RELS 224/MCGS 224: Religion and America’s Ethnic Minorities

Fall 2014

Micki Lennon

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Class times: MWF 10-10:50

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Course Description:

In this course we will look at how religion has shaped ethnic identity and the ways in which ethnicity has shaped religion in American culture. We will study religious improvisation, a process by which communities and individuals respond creatively to the challenges of cultural change and their encounters with other religions and cultures. The course will explore the religions that inform America’s ethnic minorities and the historical, cultural, and social experiences and values of Native American, Latino American, African American, Muslim American and Asian American minority groups. We will pay particular attention to the following issues as they relate to religion and ethnicity: family and inter-generational tensions and conflicts; the transmission of cultural identity through art, music, clothing, food, ritual, mythology and story-telling; the meaning of place, country of origin, and nature; and broader historical and political contexts involving religious freedom and religious and racial persecution. This course is a US Diversity course and is part of the General Education Diversity Studies Pathway. This class will also address several General Education goals, including written communication, critical thinking, and sustainability.

Readings:

Required textbooks:

website. If you do want to order a physical copy the ISBN is 019533311X—it’s about $10 from Amazon. To access the free electronic version, enter the title into the library search engine or go directly to http://opac.csuchico.edu/record=b2200987~S13.

6. PDFs available online through Blackboard Learn. On certain days specified in the syllabus you need to bring these to class—you can either print these out or bring a laptop/other mobile device to access them for discussion.

7. Please note that the films in class are also considered required texts, and you will be responsible for the material covered in them on homework assignments and exams.

**Course Requirements and Grading**

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**Grading**

Grading will be on a 1000 point scale. 935 or more points, A; 895-934 points, A-; 875-894 points, B+; 835-874 points, B; 795-834 points, B-; 775-794 points, C+; 735-774 points, C; 695-734 points, C-; 675-694 points, D+; 595-674 points, D; below 595, F.

PLEASE NOTE that I will not be posting grades on Blackboard for items you submit a physical copy of (e.g. exams, the research paper). I will give you these back in class and it is your responsibility to keep track of your grades. The points on Blackboard only encompass items actually graded on Blackboard (i.e. homework assignments and quizzes).

**Explanation of Course Requirements**

1. **Attendance/Participation (10%)**

This will be a discussion-oriented course, so your attendance and participation is vital to its success. Your participation grade will be based on attendance, level of preparation for class, contributions to class discussion, and your listening skills.

I will take attendance, and I will monitor student participation. If you have an illness or another problem which will affect your ability to attend class regularly, you must let me know as soon as possible. If you miss more than three classes without a valid excuse, it will hurt your attendance grade.

Good discussions require that participants be prepared, ask questions, make contributions to the conversation, and listen attentively to others in the class. I will also take into account your participation in small-group discussion exercises as part of this grade. If you are texting, playing games on your computer, or otherwise impolite in class, this will negatively affect your participation grade.
If you regularly come in late or leave early, this will also negatively impact your participation grade. If you have a serious and compelling reason to leave class early, please let me know in advance. It is your responsibility to make sure I know you were in class if you arrive after attendance has been taken.

2. Homework (and quizzes) (40%)

There are 17 short writing assignments during the semester as well as a syllabus quiz. The purpose of these assignments is (a) to ensure that you’ve done the reading and reflected on it (b) to prepare you for class discussion as well as (c) to improve your writing, since written communication is one of the GE SLOs for the class. Every day there is a writing assignment there will be some sort of discussion in class; for these reason writing assignments must be completed before the start of class.

Writing assignments are listed in the class calendar and also by date on Blackboard under the folder “Homework assignments and quizzes.” Unless otherwise specified, they will be worth 20 points each. (There are two that are worth 30 points, because they’re a little longer). These assignments should be submitted via Blackboard, and they will generally be 1-3 paragraphs long; the assignment question will specify the length. Assignments are always due by the start of class (10 a.m.) Please upload an attachment or type directly into the submission box—don’t submit assignments in the comment box!

When I grade homework assignments, I am looking for four things: (a) Does this assignment make clear that you read the assigned material? (b) Have you attempted to answer the questions assigned? Be sure to respond to all of the questions, if there is more than one! (c) Does your response follow the rules of grammar/good writing? (d) Does your response demonstrate that you comprehended the material? You will probably not lose many (or any) points for (d) if it is clear that you have made a good-faith effort to understand the assigned reading, even if you don’t fully understand it. Please do not be tempted to find answers on Wikipedia or other websites if you don’t fully understand the readings—plagiarism may result in you failing the entire class, which is much worse than losing a point or two because you didn’t quite understand the reading.

