American Studies

“Race, Gender, and Islam in the United States”

Spring 2013 / W 5:35-8:35pm / RAB 018

Professor Sylvia Chan-Malik

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**COURSE OVERVIEW**

In 1903, American sociologist, historian, activist, and author W.E.B. Dubois wrote, “the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line.” In 2005, Nigerian Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka remarked that the 21st-century’s defining problem would be religion. Soyinka explained: “It is not so much religion itself but what religion has turned into, the use to which religion is being put, which is a highly political, sectarian one” (*New York Times*, 4/3 0/05). Over the course of the last decade, central to the conversation concerning the highly-political nature of religion has been “Islam,” not only as a religion, but as political ideology and signifier of culture, race, and ethnicity. Often conflated with terrorism and violence, “Islam” has been subjected, as Edward Said writes, to “unacceptable generalizations of the most irresponsible sort,” leaving Muslims in the West to forge community, identities, and culture in the face of racial and religious intolerance. Issues of gender are crucial to these discussions, as Islam’s supposed treatment of women have often acted as a primary rationale for anti-Islamic racism.

This seminar merges the concerns of DuBois and Soyinka stated above by centralizing the categories of race and gender to the study of Islam in America. Throughout the semester, we will explore the polycultural presence of Islam in the Americas from the early colonial period to the present, issues of gender and sexuality, U.S. foreign policy and its consequences, pre- and post-9/11 racializing practices, and the contemporary terrains of Muslim American culture. Through television, films, literary texts, digital media, visual culture, and music, the seminar will provide students with a deeper understanding of Islam’s historical presence in the U.S., as well as offering insights into larger issues of racial, religious, and gender formation, U.S. empire and transnationalism, and identity and community formation in the United States.

This is also methods course. By this I mean that throughout the semester, we will be developing and sharpening your abilities to employ interdisciplinary research methods, which you will use to conduct your final research project.

**LEARNING GOALS**

*Departmental Learning Goals:*

Students will learn to synthesize interdisciplinary sources and methods of analysis in order to conduct an investigation of American culture across time and space in the history, politics, literature, and arts of the peoples of the United States. Students will be able to write well, speak articulately, and think critically, analytically, and creatively.

*Learning Goals Specific to this Course:*

* To gain an understanding of the historical presence of Islam and Muslims in the United States
* To develop a working vocabulary about race, religion, and gender to be used in the student’s own research
* To gain understanding of the intersections between domestic racial politics, U.S. foreign policy, cultural representations, and identity formation.

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

*Muslims in America: A Short History* by Edward E. Curtis (Oxford: 2009) / ISBN 978-0195367560

*The Autobiography of Malcolm X* by Malcolm X and Alex Haley (Ballantine: 1987 Reissue) / ISBN 978-0345350688

*The Night Counter by* Alia Yunis (Broadway: 2010) / ISBN 978-0307453631

*The Butterfly Mosque* by G. Willow Wilson (Grove: 2011) / ISBN 978-0802145338

**GRADE BREAKDOWN**

Attendance and Participation 20 pts.

Course Blog 10 pts.

Research Proposal 10 pts.

Literature Review 10 pts.

Midterm 10 pts.

Research Paper Draft 10 pts.

Final 10 pts.

Final Research Paper 20 pts.

**ASSIGNMENTS**

Attendance and Participation – 20 pts.

This is a seminar. Its success depends on your active and informed participation in our weekly discussions. Therefore, attendance is required at ALL class meetings (only ONE absence will be permitted without penalty), and class participation constitutes an essential part of the final grade. Chronic lateness will lower your final class grade. More than 3 absences will result in failure of the course. **As part of their participation grade, students are also expected to present and lead discussion of the readings for 1.5 hours of one class during the semester.**

Students are expected to attend all classes. If you expect to miss a session, please use the University absence reporting website https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/ to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email is automatically sent to me.

Course Blog – 10 pts.

