

Diverse Voices:

Voices from the Fringe of the American Religious Landscape

ENGL 3743 Spring 2022 Syllabus

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Email is the best way to reach me.

OFFICE HOURS

MW, 11:00 a.m. - noon

TR, 9:00-10:00 a.m. and 1:00-2:00 p.m.

and by appointment

CLASS MEETS - TR, 11:00 a.m. - 12:20, PY205

REQUIRED TEXTS

- *A Thousand Lives: The Untold Stories of Jonestown*, Scheeres, ISBN: 9781416596400
- *Waco: A Survivor's Story*, Thibodeau, ISBN: 9781602865730
- *Unfollow: A Memoir of Loving and Leaving Extremism*, Phelps-Roper, ISBN: 9781250758033
- *Cartwheels in a Sari: A Memoir of Growing Up Cult*, Tamm, ISBN: 9780307393937
- Readings as assigned on the course schedule (will be uploaded to D2L)

COURSE OBJECTIVE

In this course, we will read a variety of texts by and about people who have been involved in fringe religious groups. We will consider such questions as why a person chooses to join a fringe group and what compels them to stay. We will also examine how the adherents talk about their experience both positive and negative in order to begin to understand the religious impulse and the role of narrative in shaping and documenting human experience. This class will explore the questions:

- What happens when people who have been involved in these sects have the opportunity to speak out about their experiences?
- What stories do they tell?
- And how do these stories expand our understanding of fringe religious sects?

Please Note: Diverse Voices classes focus on different topics and narratives from groups that are often marginalized in our culture. In keeping with this theme, some of the topics we will discuss in class are difficult and sensitive. In addition to the assigned narratives, we will watch documentaries about our subjects and interviews with survivors of violence and extremism. In some cases, the written and documentary narratives include both firsthand accounts and reproductions of death, murder, suicide, assault, drug use, and other challenging subjects. I am happy to talk with students about concerns related to our topic.

ASSIGNMENTS

10% Active Participation in Class Activities
15% Short Paper
20% Informal Response Assignments/Homework

Project, which will include
 10% Proposal
 15% Annotated Bibliography
 20% Formal Research Paper
 10% Presentation

Your grade for Active Participation in Class Activities will be based upon three things: being in class, being prepared by completing the assigned readings ahead of time, and active participation in whatever we are doing on a given day. This could include watching a video, listening to a presentation, and participating in large group discussion, small group work, and other activities as assigned.

POLICIES

Attendance Policy:

I expect each student to be in class each day, on time, and prepared for each class meeting. Preparation includes doing any assigned reading or completing assignments before coming to class on that day. Students who do not maintain regular attendance in the course may be dropped from the course. No more than four absences in this Tuesday/Thursday class are allowable. If you have extenuating circumstances, please speak with me about them.

If you are diagnosed with Covid, you will need to fill out the Covid-19 Reporting Form for Students on the MSU Covid webpage. I will then get notified of your diagnosis and work with you to get caught up in class.

Late Work Policy:

Late work will receive a one-letter grade penalty for each day it is late unless you have spoken to me ahead of time to explain the circumstances that require an extension. Extensions are granted on a case-by-case basis and should not be expected.

Plagiarism Policy:

Plagiarism is the use of someone else's thoughts, words, ideas, or lines of argument in your own work without appropriate documentation (a parenthetical citation at the end and a listing in "Works Cited")—whether you use that material in a quote, paraphrase, or summary. Penalties for plagiarism in this course can include failure of an assignment, failure of the course, and/or a formal university report of plagiarism.

Students with Disabilities:

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact the Disability Support Services in Room 168 of the Clark Student Center, 397-4140.

Safe Zone Statement:

The professor considers this classroom to be a place where you will be treated with respect as a human being – regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, political beliefs, age, or ability. Additionally, diversity of thought is appreciated and encouraged, provided you can agree to disagree. It is the professor's expectation that ALL students consider the classroom a safe environment.

Contacting Your Instructor:

Feel free to contact me either via phone or email. Email is generally a faster way to reach me. Please understand that I will respond on the next business day if you contact me on weekends or after hours.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Any changes to the schedule will be made in class.

Week 1

Tu, 1/11–Course Introduction; Review Syllabus

Th, 1/13–What is a “cult”? Why do cults matter today?

Before class: read “Cults: The Negative Image” article (on D2L)

In class: Watch “Holy Sh*t, We’re in a Cult”

Week 2

Tu, 1/18–History of Cults in America; Read Wessinger, “Cults in America” (on D2L)

Th, 1/20–Read *A Thousand Lives* (ATL), 1-105

Week 3

Tu, 1/25–Read ATL, 106-205

Th, 1/27–Read ATL, 206-end; Short Paper assigned

Week 4

Tu, 2/1–Peer Review short paper

Th, 2/3 – Short paper due on D2L (11:59 p.m.); Read *Waco*, prologue - 58

Week 5

Tu, 2/8 – Read *Waco*, 59-126

Th, 2/10– Read *Waco*, 127-230

Week 6

Tu, 2/15–Read *Waco*, 231-end

Th, 2/17–Read *Unfollow*, 1-96; Project assigned.

Week 7

Tu, 2/22–Read *Unfollow*, 97-203

Th, 2/24–Read *Unfollow*, 204-286

Week 8

Tu, 3/1–Read *Cartwheels in a Sari* (CS), 1-91

Th, 3/3–Read CS, 92-203

Week 9

Tu, 3/8 –Read CS, 204-288

Th, 3/10–Research Day, bring laptop if you have one (I have a limited number for students to borrow in class), work in classroom

Week 10–Spring Break

Week 11

Tu, 3/22–Peer Review Proposal

Th, 3/24–Reading TBA*; Proposal Due into D2L at 11:59 p.m.

Week 12

Tu, 3/29–Library Research, meet in library

Th, 3/31–Annotated Bibliography Peer Review

Week 13

Tu, 4/5 – Reading TBA; Annotated Bibliography Due into D2L 11:59 p.m.

Th, 4/7–Reading TBA

Week 14

Tu, 4/12–Reading TBA

Th, 4/14–Holiday, No Class

Week 15

Tu, 4/19–Project Paper Peer Review

Th, 4/21–Project Paper revisions; Project Paper due into D2L at 11:59 p.m.

Week 16

Tu, 4/26–Presentations

Th, 4/28–Presentations

Finals Week

Final Exam time: Tu, 5/3, 1:00 - 3:00 p.m.

(We will NOT have a final exam, though we may meet during this time. Your Final Revision of Project Paper is due during the final exam time. Put this day/time on your calendar.)

Commencement: Saturday, 5/7

* *TBA: To Be Assigned*