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## A Hell House Divided: Performing Identity Politics through Christian Mediums of Proselytization

[Allan N. Davis](#), *Brigham Young University* -  
*Provo*

### Abstract

Every year, during the month of October, hundreds of Christian churches throughout the United States open the doors of their Hell House to surrounding communities. Hell Houses are Christian haunted houses designed to literally scare the Hell out of visitors so they will accept Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. In the place of vampires or zombies, Hell Houses portray the sins Satan is mostly likely to tempt teenagers to commit. Scenes include young girls receiving abortions, young men believing lies that they were born gay, and careless individuals drinking and driving. As para-theatrical performances, Hell Houses lead guests from one vignette to the next until they reach Heaven and Hell to show the eternal consequences of one's behavior. A Hell House is a medium of proselytization. Believers within the larger USAmerican Evangelical Christian community organize these events to facilitate the conversion of others. In this thesis, I explore how the use of Hell Houses and other mediums of proselytization are justified within religious-based communities through the implementation of what I refer to as a discourse of neutrality. According to religious-based communities because mediums of proselytization simply convey spiritual truth and reality to those outside of the community, they depict "how things really are." However, I argue that the use of each medium both reflects a perception of reality and contributes to the creation of that reality. Describing and discussing the mediums as "neutral" to the processes of creating reality and meaning generates an authoritative power to legitimately define the politics and boundaries of the religious community's identity. Furthermore, it masks the role each medium plays in the creation of reality as well as the tensions within the community to authoritatively define the "Evangelical Christian" identity. In this thesis, I explore Hell Houses as mediums of proselytization where Evangelical Christians perform their identity politics. To conduct this analysis, I examine how other mediums of proselytization associated with Hell Houses (i.e., the physical body, conversation-based evangelism, and the Internet) each depend upon their own discourse of neutrality to thrive in the community. Because each medium is seen as neutral, those who champion its usage garner an authoritative legitimacy to define the community's identity and Christianity along the lines of reality as informed by the supposedly neutral medium. Here, I detail the dynamics of the tensions within a significant and complex religious group in contemporary America and how performative practices within the community inform its identity politics.

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### College and Department

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A Hell House Divided: Performing Identity Politics through Christian Mediums of Proselytization. Every year, during the month of October, hundreds of Christian churches throughout the United States open the doors of their Hell House to surrounding communities. Hell Houses are Christian haunted houses designed to literally scare the more. A Hell House is a medium of proselytization. Believers within the larger USAmerican Evangelical Christian community organize these events to facilitate the conversion of others. In this thesis, I explore how the use of Hell Houses and other mediums of proselytization are justified within religious-based communities through the implementation of what I refer to as a discourse of neutrality. According to the theory of identity politics, the root of oppression appears to lie not with a capitalist power structure, but with a white male power structure. Now that may sound like a like semantic difference, but it isn't. We hear that term all the time: white male power structure. The class divide has not been more obvious in the United States than since the Great Depression of the 1930s. This is not some side issue, but it is the centerpiece of the capitalist system. And it's getting worse by the minute. Identity politics is typically a modern middle-class led phenomenon that helps those in charge keep the masses divided and distracted. In the West you are free to choose any gender or sexuality, transition between these at whim, or perhaps create your own, but you are not allowed to question the foundations of capitalism or liberalism. Identity politics is the new opiate of the masses and prevents organised resistance against the system. Segments of the Western Left even believe such aforementioned 'freedoms' are a bellwether of progress and an indicator of its cultural superiority, one that w