

CLEMENTS CENTER FOR  
**SOUTHWEST STUDIES**  
SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY

The Clements Center for Southwest Studies invites you to their Monthly Brown Bag Lecture Series

Wednesday, March 27, 2013  
12 noon to 1 pm  
Texana Room, DeGolyer Library  
6404 Hyer Lane & McFarlin Blvd.

**Saved by Christ, Sanctified by Crude:  
Texas Oil and the New Evangelicalism in Cold War America**

**Darren Dochuk**

Clements Center Senior Fellow for the Study of Southwestern America



This talk will explore the relationship between Southwestern petroleum and Cold War evangelical Protestantism. Emboldened by World War II and its transition into American society's mainstream, evangelicalism entered the 1950s eager to sell citizens a doctrine of Christian free enterprise, patriotism, and family values. Independent oilmen in Texas, spurred on by these same priorities and the concomitant virtues of wildcat entrepreneurialism, helped the process along by providing funds and inspiration for organizations such as the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. This alliance was evidenced in numerous institution-building enterprises, a few of which will be discussed in this talk, but it was also manifested in film. In 1953, Billy Graham's movie company released "Oiltown U.S.A.," which tapped America's obsession with the "Texas Rich" to sell a message of spiritual rebirth. Viewed by millions, this film told the biography of an extremely wealthy (and immoral) oilman who, upon hearing the old-time gospel, turned his life over to Christ and his money over to ministry. Graham's lesson was that Texas crude could be saved from its excesses and

vice and used for something constructive and divine: the sanctification of a nation. The message stuck, and had lasting consequences. Besides reconnecting Americans with a pristine past of frontier initiative and Christian morality, and engendering a more forceful doctrine of anti-statism and free market capitalism within an ascendant evangelical movement, "Oiltown U.S.A." also helped raise the cultural and political profile of the Texas independent oilman. As this talk will demonstrate, this reciprocal relationship between Texas oil and the New Evangelicalism would flourish for the next two decades, and endure beyond the 1980s, leaving a record of political and cultural engagement that we still see evident today.

Dochuk is an associate professor of humanities at the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics and in the Department of History at Washington University in St. Louis. He is spending the spring semester at the Clements Center preparing his manuscript *Anointed With Oil: God and Black Gold in Modern America* for publication.

Image: Christian Church in So. Ill. Oil Fields. Photographed by William Sturm, *Chicago Sun*, July 17, 1942.

For more information or if you need special accommodations, contact 214-768-3684 or [swcenter@smu.edu](mailto:swcenter@smu.edu).

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