



POLITICAL ISLAM PRESENT AND PAST

508:110 Spring 2018

Monday & Wednesday 2:50pm - 4:10pm
Hardenbergh Hall A7

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Office Hours: TBA

This course is an introduction to Islamic political thought and practice, which focuses on how history can inform our understanding of contemporary Political Islam. Since the attack on the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001, political debates about the role of Islam in the modern world

have arguably been the single defining issue of the twenty-first century. The manifestations of Political Islam are diverse: they range from al-Qaeda and ISIS, to Muslim political parties who participate in electoral politics in Turkey and Indonesia. Nor is Political Islam limited to Muslim-majority countries. Debates about Islam have also emerged as key political questions in the United States and Europe, influencing policies in areas ranging from surveillance to immigration and education.

The course traces the longer history of a range of flashpoints in these debates, including the relationship between *sharia* and the state, the role of new media technologies in shaping Muslim politics, veiling, and censorship of religiously offensive materials. In the process the course surveys the life of the Prophet, the early Caliphates, early-modern Muslim empires, European colonialism, and nationalist movements. But a focus on themes of contemporary relevance provides the guiding thread through this whirl-wind tour of Islamic history.

The course assumes no prior knowledge of the subject. Lectures and discussions will guide students through the analysis of a variety of historical and contemporary sources, including Ottoman *fatwas* on drinking coffee, nineteenth-century debates about the compatibility of Islam and modern science, Sufi rock videos, and Twitter feeds. Class preparation will likewise involve engagement with a variety of different forms of media, including texts, films, and podcasts—all of which students will be expected to critically analyze using techniques covered in class.

THIS COURSE FULFILLS THE FOLLOWING CORE REQUIREMENTS:

21st CENTURY CHALLENGES: Analyze a contemporary global issue from a multi-disciplinary perspective (Goal B).

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS: Employ historical reasoning to study human endeavours (Goal L).

Requirements & Grading

Participation and Attendance (10%). Attendance and participation is mandatory and will be tracked by the professor. Students may miss up to three classes, for whatever reason, without penalty. Any additional absences will only be excused under exceptional circumstances, such as family emergency or illness. In evaluating student participation the professor will particularly reward students who show thoughtful consideration for the comments of their peers, including respectful disagreement!

Blog Activities (20%). Students must complete all four blog activities, which are detailed in the syllabus, including posting and commenting. Blog assignments should be completed before the first lecture of the following week. Individual posts/comments will not receive letter grades; your grade on this assignment will be based on whether or not you complete the 4 original postings and 4 comments on time. Don't miss these easy points!

Mid-Term In-Class Exam (15%). The in-class portion of the mid-term will consist of IDs and a map exercise.

Mid-Term Take-Home Essay (15%) In order to give you ample time, the essay portion of the mid-term, which will focus on a primary text, will be administered as a take-home question. You will be given 24 hours from the end of the mid-term to submit your essay via email. You may consult course materials and your own notes in preparing your essay, but *you may not receive any outside help from classmates or others*.

Final Exam (40%). The final exam, which will be administered during the finals period, will include IDs, short-answer questions, and a pre-circulated essay prompt.

Grade Cut-offs:

A = 90 and above.

C = 70 and above

B+ = 85 and above

D+ = 65 and above

B = 80 and above

D = 60 and above

C+ = 75 and above

F = 59 and below

Course Materials: All assigned readings, podcasts, and screenings will be available via the course website.

I. INTRODUCTION

Week 1: Introduction

Session 1 (Jan. 17): Reoccurring Themes, Political Islam, Past and Present

Listen to the BBC Podcast, "The Battle Within Islam" (43 minutes).

Week 2: Core Concepts: What is sharia?

Session 1 (Jan. 22): Basic Definitions – Sharia and Islamic Law

Reading: Noah Feldman, “Why Sharia?,” *The New York Times* (March 16, 2008).

Session 2 (Jan. 24): Sharia in Practice – Inside an Islamic court in contemporary Tehran

Film Clips and Discussion (In class): *Divorce: Iranian Style*

Week 3: Past & Present Case Study I – Political Islam and New Media Technologies

Session 1 (Jan. 29): Technologies of Communication and New Muslim Publics

Reading: Francis Robinson, “Technology and Religious Change: Islam and the Impact of Print,” *Modern Asian Studies* 27.1 (Feb 1993): 229-251.

Session 2 (Jan. 31): Media and the Arab Spring – How to Stage a Media-Savvy Revolution

Reading: John Pollock, “How Egyptian and Tunisian Youth Hacked the Arab Spring,” *Technology Review* (September/October 2011), 70-82.

**** Blog Assignment – Reflections on “New Media” and Political Islam**

Pick a current example of how Muslims are using new media technologies to advance different political causes. Your example could be a conventional news story, website, or YouTube video. Post your example to the course blog and include a 2-3 sentence reflection on how it relates to the themes we have covered this week. You should also post a comment on at least one entry by another student. Both your post and comment should be up before the first lecture of next week, but if you post earlier, you are more likely to get comments!

II. ISLAM AND POLITICS – A DEEPER HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Week 4: The Birth of Islam

Session 1 (Feb. 5): Politics in the Life of Muhammad

Listen to the BBC Podcast History of Islam, “Origins” (29 minutes) and “After Muhammad” (28 minutes).

Session 2 (Feb. 7): The Rise and Fall of the Islamic Caliphate

Listen to the BBC Podcast History of Islam, “Islam’s Golden Age” (27 minutes) and “The Mid-13th Century Massacres” (27 Minutes).

