

**Course:**  
RELIGION 149

**Islam in America:**  
**Identity, Race and Faith**



Professor Babak Rahimi  
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Literature Building  
3<sup>rd</sup> floor  
Room 3204

**Location: Tuesdays & Thursdays**  
**Day/Time: 11:00-1:50**  
**Warren Lecture Hall: 2205**

**Office Hours: Wednesdays: 9:00-10:00am**  
**Tuesday & Thursday: 9:00-11:00pm**

**Description of the Course**

The course is about Islam in America. It looks at Muslim American experiences from a critical theoretical perspective, and in doing so it aims to show how the Muslim experience in the United States can be understood in terms of racialization of religion, also tied with economy, law and politics. As an interdisciplinary course, we adopt a critical look at how Muslim Americans have and continue to shape identities through assimilation, acculturation, multiculturalism, class stratification, immigration, activism and also mediatization, a communication process that produces identity through media frames and political communication discourses. We will pay particular attention to the African-American Muslim experience as a way to uncover histories and politics of exclusion,

especially manifested in urbanization, educational inequalities, media, legal and economic institutions. Through these institutions, we explore how Islamophobia can be understood as a racialized phenomenon that pertains not only to African-American Muslims but also (West and South) Asian and (Somalian) African immigrant communities since 1960s. “Muslim” as a racial category, in other words, is examined in connection with the problematic of assimilation, foreignness, embodiment, violence and sexuality.

Since a major component of this course is about how past experiences create new ones, history plays a key role in Religion 149. We trace Islam from the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century to the late medieval period with its spread in South East Asia and West Africa. We will then study the roots of Islam in America with the African slaves and ways they preserved their religion, and its suppression at the plantations in the early modern period. From World War I to 1960s, the wave of Arab Muslim migration from North Africa, West Asia and the Indian Subcontinent to urban centers such as Chicago, New York and, particularly, Detroit is discussed in light of theories of ethnicity, migration and city space. The study of Muslim American communities in the 20<sup>th</sup> century includes an examination of various American-Muslim communities, both Sunni and Shi’a, and in particular the rise of African-American converts to Islam after World War I. Here the class explores the plurality of different Muslim identities in terms of ethnicity, urbanity, race, migration, national origins and sexuality. With conversation as a socio-religious experience, we will pay particular attention to African-American Muslim movements such as the Nation of Islam founded by Wallace D. Fard Muhammad in 1930. The course examines the relationship between “heterodoxy,” sectarianism, and identity politics while considering the historical context in the reestablishment of the Nation of Islam by Louis Farrakhan in 1977. The final focus of the course will be on Islam after the Iranian hostage crisis in 1979 and, especially, the September 11, 2001, and ways in which Muslims continue to be represented in the American media through categories of class, gender, race, and violence.

## **Objectives**

The basic goals of the course are as follow:

1. To foster a critical understanding of Islam as a complex set of discursive and social practices.
2. To acquire basic themes in the study of religion with a religious minority in the North American context.
3. Study of the relationship between identity, space, race and religion.
4. To gain a familiarity with basic theoretical debates on racialized religion as advanced by scholar such as Nasar Meer, W. Paul Reeve, Shafiqah Ahmadi and Neil Gotanda.
5. To improve one’s critical writing and analytical skills.

## **Prerequisites**

Since this is an upper-division course, you are required to have taken lower-division course at least one humanity course. However, I am able to permit students without such background on an individual basis.

### **Assignments and grades:**

Class attendance and participation	20%
Critical Journals	20%
UCSD Campus project (Midterm)	20 %
Abstract and title Imagined paper	10%
Imagine paper (Final)	30%

### **Exams**

Midterm paper: a 1000-word critical-analytical research paper about race and religion on the media or any other cultural outlet, including film, music, performance, on campus event, etc. For this project, you are expected to identify your subject of your study and make critical analysis based on their readings, lectures and class discussion. This exercise is meant connect your reading and everyday experiences, and articulate it so through the practice of writing. You are also expected to show evidence of your argument. The assignment also requires you to look at media cultures from a critical perspective, a perspective that makes visible what seems to be too often invisible in our everyday situational settings. Be creative. Be bold. But also be consistent, analytical and, more importantly, articulate about your knowledge of the course materials.

