

American Studies 525:
Secularism and U.S. Empire

Spring 2015

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Humanities 459
Office Hours: Wednesdays 12:30-3:30 and by appointment

Institutional Profile:

The University of New Mexico, located just west of downtown Albuquerque on historic Route 66, is New Mexico's flagship public university. Nearly 29,000 students attend class on its main campus. UNM is the only institution in the nation that is both classified as a Carnegie Research University-Very High Activity and is also a federally recognized Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI). The student body is approximately 42% Hispanic and 6% American Indian (non-Hispanic whites make up 39% of the student body). The Department of American Studies was the first department at the university to offer a Ph.D. The department is relatively small (with seven full faculty, and another four faculty—myself included—split between other departments / programs). Even so, it prides itself on being in the top tier of American Studies departments nationally, while serving a student body—including a graduate student body—that reflects, and may in fact exceed, the overall university in ethnic diversity (we have a large number of both Latina/o and Native American graduate students), as well as diversity in socio-economic background, and gender and sexual identity. Most, but not all, of our graduate students hail from the American West and many are from New Mexico. We also have a few students who have emigrated from Mexico. As American Studies departments go, UNM American Studies imagines itself as forward thinking (i.e. an indicator of where the discipline is headed, rather than where it's been), and prides itself on the political activism of both its faculty and its students (right now prominent causes within the department include Palestine and the Israeli Boycott, Divest and Sanction (BDS) movement, police militarization and brutality, and issues facing Native Americans living in bordertowns).

Course Rationale:

In Spring 2015 I'll teach my first graduate course (M.A. and Ph.D. students) in the American Studies Department at UNM. Students who take the class will have no prior experience with religious studies, and mine will be the only course on religion they complete during their graduate work. My main objectives in designing this syllabus have been 1) to give these students a sampling of interesting and important recent scholarship at the intersection of Religious Studies and American Studies, and 2) to introduce them to scholarship applicable to their own work-- as they develop as scholars within our department at UNM, and within the discipline of American Studies. In other words, this is designed as a course for students care about things other than religion. The areas of specialization within our department, at the present time, are:

- * Transnationalism, Globalization, and Colonialism
 - * Southwest / Borderlands / Indigenous Studies
 - * Critical Race and Class Studies
 - * Environment, Science and Technology Studies
 - * Gender, Sexuality and Feminist Studies
- * Comparative Cultural and Popular Culture Studies

This course is built around two prominent and “twinned” subjects of inquiry within the last generation of religious studies scholarship-- that of the secular and that of “religion” itself, as a discrete category of knowledge. The goal here is to introduce students to the complex and culturally specific processes by which both the secular and “religion” have been historically formed and reformed, and to spend time examining how they function (often together) in relation to ideologies / practices / relationships of American imperialism. In doing so, the course will also provide occasion for thinking about the meaning and scope of “empire” itself. Here American imperialism can include both the obvious (conflicts over indigenous sovereignty and territorial acquisitions in the 19th century American West, U.S. military and non-military interventions in the late 20th century Middle East), and also the less obvious (the exercise of state power in relation to domestic populations who are governed in ways that confirm their marginal status in relation to the body politic).

I have designed this syllabus to include both historical and ethnographic texts, that employ different methodologies. I want students to think critically about how secularism and “religion” have functioned in support of one another, and in support of imperial enterprises, but I also want them to consider how people who live suspended in imperial asymmetries reimagine, redeploy, and otherwise experience, those categories in their own lives (see Dubler, Abu-Lughod, etc.). Finally, I’ve tried to step outside my own lingering U.S.-centric framework for scholarly engagement, by including texts (i.e. Abu-Lughod) set primarily outside the political boundaries of the United States.