Week 5: Religion & State in Early-Modern Empires

Session 1 (Feb. 12): Religious Pluralism in the Mughal Empire

Reading: Asher and Talbot, *India Before Europe*, 123-151; and listen to BBC Podcast Incarnations: India in 50 Lives, “Akbar: The World and the Bridge” (15 minutes).

Session 2 (Feb. 14): The Ottoman Empire and Muslim Responses to Modernity

Reading: Katib Chelebi, “Tobacco” and “Coffee,” in *The Balance of Truth*, trans. G.L. Lewis (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1957), 50-62.

Week 6: Colonialism and Re-inventing the Sharia

Session 1 (Feb. 19): Colonialism, Orientalism, and Islam

Reading: Pankaj Mishra, “The Strange Odyssey of Jamal al-Din al Afghani,” in *From the Ruins of Empire*, 46-123.

Session 2 (Feb. 21): Muslims Respond – Revival and Reform

Reading: Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, on Islam and Science, in *Modernist Islam*, 107-11.

Week 7: Nationalism and Anti-Colonial Resistance

Session 1 (Feb. 26): Islam and Anti-Colonial Resistance

Reading: James Gelvin, “Islamism and Nationalism: Common Roots, Common Destiny,” *Vorträge* (2002-2003): 82-89.

Session 2 (Feb. 28): Islam and Nationalism

Watch the film *Battle of Algiers*, which is available as an e-reserve on the course website in advance of lecture.

Week 8: Past & Present Case Study II “The Politics of the Veil”

Session 1 (Mar. 5): Gender and Veiling -- Colonial Pasts and the Post-Colonial Present

Reading: Qasim Amin, “Women and the Veil,” from *The Liberation of Women*, 35-61.

Session 2 (Mar. 7): Screening of select clips from *They Call Me Muslim* & discussion.

**** Blog Assignment – Reflections on “The Politics of the Veil”**

In lectures this week we have seen that the practice and meaning of Islamic veiling has varied historically and geographically. Pick a contemporary example of how debates over veiling continue

to play out today and post it to the blog with a 2-3 sentence reflection. Also post one comment on someone else's post. Both your post and comment should be up before the mid-term.

SPRING BREAK

Week 9: Review and Mid-term Exam

Session 1 (Mar. 19): Review

Session 2 (Mar. 21): In-Class Mid-Term Exam. Take-Home Essay Due within 24-Hours.

III. POLITICAL ISLAM – HISTORY OF THE PRESENT

Week 10: Islamism

Session 1 (Mar. 26): What is Islamism?

Readings: Selections from Qutb and Mawdudi, from *Princeton Readings in Islamic Thought*, 79-107, and 129-154; and Listen to NPR Podcast All Things Considered, "Sayyid Qutb's America" (22 minutes).

Session 2 (Mar. 28): Islamism and the State in Egypt and Pakistan

Reading: Kepel, *Jihad: The Trial of Political Islam*, 80-116.

Week 11: Islamic Revolutions

Session 1 (April 2): The Iranian Revolution

Reading: Khomeini from *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought*, 155-180; and Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi, "Small Media for a Big Revolution: Iran," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 3, no. 3 (1990): 341-371.

Session 2 (April 4): The Arab Spring and the Iranian Revolution, A Useful Comparison?

Attend the screening of the *The Square (2013)*, or watch the documentary on your own.

Week 12: Islamism – Diverging Paths

Session 1 (April 9): Global Terror -- Jihad in Afghanistan, the Origins of Al-Qaeda, and 9/11

Reading: Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*, 119-164.

Session 2 (April 11): Alternative Visions of Political Islam from Muslim Democracy to Sufi Rock

**** Blog Activity – Art as Political Islam?**

Find an example of art, music, or other forms of creative expression that reflects on themes related to contemporary Islam. In what ways do you think that your example does or does not function as a form of “Political Islam”? As usual you should include a 2-3 sentence reflection on the material you post and comment on a classmate’s post. Both your post and comment should be up before the first lecture of next week.

Week 13: Past & Present Case Study III – Islam, Censorship, and Freedom of Speech

Session 1 (April 16): Religious Offence or Free Speech? – The *Satanic Verses* Controversy

Reading: Shabbir Akhtar, “Art or Literary Terrorism?,” in *Be Careful with Muhammad! The Salman Rushdie Affair!*, 13-36; and Salman Rushdie, “In Good Faith,” in *Imaginary Homelands: Essay and Criticism, 1981-1991*, 393—414.

Session 2 (April 18): Cartoon Controversies and Images of the Prophet

Christians Gruber, “How the ‘Ban’ on Images of Muhammad Came to be,” *Newsweek* (January 19, 2015).

Week 14: The Future of Political Islam?

Session 1 (April 23): Making Sense of ISIS?

Reading: Graeme Wood, “What ISIS Really Wants,” *The Atlantic* (March 2015).

Session 2 (April 25): Syria and The Global Muslim Refugee Crisis

Readings: TBA

**** Blog Activity -- News Analysis**

In preparation for the news-analysis question on the final, pick a recent news story which relates to themes we have covered in the course. Write a one-paragraph reflection on how it relates to at least two historical themes that we have covered in class. You should also comment on at least one other post. Both your post and comment should be up before the first lecture of next week.

Week 15: Conclusions

Session 1 (April 30): Review and Conclusions

DRAFT – Subject to Change