I welcome first-person narratives. However, you are required to make references to the reading, lectures and class discussion in your midterm.

You are also expected to have a clear thesis statement, analytical and *not* merely descriptive accounts of your study. Your paper should also have a clear conclusion that summarizes your study and make explicate your opinion on the subject.

**Final Exam:** A 3000-word paper due on **the final week of the term**. This creative and yet scholarly paper is about you imagining yourself as a “Muslim American” in a specific historical context, and in doing so describing your experience in any fictional literary devices (autobiographical, memoir, flashback, flash-forward, etc.). If you identify yourself as a “Muslim” or a “Muslim American” you are still expected to imagine yourself as one or several “Muslim American (s)” of different historical and social background(s). So, your subject can be one or many, but it has to be imagined within the American social context, and it needs to speak, have a *voice* in her or his account of self and reality.

This paper will be more than **10 pages** and will be evaluated for analytical thinking, originality, evidence-based argument and exposition.

Please note that your papers should have a title and bibliography. The pages should be numbered. Your research could be analytical and should show evidence of historical references you make. It should present a thesis statement somewhere in the paper. On **the fourth week of summer instructions**, you are expected to email me a tentative title and an abstract of your imagined paper. Once I approve your title (via email) you can then begin writing your paper.

### **Critical Journals**

You are required to write 300 to 500 words weekly analytical-critical journals (**4 in total**). In these journals you are expected to critically engage with key issues we discuss in class such as urbanization, racialization of religion (Islam) or economic inequality in reference to the media, print or otherwise. Your journals are due each week at the beginning of first weekly classes (email them).

**Class attendance and participation**: this is interactive class. Your attendance and in-class participation is a must! You are expected to attend each class and express your views, engage in discussions and show what you have learned based on the reading assignments. You can be excused from only two classes for the term. Any subsequent absences will effect your 20% attendance and participation grade.

**Extra Credits**: For attending special events or other on or off campus activities, you can earn extra credits toward your grade in class.

## **Class Policy**

### *Late papers:*

Late papers will be penalized a half letter grade for each day that they are late. Please turn in your papers in class, *not* via email or fax.

- *Plagiarism*

A major part of your course assignments involves writing based on your assigned reading. So, make sure to cite your sources, either quoted directly or paraphrased, so to avoid plagiarism. See me if you have any questions regarding what constitutes plagiarism.

- *Assistance*

In case of disability that may require accommodation, please see me on the first day of class.

## **Readings**

It is important for each student to know that this upper-division course requires weekly reading. You will be expected to understand the readings and create thesis statements and make support of your claims with evidence in your writings.

A reading list of assigned texts will be provided on the first day of class.

## **Writing**

It is important to note that this is an upper-division course, which requires substantial writing. You will be expected to put your thoughts and research findings in writing as both assignments and exams.

## **Required Text (UCSD Bookstore)**

Maz Jobrani, *I'm Not a Terrorist, But I've Played One On TV: Memoirs of a Middle Eastern Funny Man*

Malcom X, Alex Haley, Attallah Shabazz, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X: As Told to Alex Haley*

**Course Reader (Cal Copy)** La Jolla Branch, 251 Holiday Ct, La Jolla, CA 92037,  
**Phone:** 1 858-452-9949

## **Schedule of Classes**

### **Week 1:**

#### **June 28, Tuesday**

- Introduction to the course

#### **June 30, Thursday**

- Religion and Society in the United States:  
Will Herberg; Max Weber; Emile Durkheim

- Agency and Racialization of religion:  
Saba Mahmood, Talal Asad and Nasar Meer

**Reading:**

- 1) Nasar Meer, “Racialization and religion: race, culture and difference in the study of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia,” in Nasar Meer (ed.), *Racialization and Religion: Race, Culture and Difference in the Study of Antisemitism and Islamophobia*,  
(Course Reader)
- 2) Will Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology*  
(Course Reader)

