

NOTE: A completed checklist form must be stapled to the front of the paper. The checklist is a reminder to you to make sure you have done all the required preparation and included all the required elements in the paper; it also guides me in locating those elements in what you have written, and makes it easier for me to point out if you have left out or forgotten to do anything.

1/28/0505  
HRS 140  
Prof. Dubois  
1546 words  
[note: **NO NAME**  
on 1<sup>st</sup> page]

## Sample Comparative Paper

### Representation of Film

[COMMENTARY: I strongly advise that (for the first paper at least) you **single-space & offset the description of your chosen scene** from the main body of your description as if it were a quote from a reading (see FAQ #22 for correct formatting, to be reviewed in class). At this stage of the description, focus on *what you actually saw and heard* (e.g., “The next scene shows Forrest singing enthusiastically with a group of African-Americans dressed in choir robes”) rather than noting general moods or judgments (e.g., “Forrest stupidly takes his friend's idea literally, joining a church and singing with a bunch of mindlessly smiling choir members”). In deciding what details are relevant to mention in leading up to and following up on your scene(s), avoid including details that have no bearing on the scene(s) in question. Finally, note that in this case the **closure** provided--i.e., the last two sentences--includes *both a description of the filmmaker's perspective* (addressing issues related to emotional tone, implied approval/disapproval, and subtle emphases of one viewpoint over another) and a *restatement of the themes* put forth in the opening synopsis (i.e., Forrest's persistence ability to do the right thing); your **own closure need only address one or another of these.**]

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The movie 'Forrest Gump' tells the story of a simple-minded yet extraordinarily sincere young man who, despite his limited intellectual capacities and the ridicule continually directed at him by others, always seems to be in the right place at the right time, doing the right thing. Towards the middle of the movie, after returning from Vietnam and unexpectedly meeting his childhood friend Jenny at a peace rally in Washington, Forrest buys a shrimp boat in honor of his lost war-buddy Bubba, who had expressed hopes of starting a shrimp business. He invites his former lieutenant Dan to be his first mate; though still bitter at having lost his legs in the war, Dan agrees to come on deck. The following scenes depict Forrest and Lieutenant Dan struggling to find shrimp:

Forrest & Dan repeatedly pull up garbage (old shoes, plastic bags, a toilet seat, etc.) in their nets, with no sight of shrimp. After Dan suggests sarcastically that "maybe [Forrest] should pray for shrimp," the next scene shows Forrest singing with a church choir, with Dan sitting in the back with his liquor bottle, as Forrest's voice describes the scene and notes that ".I think he left the prayin' up to me." The next shot once again shows Forrest and Dan on their boat dumping garbage from their net, and Dan asks "where is this God of yours?" Forrest's voice-over notes, "It's interesting Lieutenant Dan said that, because right then, God showed up." The subsequent scene shows the two in the midst of a raging storm, with Forrest steering and Dan up on the mast of the ship yelling and raising his middle finger as if cursing the agent of the storm.

These scenes are followed by a news segment revealing that Forrest and Dan end up being the only surviving shrimp boat and therefore get rich catching all the shrimp. A few scenes later, Dan thanks Forrest for saving his life in the war, something he had never done, and Forrest notes "he never exactly said this, but I got the feeling that Lieutenant Dan had made his peace with God." The rest of the film depicts similarly fantastic occasions of Forrest persevering in whatever endeavors he decides to pursue.

Forrest's elementary school phrasing and vocabulary, coupled with the fact that he persists in attaining a goal planted in his mind years earlier by a long-dead friend, both seem to reflect the filmmakers' clear though light-hearted intention to highlight Forrest's simple-minded dedication throughout the film. This is in contrast to the portrayal of other key characters such as Dan and their luck (as does Dan until just after the above scene) or simply unable to translate into action their various plans for self-improvement (Jenny).

## Representation of Reading

[COMMENTARY: Note that the primary quotation below is about **four or five sentences long** and deals explicitly in a *focused way with a single idea*. Alternatively you may wish to draw together into a single unit **two or three shorter quotations from within the same segment** of the reading (usually a two or three page range maximum) which are all by the same author and all address a similar issue of interest to you. In selecting your passage(s), avoid focusing on general introductory or concluding remarks; rather *pick out specific details or events that concretely illustrate some point or theme*, to give a vivid sense of what its central sections are about. (See FAQ #20-23 for correct formatting & citation, which will also be reviewed in class.) Note that the selective summary below provides, as you are required to do in all your own papers, **specific page numbers not only for quotations but also for all paraphrased descriptions** of the essay's content. As with the film

summary, the closure provided by the final two sentences both comments on the author's perspective and restates the theme highlighted in the second sentence of the summary, though your own summary need only address one of these.]

