses primarily on his failures in Vietnam. The theme of the film are his "eleven lessons" learned during this time. Some of these include improving military efficiency, understanding your enemy, and the frustrations of trying to deal with (and unsuccessfully trying to change) human nature. *Written by jgp3553@yahoo.com*

Readings: Ehrenreich, Chapters Four and Five

"Robert McNamara: Then and Now," James G. Blight, *Daedalus*, 1 Jan., '07 (*Note: Find this article through the Reeve's library databases, print out your own copy and remember to bring it to class!*).

Note: If you don't know anything about the history of McNamara's life, find out! Use the library data bases to help you.

Monday, Feb. 25 viewing of our film

Wed. response paper: Compare and contrast "the two McNamaras" as discussed by Blight in his analysis of this film (in light of the history of McNamara's life and 20th c. history in the U.S.). Bring in Ehrenreich's analysis: "It was war that allowed human sacrifice to achieve a truly spectacular scale" (66). How is religion "rooted in the primordial encounter with the predator beast" (75)?

T/R, Feb. 26/28 class discussion

Week Eight No film this week!

Monday, Mar. 1 (no class: spring recess)

T/R, Mar. 4/6 (no class: spring recess)

Week Nine *Coming Home, 1978* Sally Bender is the wife of a Captain in the United States Army. He is sent over to Vietnam, and Sally is alone. With nothing else to do, she decides to volunteer at a local veteran's hospital, where she meets Luke, who went to high school with Sally. Luke was wounded and is paralyzed and confined to a wheelchair. When Sally begins to fall in love with Luke, she has to make a crucial decision about her life. *Written by [David Landers {dml@qwis.com}](mailto:dml@qwis.com)*

Readings: *The War Film*, "The Reagan Hero: Rambo," Susan Jeffords; "Do We Get to Lose This Time? Revising the Vietnam War Film," Tania Modleski

Reread Lyden, Chapter Five

Monday, Mar. 10 Viewing of our film

Wed. response paper: Lyden writes, "To admit that we ought to take popular culture seriously is to admit that we should seek to understand its worldview and values, and its appeal, rather than simply dismiss it as a mindless and nihilistic glorification of sex and violence" (134). Apply Lyden's model of viewing film as interreligious dialogue to your analysis of this week's film and readings. What insights emerge for you?

T/R, Mar. 11/13 Research Workshops at Reeve's Library in both sections – **Meet in the library computer center and be prompt!**

Week Ten *Winter Soldier, 1972* For three days in 1971, former US soldiers who were in Vietnam testify in Detroit about their war experiences. Nearly 30 speak, describing atrocities personally committed or witnessed, telling of inaccurate body counts, and recounting the process of destroying a village. The atrocities are casual, seem routine, and are sanctioned or committed by officers. Images from the war illustrate the testimony; there's a side discussion among veterans about racism and a couple of interviews about the soldiers' self-realization. The testimony appears in the US Congressional Record on April 6 and 7, 1971. A "winter soldier" contrasts with Paine's "summer soldier and sunshine patriot." *Written by fjhailey@hotmail.com*

Readings: *The War Film*, "Represented in the Margins: Images of African American Soldiers in Vietnam War Combat Films," *Brian J. Woodman*

Ehrenreich, Chapters Six and Seven

Monday, Mar. 17 Due at Class: Hard copy of your 1 paragraph statement regarding the film you intend to research. What interests you in this particular film? What is the question or theme in it that you intend to explore? What questions do you have at this early juncture?

Wed. response paper: Analyze Winter Soldier in terms of the issues of the construction of African American identity and masculinity (among whites as well as African Americans) using the readings for this week. What is Ehrenreich's thesis regarding the connection between war and masculinity? What do you make of the differences and similarities between the racial issues presented in Winter Soldier and the chapters from The

War Film for this week? Finally, and do not neglect this last question, what do you make of the film's assertions regarding the commonplace crimes against humanities perpetrated by American soldiers in Vietnam?

