MYTH AMERICA
Interpretations of American Religion

Religious Studies 220-IH  T/TH, 12:45 – 2 pm Wilson 1-115

Professor Lynda Sexson
office: Wilson 2-159 994-5200
assistant: Derek Brouwer

uhils@montana.edu
hours: T, TH 2 pm; other appts welcome
derekb6464@gmail.com

... in the beginning, all the world was America...
--John Locke, 1690

... oh, brave New World, that has such people in it...
--William Shakespeare's Miranda, in The Tempest, 1611

... why do Englishmen so eagerly kill all snakes?...

Course Description:
We will examine some examples from the histories of religions in America, as well as themes of America as religion. Religious traditions from Africa, Asia, and Europe transform on this continent into various American forms. Indigenous religions, though threatened with extinction, continue to affect the worldviews of those who have migrated to this land. New religions spring up each generation, absorbing the texture of American experience. The course will also consider the sacred beyond traditional religious institutions, with topics such as civil religion, cultural myth, ideas of nature, arts and material culture. We will be attentive to the diverse and pluralistic culture of America, which is pervaded by metaphors as elemental as mountains and waters (or Big Sky) in creating the American experience.
At the conclusion of the course, we will be more articulate about religion and culture. We may discover America.

\[\ldots\ We\ do\ not\ use\ the\ ‘D’\ word\ldots\]  
--Rayna Green, anthropologist, sometime leading up to 1992

**Required Texts:**


(In addition, occasional supplemental materials will be distributed in class or cited for online reading.)

**Course Requirements:**

Assign reading.

Class Attendance and Participation. (A course is a conversation, a unique experience created by the participants. Welcome to the conversation.) Occasional in-class responses. (Sorry, there are no make-ups for in-class work, as they are dependent upon the class dialogue with study questions.)

Two Exams.  
February 21; April 24

Three Brief Essays. Researched, typed.
January 31, March 8, April 17.

You are welcome and encouraged to discuss your work at any time with Professor Sexson or Mr Brouwer.

\[\ldots\ We\ are\ all\ Americans\ldots\]  
--front page of *Le Monde*, after 9/11.

\[\ldots\ the\ Great\ Spirit\ Mother\ of\ those\ mountains,\ “Who\ hung\ the\ new\ moon\ in\ the\ skies,\ and\ cut\ up\ the\ old\ ones\ into\ stars\ldots”\]  