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In the essay "Frontiers of Experience," Diana Eck recounts the events of the World's Parliament of Religions convened in Chicago in conjunction with the 1893 World's Fair. Through this description she provides a snapshot of attitudes towards the world's many religious traditions at the end of the previous century, implicitly connecting and contrasting this snapshot to the actual presence of numerous foreign faiths in America today. She opens by telling of her visit to a Jain temple in Boston that is housed in a Swedish Lutheran Church, originally built by Eck's own denomination; the contrast of cut-crystal chandeliers and fine marble images of Jain saints provides a clear reminder that the American past long dominated primarily by Christian forms has now given way to a startling array of foreign traditions (4). She also points out the striking contrast between the staged showing of diversity at the 1893 Parliament and the actual diversity found in the Chicago metropolitan area today (4-5). Noting first the presence of religious leaders who objected to and did not attend the conference (6), she then depicts its opening ceremony:

When the Parliament opened, a replica of the Liberty Bell tolled ten times, once for each of the great religions represented....the president of the Parliament...began his address, "Worshippers of God and Lovers of Man, let us rejoice that we have lived to see this glorious day!"...John Henry Barrows then welcomed the delegates and confessed, "When, a few days ago, I met for the first time the delegates who have come to us from Japan, and shortly after the delegates who have come to us from India, I felt that the arms of Human brotherhood had reached almost around the globe....what gives us the most hope and happiness today is our confidence that 'the whole round world is every way bound by gold chains about the feet of God'...devout men of all faiths may speak for themselves without hindrance, without criticism, and without compromise, and tell what they believe and why they believe it." And so they did. (6-7)

Eck goes on to sample key speakers from the Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim traditions, emphasizing their bold tone, and noting too that a "universalist fulfillment theology" was the overall position of most who attended (7-9). She closes by mentioning several glaring omissions among those who attended: the embarrassingly small percentage of women, the near absence of African Americans,

and the total absence & even lack of acknowledgement of Native American traditions (10-11).

Through all of these details Eck stresses not only that our contemporary attitudes towards religious diversity originated several generations ago; but also that the social reality in which we live could hardly have been imagined by those early explorers of the world's religions. She seems appreciative, furthermore, of the visionaries who planned the 1893 World's Parliament, but also clearly highlights their narrow-mindedness, as if to suggest that we be alert to the possibility of our own limited visions.

### Comparison

[COMMENTARY: This sample draws on the two examples presented above as well as another reading selection from WOR, ch. 11: "Religion in America;" in your paper you **may use anything from any of the assigned readings** (including scriptures in WOR, NHLR & the course pack). Note also that, as your own paper should do, this section makes *more than one type of comparison* (i.e., not only of characters and events, but also of genres, times and places written, and focus on particular aspects of religious life); and addresses *not only similarities but differences* as well.]

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Though both are narratives, the film scene and Eck's essay differ greatly in style. The plot of "Forest Gump" is fiction, emphasizing the fantastic dedication of a single individual over the course of a whole lifetime. Eck's description of the World Parliament, on the other hand, is a historical reconstruction of a moment in history--a moment that Eck suggests is both related and starkly different from our own present-day wrestling with religious diversity. The contrast in the personalities and speaking styles of these two contexts is even more pronounced. Forrest wants primarily to honor his promise to his dead friend, and speaks simply and straightforwardly of that goal. He takes Dan's suggestion about prayer literally when it was most likely meant sarcastically; and seems to think of God quite literally as the agent of the storm. Barrows and his colleagues, on the other hand, compose formal speeches full of lofty metaphors, intended to communicate across religious traditions the vastness of "Human Brotherhood" (meanwhile, as Eck points out, clearly

unaware of leaving out the female half of humanity). Most likely the Parliament did involve more spontaneous conversations between the participants; but based on the details Eck describes, one gets the impression these would likely also have been relatively formal given that they took place between virtual strangers, some from completely different cultures. A further contrast to both the film and reading is found in Peter Cartwright's autobiographical account of religious revivals and frontier preaching in early eighteenth century Kentucky (490-99), which focuses on personal accounts of religious conversion in America several generations before the World Parliament, and far to the south of urban Chicago. Cartwright, like Forrest, manifests straightforward personal commitment to his religious practice, but with a focus on the need to convert and reform others that also contrasts with the viewpoint of the 1893 World Parliament's organizers.

Interestingly, however, the film scene and two readings all portray reliance on some form of ritual supported by a larger community, in order to inspire awareness of a larger unseen reality. Forrest's desire to honor his dead friend's wish for success in shrimp fishing brings him to singing & praying in a church community, which in turn leads him to see subsequent events as guided by the hand of God; even the cynical Lieutenant Dan is eventually transformed by his encounter with the power of the storm. A century earlier in Eck's narrative, the liberty bell replica tolls symbolically at the start of the World Parliament, signaling a new kind of community marked by the desire to communicate across faiths; the opening speaker of the parliament paints a picture of "the arms of...brotherhood" bringing them all together. Cartwright's conversion is effected by praying and "regular reading of the Testament" (492); and he latter extends this fervent connection to his unseen God through prayer and scripture reading to effect the conversion of large numbers of people in camp-meetings lasting hours and days at a time, where "hundreds fell prostrate under the mighty power of God, as men slain in battle" (493). The three accounts show three generations of American religious life each nearly a century apart, all of them suggesting a distinctly liberal approach to

modifying the uses of traditional Christian rituals. Ultimately all these three sources reflect uniquely American approaches to seeing God's hand in every possible aspect of life, from the involuntary bodily motions of converts seized by the spirit (Cartwright 495-97), to foreign cultures from across the globe (in the 1893 Parliament & 1993 urban America), to the storms that inevitably challenge (and paradoxically sometimes reward!) those who like Forrest & Dan seek to draw their harvest from the sea.