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Office hours: Weds 12–1:00
and by appointment

Spring 2017
RAB, 208
In-class: Weds 2:15–3:35
Online: Mon 2:15–3:35

Religion 101: Gods, Myths, and Religions in a Secular Age

This course treats religion as an object of critical academic inquiry and interpretation. We will draw on diverse source material, including Indian, Muslim, Greek, and Jewish traditions and we will also seek to understand how these traditions are appropriated and re-interpreted in new and changing contexts. Major topics include: popular notions of “cults” and illegitimate religion; myth and mythmaking; religious and textual authority; religious space and ritual practices. As part of this project, we will also treat major theories of religion, including the work of E. B. Tylor, Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, Clifford Geertz, and contemporary Cognitive Science research. Other important subtopics are: secularism and colonialism; race, ethnicity, and gender; debates about religion and science in the 20th and 21st centuries; and religiously motivated violence.

Course-Specific Learning goals:

- 1) To critically analyze practices, traditions, and discourses about the sacred or religious as human phenomena
- 2) To develop critical acumen in reading and interpreting texts
- 3) To categorize, analyze, and compare diverse systems of value, belief, and practice
- 4) To develop global and local religious literacy. This means, in particular, cultivating the skills of identifying and interpreting religious traditions, practices, and discourses and of understanding the centrality of religious worldviews and communities in New Jersey, the United States, and on the global stage.

Core Curriculum Goals:

21st Century Challenges [21Cb]

- b. Analyze a contemporary global issue from a multidisciplinary perspective.

Arts and Humanities [AHo]

- o. Examine critically philosophical and other theoretical issues concerning the nature of reality, human experience, knowledge, value, and/or cultural production.

Course Requirements:

1. Midterm Exam: Students will prepare responses to essay questions circulated in advance and then write them during an 80-minute class period: 20%.
2. Final Exam: Students will prepare responses to essay questions circulated in advance and then write them during the final: 25%
3. Two short papers (1500–2000 words) that will be revised in response to comments from the instructor and to peer review: 15% each; 30% total.
 - a. The first short paper will be a rewrite (and expand) one of the essay questions on the midterm that responds to instructor and peer comments
 - b. The second short paper will be more open but draw from topics to be distributed in advance
4. Class discussion, forum-posts, and quizzes: 25%
 - a. Discussion: All readings and assignments must be completed prior to the class or discussion session for which they are assigned. The standards by which I grade participation are attached to the bottom of this syllabus. Please familiarize yourself with these standards. Participation is an active and rewarding process which requires more than mere attendance.

- b. Online forum posts: In smaller Forum “discussion” groups of 4–5, students will post reading reflections once per week and later respond to at least one of their peers (min. 200 words). Responses to their peers must be completed by 11:55 pm on the same day.
- c. Quizzes: online and in-class quizzes will focus on the assigned readings. Online quizzes will be a standard part of the online meeting and typically consist of 5-10 multiple choice or fill-in-the-blank questions that test reading comprehension.

Required textbook and use of Sakai:

Daniel Pals, *7 Theories of Religion* (Oxford, 2009) (available used on Amazon etc.)

All other materials are available on Sakai; see the course page for reading suggestions, prompts, links, and updates.

PART 1: MAKING THE STRANGE FAMILIAR AND THE FAMILIAR STRANGE

Weds 1/18: Introduction to the course; begin Heaven’s Gate documentary

Mon 1/23: Illegitimate religions? Religious “Cults” and the Specter of Violence

Assignments:

1. Watch *Inside Story: Heaven’s Gate* (BBC, 90 mins)
2. Read M. Meusse, “Religious Studies and ‘Heaven's Gate’: Making the Strange Familiar and the Familiar Strange,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April, 1997 (3 pp.)
3. Read Hall, “Finding Heaven’s Gate,” in *Apocalypse Observed: Religious Movements and Violence*, 155–188.

Weds 1/25: Jonestown as a Kind of Religious Movement

Assignments:

- 1) Watch *Jonestown: Life and Death in the People’s Temple* (PBS, 120 mins)
- 2) Read J. Z. Smith, “The Devil and Mr. Jones,” 102–120

PART 2: GODS, MYTHS, AND MYTHMAKERS

Mon 1/30: Myths and Types of Myth

Assignments:

1. Read Hesiod’s *Theogony*, lines 1–210 (approx. 6 pp.) and *Works and Days* (approx. 6 pp.)
2. Read *Bilgamesh in the Netherworld* (approx. 20 pp.)
3. Rig Veda 10.89; 10.90

Weds 2/1: What is Myth?

Assignments:

1. McCutcheon, “Myth,” in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, 190–208
2. Screen either *Stars Wars, the Empire Strikes Back* OR *Avatar*

Mon 2/6: Creation Myths

Assignments:

1. Read *Enuma Elish* (Babylonian creation myth), 35–59
2. Read, Hesiod’s *Theogony* (again); Stoic Philosophical Allegory (selections)
3. Navajo Creation account

Weds 2/8: Theories of Myth

Assignments:

1. Read Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth*, 146–159
2. Read Plato, *Phaedrus* and *Republic*, selections (approx. 11 pages)

Mon: 2/13: Revisiting Creation(s): Variation, Change, and Multiple Authorship

Assignments: revisit some primary sources with McCutcheon and Lincoln in mind:

1. Genesis 1–4 (i.e. chapters 1 through 4)
2. *1 Enoch* 1–16
3. Carl Ernst, “India as a Sacred Islamic Land,” 556–563

PART 3: RELIGIOUS PRACTICES, SPACES, AND THINGS

Weds 2/15 Ritual and Practices

Assignments:

1. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 29–40
2. Zoroastrian Vestas (excerpts on defilement)
3. Manual of Hadith 29, “Toilet” [in the sense of “hygiene”]
4. Leviticus 11–15, 18

Mon 2/20: Religious Figures and Types of Authority

Assignments:

1. Read Kugel, *The Bible as It Was*, selections on Moses and Mt. Sinai
2. Read Qur'an, selections on Mohammed
3. Read *History of Joseph Smith*, selections (Mormon tradition)

Weds 2/22: Religious Practices: Bodily Discipline, Food, Prayer, and Dance

Assignments:

1. Read Bielo, “Bodies, Words, and Things,” 54–80
2. Watch *Embrace* (2011, 55 min) on Tibetan Buddhists

Mon 2/27: Religious Practices and Ritual

Assignments:

1. Watch: Greek orthodox baptism: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W3fbMDU0fec>
2. Evangelical baptism: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KoPEMVTA19M>
3. Demon manifestation post baptism: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xI8vCOHqMXc>
4. Screen: *A Life Apart: Hasidism in America* (1997, 87 mins)

Weds 3/1: Midterm Exam

PART 4: THEORIES OF RELIGION

Mon 3/6: The Romance of Primitive Origins

Assignments:

1. Pals, “Animism and Magic,” 16–53 (on Tylor and Frazer)
2. E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, selections

Weds 3/8: Romantics React

Assignments:

1. Read Pals, "The Reality of the Sacred: Mircea Eliade," 158–197
2. Selections from R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* and M. Eliade, *Sacred and the Profane*

Mon 3/13 and Weds 3/15: No Class, Spring Break

Mon 3/20: Psychology: Personality and Neurotic Projections

Assignments:

1. Pals, "Religion and Personality," 54–87

Weds 3/22 Marxists Attack

Assignments:

1. Pals, "Religion as Alienation: Karl Marx," 124–157
2. Marx on Religion, selections

First short paper due

Mon 3/27: Civil Religion and the Political Mythmaking

Assignments:

1. Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* 96.1 (1967): 1–21.
2. Watch AND read the Kennedy Inaugural (1961):
3. M. Serazio, "Just How Much is Sports Fandom Like Religion?" *Atlantic*, 2013

Weds 3/29: Religion and the Social: E. Durkheim

Assignments:

1. Readings: "Pals, Society as Sacred," 88–123
2. *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, selections

Mon 4/3: Religion and Science in and outside the academy:

Assignments:

1. Screen, *Inherit the Wind* (1960, 128 min)
2. Bill Nye and Ken Ham debate (168 mins, 2014):
3. Look carefully at Creation Museum web-site: <http://creationmuseum.org>

Weds 4/5: Religion and Culture: Clifford Geertz

Assignments:

1. Pals, "Religion as a Cultural System," 233–267
2. Geertz, "Thick Description;" "Religion as a Cultural System" (selections)

Mon 4/10: Cognitive Science and Evolution

Assignments:

1. J. Barret, *Why Would Anyone Believe in God?* (selections)

Weds 4/12: Cognitive Science and the Study of Religion

Assignments:

1. J. Barret, *Why Would Anyone Believe in God?* (selections)
2. Anne Taves, "Special Things as Building Blocks for Religion," 58–83

PART 5: SECULAR TENSIONS

Mon 4/17: Women, Gender, and Sexuality

Assignments:

1. Phyllis Trible, "Eve and Adam: Genesis 2-3 Re-Read" (approx. 11 pp.)
2. William Countryman, "Bible, Heterosexism, and the American Public Discussion of Sexual Orientation," 167–183;

Weds 4/19: Gender, Sexuality and "the secular thesis"

Assignments:

1. *Religion, the Secular, and the Politics of Sexual Difference*, ed. Cady and Fassenden (selections)
2. R. Wuthnow, "Religious Diversity in a 'Christian Nation': American Identity and American Democracy," in Thomas Banchoff, ed., *Democracy and the New Religious Pluralism* (Oxford, 2007)

Mon 4/24: Secularism, Ethnicity, and Race

Assignments:

1. Read Nelson, "Myths, Shinto, and Matsuri in the Shaping of Japanese Cultural Identity," 152–166
2. Eddie Glaude, Jr. "Myth and African American Self-Identity," 28–42 (both from *Religion and the Shaping of Race and Identity: An Introduction*, ed. Craig R. Prentis (NYU Press, 2003)
3. Watch *Bad Friday: Rastafari after Coral Gardens* (2011, 63 mins)

Weds 4/26: Religion, Violence, and Fundamentalism after 9/11

Assignments

1. B. Lincoln, "The Study of Religion at the Current Political Moment," chap. 1 in *Holy Terrors*
2. G. Wood, "What Isis Really Wants," *Atlantic*

Second short paper due

Final exam: Tuesday, May 9, 12–3 pm in our normal meeting room

Standards for Grading Student Participation in Class Discussions

A:

A student who receives a **A** for participation in discussion typically comes to every class with questions about the readings in mind. An **A** discussant engages others about ideas, respects the opinions of others, and consistently elevates the level of discussion.

B:

A student who receives a **B** for participation in discussion typically does not always come to class with questions about the readings in mind. A **B** discussant waits passively for others to raise interesting issues. Some discussants

in this category, while courteous and articulate, do not adequately listen to other participants or relate their comments to the direction of the conversation.

C:

A student who receives a **C** for participation attends regularly but typically is an infrequent or unwilling participant, or an obstreperous one.

D:

A student who fails to attend regularly and prepare adequately for discussion risks the grade of **D**

Or even F

[These standards are adapted only slightly from those officially adopted by the Princeton University Department of History in 1998. They were authored primarily by Andrew Isenberg]