I have set up a blog site on Sakai, which you can access by selecting “Blog” on the drop-down menu for the course. You are required to blog every week, with all entries for each week being submitted by 5pm every Tuesday (to allow me time to review them before class on Wednesday). There is no specified length; however entries should offer your initial thoughts on the main points and themes of the readings, what was helpful to you (or what was not), further questions for discussion, as well as any responses you might have to what your peers have written on the blog as well. You may also use the blog to have conversations with myself and your classmates; it’s a good place to bring up issues and items you find pertinent to the course, or just to discuss whatever thoughts you might have in relation to your research. Your thoughts can be informal, scattered, random. What I am looking for more than anything is a sincere and concerted effort with our course materials and an engagement in your own research process.

Research Proposal- 10 pts.

You will turn in a 3-4 page, double-spaced research proposal. In this proposal, you should: 1) identify research questions you want to pursue, 2) provide a background section that explains why you think these question have not been addressed in previous literature, and 3) explain why you believe these questions are relevant.

Literature Review- 10 pts.

This is a 4-5 page review of the existing literature on your topic. You paper should provide a clear sense of the fields you are engaging in your work and include 6-10 scholarly sources (books and scholarly articles). Further details to be discussed in class

Midterm – 10 pts.

The midterm will consist of a series of identifications drawn from the readings and an essay question.

Research Paper Draft – 10 pts.

You have two options of how to do this. Option 1: You turn in two parts—first, a draft of around 5 pages which includes an introduction and at least one section of the paper, and second, a complete draft of 10-15 pages. I highly recommend this option. Option 2: Just a complete draft 10-15 pages.

Final – 10 pts.

The final will consist of a series of identifications drawn from the readings and an essay question.

Final Research Paper – 25 pts.

This paper is the culmination of your work in the course. It is a formal presentation of the research you have conducted during the semester. The final paper can incorporate parts of your literature review and be 10-15 pages double-spaced. Further details about formatting and content to be discussed in class.

Rutgers University Grading Scale

100– 92= A; 91– 87= B+; 86–81= B; 80 – 77= C+; 76– 70= C; 69–60= D; 59– 0= F ann

Note: there are no minus grades at Rutgers.

**Course Policies**

Technology in the Classroom

All cell phones and hand-held devices must be turned off. NO TEXTING – if I catch you texting, you will be counted as absent that class.

COMPUTERS ARE ALLOWED ONLY A SPECIFIC TIMES DURING SEMINAR. I have found time and time again that computers distract from discussions, and provide too many temptations in terms of email, web- surfing, and so on. If I catch you using the computer for social media or non-course related work, you will be counted as absent that class. On occasion, I will invite students to use laptop computers for in- class activities. However, students should not pull out their computers unless specific instructions have been given allowing their use.

Submitting Assignments

Assignments are due at the beginning of class, unless otherwise instructed. All assignments must be completed in order to pass the class. Late assignments will be penalized one letter grade per day late. All papers must be double-spaced, typeset with Times or Times New Roman 12pt font, and have page numbers and one-inch margins Format of papers should adhere to a recognized style manual (such as MLA, APA and Chicago).

Students with Disabilities

Students with documented disabilities should present their documentation to the professor at the beginning of the semester in order to be afforded appropriate accommodations. Students with disabilities requesting accommodations must follow the procedures outlined at <http://disabilityservices.rutgers.edu/request.html>.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism of any sort will not be tolerated. Plagiarism includes copying classmates’ answers and improper citation of any text in the course or otherwise. Ignorance of university policy is not an

excuse.

Current Academic Integrity Policy http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/files/documents/AI\_Policy\_9\_01\_2011.pdf Violations include: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, denying others access to information or material, and facilitating violations of academic integrity. Honor Pledge: I pledge on my honor that I will adhere to all aspects of the Rutgers Academic Integrity Policy.

