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Contemporary Religious Thought, Islam in the Modern World

Instructor

Amir Hussain
amir.hussain@csun.edu

Institution

Dept. of Religious Studies, California State University, Northridge

Course Description

This course will examine some of the relationships between "Islam" and "the Modern World". The course will start with some methodological issues: What is "Islam"? What is "the Modern World"? How can these phenomena be studied? We will then move on to discuss some examples of Muslim approaches to modernity. Since the figure of Muhammad and the Qur'an and its interpreters are key to almost all of these approaches to modernity, we will discuss these two items at some length. In this section of the course, we will discuss some of the major reformers of Islam in the modern world. The next section of the course will discuss Feminism, and its impacts on Islam and modernity. The third section of the course will focus on contemporary Muslim religiosity and activity outside of North America, examining such themes as Orientalism, the "Islamic Threat", the Iranian revolution, the "Rushdie Affair", Islamic organizations, and the meanings of "jihad". The final section of the course will discuss the role of Islam in the United States and Canada.

Goals for students enrolled in this course are 1) to develop the ability to interpret texts and other cultural phenomena (such as rituals, myths, architecture) that have religious presuppositions or implications, and 2) to develop the ability to think both empathetically and critically about conflicting religious claims. This course satisfies the C-3 category of General Education requirements, and is classified as "writing intensive".

Required Texts for Purchase at the Bookstore

Andrew Rippin, *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices. Volume 2: The Contemporary Period*, (London: Routledge, 1993).

John Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality? Second Edition*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Evaluation

It is important for each student to know at the outset that this course requires daily reading, a research paper, an in-class test, and a final exam. Moreover, regular class attendance and participation are required. Clear, grammatically correct composition and standard spelling are expected on all written assignments.

Information on the research paper (which will be on a topic of the student's choice, in consultation with the instructor) will be provided separately during the course. The in-class test will focus on the Rippin book, and lecture material to that date. The final examination will be cumulative, and based on both books, with greater

emphasis being placed on the Esposito book. The test and exam will be graded on a) familiarity with the readings and b) independent questioning and reflection elicited by the lectures and classroom discussions. Methodical reading, conscientious writing of the research paper, and participation in class discussion will prepare students for the test and exam.

Active class participation will positively affect the student's final grade. Being absent more than three times during the semester will negatively affect the student's grade. The University's grading policy, including the plus/minus system, will be used. The University's cheating policy will be used in this course.

Grades will be determined as follows:

15% An in-class test on October 7.

40% A research paper of not more than 15 pages due on November 25.

35% A final examination on December 16.

10% Class participation.

Schedule of Lectures

Sept. 2: Introductory meeting: What is Islam? What is modernity? Methodological issues in this course. The role of women in contemporary Islam.

Sept. 9: Basic terms and concepts about Islam. READING: Rippin, pages ix to 7; Esposito, prefaces, introduction, Chapter 2.

Sept. 16: The contemporary world and the phenomenon of modernity. Muslim approaches to modernity. READING: Rippin, Chapters 1 & 2.

Sept. 23: Muhammad and the "traditions" in the modern world. READING: Rippin, Chapters 3 & 4.

Sept. 30: The Qur'an and its interpreters in the modern world. READING: Rippin, Chapters 5 & 6.

Oct. 7: **Test**. Islamic reformers in the modern world. READING: Esposito, Chapters 1 & 3.

Oct. 14: Feminism and Islam. Video on Women and Islam. READING: Rippin, Chapter 7.

Oct. 21: Feminism and Islam continued.

Oct. 28: Orientalism and the "Islamic Threat". Video presentation on "Jihad in America". READING: Esposito, Chapter 3.

Nov. 4: The emergence of modern Shi'i patterns in Iran. The "Islamic Revolution" in Iran. The resurgence of Islam in the modern world. READING: Esposito, Chapter 4.

Nov. 11: Radical "fundamentalism" and the Islamic revival. Islamic organizations. READING: Esposito, Chapter 5.

Nov. 18: Islam as a minority religious tradition in interaction: the example of India. The "Rushdie Affair". Excerpt from video by Rushdie on religious conflict in India. Islam and the


West. READING: Esposito, Chapter 6.

Nov. 25: **Research Paper Due.** Islam in North America: African-American and other movements; The example of Malcolm X and the "Black Muslims". Possible Video presentation on Malcolm X.

Dec. 2: Islam as a North American religious phenomena: The Muslim communities of the United States and Canada. READING: Rippin, Chapter 8 & conclusions.

Dec. 9: Review for the Final Examination.

Dec. 16 **Final exam** (8:00 - 10:00 p.m.). Final exam is cumulative, based on everything covered in the course.

Select a location 

http://www.wlu.ca/~wwaar/syllabi/islam_in_the_modern_world.html

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