

# RELIGION, RACE, AND EMPIRE

RELS 450: Senior Seminar in Religious Studies

TR 1:40-2:55 (MYBK 119)



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Hours: MW 3:15-4:30PM and By Appointment

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## DESCRIPTION

We tend to think of religion and race as natural categories, two words that innocently describe groups of people on the basis of what they believe and how they look. In reality, both of these terms were born in a particular time and for a particular purpose: in the context of enslavement and empire. This course will explore the simultaneous creation of “religion” and “race” as European Christians sought to categorize and conquer the peoples of Africa, Asia, and the Americas. We will focus our attention on the emergence of the modern study of religion in the context of colonial encounters in South Asia, southern Africa, and North America. We will also investigate the implications this history has for us in the twenty-first century.

## OBJECTIVES

- 1) Introduce and interrogate “religion” and “race” as modern constructed categories
- 2) Situate the construction and deployment of these categories in the context of “colonialism”
- 3) Cultivate ability to apply this theoretical framework in order to better understand our world
- 4) Hone your critical reading, thinking, and writing skills through disciplined engagement with texts, constructive conversation with classmates, and research writing projects

## BOOKS

Since our collective success depends on careful and critical reading of all materials, it is imperative that you have your own physical copies of all texts. I expect you to actively engage the texts (underline arguments, star key points, write exasperated comments in the margins, etc.) while reading outside of class and to bring them with you to class to facilitate discussion.

There are two required books. All the books are available from the CofC Bookstore. All other readings will be posted our OAKS site (under Content). Please buy a binder, print them, and bring hard copies with you to class when necessary. If cost is a concern, please see me.

- A binder for material posted on OAKS (yes, like, for realies)
- David Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (University of Virginia Press, 1996)
- Tisa Wenger, *Religious Freedom: The Contested History of an American Ideal* (University of North Carolina Press, 2017)

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Since this is an advanced course, I encourage you to read beyond what is required of you. To that end, I have listed two books I highly recommend. Johnson is a great introduction to colonialism and the category of religion, as well as the history of black religion across the African diaspora. HoSang, LaBennett, and Pulido’s edited volume on *Racial Formation* and Gin Lum and Harvey’s edited *Oxford Handbook* will both be essential resources for your research.

- Daniel Martinez HoSang, Oneka LaBennett, Laura Pulido, ed., *Racial Formation in the Twenty-First Century* (University of California Press, 2012)
- Sylvester Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500-2000: Colonialism, Democracy, and Freedom* (Cambridge University Press, 2015)

- Kathryn Gin Lum and Paul Harvey, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Race in American History* (Oxford University Press, 2018)

## EVALUATION

### 20% Participation

- You cannot participate if you are not present.
- Quality counts more than quantity, but you must speak to contribute.
- If you are worried about participation, meet with me (ASAP) to strategize.
- Here's a breakdown of potential participation grades (there is no +/-):
  - **A:** almost always present in class, regularly demonstrates both verbal and nonverbal participation in class activities and discussions, consistently shows engagement with and (attempted) comprehension of readings.
  - **B:** almost always present, regularly demonstrates nonverbal but only occasionally verbal participation in activities and discussions, shows engagement with readings but comprehension occasionally unclear.
  - **C:** sporadically present, occasionally demonstrates verbal and nonverbal participation but often disconnected from activities and discussions, does not evidence consistent or sustained engagement with readings.
  - **F:** frequently absent, rarely demonstrates verbal or nonverbal participation in activities and discussions, consistently fails to show any attempt to complete or comprehend course readings; and/or disruptive.

### 10% Discussion Board

- You will post on our OAKS discussion board by 11:59PM prior to each class.
- Your post should do two things:
  1. Rearticulate the reading's most important point in your own words.
  2. Pose a question raised by the reading for further discussion in class.
- Your posts will be graded on the following scale:
 

✓	(100%)
✓ -	(75%)
0	(0%)
- Please read your peers' posts in preparation for class.
- Gifs and memes are *strongly encouraged* in posts and replies.

### 10% Discussion Leaders

- Each of you will be assigned to a small group.
- Your small group will lead one class discussion.
- You will meet with me the preceding week to help prepare our discussion.

