

Religion & Violence in North Africa

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Course Overview

Today it is difficult for us to disentangle the religious and political threads that weave together to form our social fabric. And yet, given the intensity of the violence threatening to tear that fabric apart, we cannot simply look away. On the global stage, religious voices continue to make themselves heard, laying claim to any number of political positions and projects. Some voices call for an end to violence in both the foreign and domestic spheres; others clamor for new theaters of conflict; and still others find room for some kind of compromise between pure pacifism and absolute belligerence. Seldom, however, is there a one-to-one relationship between religious and political commitments.

But what are we to make of these unstable interactions between religion, politics, and violence? To analyze the entire series of combustible reactions across every permutation of religious life would prove too daunting. Perhaps, then, it's best to start small. By focusing on one region of the globe, we can narrow the scope of our investigation down and get a closer look at things. At the same time, by taking a long-term historical view, we can explore a wider range of actual interactions between religion and violence than might otherwise be possible.

The aim of this course, then, is to focus in on the history of religion and violence in North Africa. For our purposes, we can define this region as consisting of territories now known as northern Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. Of course, the history of this region makes it clear that it did not develop in isolation from the broader world, as we'll see. Still, in order to interrogate our chosen problem, we'll look most closely at how the relationship between religion and violence played out in this specific region during three exemplary periods.

The first case study will take us to late antiquity, when the Roman Empire held sway over most of North Africa. There, we'll see how burgeoning Christian communities were able to survive state persecution, only to later invite imperial power to adjudicate their own internal disputes. Next, we'll move several centuries ahead to the arrival of Islam in North Africa. There we'll take note of how new Muslim communities were able to reshape the sociopolitical landscape, though not without their own external and internal conflicts. Finally, we'll leap ahead to the age of European colonialism, when nation-states like France began to dominate the indigenous population with a new brand of force. In so doing, the colonizing powers reset the political parameters for the relation between religion and violence in the modern era.

The goal of this tour through the history of North Africa is not to reaffirm our ideas about either Christianity or Islam, but to challenge our preconceptions about both. We can do that by paying special attention to the startling variety of positions religious groups could take when politics threatened to turn into war. Doing so should also give us the opportunity to reflect on how other religions—especially Judaism—were able to negotiate this fraught landscape. By working through these three case studies, then, we should be able to sketch out a number of different ways religious communities could resort—or refuse to resort—to violence as a political strategy.

Required Texts

Abun-Nasr, Jamil M. *A History of the Maghrib in the Islamic Period*. Cambridge UP, 1987.
Naylor, Philip C. *North Africa: a History from Antiquity to the Present*. University of Texas Press, 2010.

Supplementary Texts

Readings from the following texts will be scanned and made available in PDF form on Chalk.

Augustine of Hippo. *Political Writings*. Ed. E.M. Atkins & R.J. Dodaro. Cambridge UP, 2001.
Burns, J. Patout, & Robin M. Jensen. *Christianity in Roman Africa*. Eerdmans, 2014.
Camus, Albert. *Resistance, Rebellion, & Death*. Trans. Justin O'Brien. Vintage, 1995.
Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*. Trans. Justin O'Brien. Vintage, 1991.
Clancy-Smith, Julia, & Charles Smith. *The Modern Middle East & North Africa: a History in Documents*. Oxford UP, 2013.
Conant, Jonathan. *Staying Roman: Conquest & Identity in Africa and the Mediterranean, 439-700*. Cambridge UP, 2012.
Crapanzano, Vincent. *The Harkis: the Wound That Never Heals*. University of Chicago Press, 2011.
Fredriksen, Paula. *Augustine and the Jews: a Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism*. Yale UP, 2010.
Gottreich, Emily Benichou, & Daniel J. Schroeter. *Jewish Culture & Society in North Africa*. Indiana UP, 2011.
Nirenberg, David. *Anti-Judaism: the Western Tradition*. Norton, 2014.
Nirenberg, David. "Slay Them Not: A Review of Paula Fredriksen's *Augustine and the Jews*." *New Republic*. March 18, 2009.

