

I didn't want to submit to the army and then, on the Day of Judgment have God say to me, "Why did you do that?" This life is a trial, and you realize that what you do is going to be written down for Judgment Day.

— Muhammad Ali (1942 – 2016)

America needs to understand Islam, because this is the one religion that erases from its society the race problem. Throughout my travels in the Muslim world, I have met, talked to, and even eaten with people who in America would have been considered white, but the white attitude was removed from their minds by the religion of Islam. I have never before seen sincere and true brotherhood practiced by all together, irrespective of their color.

— Malcolm X (1925 – 1965)

God may be omnipotent, omnibenevolent and wise. Whether, however, Blackamericans experience God's power and goodness in ways that benefit them will depend on the kind of relationship – individually and collectively – that they establish with God.

— Sherman Jackson (b. 1956)

Muslim-Americans

REL 165 (Spring 2017)
TTH 9:40 – 10:55 (Chambers 2087)
Thursday Discussion Classroom (SLOAN B011)

Prof. Anne Blue Wills & Dr. Syed Rizwan Zamir

Meeting Hours: Fridays 9 am-11 am

Course Description:

Our conversation this term will explore historical origins and major events/figures, intellectual currents, cultural practices, selected themes such as representation of Muslims in media, politics and law, and challenges facing Muslim communities in the U.S. Ultimately, the course is a journey through time and space and imagination of wider American public to discover and hopefully 'locate' Muslim-Americans on the historical, geographical and imaginal plane of the United States of America.

Learning Outcomes: By the end of the course the students will have:

1. Reflected on the stakes in the study and understanding of Muslim-Americans;
2. Discovered Muslim presence amidst American landscape across space and time;
3. Researched and shared findings on the lives and lived experience of well-known and unknown Muslim-Americans and Muslim communities;
4. Navigated the terrain of historical information to formulate an alternative visual conception of historical timeline;
5. Learned how to tell human stories in ways that are compelling;
6. Helped build a website that showcases the stories of Muslim-Americans and communities.

Intellectual Practices: (See the description of each practice below)

1. Collaborative Visualizing of Timeline/Conceptualizing Periodization: 10% (Due FEB 16)
2. Collaborative Comparative Report on Two Muslim Communities: 30% (Week of MAR 21)
3. Collaborative Media Analysis (Group of 4): 20% (Due APR 4)
4. Collaborative Biographies of Two Muslims (Group of 4): 30% (Due MAY 2)
5. Participation/Practice/Contribution: 10%

INTELLECTUAL PRACTICES

Collaborative Visualizing of Timeline (10 % of semester grade):

For this assignment, you will devise a timeline that organizes and explains, with a visual chronology, what you consider to be significant events and/or figures in the Muslim-American story. (For example, Microsoft Word includes timeline-creation tools; Insert → SmartArt → Process → choose layout, insert text/images. You may also want to consult the media tutors for ideas and help. Creativity and Aesthetic appeal will be critical to this exercise.)

This assignment requires you to decide what you think “the Muslim-American story” is. You will need to make choices in where you start and end your timeline and in how you organize it. There is no correct maximum or minimum number of items to include; use your judgment to decide what merits inclusion (or not). Include a statement (approximately 1 page) that explains your rationale.

Due date: beginning of class, Thursday 16 February.

Collaborative Comparative Community Report (30 % of semester grade):

Working in pairs from your 4-person teams, you will choose a Muslim-American community, center, or organization to research.

The first part of the assignment is information-gathering, in pairs. Research the organization's history (locally and more broadly, if the group is part of a larger network). If possible, visit a meeting of the group as part of your inquiry. Questions to consider: Explore how new members join, how leadership is structured and selected, and how leaders and members interact. What purposes does the organization serve? What do participants "get" from affiliation with the group? Does it reflect a particularly regional or ethnic identity, and if so, how? What sources of authority (scriptural, spiritual, cultural, etc.) does the group draw from? What challenges and/or successes has the organization experienced?

The second part of the assignment is to meet with your team's other pair, and compare findings on the two organizations you have researched. Do the two groups differ? If so, how? What, if anything, do they share? How does your combined investigation of these two groups complicate your understanding of Muslim-Americans? What have you learned? What phenomena that we have read about or discussed have you seen "live and in person" in these groups?