### 60% Research Paper + Workshop

- Appointment and Topic (5%)
- Annotated Bibliography (10%)
- Intro Paragraph and Thesis (5%)
- Workshop and Paper Draft (15%)
- Final Paper (12-15 pages) (25%)

## GRADING SCALE

A = 93-100	B+ = 87-89	C+ = 77-79	D+ = 67-69	F = 0-60
A- = 90-92	B = 83-86	C = 73-76	D = 63-66	
	B- = 80-82	C- = 70-72	D- = 60-62	

## ATTENDANCE AND LATE POLICIES

- Class begins promptly at 1:40PM on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I expect us to be seated and prepared for class when the proverbial iPhone strikes 1:40. Points will be deducted if you arrive late or leave before the end of class. I will have to bolt from class when the iPhone strikes 2:55 to pick up my daughter from Kindergarten, so if we need to talk immediately (and not in office hours), it will be an Aaron-Sorkin-style “walk-and-talk.”
- Assignments are due at the time specified on the assignment itself. Any assignment turned in after the designated deadline is considered late. You will be penalized one letter grade (10 points) for each day that your assignment is late. Days are calculated by 24-hour periods that begin with the original due date and time.
- No one is more sympathetic to the busyness of our curricular and co-curricular schedules than I am (I have a wife, three daughters, a dog, after all). Nevertheless, it is crucial that we all learn to plan ahead and balance our respective responsibilities. Prior commitments and other deadlines are not acceptable excuses for late work.
- The same goes for technological problems. We are increasingly dependent on our devices and other technologies. However, as I know you know, technology can fail us. Computers crash, iPads break, servers are sometimes down, etc. Again, while I’m sympathetic, technical difficulties are not acceptable excuses for late assignments or missed class. I expect you to complete assignments well enough in advance to factor in these variables and remember, always (ALWAYS!) back up your documents!!!

## TECHNOLOGY

Students are expected to have a CofC email address linked to OAKS that they check regularly. Email is my most frequent and effective means of communication.

Please turn your cellphones on silent when you enter the classroom.  
Use of cellphones is strictly prohibited.

I prefer that you use paper and pen/cil as your note-taking devices (crayons and markers also acceptable). If you prefer to take notes on a laptop or tablet, I ask that you sign an agreement with me for responsible use and that you sit in the rear of the classroom, so as not to distract your classmates. If your use of devices disrupts our class, I reserve the right to embarrass you and/or ask you to leave. (See me if you wish to sign an agreement.)

## DISABILITY ACCOMODATION

If you have, or think you may have, a documented disability (physical, learning, psychiatric, visual, hearing, etc.) please visit the Center for Disability Services. The Center can provide you with the information and documentation necessary to arrange accommodations you may require. The Center for Disability Services / Students Needing Access Parity (SNAP) can be

accessed via: <http://disabilityservices.cofc.edu/>.

#### RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION

The College acknowledges that religious practices differ from tradition to tradition and that the demands of religious observance in some traditions may cause conflicts with student schedules. In affirming this diversity, the College supports the concept of “reasonable accommodation for religious observance” in regard to class attendance, and the scheduling of examinations and other academic work requirements, unless the accommodation would create an undue hardship on the College. Our full Statement on Religious Accommodations Policy can be found here: <http://president.cofc.edu/community-relations/rlc/accommodation.php>

#### THE CENTER FOR STUDENT LEARNING

The CSL, located on the first floor of the library, offers a wide variety of tutoring and other academic resources that support many courses offered at the College. Services include walk-in tutoring, by appointment tutoring, study strategies appointments, Peer Academic Coaching (PAC), and Supplemental Instruction (SI). All services are described and all lab schedules are posted on the CSL website: <http://csl.cofc.edu/>.

#### WRITING LAB

I encourage you to take advantage of the Writing Lab in the Center for Student Learning (Addlestone Library, first floor). Trained writing consultants can help with writing for all courses; they offer one-to-one consultations that address everything from brainstorming and developing ideas to crafting strong sentences and documenting sources. For more, visit <http://csl.cofc.edu/labs/writing-lab/>.

#### HONOR CODE AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Lying, cheating, attempted cheating, and plagiarism are violations of our Honor Code that, when identified, are investigated. Each incident will be examined to determine the degree of deception involved. Incidents where the instructor determines the student’s actions are related more to a misunderstanding will be handled by the instructor. A written intervention designed to help prevent the student from repeating the error will be given to the student. The intervention, submitted by form and signed both by the instructor and the student, will be forwarded to the Dean of Students and placed in the student’s file.

Cases of suspected academic dishonesty will be reported directly by the instructor and/or others having knowledge of the incident to the Dean of Students. A student found responsible by the Honor Board for academic dishonesty will receive a XXF in the course, indicating failure of the course due to academic dishonesty. This grade will appear on the student’s transcript for two years after which the student may petition for the XX to be expunged. The F is permanent. The student may also be placed on disciplinary probation, suspended (temporary removal) or expelled (permanent removal) from the College by the Honor Board.