Course Requirements

In order to fulfill the requirements for this course, you'll be asked to attend every regularly scheduled meeting and contribute to the weekly discussion. Getting everyone to participate in our shared conversation will be one of our main goals this quarter. So that we can create the conditions for that to happen, we'll aim to encourage an open environment that will lead to lively discussion and rigorous reflection on the texts at hand.

You'll also be asked to write two papers of varying length over the course of the term. The first will serve as a midterm evaluation of the first unit of our course. In advance, I'll disseminate several essay questions revolving around the topic of Christianity and Judaism in Roman Africa. This midterm paper should come in somewhere between 800-1000 words and will be due by the end of Friday of Week 5. (By 'the end of,' I mean 11:59 p.m.) The second paper will serve as a final evaluation, focusing on topics drawn from the history of Islam in medieval and colonial Africa. It should be between 1400-1600 words and will be due by the end of Monday during Finals Week.

The purpose of these assignments is to sharpen your writing skills at the college level. Starting out with a shorter piece allows you to work your way up to longer and more incisive forms of argumentation. By the end of the quarter, you should be able to say not only that you've learned more about the history of North Africa, but also that you've developed more effective ways of expressing what it is you've learned about that history.

Grades

Participation: 30%
Midterm Paper: 30%
Final Paper: 40%

The first paper will count for less of your overall grade and will serve as a primer on expectations of college-level writing in this course. Don't panic if your initial grade isn't immediately what you expected. We assign an early essay that counts for a bit less so that some room for improvement will be left over. Lessons learned from that first paper can then be applied to the final assignment, which will count for a higher percentage of your final grade.

Please note that participation, too, counts for a substantial portion of that final grade. Constructive contributions to class discussion will ultimately be worth just as much as a well-crafted paper.

Course Policies

Absences

Only by attending all of our regularly scheduled class meetings will you be able to earn a full participation grade. If you need to be absent for a substantive reason—such as a health issue, personal emergency, or religious occasion—please email me to let me know.

Late Assignments

Papers handed in after 11:59 p.m. on their respective due dates will be docked one third of a letter grade. That is to say: a very impressive paper handed in at 12:00 a.m. the following day will be docked from an A to an A-, and so on down the line. The letter grade will continue to go down by one third for each added day that the paper is late. In general, it's much better to hand in a paper on time than to hold on to it for an extra day in hopes of ratcheting up its quality. The daily loss in thirds of a letter grade tends to make holding on to papers no longer a worthwhile enterprise.

Formatting Papers

Please try to hand in your papers as Word documents attached to an email. Be sure to send that email to me. Please also try to stick to the allotted amount of words. There are all sorts of tricks that students can try in order to fit a good number of words onto a relatively small number of pages. Please refrain from trying these tricks out. They can easily be flouted thanks to Word's handy 'word count' feature. If you do choose to exceed the allotted amount of words by an egregious amount (in the range of, say, 200-400 words), such egregious excess will find its negative reflection in that paper's grade.

Plagiarism

Above all, please refrain from committing the intellectual crime of taking someone else's words as your own. This is known as plagiarism, and it can run the gamut from stealing a friend's paper wholesale to improperly citing a scholarly text. Papers marred by plagiarism would have to receive a failing grade. It would also be my duty to report authors of a plagiarized paper to the College. That

would be a sad day for all involved. Happily, though, the University's Writing Program has prepared a useful guide for avoiding plagiarism, even during those dark nights of the soul when you're feeling most tempted to finish that paper by any means necessary. Rather than waiting for such nights, it would be best to check out their website in advance:

http://writing-program.uchicago.edu/resources/collegewriting/but_what_if_you_get_stuck.htm

Writing Assistance

When they're not busy combatting plagiarism, the Writing Program also provides a number of other services that can prove helpful to burgeoning writers in the College. If you're taking a section of the HUM core this year, then you may already be acquainted with the Writing Intern assigned to work with you throughout that course. They can aid you as you strive to sharpen your essay-writing skills as the quarter progresses. The Writing Program also employs Writing Tutors, who can take extra time to introduce you to the strategies that make for successful composition and argumentation at the college level. Again, feel free to peruse the Writing Program's website and check out the full suite of options available to you:

<http://writing-program.uchicago.edu/>

Accommodations

If you believe you may need any kind of special accommodation when attending class or completing an assignment, please let me know right away. I will be sure to connect you with the appropriate offices in the College, so that we'll be able to arrange accommodations as soon as possible.