Course Description:

From nineteenth century talk of manifest destiny to twenty-first century evangelical interventions in U.S. foreign policy, religious motivations have undergirded American empire. This course recognizes the role of religion in the processes and relationships of U.S. imperialism. We’ll focus on the similarly important role of *secularism* in shaping ideologies, practices, and experiences of empire. Over two centuries, American imperialism has been tied to imaginings, formal and informal, of the United States as a secular nation—a government and culture where “religion” exists apart, as something privatized and optional. These secular imaginings have produced particular ways of talking about “religion”—including discourses about religious freedom and pluralism, and rhetorical distinctions of “good” v. “bad” Islam. This course considers how U.S. formations of “the secular”—and efforts toward defining and regulating “religion” that they incubate—extend into imperial relationships. We’ll ask how these co-emergent categories have played into the interlocking modern projects of capitalism and colonialism. We’ll pay attention to how “the secular” and “religion” are assembled, historically, from ideas about race, class, gender, and sexuality, and how the state has invoked both to police racial, sexual, etc. identity

and behavior. American imperialism extends to distant peoples, and it also bears on “domestic” populations who, by virtue of race, sexuality, immigration or felon status, are governed in ways that produce their marginalization within the body politic. This course examines how secularism- and religion-making work in the service of empire, *and* how these diverse subjects of empire receive those categories and resist, trouble, or otherwise make them a part of their own lives.

Required Texts:

Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*.

Gil Anidjar, *Blood: A Critique of Christianity*.

Leigh Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment*.

Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular and American Literature*.

Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth Century America*.

Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance*.

David Chidester, *Empire of Religion: Imperialism and Comparative Religion*.

Tisa Wenger, *We Have a Religion: The 1920s Pueblo Indian Dance Controversy and American Religious Freedom*.

Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, *Ministry of Presence: Chaplaincy, Spiritual Care, and the Law*.

Joshua Dubler, *Down in the Chapel: Religious Life in an American Prison*.

Kathryn Lofton, *Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon*.

Melani McCalister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945*.

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

All other texts are available in the electronic readings folder on the course page on UNM Learn.

Course Requirements:

Expectations for Attendance and In-Class Participation:

Participation is a critical component of student course work. Students are expected to attend class regularly and arrive promptly. If you are unable to attend class due to illness or other unavoidable circumstances, you must inform me by email *ahead of our meeting session*. Absences without notice will negatively affect a student's participation grade. In addition, students are expected to complete all assigned readings and to actively participate in class discussion. Weekly assignments may include 200 pages or more of reading; I expect students to employ reading strategies (i.e. selective skimming, etc.) that will enable them to effectively engage the required material. Any student with questions or concerns about completing the required readings, or about reading assignments generally, should attend office hours within the first two weeks of class in order to discuss them.

Blog Posts:

Students will complete **twelve** blog posts over the course of the semester. Each post should be approximately 500 words long, and must be posted on UNM Learn by **midnight** on the night before our class meeting. Blog posts should demonstrate that a student has completed the readings, but I'm not looking for simple summarization. Instead, students should consider each post an opportunity to introduce the assigned text(s) into a wider discussion about secularism, religion-making, and empire-- to be continued in person during our seminar. You might do this by reflecting on themes / concepts within the text you found particularly interesting, troubling, or difficult. The blog post is also a good place to reflect on how the week's readings interact with other texts, or how they develop (support, challenge, modify) ideas raised elsewhere in the course. In addition, you might weigh in on an author's choices regarding methodology, use of source material, etc. Finally, you might use the blog to think about the assigned readings in relation to your own scholarly interests, or other ideas / conversations / texts you've encountered during your graduate career.

In addition to submitting blog posts, each student will commit to **one** week, during which she/he is required to read all other student blog posts ahead of class. On his/her selected week, the student should arrive to class ready to open discussion with a few (five minutes or less) opening remarks about the readings, based upon his/her own response and those of her/his classmates.

Research Paper:

Each student will write a 15-20 page research paper, on a theme that relates broadly to the course's subject matter. Papers may be framed as historiographic interventions (i.e. an extended, critical analysis of existing scholarship), or they may include original research. My hope is that students will use this assignment as an opportunity to explore how the course intersects with their other areas of scholarly interest. Students must adhere to the following deadlines, related to the paper:

Weeks 4-5: Meet with professor during office hours to discuss paper topic.

Week 8: 250-word précis and initial bibliography due.

Week 12: 500-word précis and full bibliography due.

