

Religion: Re-Envisioning Identity, Borders, and Belonging

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Online

Office Hours by Appointment

Course Description:

The contemporary world offers different deployments of the politics of inclusion/exclusion. What roles do religion and theology play in shaping the identities and actions of Black Lives Matter, Burmese Buddhists, and alt-right white nationalist movements in the U.S.? Through reading classic and contemporary works on religion and identity, students will gain sophisticated theoretical frameworks to help analyze phenomena that increasingly seem to shape events.

Degree Learning Goals:

First Year Interdisciplinary Course (4 credits): This course is team-taught and will introduce students to terminology, reading of primary texts and how to write academic papers as well as expose them to the complexity and significance of theological reflection. The course must be taken within the student's first 40 credit hours.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this class students will:

1. be able to articulate some of the ways religion, race, and nationalism function in the modern world;
2. be able to articulate some of the ways religious nationalism has shaped the identities of groups and individuals in different parts of the world and different times;
3. increase their facility with analyzing arguments; and
4. be able to write academic papers that make and support real arguments.

Course Requirements

1. The first week and final week of class we will do a group annotation project.
2. Intro video. Each student will post a brief (1-3 minute) video introducing themselves during the first week of class.
3. 5 mandatory synchronous Zoom discussions during weeks 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10 from 9:00 am to 10:15 am MST (Denver time) Tuesday (Tuesday January 12 and 26, Tuesday February 9 and 23, Tuesday March 9).
4. Preparation and attendance (asynchronously and synchronously). The first 4 Course Requirements are all part of your Participation grade, 15% of final grade.

5. Each student will write 3 3-page papers analyzing one of the readings. You may not write on the same author more than once, and you may not write more than one paper for any given class. Class will begin with a student reading their paper as a way of kicking off our discussion of the reading. Please try not to sign up for papers in consecutive weeks, so that we can get you feedback on a paper before you write your next one. Each paper is 25% of final grade (75% total).
6. Backgrounds. Each student will sign up to present one short introduction to one of our authors (may be in the form of a video). 5% of final grade.
7. Artifacts. Students will sign up to upload an artifact 2 times during the quarter (picture, music or video clip, link to news article) that links one idea in the readings that week to our contemporary world. Students will post a brief (3 sentence max) explanation of the link that they see. 5% of final grade.

3-page papers:

Papers will be graded according to the following 4 criteria: 1. A clearly stated claim; 2. Textual evidence to support the claim; 3. Quality of writing (organization, proper use of sentences and paragraphs, grammar, spelling, and all other mechanics); 4. Depth and seriousness of analysis. In a short paper the claim typically appears as the last sentence of the introductory paragraph (if it is not there the writer needs clearly to mark where it is, since otherwise readers will assume that sentence is the claim). A claim states the conclusion of the argument put forward in the paper. You have a great deal of freedom here. A claim might state what is the most important idea in the reading, or what the author must assume to make their argument, or what the logical extension of that argument might be, or how that argument relates to other readings on our syllabus, or what the author gets right or wrong, etc. In a short paper you will likely not be able to summarize the all the points the author makes, nor should you try. Part of your task of analysis is to prioritize what is most important to lift up for discussion for our class. Your paper will likely not follow the same organization as the reading under analysis, since the logic of your argument will not be the same as the logic of the argument of the reading. If your paragraphs tend to begin “And then . . .”; “Next . . .” then it is probably time to go back and do at least one more draft and re-think what you are presenting and how. The main thing is to make a point about the text.

The purpose of the papers is three-fold: the first is to encourage deep engagement with the texts; the second is to encourage a habit of discussion that is open, respectful, and rigorous. This is best accomplished when the analytical essays take a charitable stance towards the readings. Some of them will seem old-fashioned, and the writers may have different concerns than do we. Some will seem radical. As in any good conversation, it is important first to try to see where the writer is coming from, rather than to be dismissive of their ideas. There will be plenty of time later to decide what is useful to you and what is not. We must begin with an accurate understanding of what is actually going on in the essay. Third, these papers will help develop your skills as readers and writers. A great number of studies show that “peer-review” is a very effective way to teach writing. The feedback you get on these papers during discussion will be quite valuable.

Readings:

The following books are for purchase:

Hucks, Tracey E. *Yoruba Traditions and African American Religious Nationalism* (University of New Mexico Press, 2012) (available as an ebook through Taylor library).

Finley, Gray, and Martin eds. *The Religion of White Rage: Religious Fervor, White Workers and the Myth of Black Racial Progress* (Edinburgh UP, 2020). (Available for \$4.99 as a pdf from Edinburgh Press)

Beliso-De Jesus. *Electric Santeria: Racial and Sexual Assemblages of Transnational Religion* (Columbia). (Not yet available as an ebook through Taylor library).