Laptops & Phones

Though it can be difficult to tear ourselves away from our electronic devices and the vast stores of data they hold within themselves, we should aim to prioritize interaction with our fellow humans during class time. There is nothing wrong with using a laptop or tablet to take notes, but please don't distract yourself or others by browsing extracurricular sites. Please also keep the sound switched off, even if (or, rather, especially if) you have one of those apps that makes your keyboard sound like an old-fashioned typewriter. As for phones, it's best to set those aside entirely for the duration of our meeting. Our goal, remember, is to create the conditions for a constructive conversation, and that's a goal that demands our attention if we're ever going to meet it.

Course Schedule

Week 1

Day 1: What is 'North Africa?'

Read: Naylor, 1-14.

Day 2: North Africa Before the Romans

Read: Naylor, 15-34.

UNIT I—Polytheisms and Monotheisms

Week 2

Day 1: Introducing Roman North Africa

Read: Naylor, 35-56.

Day 2: Christianity in the Context of Roman Religious Diversity

Read: Burns & Jensen, 1-44 (posted to Chalk).

Week 3

Day 1: Schismatic Violence within Christianity I: Donatism & Guerrilla Action

Read: Burns & Jensen, 45-60; Augustine, 128-157 (both posted to Chalk).

Day 2: Schismatic Violence within Christianity II: Imperial Intervention

Read: Augustine, 158-204 (posted to Chalk).

Week 4

Day 1: Jews & Christians in North Africa

Read: Fredriksen, "Prologue;" Nirenberg, "Slay Them Not" (both posted to Chalk).

Day 2: Arian 'Vandalism'

Read: Conant, 19-65 (posted to Chalk).

UNIT II—The Arrival of Islam

Week 5

Day 1: Understanding the Maghreb

Read: Abun-Nasr, 1-25.

Day 2: The First North African Muslim Communities

Read: Abun-Nasr, 26-36; Naylor, 57-88.

Friday: First Papers Due

Week 6

Day 1: Center & Periphery I: the Kharijite Rebellion against the Caliphate

Read: Abun-Nasr, 37-70.

Day 2: Center & Periphery II: 'Arabs' and 'Berbers'

Read: Abun-Nasr, 76-117.

Week 7

Day 1: Andalus & Maghreb—Relating Religions in Spain & North Africa

Read: Abun-Nasr, 71-75, 118-143.

Day 2: Jewish Life in Medieval North Africa

Read: Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism*, 135-182; Mabrouk Mansouri, “The Image of Jews in North Africa Before the Tenth Century,” in *Jewish Culture & Society*, 45-58 (both posted to Chalk).

UNIT III—Colonial Power

Week 8

Day 1: European Colonialism Crosses the Mediterranean

Read: Naylor, 141-167; Clancy-Smith, Ch. 1.

Day 2: The Return of Christianity in French Algeria

Read: Abun-Nasr, 248-271.

Week 9

Day 1: Religion and Rights in Vichy North Africa

Read: Fayçal Cherif, “Jewish-Muslim Relations in Tunisia during WWII,” in *Jewish Culture & Society*, 305-320 (posted to Chalk); Clancy-Smith, Ch. 5.

Day 2: Algerian War of Independence I

Read: Abun-Nasr, 324-353; Crapanzano, 15-34 (posted to Chalk).

Week 10

Day 1: Algerian War of Independence II

Read: Camus, “Algeria,” in *Reflections*, 109-154 (posted to Chalk).

Day 2: Religion & Violence in Post-Colonial North Africa

Read: Naylor, 253-277; Camus, “Summer in Algiers,” in *Myth of Sisyphus*, 139-154 (posted to Chalk).

Finals Week

Monday: Final Papers Due