Exam week: Final paper due. *Note that this is a firm deadline and no extensions will be given.*

Breakdown of Grading:

Research Paper	50%
Blog Posts	25%
Attendance and Participation	25%

Grading Scale:

100-95: A
94-90: A-
89-86: B+
85-82: B
81-78: B-
77-75: C+
74-72: C
71-69: C-
68-65: D+
65-62: D
62-60: D-
Below 60: F

All materials written by students for this course (and all courses at UNM) *must* adhere to the university's policy guarding against academic dishonesty. That policy is worded as follows:

“Each student is expected to maintain the highest standards of honesty and integrity in academic and professional matters. The University reserves the right to take disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal, against any student who is found guilty of academic dishonesty or otherwise fails to meet the standards. Any student judged to have engaged in academic dishonesty in course work may receive a reduced or failing grade for the work in question and/or for the course. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, dishonesty in quizzes, tests, or assignments; claiming credit for work not done or done by others; hindering the academic work of other students; misrepresenting academic or professional qualifications within or without the University; and nondisclosure or misrepresentation in filling out applications or other University records.”

<http://pathfinder.unm.edu/common/policies/academic-dishonesty.html>.

All instances of plagiarism and / or academic dishonesty will be reported to the Dean of Students. If you have any questions at all about proper documentation, and other techniques to assure you avoid plagiarism, or any questions about what else constitutes academic dishonesty, please don't hesitate to see me.

Students with Disabilities::

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodations should meet to discuss specifics with me. It is the policy of UNM to make reasonable academic accommodations for qualified individuals with disabilities. To receive accommodations, you must present verification, and to do this you must register with the Accessibility Resource Center. Find out more at 277-3506 or <http://as2.unm.edu>.

Weekly Schedule:

I. Considering Religion and the “Secular Age”

Week 1:

Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*

Week 2:

Charles Taylor, “Introduction,” “The Bulwarks of Belief” (excerpts) and “The Immanent Frame” (excerpts) from *A Secular Age*;

Talal Asad, “Thinking About Religion, Belief, and Politics,” (*The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, ed. Robert Orsi);

Saba Mahmood, “Can Secularism Be Other-wise?,” (*Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, eds. Edited by Michael Warner, Jonathan VanAntwerpen, Craig Calhoun).

Week 2:

Gil Anidjar, *Blood: A Critique of Christianity*

II. Forming an American Secular

Week 4:

Leigh Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment*;

John Lardas Modern, “Evangelical Secularism and the Measure of Leviathan” (from *Church History* 77.4 (Dec 2008)).

Week 5: deadline for meeting to discuss paper topic

Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular and American Literature*.

III. Sex and the U.S. Secular

Week 6:

Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth Century America* (Introduction, Chs. 1, 2, 3, 4, Epilogue);

Amy Kaplan, “Manifest Domesticity,” from *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*.

Week 7:

Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance*

IV. Religion Making in a Secular Empire

Week 8: First précis and bibliography due

David Chidester, *Empire of Religion: Imperialism and Comparative Religion* pp. 1-124, 159-256 (Chapters 1-4, 6-8);

Richard King, "Imagining Religions in India: Colonialism and the Mapping of South Asian History and Culture" (from *Secularism and Religion-Making* (eds. Markus Dressler, Arvind-Pal S. Mandair)).

Week 9:

Tisa Wenger, *We Have a Religion: The 1920s Pueblo Indian Dance Controversy and American Religious Freedom* pp. 1-236 (Introduction, Chapters 1-5);

Greg Johnson, "Apache Revelation: Making Indigenous Religion in the Legal Sphere" (from *Secularism and Religion-Making* (eds. Markus Dressler, Arvind-Pal S. Mandair)).

V. Doing "Religion" (or not) in a Secular Empire

Week 10:

Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, *Ministry of Presence: Chaplaincy, Spiritual Care, and the Law*; Pamela E. Klassen and Courtney Bender, "Introduction: Habits of Pluralism" (from *After Pluralism: Reimagining Religious Engagement*);

Week 11:

Joshua Dubler, *Down in the Chapel: Religious Life in an American Prison*.

Week 12: final précis and bibliography due

Kathryn Lofton, *Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon*

VI. U.S. Secularism and the Encounter with Islam

Week 13:

Melani McCalister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945*;

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Exhibiting Jews" (from *Destination Culture*).

Week 14:

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

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Joan Wallach Scott, "Secularism and Gender Equality" (from *Religion, the Secular, and the Politics of Sexual Difference* (eds. Linell E. Cady and Tracy Fessenden)).

Week 15:
Wrap Up

****final papers due on the last day of exam week****