

Islam in America or American Islam?

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Course Description

Muslims have been in the Americas since before the United States was founded. In recent decades they have faced a new wave of political alienation. Despite this societal backlash, Muslim communities in the United States of America have grown considerably, participating in all aspects American art, literature, politics, and media. From Ilhan Omer to Hasan Minhaj, Muslims have become visible in every part of American society. Out of this dynamism it is possible to ask: Is American Islam an extension of Global Islam or something uniquely American? In this class we will theorize this question through a variety of lenses including race relations, history, gender dynamics, class discrimination, assimilation, and immigration. Beginning with the Thomas Jefferson's Qur'an and ending with Islamic hip hop, we will attempt to better understand the history of Islam in America through the multifarious and diverse voices of America's Muslims.

Sample Readings:

Spellberg, *Thomas Jefferson's Qur'an: Islam and the Founders*

Austin, *African Muslims in Antebellum America*.

Chan-Malik, *Being Muslim: A Cultural History of Women of Color in American Islam*.

Khabeer, *Muslim Cool: Race, Religion, and Hip Hop in the United States*.

Omar Ibn Said, *A Muslim American Slave: The Life of Omar Ibn Said*.

Yuskaev, *Speaking Qur'an: An American Scripture*.

Curtis, *Muslim Americans in the Military: Centuries of Service*

Reading/Writing Assignments

Weekly readings of around 150 pages are supported by short response papers (1-2 pages) based on a close-reading and analysis of the week's primary source material. Students are allowed to explore any aspect of these documents. This will be an opportunity to practice and gain feedback on primary source analysis. In addition students will complete a book review for their midterm and a final capstone project (10-12 pages or equivalent) that makes an argument regarding the categories of American Islam or Islam in America. This project can take the form of a research paper, podcast, vlog, or other approved medium.

Structure of the Course

Narrative Description

In this class we will explore the history of Islam across the United States of America. Moving chronologically we will deal with issues of orientalism, slavery, race, immigration, integration, politics, gender, and media. In addition to examining the long and integrated legacy of Muslims in American history, students will practice analyzing primary and secondary sources throughout the semester as well as enhance their ability to discuss these topics both inside and outside of the classroom. In other words, rather than merely being able to reiterate the *arcana academia* students will leave this course with the capacity to talk openly with their friends and family about the complexities of the experience of Islam in America / American Islam.

Since this is an upper-level seminar our classes will be based primarily on in-depth discussion of the assigned readings. You are expected to come to class prepared to engage with the week's readings and collaborate with your peers.

Grading and Assessment

In-class participation 25%
Primary Source Analysis 25%
Midterm Book Review 20%
Final Project 30%

Assignments:

1. In-class participation, 25%

This course is a collaborative learning environment. Therefore, it is crucial that you are prepared to engage with conversation during discussion in our weekly classes. That means doing the readings prior to class, as well as the primary source analyses to help you for discussion.

2. Primary Source Analysis, 25%

Reading assignments marked with “ *** ” indicate the primary source that should be analyzed that week. In these 2-3 page written assignments you should place the source in its historical context and analyze how it can help us to better understand a history of Islam in America or American Islam. (Note: there is no response in the weeks surrounding the Midterm Book Review)

3. Midterm Book Review, 20%

Since this course is based on in-depth reading and discussion of historical books, you will be asked to complete a five-page book review as your midterm assignment. This review

should briefly summarize the argument(s) of the text and identify the contributions of the book to the study of Islam in America / American Islam / or another framework. Finally, you should include any questions or comments about places where the argument could be improved or is unclear.

4. Final Project, 30%

For the final project you should choose an object, person, place, concept, or event. You will then analyze this object in a way that helps us to think through the categories of Islam in America and American Islam. In doing so, you can defend why you think one of these categories is more descriptive or present an alternative framework based on your research and analysis of the object you chose.

Course Outline

Week 1: What is Islam?

Day 1:

- Smith, "Muslim Faith and Practice" in *Islam in America*, pp. 1-21.

Day 2:

- Hussain, "Introduction: The American Ideal and Islam" in *Muslims and the Making of America*.