T/R, Mar 18/20 class discussion

Week Eleven *Courage Under Fire, 1996* This film is a series of flashbacks, in which Lieutenant Colonel Nathaniel Serling (Washington) attempts to prove that Captain Karen Walden (Ryan) deserves to be the first woman ever to win the Medal of Honor. Written by [Lisa Buckley {buckley@idirect.com}](mailto:buckley@idirect.com)

Readings: *The War Film*, "Soldiers' Stories: Women and Military Masculinities in *Courage Under Fire*," Yvonne Tasker; "Rehearsing Feminism: Women/History in *Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter* and *Swing Shift*," Mimi White

Ehrenreich, Chapter Nine

Monday, Mar. 24 Viewing of our film

Wed. response paper: Use your readings to analyze this week's film. What characterizes "the warrior elite" according to Ehrenreich? What characterizes "media discourses about military women" according to Tasker? What does White mean by the following: "the contemporary understanding of WWII as a period of new opportunities for women in the labor force might be seen as the effect of unresolved issues and contradictions in women's current status rather than as an unfulfilled but closed sequence. . ." (203)?

T/R, Mar. 25/27 class discussion

Week Twelve *Jarhead, 2005* Jarhead (the self-imposed moniker of the Marines) follows "Swoff" (Gyllenhaal), a third-generation enlistee, from a sobering stint in boot camp to active duty, sporting a sniper's rifle and a hundred-pound ruck on his back through Middle East deserts with no cover from intolerable heat or from Iraqi soldiers, always potentially just over the next horizon. Swoff and his fellow Marines sustain themselves with sardonic humanity and wicked comedy on blazing desert fields in a country they don't understand against an enemy they can't see for a cause they don't fully fathom... Written by austin4577@aol.com

Readings: *The War Film*, "The New War Movies as Moral Rearmament: Black Hawk Down and We Were Soldiers," Thomas Doherty

Ehrenreich, Chapters Ten and Eleven

Monday, Mar. 31 Due in Class: Annotated Research Bibliography . . . Viewing of our film

Wed. response Paper: Eberwein's anthology ends before any in depth analysis of the creation of films post 9/11. How does Doherty analyze war films in light of the cultural anxieties and preoccupations of the pre 9/11 period? How does Jarhead demonstrate a whole new set of preoccupations at work in the American imagination? Does Jarhead illustrate Ehrenreich's point/critique regarding what goes for "the true valour of civilized nations, i.e. their readiness for sacrifice in the service of the state" (193)? Why or why not?

T/R, April 1/3 Class Discussion

Week Thirteen *A History of Violence, 2005* Tom Stall, a humble family man and owner of a popular neighborhood restaurant, lives a quiet but fulfilling existence in the Midwest. One night Tom foils a crime at his place of business and, to his chagrin, is plastered all over the news for his heroics. Following this, mysterious people follow the Stalls' every move, concerning Tom more than anyone else. As this situation is confronted, more lurks out over where all these occurrences have stemmed from compromising his marriage, family relationship and the main characters' former relations in the process. *Written by [balboa82](#)*

Readings: Finish Ehrenreich!

Monday, April 7 Viewing of our film

Wed. response paper: For your final response paper, compare and contrast the questions raised by A History of Violence with Ehrenreich's theory about the feelings and passions that give rise to war. Why does this violence occur? And most importantly, what do the film and Ehrenreich say about the possibilities for the violence and the violence of war to be tamed/curbed/controlled? What is your opinion with regard to these questions?

T/R, April 8/10 Class discussion

Week Fourteen , No film this week!

Monday, April 14 Students will sign up to meet with me (and one another) to evaluate their research/writing progress on their projects. We will meet during class time. Use the remainder of your time this week to work on your research project.

T/R, April 15/17 Group meetings continue

Week Fifteen -- Film to be chosen by Class!

No readings this week – class members will take their research paper draft to the writing center and work with the writing specialists there to hone their work. Ask the writing specialists to work with you on: mechanical details (spelling, grammar, correct citation, sentence structure and flow, etc.); and much more importantly, ask for their feedback regarding your project's thesis and analysis. Does your paper present an in depth and coherent argument (again, do NOT retell the film's narrative plot!)? Does the argument flow? Do your transitions work well? Have you utilized your research resources appropriately and with intelligence? Make sure the writing resource specialist emails me upon completion of your session so that I know you have accomplished this assignment. You may meet with them any time during this week ONLY (in other words, a later appointment will not be accepted as accomplishment of this assignment).

Monday, April 21 viewing of our class film

T/R, April 22/24 Research Roundtable begins!

Week Sixteen

Monday, April 28: Potluck Dinner, completion of Research Roundtable and celebration of our good work together over the semester!