Except for collaborative assignments officially approved by the professor in advance, all work a student submits must be his/her own independent effort. Students must cite properly all outside sources consulted in preparing written assignments. Students should review the university policy on Academic Integrity (see the website for the Center for the Advancement of Teaching: http://teachx.rutgers.edu/integrity/policy.html). You can obtain help in maintaining standards of academic integrity by taking a 20-minute interactive tutorial on Plagiarism and Academic Integrity: <http://www.scc.rutgers.edu/douglass/sal/plagiarism/intro.html>.

For information on proper documentation, consult Acknowledging Sources: <http://amerstudies.rutgers.edu/documents/AcknowledgingSources.pdf> , the guide prepared by the American Studies Department, available on the departmental web site and on the course Sakai web site.

The professor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus and to give impromptu quizzes during the semester.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

Week 1

1/23 Introduction / Writing Diagnostic

Who is Yasiin Bey?

Week 2 Genealogies I: ISLAM AND EMPIRE

1/30 \*\*Edward Said, *Covering Islam* (excerpt)

\*\*Deepa Kumar, “The Persistence of Orientalist Myths.” In *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire* (Haymarket: 2012)

Edward Curtis, *Muslims in America*

Week 3 Genealogies II: RACE / BLACKNESS

2/6 \*\*Robin D.G. Kelley, “Polycultural Me”

\*\*Eddie S. Glaude, “Myth and African American Self-Identity.” In *Religion and the Creation of Race and Ethnicity: An Introduction*, ed. Craig R. Prentiss (NYU:2003)

\*\*Patricia Hill Collins, “U.S. Black Feminism in Transnational Context.” In *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. (Routledge: 2000)

Curtis, *Muslims in America*

Week 4 Genealogies III: THE MUSLIM WOMAN

2/13 \*\*Homa Hoodfar, “The Veil on their Minds and on Our Heads”

\*\*Katherine Viner, “Feminism as Imperialism”

\*\*Leila Ahmed, “Veil of Ignorance”

\*\*Chan-Malik, “Chadors, Feminists, Terror”

Week 5 Genealogies IV: “9/11”

2/20 \*\*Leti Volpp, “The Citizen and the Terrorist.” In *September 11 in History: A Watershed Moment?* Ed. Mary L. Dudziak (Duke: 2003)

\*\*Deepa Kumar, “Legalizing Racism: Muslims and the Attack on Civil Liberties”

**RESEARCH PROPOSAL DUE**

Week 6 Genealogies V: “MUSLIM AMERICAN”

2/27 \*\*Amina Wadud, “American Muslim Identity: Race and Ethnicity in Progressive Islam.” In *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism*, ed. Omid Safi (OneWorld: 2003)

\*\*Thalia Gigerenzer, “Muslim American Artists Strive to Build a Chasm”

Start *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (Ch. 1-10)

Week 7 Voices I

3/6 \*\*Elijah Muhammad, *Message to the Black Man* (excerpt)

*The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (Ch. 11-19)

Week 8

3/13 **MIDTERM**

\*\*Kaplan, Amy, “Where is Guantanamo?”

EXHIBIT: “Curating Guantanamo”

Week 9

3/20 Spring Break

Week 10 Voices II

3/27 Alia Yunis, *The Night Counter*

**LITERATURE REVIEW DUE**

Week 11 Voices II

4/3 Alia Yunis, *The Night Counter*

Week 12 Voices III

4/10 G. Willow Wilson, *The Butterfly Mosque*

Week 13 Voices III

4/17 G. Willow Wilson, *The Butterfly Mosque*

**RESEARCH PAPER DRAFTS DUE**

Week 14

4/24 Final

Film: *New Muslim Cool*

**RESEARCH PAPER DRAFTS DUE**

Week 15

5/1 In-Class Presentations

**RESEARCH PAPER DRAFTS DUE**

**FINAL PAPERS DUE BY MONDAY 5/12 IN MY MAILBOX IN RAB 024**