Special Needs

Iliff engages in a collaborative effort with students with disabilities to reasonably accommodate student needs. Students are encouraged to contact their assigned adviser to initiate the process of requesting accommodations. The advising center can be contacted at advising@iliff.edu or by phone at 303.765.1146.

Schedule of Readings and Classes

Week 1 African Diasporic Religious Nationalism

Reading:

Hucks, Tracey E. *Yoruba Traditions and African American Religious Nationalism* (University of New Mexico Press, 2012)—Chapter 1, 3-4.

Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Chap. 1: “Freedom’s just another word . . .” 5-38.

Week 2 African Diasporic Religious Nationalism; Writing Resources

Reading:

Hucks—Chapter 8.

Beliso-De Jesus. *Electric Santeria: Racial and Sexual Assemblages of Transnational Religion* (Columbia)—Introduction, Chapter 1.

Jasbir Puar, “Introduction: homonationalism and biopolitics,” *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalisms*

Week 3 African Diasporic Religious Nationalism; Library Resources

Reading:

Beliso-De Jesus. *Electric Santeria: Racial and Sexual Assemblages of Transnational Religion* (Columbia)—Chapter 2.

Kamari Clarks, *Mapping Yoruba Networks: Power and Agency in the Making of Transnational Communities* (Duke, 2004)—Chapter 1.

Giyatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”

Week 4 Myanmar

Reading:

Walton, Matthew J. and Hayward, Susan. *Contesting Buddhist Narratives: Democratization, Nationalism, and Communal Violence in Myanmar* (East-West Center)

Ernest Gellner, Nations and Nationalism, chap. 4: "The Transition to Nationalism." 39-52

Theodore Vial, "Schleiermacher and the State"

Week 5 Myanmar

Reading:

Lehr, Peter, "Chapter 6: Burma "You Cannot Sleep Next to a Mad Dog"," *Militant Buddhism: The Rise of Religious Violence in Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand* (Palgrave: NY, 2019), 157-192.

Arendt, Hannah. *Origins of Totalitarianism. If we do Arendt, we should do Chapter 5: "The Political Emancipation of the Bourgeoisie.*

Robinson, Cedric. "Racial Capitalism: The Nonobjective Character of Capitalist Development," *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2000): 9-28.

Week 6 Myanmar

Reading:

Alam, Jobair, "The Rohingya of Myanmar: theoretical significance of the minority status," *Asian Ethnicity* 19:2 (2018): 180-210.

✓ Durkheim, *Elementary forms* selections. Chapter 7: "Origins of these Beliefs (Conclusion)": 207-241 (sections I-IV).

Trinh Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other*, Chapter 2: "The Language of Nativism: Anthropology as a Scientific Conversation of Man with Man": 47-76.

Week 7 White Nationalism

Reading:

Finley and Gray, *The Religion of White Rage* — Introduction, Chapter 7, Chapter 9

Geary, Schofield, Sutton, *Global White Nationalism* — Chapter 5, Postscript.

Da Silva, "'Bahia Pelo Negro' *Can the subaltern (subject of raciality) speak?*"

Week 8 White Nationalism

Reading:

Finley and Gray, *The Religion of White Rage* — Chapters 1-2, and 4.

Geary, Schofield, Sutton, *Global White Nationalism* — Chapter 2, 7.

✓ Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, Chap. 9, "Why Are We So Groupish?"

Week 9 White Nationalism

Reading:

Eric Weed, *The Religion of White Supremacy in the United States*. All students read:

Ch 1: Epistemology of whiteness; ontology of white supremacy; deconstructing doctrine of discovery, white exceptionalism, and epistemic supremacy.

Ch 2: ontology of white supremacy, soteriology of the white fresh, and the ultimacy of white supremacy in opposition to “heathens”

Conclusion

All students read ONE of the following chapters:

Ch 3: history of indigenous people of the united states, establishing white nation via genocide, contemporary deployment of Indianness (NFL)

Ch 4: Black/white relationship post Civil War, Tulsa Race Riots, lynching, social death

Ch 5: White purity, miscegenation, Naturalization Act 1790, US Supreme court citizenship cases, Black Codes

✓ Nicholas Christakis, *Blueprint*, Chap. 8, “Friends and Networks”

Week 10 Liberating Futures

Reading:

The Combahee River Collective Statement

The BREATHE ACT (Movement for Black Lives)

Sunrise’s Principles (Sunrise Movement)