COURSE DESCRIPTION
The ancient Maya predicted the end of the world would occur on December 21, 2012—if you believe what you have seen in the movies, that is. Recent Hollywood films like *Apocalypto* and *2012* have woven fantastic stories around this date, which marks the conclusion of the Mesoamerican Long Count calendar. But what did ancient Maya civilization believe about 2012? This course will consider the issue of cultural appropriation by contrasting the original history and meaning of Mayan artifacts against their reinterpretation in U.S. museum displays, paintings, sculptures, comic books, and movies. Over the course of the semester, we will address question such as: What can practices of cultural appropriation tell us about the societies involved? Is the adoption of visual elements from one cultural group by another ethically objectionable? Why or why not? What does it mean for an object to become divorced from its original context? Do new interpretations overwrite the old, or can multiple meanings and histories coexist for a single object? And finally, how does the example of Mayan mythology in the American imagination provide insight into other instances of cultural appropriation, both historically and in the present day?
Office Hours & Location
My office hours are on Wednesdays from 3:00 – 5:00 pm and by appointment. My office is located in 41 Wylys, on the 3rd floor, Room 304.

Email and Telephone
You can email me at brobertson@wesleyan.edu or leave a message on my office telephone at 860-685-2721.

Moodle
All course information including syllabus, research paper guidelines, electronic reserve readings, and research tips can be found on Moodle, which can be found at moodle2.wesleyan.edu. I will post announcements to Moodle; be sure to check the course site once a week.

Course Texts
The required readings for this course include the following books, which are available for purchase at Broad Street Books:


You also may wish to purchase Sylvan Barnet’s A Short Guide to Writing about Art (10th ed), a helpful book for how to write on visual subjects. In addition, eBooks are available through Wesleyan University libraries for the following required titles:


Reserve Reading
One copy of each required textbook will be available at the reserve desk in Olin Library. Additional assigned readings are on physical reserve at Olin, posted to the web as electronic reserves, or can be accessed via Moodle or one of the online library databases (e.g. JStor). Reserve readings are indicated by the letters RSRV, eRes or PDF in parenthesis in the course outline section of this syllabus. To access the readings marked eRes on the syllabus, go to the library homepage at www.wesleyan.edu/libr. Click on the ITEMS ONLINE – ERES link under RESERVES in the FIND bucket. Password: amst311. You can also access these readings from off campus by using your Wesleyan username and password.

Additional books that are recommended for individual class presentation assignments and/or for general reference are also available at the reserve desk (see attached Reserve Reading List).

Readings may be added or deleted during the semester.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A. CLASS FORMAT

The majority of course sessions will involve CLASS PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSION. For this session format, I will briefly introduce the session topic at the end of the previous class, and you will be given a handout with detailed instructions for the assignment. Typically, these assignment handouts will explain the general question or issue we will be addressing, and then divide the problem into aspects or components to be assigned to various members of the seminar. In most cases, you will work on these assignments in small groups; this small-scale collaboration is essential to the success of the seminar, as prior discussion of the problems will help develop your understanding (and also help identify unresolved problems that need to be addressed by the whole group). Each group will be required to bring written statement summarizing their findings for distribution in class before the presentation. The group will be given a brief period (5-8 minutes) to present their findings to the class, followed by several minutes for other members of the seminar to ask clarificatory questions. After all presentations are completed, a period of general round-table discussion will follow.

Several sessions will take the format of GROUP EXERCISE AND DISCUSSION. For these sessions, necessary materials will be distributed one week in advance, and you will be charged with a clearly defined problem that can be approached through analysis of this material. It will be necessary to begin digesting and analyzing this material on your own during the week before class. Then, in class, we will divide into two or more smaller working groups to continue working collectively toward a resolution of the problem. After working collectively on the problem for some period, each group will present a progress report to the rest of class, and then return with vision refreshed by the group's feedback. After a further period of work, there will be final presentations and general discussion. Our ultimate concern in these exercises will be as much with methodology as with the substance of the specific problems.1

B. ASSIGNED READINGS

Everyone will be expected to read the primary reading for the week (see course calendar), using the sets of questions under the subject areas as a general guide and framework within which to formulate your understanding. Some additional readings will be indicated under each subtopic on assignment handouts; these are not required for the entire class, but only for those individuals working on the problem in question.

C. WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

You will have a total of four writing assignments, two (2) short essays (3-5 pages), one (1) proposal (about 2 pages) and preliminary bibliography (at least 1 page) for a longer, problem-oriented research project, and the final research paper itself (8-12 pages).

