

Hartford Seminary, Spring 2021

PRELIMINARY SYLLABUS

Race, Religion and Politics (RS-631)

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Class sessions: Wednesdays, 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm, Zoom

Office hours: TBD

Course Description:

All Americans, wrote Derrick Bell, are “imprisoned by the history of racial subordination.” How have the dynamics of racialized class prejudice played out in American religious history? Is there a way out? While paying attention to global histories and theoretical reflections, students in this course will examine and draw lessons from case studies that highlight the problematic interweaving of race, religion and politics in the lives of human beings designated as minorities, including African-Americans, American Catholics, Jews, and Muslims.

Disclaimer/Note to Students:

This course is not a survey. For that, our subject is too vast, too varied, too visceral.

If we succeed, we will engage in in-depth and, gradually and carefully, more informed dialogues on the dilemmas of race, religion and politics – and several other interlinking undercurrents, all dealing with the enforcement of and resistance to the hierarchies of majority/minority constructions of power. Our readings and conversations – which must, crucially, reflect our experiences – will balance a range of interdisciplinary approaches that examine the dynamic entanglements of racial – and gender and class – hierarchies. The aim is to enable us to become better informed, more aware, respectful and careful allies and agents of change, within and beyond our fields, institutions and communities.

Therefore, on a pragmatic note, your work in this class may turn out to be of a hybrid type. Together and throughout the course, we will read, discuss and reflect. Your midterm will be a standard paper. But then, after that midpoint, some of you may want to consider alternative, non-strictly-academic final product/project. (“Theoretical approaches are important,” a friend of mine recently wrote, “but their retrospective character reminds me of a betrothed perpetually arriving too late for the wedding.” <https://thewritelaunch.com/2018/10/quantum-solidarity->

[making-hajj-at-bear-lodge/](#)) What that final product will be is up to you. Of course, you will need to demonstrate that you have read, processed and can productively use the material we have studied together. The “up-to-you” part is the format and genre that might be effective in your line of work, beyond our classroom.

(If, still, after all of this, you wonder what this course is about, read James Baldwin’s “A Letter to My Nephew:” <https://progressive.org/magazine/letter-nephew/>. For some of us, this course might be a peculiar challenge, for it entails confronting our “innocence.”)

Learning Outcomes:

- To demonstrate the knowledge, capacities, and willingness to respectfully engage other religions and world views (MARS #2)
- To demonstrate knowledge and skills for dialogical and constructive engagement with diversity (MARS #4)
- To demonstrate the ability to relate theory and practice in the social contexts in which a religion’s communities exist (MARS #5)
- Develop an appreciation of living in a pluralistic world and dialogical skills needed to work in multi-faith and diverse settings (ICP #2)
- To demonstrate knowledge of the larger social and cultural dynamics affecting religious life and organizations in the 21st century and their implications for ministry setting (DMin #1)
- To share the transformed consciousness of one’s own spirituality in ways beneficial to the wider world (MATLS #3)
- To acquire a comprehensive knowledge in Islamic Studies, Christian-Muslim Relations, and Interreligious Engagement/Interfaith Dialogue (PhD #1)
- To develop the competence to produce original research and written works to advance the scholarship on Islamic Studies and Christian-Muslim Relations for the benefit of religious communities, academy, and society (PhD #2)

Evaluation

Grading will be based on

1. Weekly reflections (30%)
2. Class Participation (10%)
3. Mid-term essay (30%) – due date TBD (email to bansari@hartsem.edu and yuskaev@hartsem.edu)
4. Final essay (30%) – due date TBD (email to bansari@hartsem.edu and yuskaev@hartsem.edu)

Logistics

1) Weekly Reflections:

You will be expected to analyze and discuss the assigned readings at each session. Weekly reflections will be your “talking points.” They will help you organize your thoughts and prepare for each class.

Our class meets on Wednesdays at 4:00 pm. You are required to email me your reflection by 1:00 pm on the day of the class. Each reflection must be 1 to 2 pages (the length does not really matter – but don’t make it too long). Please approach each reflection as a dialogue between you and the readings. In other words, what are your thoughts on one or two points an author makes? What are some questions that arose for you when you read the assignment? How can you connect what you are reading currently with what we have read and discussed in the class before?

At the end of each reflection please make sure to pose 1 or 2 questions you would like to ask in class. (Make sure these questions are anchored in our readings!)

You will be required to start submitting reflections as of our 2nd session. The grade for this assignment will be based on the quantity and quality of your submissions. I will return copies of your reflection with some comments and a grade of either a “+” (“pass”) or a “-” (“fail”).

The scale for the final evaluation will be as follows:

A=11 passing entries
B=8 passing entries
C+ = 6 passing entries
C=5 passing entries
F=4 or fewer passing entries.

No late submissions will be accepted. There will be no way to make up for missed reflections.

Note that each student will be asked to formally present their reflection and serve as a respondent to another student’s reflection once during the semester.

2) Midterm and Final Essays (or projects):

You will have to submit two essays during the semester. The midterm essay should be 5-7 pages in length. The final essay should be 10-12 pages.

We will agree on the general topic/angle of the midterm paper in our class discussions (or I may just assign one). However, you will be responsible for selecting the subject of your final essay.

Please feel free to contact me with your ideas for both papers at any stage of preparation.

Please note that for your final assignment you will have an option of preparing/writing a final project, as opposed to a formal, academic final essay. We will discuss this in class.

Grading standards for the essays (and project, if you choose that option) will be:

A = Excellent. Excellent presentation and analysis that demonstrates original interpretation.

B = Good. Solid command of facts and a good attempt at analysis.

C+ = Adequate in the sense of doing minimal compliance with the assignment.

C = Poor; did not complete the assignment adequately but shows some effort.