The third part of the assignment is your team's 10-15 minute presentation, with time for questions, on 21 or 23 March, during which you share combined findings and significant conclusions. Each pair will submit a report on its findings at the beginning of class, Tuesday 21 March.

Collaborative Media Analysis (20 % of semester grade):

In pairs from your 4-person teams, choose an example of popular media (e.g., film, television show, news report/documentary, novel, play, music, etc.) that focuses on Muslim-Americans. Research the source of the production, such as the creators, funders, distribution networks, etc. Analyze the item's representation of Muslim-Americans, attending to such aspects as representation of religious practices, cultural expression, community life, political engagement, etc. What are the goals of the particular example you have chosen? Given those objectives, what does the piece do especially well or especially poorly?

Each pair will present findings and conclusions on 4 or 6 April, and will submit a report on its findings at the beginning of class, Tuesday 4 April.

Collaborative Biographies (30 % of semester grade):

In your 4-person teams, choose two Muslim-American figures to research. One of these figures should be someone with a record of public accomplishment, and the other, someone you might not otherwise know anything about. As a team, you will submit two biographical articles (approx. 5 pages each) for publication on the class's website.

The publicly accomplished person may be distinguished in arts and letters, popular culture, entertainment, politics and public life, science, technology, etc. Establish basic biographical facts, including personal and vocational influences and training. Being Muslim in the U.S. may or may not have played a significant role in this figure's endeavors; you will need to sort that question out.

The other biography will focus on an "anonymous" Muslim-American. Again, establish basic biographical facts and inquire into what influences, experiences, schooling/training, etc., the person has had. How has being Muslim – as someone born into the faith or as a convert to it – shaped his or her life in the U.S.?

Due date: Beginning of class, Tuesday 2 May. Teams will present their findings to the class on 2 or 4 May.

Participation/Practice/Contribution (10 % of semester grade):

This course depends heavily on our engagement as a community of inquiry. To that end, class participants will post questions and comments regularly to a FORUM (a WEBPAGE or a GOOGLEDOC, will be decided soon) that will be moderated by TWO student volunteers. Post questions or reflections by 6 a.m. on class days as part of your preparation. No required minimum or maximum, although regular engagement tends to evidence consistent preparation.

COURSE OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

Week 1 (Jan 17-19): Introduction

Thursday:

1. "Islam in America: Adventures in Neo-Orientalism" in RoMEs 43:1 (2009)
2. Edward Curtis, "Why Muslims Matter to American Religious History" in *Bloomsbury Reader* (47-58)

PART I: HISTORY & THOUGHT

Week 2 (Jan 24-26): The Antebellum Period I

Tuesday:

1. *African Muslims in Antebellum America*, (1-30 & 129-158 – Umar ibn Said)
2. *Columbia Sourcebook: The Autobiography of Omar ibn Sayyid* (1831), 5-8

VISIT: Class meets in the Rare Book Room ([Sharon Byrd's presentation](#))

Thursday:

1. *Cambridge Companion*, Chap. 2: "African Muslim Slaves and Islam in Antebellum America" (28-44)
2. *African Muslims in Antebellum America*, Abd ar-Rahman, 65-84);

FILM VIEWING (?): *A Prince among Slaves*

Week 3 (Jan 31-Feb 2): Antebellum II & Developments till 1965

Tuesday:

1. *African Muslims in Antebellum America*, (31-64 & 85-128)
2. *Cambridge Companion*, Chap. 3, "Laying the Groundwork for American Muslim Histories: 1865–1965"
3. *Islam in Black America* "Introduction (1-20)

Thursday: *Columbia Sourcebook* (selections will be announced)

Week 4 (Feb 7-9): Islam in Black America

Tuesday: *Islam in Black America* (21-106)

FILM VIEWING: Ali (2001) OR *Malcom X* (1992)

Thursday: *Columbia Sourcebook* (selections will be announced)

1. Blyden, "Islam in the Western Soudan" (1902, 18-21);
2. Noble Drew Ali *The Holy of the Moorish Science Temple* 59-63;
3. Elijah Muhammad, "What the Muslims Want...", 92-95
4. Malcom X, "Interview", 96-104

Week 5 (Feb 14-16): Developments since 1965

Tuesday:

1. *Islam in Black America* (107-140);
2. *Cambridge Companion* Ch. 4 "American Muslims: 1965 to the present";
3. Charles Braden, "Islam in America" (309-317) *International Review of Missions* (1959);

Thursday: *Columbia Sourcebook* (selections will be announced)

PART II: CULTURE, SOCIETY & INSTITUTIONS

Week 6 (Feb 21-23): Religious Life & Religious Diversity

Tuesday:

1. *Cambridge Companion*,
 - a. Ch. 13 "Muslim Spaces & Mosque Architecture" (228-245);
 - b. Ch. 11 "American Sufis" (190-207);
2. Liyakat Takim, *Shi'ism in America* (selections will be announced)

Thursday: *Columbia Sourcebook* (selections will be announced)

Week 7 (Feb 28-Mar 2): Marriage, Gender and Sexuality

Tuesday:

Cambridge Companion,

1. Chap. 18 "Sexual Identity, Marriage, and Family"
2. Chap. 19 "Studying Muslim Women: Gender, Feminism, and Islam"

Thursday: *Columbia Sourcebook* (selections will be announced)

SPRING BREAK

FRIDAY, March 3 (4:30 P.M.) - MONDAY, March 13 (8:30 A.M.)

Week 8 (Mar 14-16): Youth, Education, Literature and Culture

Tuesday:

1. Amir Hussain, *Muslims and the Making of America* (Ch.2, 3 & 4), 39-126
2. *Muslim Cool*, Introduction, 1-26

FILM VIEWING (?): *Fordson*

Thursday: *Muslim Cool* (selections will be announced)

Week 9 (Mar 21-23): Presentations on Muslim Communities

PART III: REPRESENTATIONS IN LAW, POLITICS AND MEDIA

Week 10 (Mar 28-30): Representation in Law & Politics

Tuesday:

Cambridge Companion to American Islam,

1. Ch. 6 "Demographics, Political Participation, and Representation" (98-118);
2. Ch. 10 "Institutions, Networks, Groups" (170-189)
3. Ch. 8, "Muslims in the American Legal System" (139-155);

Thursday: *Columbia Sourcebook* (selections will be announced)

Week 11 (Apr 4-6): Representation in Media (Class Presentations)

Tuesday: *Cambridge Companion*, Chap. 7, "American Muslims and the Media",

WATCH: *Reel Bad Arabs*

Thursday: (Class Presentations)

Week 12 (Apr 11-13): 9/11 & The War on Terror & Political and Civic Engagement

Tuesday:

1. Schwartz, "Radical Islam in America" (16-18) in *USA Today* (2005);

2. *Oxford Handbook to American Islam*, Ch. 29 "The War on Terror and its Effects on American Muslims" (490-506);
3. *The Bloomsbury Reader on Islam in the West*,
 - a. "Laughter the Best Medicine": Muslim Comedians and Social Criticism in Post 9/11 America" (261-269)
 - b. "On the Allegiance of the American Muslim Soldiers in the Aftermath of September 11" (217-224)

Thursday: *Columbia Sourcebook* (selections will be announced)

EASTER BREAK

FRIDAY, APRIL 14 (4:30 P.M.)-WEDNESDAY, APRIL 19 (8:30 A.M.)

PART IV: BEING MUSLIM-AMERICAN

Week 13 (Apr 20): Being Muslim-American I

Thursday:

1. "What does it Take to be an American?" in *Young American Muslims*
2. *Muslim Cool* (selections will be announced)

Week 14 (Apr 25-27): Being Muslim-American II

Tuesday:

1. *Islam and the Blackamerican*, "Islam and Black Religion" & "Blackamerican Islam Between Religion, Nationalism and Spirituality", 171-198

WATCH (?): *Moozlum* (2010)

Thursday:

1. Public Lecture (SHN): "How to be a Muslim in America?"
2. *Columbia Sourcebook*: Omid Safi, "Being Muslim, Being American after 9/11",
3. Caner Dagli lecture: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vPMXedcJOpY>

Week 15 (May 2-4): Biographies of Muslim-Americans

Integral to the collaboration, Comparative Community Reports and Biographies will also be properly edited, formatted and delivered to the Class Website this week.