Students should be aware that unauthorized collaboration—working together without permission—is a form of cheating. Unless the instructor specifies that students can work

together on an assignment, quiz and/or test, no collaboration during the completion of the assignment is permitted. Other forms of cheating include possessing or using an unauthorized study aid (which could include accessing information via a cell phone or computer), copying from others' exams, fabricating data, and giving unauthorized assistance. Research conducted and/or papers written for other classes cannot be used in whole or in part for any assignment in this class without obtaining prior permission from the instructor.

Students can find the complete Honor Code and all related processes in the *Student Handbook* at <http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/honor-system/studenthandbook/index.php>

COURSE SCHEDULE (subject to change with advance notice)

### **Critical Categories**

Week 1 – August 21-13

Day 1: What's this course about? What's it *not* about?

Day 2: Gin Lum and Harvey, "Introduction" to *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Race in American History* (2018) [Posted on OAKS]

Week 2 – August 28-30

Day 1: Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious" (1998) [Posted on OAKS]

Day 2: de Costa, excerpt, *The Natural and Moral History of the Indies* (1590) [Linked on OAKS]

Week 3 – September 4-6

Day 1: Omi and Winant, "Racial Formation" (1986) [Posted on OAKS]

Day 2: the Virginia Slave Laws (1662-1669) [Linked on OAKS]

Week 4 – September 11-13

Day 1: Nye, "Race and Religion: Postcolonial Formations of Whiteness" (2018) [Posted on OAKS]

### **South Asia**

Day 2: Gottschalk, "1: Religion, Science, and Scientism" in *Religion, Science, and Empire* (2012) [Posted on OAKS]

Week 5 – September 18-20

Day 1: Gottschalk, "Conclusion" in *Religion, Science, and Empire* (2012) [Posted on OAKS]

Day 2: Müller, "On the Truthful Character of the Hindus" (1882) [Linked on OAKS]

### **Interlude**

Week 6 – September 25-27



Day 1: Mehta, *Earth* (1998)

Day 2: Analyzing religion, race, and empire in *Earth* [Readings TBA]

### **Southern Africa**

Week 7 – October 2

Day 1: Chidester, “1: Frontiers of Comparison” in *Savage Systems* (1996)

Day 2: Research Day [Post on Chidester, “2: Inventing Religion” in *Savage Systems* (1996)]

Week 8 – October 9-11

Day 1: Chidester, “3: The Religion of Unbelievers” in *Savage Systems* (1996)  
[Discussion Leaders #1 and #2]

Day 2: Field Trip #1: *Freedoms Lost & Gained* exhibit, Addlestone Library  
[Read Chidester, “4: The Unknown God” in *Savage Systems* (1996)]

Week 9 – October 16

Day 1: Chidester, “6: Beyond the Frontier” in *Savage Systems* (1996)  
[Discussion Leaders #3 and #4]

Day 2: Research Day

MIDTERM GRADES: Wednesday October 17

### **Interlude**

Week 10 – October 23-25

Day 1: Cameron, *Avatar* (2009)

Day 2: Reading and debating religion, race, and empire in *Avatar* [Readings TBA]

### **United States**

Week 11 – October 30-November 1

Day 1: Wenger, “Introduction” to *Religious Freedom* (2017)  
Wenger, “1: Making the Imperial Subject” in *Religious Freedom* (2017)

Day 2: Wenger, “2: Making Empire in the Philippines” in *Religious Freedom* (2017)  
[Discussion Leaders #5 and #6]

Week 12 – [Fall Break: November 5-6] November 8

Day 2: Wenger, “3: Making Religion on the Reservation” in *Religious Freedom* (2017)  
Wenger, “4: Making American Whiteness” in *Religious Freedom* (2017)

Week 13 – November 13-15

Day 1: Field Trip #2: Monumental Tour

[Read Wenger, “5: Defining a People” in *Religious Freedom* (2017)]

Day 2: Wenger, “Conclusion” to *Religious Freedom* (2017)

[Discussion Leaders #7 and #8]

### **Research Presentations**

Week 14 – [Thanksgiving Break: November 21-25]

Day 1: Research Day

Week 15 – November 27-29

Day 1: Workshopping Final Paper Drafts

Day 2: Workshopping Final Paper Drafts

Final Papers Due Sunday, December 9 by 11:59PM