If you submit a written assignment or a quiz late, you will receive half-credit for it—this will be true even if you are sick or have to miss class for a university-sponsored event. In both cases you should still submit the assignment online. If Blackboard goes down, email me at plennon@csuchico.edu and let me know that, and I will give the whole class an extension. Late homework can be turned in until December 12 at 5 p.m.; after that date it will not be accepted.

3. Exams (30%)

There will be two exams for the class: a midterm, on October 24, and a final exam on December 17. You will receive a study guide at least a week in advance. The exams will be a combination of multiple choice and essay questions. Exams cannot be made up except in cases of severe illness or other significant emergencies (e.g. death in the family), and you must notify me in advance if you must miss an exam for these reasons.

4. Research project (20%)

Everyone will be required to submit a 5-7 page research project on December 5. This research project may take one of two forms:
1. A family history project that traces at least two generations of your family’s history in the United States (e.g. a parent and a grandparent) and connects that personal history to broader themes of the class (such as generational conflict, assimilation, hybridity, etc), or

2. A standard research project on the role of religion in an American ethnic community (e.g. the role of the Methodist church in the Korean-American community; debates over the use of Peyote in the Native American Church; the connection between Conservative Judaism and assimilation among second-generation Jewish Americans; conflicts between shamanic treatment and medicine in the Hmong community; controversies about the concept of race in the Father Divine movement, etc.)

Specific requirements for the paper

A. Sources

1. Those writing the family history paper need a minimum of two interview sources and two research sources. By “interview sources” I mean you must interview at least two family members (or people who knew your family members), though if you have access to a family member’s letters or journals you could substitute that for an actual interview. By “research sources” I mean scholarly research sources that connect somehow to your family history. For example, if your family is Irish Catholic your research sources might be an academic book on Irish immigration to the U.S. and a scholarly journal article on Catholic practices in the 1950s.

2. Those writing the standard research paper need a minimum of 4 scholarly research sources. This would include academic books and journal articles, but not generally websites (unless it is the website for an academic publication accessed through the library database—ask Professor Lennon if you have questions). If you want to use interviews for your research paper, ask Professor Lennon. Your research paper should have some sort of thesis—that is, it should make some sort of argument. For example, your general topic might be the use of peyote in the Native American church and your argument might be that the “Employment Division v. Smith” Supreme Court case was actually a violation of the first amendment religious freedom rights of Native Americans.

B. Deadlines

1. By October 13, you need to have decided which option you are choosing and submit a proposal that includes a 1-2 sentence description of your topic and the four sources you are using. See below for an example.

2. Your papers are due by December 5. They must be 5-7 pages in length and also include a works cited page. (The works cite page doesn't count toward the page length). Please be certain to cite your sources in the text! Remember that plagiarism is grounds for failing the class. Also, please staple your paper, and don’t place it in a cover or binder when you submit it. If you turn your paper in after December 5, you will receive a 20% point deduction. The last day you can turn it in and receive any credit for it is December 12.
3. There is also an extra credit opportunity associated with the research project. You can get up to 20 points extra credit if you submit, by December 8, some sort of multimedia presentation based on your project. This could be a powerpoint with pictures connected to your project, along with text explaining the context, or it could be a short video that you make (not more than 5 minutes long, please!) Especially if you are doing a family history, this might be a part of the project you can share with your family.

Sample proposal (family history):

I will be doing a family history project talking about my paternal family’s emigration to America from Russia, focusing on two themes we’ve talked about in class: assimilation (specifically in the area of language, since my great-grandmother’s native language was Yiddish and she had to learn English) and the role of religion (discussing Judaism in my family’s life). I will interview my mother, Rebecca Roberts, and my great-uncle, Stanley Rosenbaum, and also use some of my grandmother’s letters. My two scholarly research sources will be:


Polland, Annie. “May a freethinker help a pious man? The shared world of “religious” and “secular” among eastern European Jewish immigrants to America,” American Jewish History. 93:4 (Dec 2007), 375-408.

Sample proposal (research project):

My paper will explore the way Muslim-Americans have been depicted in popular media since September 11. I will argue that despite the attempts by government officials and civic groups to educate the public about Islam, there has been a sharp increase in anti-Muslim media representation since 9/11.