Paper #1: 3-5 pages, due Sept 27. Object analysis and interpretation of a single Maya or Aztec artifact/monument. As the culminating assignment of our three-week unit on Mesoamerican antiquity, this paper builds upon the group exercise on September 19 and will elucidate the meaning and cultural significance of the object, using contextual evidence, iconographic analysis, and epigraphy (where available). Collectively, these papers will form an “object library” for members of the class and should be written in an accessible, concise manner with this purpose in mind.

1 Adapted from Phil Wagoner’s 2011 syllabus “Relic and Image: Archaeology and Social History of Indian Buddhism” at Wesleyan University.
Paper #2: 3-5 pages, due Oct. 28. Critical response to Mel Gibson’s *Apocalypto*. What is the dividing line between artistic representation/appropriation and ethical responsibility? Is this movie offensive? Why or why not? This essay builds upon earlier course discussions addressing issues of aesthetic appropriation, representation, ethics, and artistic liberty. Be sure to consider what, how, and why: what does the movie show with regard to pre-Columbian civilization? how is this material depicted? and finally, why? to what end or purpose? How does this content function within the larger context of the film? Within the art world? Within the history of U.S. appropriation?

Paper #3 deadlines (details below):
- Individual meeting to discuss possible research topics, week of Oct. 1
- Proposal and preliminary bibliography, due Nov. 8
- In-class presentations, Dec. 3 & 5
- Final paper, due Dec 13

Presentation, Proposal and Bibliography

Each student is required to deliver a 15-minute oral presentation (either read from a paper or from notes) fully illustrated using PowerPoint. You will select a topic of your choice, developed in discussion with me. The central theme of our course is the cultural appropriation of Maya history and culture; however, you may feel free to choose from visual representations that draw imagery from any pre-Columbian civilization, not only the Maya. I will hand out a list of possible topics during the second week of class; the list will not be exhaustive and you should feel free to come up with your own topic. I will hold individual meetings with students to discuss possible paper topics during the week of October 1. You must have your paper topic selected by Friday, October 11.

All students must submit to me a proposal and one-page preliminary bibliography of their topics by Friday, November 8. I will disseminate the abstracts to seminar participants via the course list serve.

The presentation is not your final paper. In your presentation, you may choose to address a single point or a few points that your paper will expand upon. The presentation is governed by the necessity to engage your audience with visual material and your written paper is not under the same constraints. In short, while your presentation treats the same material that your final paper does, the presentation is not the same medium of expression, and it should therefore be treated independently, so far as its form is concerned. Final presentations are scheduled for the final week of classes, December 3 and 5.

Final Paper

Each student will write a paper (8-12 pages) that expands on your presentation. The written paper must incorporate any critique or suggestions from the professor or seminar participants. Papers are due on Friday, December 13.

All papers are due by 5:00 pm on the due date, and may be submitted either in hard copy (placed under my office door or in my mailbox in the department office), or electronically, as a digital upload on Moodle. When submitting papers electronically, please use PDF format. Please note that all papers are to be printed/formatted in a 12 pt. font, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins, and pages numbered. Work that does not adhere to these guidelines will be returned with a letter grade but with no comments or suggestions.
D. POLICY ON EXTENSIONS:
Late work is not accepted and there will be no make-ups or extensions, except in the case of a medical or personal emergency supported by a letter from your class dean. If papers are turned in after the due date, your grade will be reduced by one-half letter grade for each day or fraction of a day that the paper is late.

E. EVALUATION & GRADING
Evaluation is based on the student’s assimilation of course content and active engagement with it as expressed primarily in written assignments. Each written item will be evaluated on grammar, content, and clarity, as indicated in the grading rubric below:

**Rubric for Writing Components:**

**A**
Content: Answers the question(s) fully, demonstrating good knowledge of course materials (e.g. class lectures, assigned readings), good analytical skills, and insight. The student demonstrates a certain measure of sophistication in dealing with the material, not mere regurgitation. The student has developed a good working sense of basic chronology that s/he is able to tap into when necessary.

Writing: Good introduction, conclusion. The student organizes the material well and knows how to construct sentences properly (no run-ons or fragments). The student can communicate thoughts well in written form, does not confuse the reader, and demonstrates good word choices. The student possesses an excellent command of grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

**B**
Content: Answers the question(s), but lacks some of the confidence and mastery needed for an A. The student occasionally synthesizes class lecture material and readings.

Writing: Good organization, paragraph and sentence construction. The student communicates well with only occasional lapses in logic, order, and/or grammar.

**C**
Content: The student demonstrates a fair amount of knowledge, but fails to answer the question(s) asked. The student does not engage issues directly and wisely.