F = Failing; did not complete the assignment

Books

The following texts are to be purchased, borrowed or accessed via Digital Theological Library (DTL):

- 1) Raj Patel and Jason W. Moore, *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things: A Guide to Capitalism, Nature, and Future of the Planet* (University of California Press, 2018)
- 2) Sylvester A. Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500-2000: Colonialism, Democracy, and Freedom* (Cambridge University Press, 2015)
- 3) Dolores S. Williams, *Sisters in Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Orbis Books, 2013)
- 4) Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton University Press, 2006)
- 5) Su'ad Abdul Khabeer, *Muslim Cool: Race, Religion, and Hip Hop in the United States* (New York University Press, 2016) eBook available via DTL/HartSem library website
- 6) Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Duke University Press, 2007)

Note: articles and book excerpts available in CANVAS.

Schedule

- 1) Week 1

Read:

- W.E.B. DuBois, “The Souls of White Folk,” in W.E.B. DuBois, *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York, 1920): https://www.gutenberg.org/files/15210/15210-h/15210-h.htm#Chapter_II
- James Baldwin, “A Letter to My Nephew” (<https://progressive.org/magazine/letter-nephew/>)
- Bruce Lawrence, “Introduction,” from *New Faiths, Old Fears: Muslims and Other Asian Immigrants in American Religious Life* (Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. 1-22
- Hortense J. Spillers, “Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics*, 17 (1987): 64-81

(Note: **those joining this class late are still required to read these pieces.**)

2) Week 2

- Raj Patel and Jason W. Moore, *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things*

3) Week 3

- AndreaSmith, “Native Studies at the Horizon of Death: Theorizing Ethnographic Entrapment and Settler Self-Reflexivity,” from Andrea Smith and Audra Simpson, eds., *Theorizing Native Studies* (Duke University Press, 2014), pp. 207-234
- Sylvester A. Johnson, *African American Religions*, pp. 1-158

(Note: Monday, February 11 is the last day to drop a class without academic or financial penalty)

4) Week 4

- Sylvester A. Johnson, *African American Religions*, pp. 159-406

5) Week 5

- Charles Marsh, “Introduction – With God on Our Side: Faiths in Conflict,” (pp. 3-9), “‘I’m on My Way, Praise God’: Mrs. Hamer’s Fight for Freedom,” (pp. 10-48), from Charles Marsh, *God’s Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights* (Princeton University Press, 1997)
- Timur Yuskaev, “Redemption,” from Timur Yuskaev, *Speaking Qur’an: an America Scripture* (University of South Carolina Press, 2017), pp. 69-110

6) Week 6

- James H. Cone, “Theology’s Great Sin: Silence in the Face of White Supremacy,” *Black Theology*, 2, no. 2 (2004): 139-152
- Dolores S. Williams, *Sisters in Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, pp. ix-126

7) Week 7

- Dolores S. Williams, *Sisters in Wilderness*, pp. 127-212
- Amina Wadud, “Qur’an, Gender, and Interpretive Possibilities,” from Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad* (Oneworld Press, 2006), pp. 187-216

(Note: this is the last week to withdraw from a course without academic penalty)

8) Week 8

Readings posted in CANVAS. Proceed in the following order:

- Joshua Paddison, “New Directions in the History of Religion and Race,” *American Quarterly* 68 (2016): 1007-17
- John T. McGreevy, “Catholicism, Slavery, and the Cause of Liberty,” from *Catholicism and American Freedom* (W.W. Norton & Co., 2003), pp. 43-68
- Joshua Paddison, “Anti-Catholicism and Race in Post-Civil War San Francisco,” *Pacific Historical Review* 78 (Fall 2009): 505-44
- McGreevy, “American Freedom and Catholic Power,” from *Catholicism and American Freedom*, pp. 166-188
- McGreevy, “Democracy, Religious Freedom, and the Nouvelle Theologie,” from *Catholicism and American Freedom*, pp. 189-216

9) Week 9

- Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness*, pp. 1-164

10) Week 10

- Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness*, pp. 165-240
- Henry Goldschmidt, “The Voices of Jacob on the Streets of Brooklyn: Black and Jewish Israelites in and around Crown Heights,” *American Ethnologist*, 33 (2006): 378-396

11) Week 11

- Su'ad Abdul Khabeer, *Muslim Cool: Race, Religion, and Hip Hop in the United States* (note: eBook available via DTI/HartSem library)

12) Week 12

- **midterm papers/essays due this week** (5-7 pages; email to bansari@hartsem.edu and yuskaev@hartsem.edu)
- prepare to present your papers in class

13) Week 13

You have a choice of reading either the two assigned articles or the book.

(Of course, those who want can read all three texts are more than welcome to do so, perhaps utilizing the "reading week.")

- Micol Seigel, "'Convict Race': Racialization in the Era of Hyperincarceration," *Social Justice*, 39 (2014): 31-51
- Sherene H. Razack, "How Is White Supremacy Embodied? Sexualized Racial Violence at Abu Ghraib," *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law*, 17 (2005): 341-363.
- Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*

14) Week 14 – Review and presentations of proposals for final papers or projects

- Nancy Fraser and Nancy A. Naples, "To Interpret the World and to Change It: An Interview with Nancy Fraser," *Signs*, 29 (2004):1103-1124

Recommended: William E. Connolly, *Facing the Planetary* (Duke University Press, 2017). Available via DTL. (If one is to read the book -- or glance at it, as I invite you to do -- it might be useful to prioritize the Prelude, Chapter 1, Chapter 5, and Chapter 6. If one's time is limited, reading the Prelude might just be enough...)

Final paper/project due date TBD

(10-12 pages; email to banasari@hartsem.edu and yuskaev@hartsem.edu)