Sources:


5. Extra credit opportunities: You may complete two of these—they are worth 20 points if you get full credit-- for a maximum point value of 40 points.
1. Attend Yuba City Sikh parade (weekend of Oct 31— the parade is on Nov 2) and post 1-2 pictures of the event and a two paragraph description of your experiences on Blackboard by November 10.

2. Attend a Dias de los Muertos event (weekend of Oct 31) and post 1-2 pictures of the event and a two paragraph description of your experiences on Blackboard by November 10.

3. Visit the Oroville Chinese Temple and post 1-2 pictures of the event and a two paragraph description of your experiences on Blackboard by December 8.

4. Make some sort of multimedia presentation related to your research project and post it to Blackboard by December 8.

Other information important for your success in the class:

**Academic Honesty**

Any instance of plagiarism or other academic dishonesty (e.g. cheating on exams) will result in an “F for the course and a report of academic misconduct submitted to Student Judicial Affairs. If you borrow the ideas of others in composing your written work, they must be cited; if you borrow the words of others, they must be enclosed in quotation marks and cited. If you have any doubts as to whether or not something needs to be cited, play it safe and cite it—or ask me about it. Any standard citation format (MLA, APA, etc.) is fine.

If you are having health problems or personal crises which might tempt you to plagiarize, please talk to me. In some cases, I may be able to make accommodations for your situation. Students who plagiarize on more than one occasion will be expelled from the university. In the long run, it is far better to receive a lower grade (or even a failing grade) than to jeopardize your entire academic career.

Please note that material from the internet is still someone else’s work, and must be cited appropriately! If you are unsure of how to do this properly, consult the following website: [http://www.csuchico.edu/engl/Links/style_guide.html](http://www.csuchico.edu/engl/Links/style_guide.html)

**General Guidelines for Writing Assignments**

- Students are required to keep a copy of all written assignments submitted to me, and to resubmit written work if required.
- Please submit written assignments through the appropriate Blackboard assignments tool, not through campus email or Blackboard email. Either attach your assignment (as a Word document or a pdf) or click on “Write submission” and type directly into that box. Please don’t submit your homework in the comment field!
- If you turn in an assignment via Blackboard, it automatically tells me your name and section, so you don’t need to include that information, but for any assignments you give me a written copy of (e.g. the proposal and research paper) please include your name, class and section number, and the day the assignment is due. A title page is not necessary, and please don’t submit work in folders or binders.
- All written assignments that you actually hand in to me should be typed, double-spaced, on
standard 8 1/2 by 11 paper. Margins should be one inch on all sides. Please use a 12 point font. **These must be stapled!** If you turn in an assignment in which the pages are not stapled together, I accept no responsibility for lost pages. Please do NOT turn in assignments in binders or plastic covers.

**Americans with Disabilities Act**
If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability or chronic illness, or if you need to make special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please let me know this as soon as possible (within the first two weeks of the semester). Please also contact Accessibility Resource Center (530-898-5959, Student Services Center 170, arcdept@csuchico.edu) as they are the designated department responsible for approving and coordinating reasonable accommodations and services for students with disabilities. ARC will help you understand your rights and responsibilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act and provide you further assistance with requesting and arranging accommodations.

**Class Calendar**
Note: Assignments are due on the day they are listed in the calendar. For example, the homework assignment listed next to 8/27 is due on August 27, not the class period after August 27.

Readings either will list the last name of the author of the textbook the reading can be found in, or it will say “Blackboard,” which means the reading is available as a pdf file on Blackboard under the “Readings not in textbooks” folder. Fountas means Angela Fountas, *Waking Up American*; Baldwin means James Baldwin, *Go Tell it on the Mountain*; Anaya means Rudolfo Anaya, *Bless Me Ultima*; Uchida means Yoshiko Uchida, *Desert Exile*; Mann, Numrich and Williams mean Gurinder Singh Mann, Paul David Numrich and Raymond B. Williams, *Buddhists, Hindus and Sikhs in America*.

**Unit One: Introduction to the Class**
8/25: Introduction to the class
8/27: Thinking about identity

Reading: Patricia Tumang, “(Un)American,” (Fountas 63-74); Emiene Shija Wright, “Say Something African” (Fountas, 97-106).