**\*Critical Journals due Sunday 11:59pm**

**Week 2:**

**Origins of Islam & the Trans-Atlantic Slavery**

**July 5, Tuesday**

- Islam: From 7<sup>th</sup> Mecca to 16<sup>th</sup> century Ghana and Mali

**Reading:**

- 1) Penelope Johnstone, “Islam,” in John Bowker (ed), *Religions*  
(Course Reader)

**July 7, Thursday**

- “New World,” Ottomans, Trans-Atlantic Slave
- Roots of Islam and Slavery in America:  
Omar Ibn Said (1770-1864), Charleston, S Carolina

**Reading:**

- 1) Jane I. Smith, *Islam in America*, Islamic comes to America,

(Course Reader)

- 2) Alan D. Austin, *African Muslims in Antebellum America: Transatlantic Stories and Spiritual Struggles*, "These Are Good Men in America, but All Are Very Ignorant of Africa"---and Its Muslims; "Umar ibn Said's Legend(s), Life, and Letters"

(Course Reader)

**\*Critical Journals due Sunday 11:59pm**

## **Week 3**

### **Urban America and Islam: Race, urbanization and Black Nationalist Movements**

#### **July 12, Tuesday**

- Muslim Immigration, 1878-1924  
Emerging Muslim centers in urban north  
Cedar Rapids; Iowa; Ross, North Dakota; Detroit; Michigan City.
- Euro-American Islam: Mohammad Alexander Webb (1847-1916),  
Chicago

#### **Reading:**

Umar F. Abd-Allah, *A Muslim in Victorian America: The Life of Alexander Russell Webb*, The Yankee Mohammedan; Hudson Valley Roots; Webb's Journey to Islam; Go West, Young Man,

(Course Reader)

#### **July 14, Thursday**

- Urban converts: the rise of African-American Muslims
- Black nationalist movements:  
Noble Drew Ali and the Moorish Science Temple
- Wallace D. Fard "Allah in Person" (1930)

#### **Reading:**

Jane I. Smith, *Islam in America*, Islam in the African American Community,

(Course Reader)

## **Midterms are due!!!**

**\*Critical Journals due Sunday 11:59pm**

### **Week 4**

#### **Agency, Race and Religion: Racialization of Islam and Politics of Race I**

**July 19, Tuesday**

- Elijah Muhammad: Black Islam in Detroit and Chicago

Malcom X, Alex Haley, Attallah Shabazz, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X: As Told to Alex Haley*

**July 21, Thursday**

- Malcolm X
- Civil Rights Movements and the Muslim-American Experience

**Reading:**

Malcom X, Alex Haley, Attallah Shabazz, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X: As Told to Alex Haley*

**\*Email the title and abstract of your IMAGINED paper**

**\*Critical Journals due Sunday 11:59pm**

## Week 5

### **Migration and Identity: Diaspora, Ethnicity and Gender**

**July 26, Tuesday**

- Migration and Citizenship: 1970-2001
- The American Society of Muslims and the Nation of Islam:  
1970-1990s
- Post-9/11: Imagining Islam in America: Violence, Ethnicity and Islam  
Edward Said, *Covering Islam*

Reading:

- 1) Jane I. Smith, *Islam in America*, Islam in America Post-9/11,  
(Course Reader)
- 2) Edward Said, *Covering Islam*  
(Course Reader)
- 3) Maz Jobrani, *I'm not a Terrorist but I've Played one on TV: A Memoir of a Middle Eastern Funny Man*

**July 28, Tuesday**

- Agency and Gender  
Lila Abu-Lughod on *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*  
Jamillah Karim on *Negotiating Race, Class and Gender*
- Conclusion: Difference, Identity and Islam
- Talal Asad on *Reflections on Violence, Law and Humanitarianism*

1) Jane I. Smith, *Islam in America*, Women and the Muslim American Family; Living a Muslim Life in American Society,

(Course Reader)

3) Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*

(Course Reader)

4)

[http://criticalinquiry.uchicago.edu/reflections\\_on\\_violence\\_law\\_and\\_humanitarianism/](http://criticalinquiry.uchicago.edu/reflections_on_violence_law_and_humanitarianism/).

**Final Paper Submission  
(Email!)**