

Department of Religion
Topics Courses / 2019-20

Block 1

RE 200 Religion and Race in the Modern World

In this course, we will explore the intersection of race and religion in the modern world, alongside a brief examination of the possibility of identifying racialization in the medieval period. Contemporary theorists of race and religion have demonstrated how religion serves as a means of racializing various human groupings, producing understandings of “peoplehood” with the goal of categorizing particular communities for differential treatment within the social body. This course will expose students to competing definitions of race and the ways in which race and religion serve to co-constitute one another both historically and contemporarily. Diverse historical and cultural moments will be examined, including but not limited to, European colonial expansion, transatlantic slavery, 19th Century U.S. American understandings of race in relation to the Bible, and the racialization of Islam in contemporary U.S. culture and politics. Prof. Christopher Hunt.

Block 2

RE 200 Religion & Violence

In popular media, religion is often portrayed as a source of violence in the world. Religious texts depict violent acts and have been read to condone them. At the same time, there is a growing body of scholarly literature that contests a simple cause-and-effect relation between the two. This course examines the problem of religion and violence in the context of the current debate and, in the process, equips students to think critically about an issue that has become emblematic of our time. Prof. Peter Wright.

Block 3

RE 200 African American Religious History: An Introduction

This introductory course seeks to introduce students to the formation and varying historic trajectories of African American religious traditions in the United States, with some brief engagement with African-derived religions in the Caribbean. Although some studies of African American religion begin with the period of slavery and the Christianization of diasporic Africans, this course locates the origin of black religion on the continent of Africa. From this starting point, this course will not only examine West African religions, the religions of enslaved Africans, the formation of black Christian denominations, and the origin of black Pentecostalism, but it will also expose students to often overlooked historical periods and religious expressions including the arrival of black religio-racial movements during the Harlem Renaissance, 19th century black women preachers, and the African derived religions of Voodoo and Santería. Prof. Christopher Hunt.

Department of Religion
Topics Courses / 2019-20

Block 4

RE 200 Religion in China and Japan

A survey of both institutional and popular religion, ancient and modern, in China and Japan. Focuses on classical Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism (all imported from China to Japan by the 6th century), Shinto in Japan, and various religious expressions in modernity. Will question definitions of “religion” that are challenged by these traditions. Prof. David Gardiner.

RE 200 Martyrs and Saints

(HY 200; Writing Intensive; Social Inequality Critical Perspective)

This course centers on martyrs and saints in the Christian tradition, primarily through encountering related art, artifacts, and spaces in Rome, Italy. We will begin by exploring the development of martyrdom in the early church, particularly in the context of the Roman Empire. Specifically, through an examination of imperial interests and spaces, including the Roman arena, we will consider evidence for persecution. Through early Christian accounts of and reflections on martyrdom, we will also consider how early Christians both rely on and resist imperial culture. In addition, attention to Christian beginnings in Rome will involve a study of the legacies of the apostles Paul and Peter, including Roman Catholic memorials at the Vatican, most prominently St. Peter’s Basilica. We will also examine transitions from martyrdom to sainthood, related, in part, to an imperial turn to favor Christianity during the fourth century under the emperor Constantine. Our consideration of martyrs and saints will also reflect on representations of gender and related attributions of authority. Our historical study will be especially attentive to ways in which Christian communities construct and memorialize—through literature, art, and space—martyrs and saints. This approach will align with our focus on material culture, including sacred spaces and visual representations, in Rome and the surrounding regions. Site visits may include attending regional festivals devoted to celebrations of saints; such experiences will offer further insight on the persistence and development of traditions over time, from antiquity to the present. Prof. Pam Reaves.