**Homework Assignment.** There are two assignments today:
A. For 20 points: Bring to class a recent photo of yourself (no larger than a 3 by 5 index card). You won’t get the photo back. Don’t submit this on Blackboard—I want a physical copy!
B. For 20 points, answer **both questions 1 and 2** (turn in your answers on Blackboard Learn through the “Homework assignments and quizzes” folder). This assignment is due by the start of class on August 27.
   1. Building on the exercise we did on the first day of class, write 1-2 paragraphs on aspects of your identity that are important to you. (This might be a family identity, e.g. sister, son, uncle; your membership in a religious or ethnic group, e.g. Jewish or African American; an important role you play, like teammate or student; or some other aspect of your identity, e.g. being bisexual or from another country or being a Spanish speaker or someone from a small town, etc.)
2. Tumang is a Filipina-American who studied in Africa; Wright is a Nigerian American who emigrated to the U.S. What sort of perceptions/expectations did they encounter from the people they met when they travelled to Africa and America, respectively? How did other people's expectations affect their own sense of identity?


9/3: Theory and practice: understanding concepts concerning ethnicity and race
Reading: Jenesha De Rivera, “A Lesson in Posture” (Fountas, 107-118); Maria Elena Fernandez, “Fooling Mexicans” (131-140); Monica Villavicencio, “The Hyphenated American: On Checking “Other” (Fountas, 207-214); Anne Liu Kellor, “Rising and Falling” (Fountas, 141-146).
Homework Question: Pick two of the essays for today and discuss how some of the theories from Cornell and Hartmann (or that I went over in lecture on Friday) apply—or fail to apply—to them. For example, we talked about race as a social construct—how does that connect to De Rivera’s mother and her understanding of beauty? Or we talked about ethnicity as connected to shared common descent and history; how is that complicated by people with mixed ethnic heritage, such as Villavincencio or Kellor? Your response should be about 2 paragraphs.

Unit Two: African-American Religious Experience
9/5: African Religion, Slavery and its consequences. Syllabus quiz must be completed by 11:59 p.m. tonight.
Film: This far by faith
Reading: James Baldwin, Go Tell It On the Mountain, “The Seventh Day.” (I'd recommend looking at the study guide for the novel, which is available on Blackboard under “Readings not in the textbooks,” before starting the novel).

9/8: African-American Christianity and the Pentecostal experience.
Reading: James Baldwin, Go Tell It On the Mountain, “The Prayers of the Saints” and “Florence’s Prayer.”

9/10: Go Tell It on the Mountain discussion
Reading: You must have read through the end of “Gabriel’s Prayer” by this class period.
Homework assignment: Write 1-2 paragraphs on one of the following:

1. Each character we’ve read about so far (John, Florence, Gabriel) has a conflict with at least one family member that affects their experience of religion. Select one of these characters and describe the conflict and where it seems to lead, at this point in the novel.
2. How does religion shape the lives of the characters in this novel? For example, how does it shape their behavior, their attitudes, or their expectation about the world? You can focus on one or two specific characters in responding to this.

9/12: Go Tell It On the Mountain discussion
Reading: You must have finished the novel by this class period. Note that today's homework assignment is worth 30 points rather than 20 points!
Homework: Write 2-3 paragraphs on one of the following questions:

1. Is John’s conversion inevitable? What are the forces that help produce it? In your opinion, does it constitute a surrender to his father or a triumph over his father?
2. Choose one of the conversion experiences in the novel and describe what happens in it. Does conversion work a permanent change in a person’s character? Why/why not?
3. In what ways is the religious imagination of the characters in this book—eg the way they understand God, their expectations about life, death, and suffering, etc.—shaped by their experience of being black in a predominantly white country?

9/15: The Civil Rights Movement
Film: Eyes on the Prize
Reading: James Cone, Malcolm and Martin (Blackboard)

9/17: Religion and Racism: Perspectives from Martin Luther King and Malcolm X
Reading: Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham Jail;” Excerpt from Malcolm X, Autobiography of Malcolm X; excerpt from James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time[?Maybe?]

Homework question: Write 1-2 paragraphs on ONE of the following questions:
   1. What is the message of the story of Yacub, and why do you think it was attractive to adherents of the Nation of Islam? How does this connect to the messages of Black Nationalism discussed in the Cone reading (the reading for 9/15)?
   2. What, according to MLK, was the goal of direct action? What were the 4 steps of nonviolent campaigns, and how did they apply in Birmingham? How do these nonviolent campaigns connect to the goals of Black integrationism discussed in the Cone reading (for 9/15)?
   3. Compare Malcolm X and MLK Jr’s criticisms of Christianity in the two texts you read for today. Do you think they would agree on any specific criticism?