Writing: The paper has serious writing problems – lots of grammatical errors and problems with basic writing. The student scrambles sentences, chooses words that confuse rather than inform readers, and/or the argument is not logically organized.

In addition to your written work, the level and quality of your participation in this seminar will be graded. Participation” is broken into two categories: attendance and contribution. Attendance will be taken at each class meeting. More than two (2) unexcused absences (i.e. over a week of class) will result in the lowering of your participation grade by one full letter.

“Contribution” refers to both the frequency and the quality of your in-class contributions to the success of the seminar – which includes both formal presentations and discussion. Every member is expected to prepare carefully for each week’s activity – whether it involves discussion, presentations, or a group exercise – and to remain focused, engaged, and responsive to the contributions of other members of the seminar.
Your final grade for the course will be calculated according to the following formula:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>REQUIREMENTS</th>
<th>WEIGHT</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participation: Attendance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation: Contribution</td>
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<tr>
<td>Essay #1</td>
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<td>Essay #2</td>
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<td>Research Project: Proposal/Bib</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Project: Final Paper</td>
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F. CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE
Please notify me in advance if you must be absent from class. Students may be excused from class if they present documentation (from the deans’ office or health services) for personal emergencies or illness within a week of the missed class.

As a courtesy to your classmates, please turn off all cell phones before coming to lecture. Please arrive on time, and please do not get up and leave the room before class is over. If you bring food or beverages, please throw away your trash when class is over.

Taking notes on a laptop computer is also discouraged. This is an image-intensive course and it is very easy to miss an important point if your eyes (and brain!) are trying to process the information on two (or more) screens.

G. HONOR CODE AND PLAGIARISM
The university has a recognized Honor Code, administered by the Honor Board. This code sets standards for academic integrity for all undergraduate students. As a student you are responsible for upholding these standards for this course. In particular, pay special attention to the section on plagiarism, which describes the acceptable ways of quoting, paraphrasing, and citing the works of others, and acknowledging the ideas of others. Any suspected violations of the honor code will be reported to the Honor Board. For additional information on the Honor Code visit the Student Handbook web site: http://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/studenthandbook/standardsregulations/studentconduct.html.

H. DISABILITY RESOURCES
Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a documented disability as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and provide documentation of the disability. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Disability Resources as soon as possible.

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact Dean Patey in Disability Resources, located in North College, Room 021, or call 860-685-2332 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations.
# Course Schedule

## Sept 3  Introduction to the Course

## Part I: The Maya

### Sept 5  Gods of Creation (Class Presentations/Discussion)
- Carrasco, “Maya Religion: Cosmic Trees, Sacred Kings, and the Underworld,” in *Religions of Mesoamerica: Cosmovision and Ceremonial Centers*, 92-123. (RSRV)

**Recommended:**

### Sept 10  Divine Kingship, City-States and Warfare (Group Ex./Discussion)
- Martin and Grube, *Chronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens*, 14-53. (RSRV)

**Recommended:** The NOVA documentary *Cracking the Maya Code* provides an excellent overview of the longstanding challenge and relatively recent triumph of deciphering Maya hieroglyphics: [http://video.pbs.org/video/980048895/](http://video.pbs.org/video/980048895/)

### Sept 12  Blood & Sacrifice: Vision Quest & the Ballgame (Class Presentations/Discussion)
- Miller, *Maya Art and Arch.*, 109-149.

## Part II: The Aztecs

### Sept 17  Origin and Destiny (Class Presentations/Discussion)

**Recommended:**
- Taube, “Aztec Mythology,” in *Aztec and Maya Myths*, 31-50. (eRes)
SEP 19  **BLOOD DEBT AND SACRIFICE (GROUP EXERCISE/DISCUSSION)**


SEPT 24  **EMPIRE, EXPANSION, AND NARRATIVES OF CONQUEST**

**CLASS PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSION**

- Townsend, “The Arrival of Strangers” and “The Fall of the Aztec Empire,” in *The Aztecs*, 14-34, 35-42. (eRes)


PART III: THE MYSTERIOUS MAYA IN EARLY U.S. ARCHAEOLOGY & INTERPRETATION

SEPT 26  **LIVING REMNANTS OF THE PAST: A CASE STUDY OF STEPHENS & CATHERWOOD**

**Laboratory Session: Meet at Olin Library Davison Special Collections**

- Evans, *Romancing the Maya*, 10-87.