***Write a reflective essay (1-2 pages) in which you highlight both what you would like to gain from this course as well as what kinds of knowledge, experiences, and perspective you bring to our classroom.

Week 2: Islam in America, Orientalist beginnings

Day 1:

- Spellberg, *Thomas Jefferson's Qur'an: Islam and the Founders*, pp. 3-40.

Day 2:

- Spellberg, *Thomas Jefferson's Qur'an: Islam and the Founders*, pp. 81-197

Week 3: Islam and Slavery in Antebellum America

Day 1:

- Austin, "Introduction"; "Glimpses of Seventy-Five African Muslims in Antebellum North America"; and "Bilali Mohammed and Salih Bilali: *Almaamys* on Georgia's Sapelo and St. Simon's Islands" in *African Muslims in Antebellum America*, pp. 3-50 & 85-114.

Day 2:

- Watch *Prince Among Slaves*

- Omar Ibn Said, *A Muslim American Slave: The Life of Omar Ibn Said* ***

Week 4: Post Civil War Era and the Nation of Islam

Day 1:

- GhaneaBassiri, "Conflating Race, Religion, and Progress: Social Change, National Identity, and Islam in the Post-Civil War Era," in *A History of Islam in America*, pp. 95-134.

Day 2:

- Elijah Muhammad, "What the Muslims Want" and "What the Muslims Believe" from *Message to a Blackman in America*, pp. 92-96.

- Elijah Muhammad, *How to Eat to Live* ***

Week 5: Malcolm X, Civil Rights, and Race

Day 1:

- GhaneaBassiri, "A New Religious America and a Post-Colonial Muslim World: American Muslim Institution Building and Activism, 1960s-1980s" in *A History of Islam in America*, pp. 241-271.

Day 2:

- Malcolm X, Chapter 13 – end, in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. ***
- Malcolm X: Interview with al-Muslimoon (1965), pp. 96-104.

Week 6: Twentieth century Immigration and Immigration Narratives

Day 1:

- GhaneaBassiri, "Race, Ethnicity, Religion, and Citizenship: Muslim Immigration at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," in *A History of Islam in America*, pp. 135-164.

Day 2:

- Excerpts from Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* ***

Week 7: Muslim Contributions to the United States, an introduction

Day 1:

- Curtis, *Muslim Americans in the Military: Centuries of Service*, pp. 1-85.

Day 2:

- Hussain, "Blues for Allah: Music" and "The Greatest: Sports" in *Muslims and the Making of America*.
- Abdullah, "A Sacred City" in *Black Mecca: The African Muslims of Harlem* pp. 107-142.

MIDTERM BOOK REVIEW DUE

Week 8: Gender Discourse and Religious Authority

Day 1:

- Hammer, *American Muslim Women, Religious Authority, and Activism*, pp. 1-76.

Day 2:

- Hammer, *American Muslim Women, Religious Authority, and Activism*, pp. 77-146.

Week 9: Muslim-American Landscapes Arabs in the Midwest, Sufis in California

Day 1:

- Shyrook, Abraham, and Howell, “The Terror Decade in Arab Detroit: An Introduction” and “Civilian Stories” in *Arab Detroit 9/11: Life in the Terror Decade*, pp. 1-28 & 213-253. ***

Day 2:

- Korb, *Light without Fire: The Making of America’s First Muslim College*, 1-78.

Week 10: Islam & American Politics

Day 1:

- Yuskaev, “Introduction”; “Justice”; and “Politics” in *Speaking Qur’an: An American Scripture*.

Day 2:

- Zaid Shakir, “Where Islam and Nationalism Collide” online article & interview video. ***

Week 11: Pop Culture and American Islam

Day 1:

- Khabeer, *Muslim Cool: Race, Religion, and Hip Hop in the United States*, pp. 1-76.

Day 2:

- Khabeer, *Muslim Cool: Race, Religion, and Hip Hop*, pp. 77-138.
- Watch “Taqwacore: The Birth of Punk Islam” ***

Week 12: Muslims in Comics and on TV

Day 1:

- Wilson, *Ms. Marvel* (Comic series)

Day 2:

- Watch selected episodes of “Ramy” and “Man like Mobeen” ***

Week 13

Day 1: Presentations

Day 2: Presentations