Block 5

RE 200 Colonialism and Religion

From 1492, when Columbus set sail in search of India, religion has been intimately bound up with the project of modern colonialism. A range of colonial regimes actively sponsored Christian missionary projects of conversion or sought to regulate and reform the traditions and practices of the colonized. Indeed, scholars in religious studies have argued that the modern conception of religion (and its cognate, world religions) emerged out of these colonial encounters (Asad 1993; Smith 1998; Masuzawa 2005). This course provides an introduction to the study of the relationship between colonialism and religion. Two broad questions will inform our inquiry: How did the colonial encounter

Department of Religion
Topics Courses / 2019-20

shape our knowledge of and relationship to religion? How did colonial technologies of rule (law, education, the census, surveillance, welfare) transform the religious beliefs, traditions and practices of both the colonizer and the colonized? Our readings will include case studies from various modern empires in the Americas, Asia, Africa and the Middle East. We will explore how religion was constitutive of these empires and how it relates to other sites of social power including race, gender, and nation. Themes will include religious conversion and freedom of religion, religious institutions and reforms, textuality and interpretation, ritual and material cultures, and legal reforms and regulation. We will end the course with an exploration of the place of religion in postcolonial theory. Prof. Yogesh Chandrani.

Block 6

RE 200 Black and Womanist Theologies

Black theology, sparked with the 1969 publication of James Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power*, issued a radical call to the theological establishment, inextricably linking the Christian gospel to black struggles for liberation. Later, womanist theology arose, pushing back against the male-dominated discourse of black theology while exploring the distinct faith expressions of black women who experience oppression at the intersection of race, gender, and class. This course serves as an introduction to the history, major figures, and themes of both black theology and womanist theology. Special attention will be paid to the socio-political movements which gave birth to these theological discourses (i.e. the civil rights and Black Power movements and black feminist discourse) and the continued relevance of black and womanist theology to the ecclesial practices of black churches and social justice movements. Prof. Christopher Hunt.

Block 8

RE 200 James Baldwin and Religion

This course serves as an introduction to James Baldwin's literature and his robust engagement of religious themes throughout his literary corpus. Students will explore the autobiographically inspired religious and theological questions which often serve as the foundation for Baldwin's complex understanding/critique of the socio-political realities of race, sexuality, and gender in the United States. In addition, this course will show the ways in which Baldwin "queers" Christian theological language and symbols in putting forth his own unique post-Christian religious vision. Prof. Christopher Hunt.

Department of Religion
Topics Courses / 2019-20

RE 200 Politics, Religion and the Secular

Since the Enlightenment, philosophers and historians have argued that individual freedom and autonomy depend upon the confinement of religious beliefs and practices to the private sphere. On their view, the spread and entrenchment of institutions of modernity would result in the decline of religion as an active moral and political force. These modern ways of thinking assume that there are discrete entities called religion and the secular; where the latter is conceived as the arena of activities such as politics, economics and science in which religion has no place.

In this seminar, we will examine the phenomena of religion and the secular and their place in the modern world through close readings of historical, sociological, philosophical and anthropological works that address the question of religion and its relationship to politics in diverse contexts such as the Middle East, South Asia, and Europe. Our aim will be to acquire an understanding of the variety of ways in which the relationship between religion and politics is configured and debated and to complicate our understanding of key concepts such as modernity, progress, freedom, religion, toleration, community, politics and ethics. Prof. Yogesh Chandrani.

Summer – Block A

RE 200 Excavating Israel: The Archaeology of Ancient Judaism and Christianity

(CL 222 / HY 200)

This course centers on student participation in archaeological excavations at Shikhin, an ancient Jewish village in the Galilee region of Israel. Through this field experience, students will gain training in essential methods and theories of archaeology as well as insights into the history, culture, politics and economics of the region during the Hellenistic and Roman periods. With an understanding of these contexts, students will examine the related histories of early Judaism, the ministry of Jesus, and Christian origins. In addition to their experience in the field, students will learn through assigned readings, regular evening lectures, excursions to other significant historical sites in the region, and a final weekend exploring Jerusalem. The course will be especially attentive to the benefits and challenges of correlating ancient literary sources, including biblical narratives, with the archaeological record. Prof. Pam Reaves.