SEPT 27  **PAPER #1 DUE (FRIDAY, NO CLASS)**

OCT 1  **A FOUNTAINHEAD OF FAITH: CASE STUDY OF THE MORMON RELIGION**

**CLASS PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSION**


OCT 3  **DIFFUSIONIST ORIGINS & EXOTIC ENTERTAINMENT: DÉSIRÉ CHARNAY AND AUGUSTUS LE PLONGEON (CLASS PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSION)**

- Lerner, *Maya of Modernism*, 144-160. (eBook)
**PART IV: AESTHETIC BORROWING: RE-PRESENTING THE PAST**

**OCT 8**  
**PRIMITIVISM AND THE VANISHED RACE: CASE STUDY, MODERN ARCHITECTURE**  
*(CLASS PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSION)*  

**OCT 10**  
**NO CLASS – RESCHEDULED FOR CLASS FIELD TRIP**

**OCT 13**  
**MEXICAN MURALISM IN THE U.S.**  
**FIELD TRIP TO DARTMOUTH COLLEGE TO VIEW OROZCO’S MURALS**  
- Brown, “The Past Idealized: Diego Rivera’s Use of Pre-Columbian Imagery,” in *Diego Rivera: A Retrospective*, (eRes)  


**OCT 15**  
**RETURNING TO AZTLÁN: THE CHICANO ARTS MOVEMENT**  
*(CLASS PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSION)*  

**OCT 17**  
**APPROPRIATION WITHOUT REPRESENTATION: ABSTRACT & CONCEPTUAL ART**  
*(GROUP DISCUSSION)*  
- Review: Young, *Cultural Appropriation and the Arts*, chapter 2  

**OCT 22**  
**NO CLASS – FALL BREAK**

**PART V: ETHICS OF APPROPRIATION**

**OCT 24**  
**HOLLYWOOD FANTASY AND THE ETHICS OF REPRESENTATION**  
In Class: Watch Mel Gibson’s *Apocalypto*  
- Young, *Cultural Appropriation and the Arts*, 106-158.  
- Hanson, “Relativism, Revisionism, Aboriginalism, and Emic/Etic Truth: The Case Study of *Apocalypto,*” in *The Ethics of Anthropology and Amerindian Research*, 147-190. (eBook)
OCT 28  PAPER #2 DUE (NO CLASS)

OCT 29  DISCUSSION: MEL GIBSON’S APOCALYPTO (WRITTEN RESPONSE/DISCUSSION)

OCT 31  COLLECTING THE PAST: STOLEN ANTIQUITIES & MUSEUM ETHICS
(GROUP EXERCISE/DISCUSSION)
- Young, Cultural Appropriation and the Arts, 63-105.

Recommended: NPR, “Finders Not Keepers, Yale Returns Artifacts to Peru”:
http://www.npr.org/2012/01/01/143653050/finders-not-keepers-yale-returns-artifacts-to-peru

NOV 5  MUSEUM NARRATIVES AND ETHICS OF DISPLAY (CLASS PRES./DISCUSSION)


NOV 7  THE PROPHETIC MAYA: CASE STUDY, 2012 PHENOMENON
(GROUP EXERCISE/DISCUSSION)

Recommended: For an example of how the 2012 Phenomenon permeated popular culture, check out “Hulk Battles the Maya Apocalypse”: http://www.comicbookresources.com/?page=article&id=37636

NOV 8  PROPOSAL AND PRELIMINARY BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE (NO CLASS)

NOV 12  THE CONTEMPORARY MAYA: COLONIAL LEGACIES, CURRENT STRUGGLES, & ANCIENT HERITAGE (CLASS PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSION)
- Young, Cultural Appropriation and the Arts, 152-158.
**Part V: Contesting U.S. Myth-Making**

**NOV 14  Contemporary Indigenous Response (Group Exercise/Discussion)**

- **In Class:** Watch *Couple in a Cage*
  - Aguirre, “Freak Show: The Aztec Children and the Ruins of Race,” in *Informal Empire: Mexico and Central America in Victorian Culture*, 103-134, 181-188. (eRes)


**NOV 19  Ruins: A Fake Documentary and the Trouble with Forgery**

- **(Group Discussion/Written Response)**
  - Watch *Ruins: A Fake Documentary* (RSRV)
  - Lerner, “No Lies about Ruins” in *F is for Phony: Fake Documentary and Truth’s Undoing*, 67-75. (eBook)

**NOV 21  Ruins Response Due (No Class – Rescheduled for Class Field Trip)**

**NOV 26  Final Presentations**

**NOV 28  No Class: Thanksgiving Break**

**Part VI: Presentations & Finals Week**

**DEC 3  Final Presentations**

**DEC 5  Final Presentations**

**DEC 13  Final Paper Due**
AMST 311 Reserve Shelf: Assigned Readings and Source Books


Taube, Karl A. *Aztec and Maya Myths*. University of Texas Press, 1993. RSRV: F1219.76.R45 T38 1993