9/19: Islam in America: The African American experience
Homework assignment: Jane Smith, Islam in the African-American Community
Lecture on African-American Islam and its differences from traditional Islam

Readings: Hasan, “Born Muslim” (available on Blackboard). Optional reading: Alan Stepick, “God is apparently not dead: the obvious, the emergent, and the still unknown in immigration and religion” (recommended mainly for people who want a little more theory about immigrant religion).

9/24: Islam and racism after 9/11

Homework question: How did American perceptions of Islam change after 9/11? What were some of the responses of the Muslim community?
9/26: Islam in America: immigrants and gender norms  
Readings: Masood, “Caught Between Worlds: A Pakistani-Muslim Adolescence in America;” (Fountas, 53-62); Hasan, “Because Islam is a woman’s religion;” (Blackboard); and Rasma Haidri, “Urdu, My Love Song,” (Fountas. 11-20).  
Homework question: Write on one of the following (1-2 paragraphs)  
1. How do American norms about women’s roles differ from some traditional Muslim ones? How do Masood and Hasan make sense of these differences?  
2. What are some of the conflicts the three authors experience, growing up as first or second-generation immigrant children? How do they try to negotiate between family or traditional cultural expectations and life in America?  

Unit Three: Asian American Religious Experience  
9/29: Issues in Immigration: The Hmong as a Case Study  
Reading: Selections from The LatehomeComer, (Blackboard)  
Lecture on Hmong history and religion  
10/1: Hmong Shamanism and funeral rituals  
Film: The Split Horn  
10/3: Discussion of Hmong religion and generational issues  
Homework question: Based on Split Horn and the two readings on the Hmong (from 9/29 and 10/1), write 1-2 paragraphs on one of the following:  
1. What is the role of the shaman in Hmong culture? How is that role being challenged among immigrant communities in America?  
2. What sort of generational conflict seems to exist between parents or grandparents and their children, in the examples of Hmong life in the readings and film?  
3. How do Hmong funerals and their understanding about life, death, and the afterlife seem to differ from American understandings?  
Please bring the 2 readings on the Hmong to class today, either printed out or on a laptop.  
10/6: Hinduism in America  
Reading: Chapters 4 and 6 of Buddhists, Hindus and Sikhs in America  
10/8: Hinduism in America: Cultural Change and Adaptation  
Reading: Chapter 5 of Buddhists, Hindus and Sikhs in America; Sona Pai, “Under the Mandap” (Fountas, 119-130).  
Homework question: What are some of the ways that Hindu religious practice (e.g. religious rituals or temples) have changed in America?  
10/10: Sikhism in America  
Reading: Chapters 7 and 9 of Buddhists, Hindus and Sikhs in America
10/13: Buddhism in America: Chinese and Japanese experiences. **Research project proposals due today.**
Reading: Chapters 1 and 2 of *Buddhists, Hindus and Sikhs in America*

10/15: Chinese and Japanese Experiences in America
Film: Chinatown
Reading: Desert Exile, chapters 1-3

10/17: The Japanese Internment Experience
Reading: Desert Exile, chapters 4-6
**Homework question:** According to *Desert Exile*, what were the justifications for the Japanese internment, according to the U.S. government? What were the conditions like in the Tanforan camp?
Film: Excerpts from *Rabbit in the Moon*

10/20: Desert Exile discussion
Reading: Desert Exile, chapters 7-epilogue. Optional reading: David Yoo, “A Religious History of Japanese Americans in California” (Blackboard—recommended mainly for people interested in religious variety among Japanese immigrants)
**Homework question:** Based on the film and the readings from *Desert Exile*, what impact did the internment experience have on the Japanese American community?

10/22: Wrapup/review

10/24: Midterm

**Unit Four: Chicano/Latino Religious Experience**

10/27: Mexican Catholicism
Reading: Look at the study guide for *Bless Me Ultima* on Blackboard, which includes translations for many of the Spanish phrases.

10/29: Bless Me Ultima
Reading: Bless Me Ultima, chapters uno (1)-seis (6)
Film: Bless Me Ultima

11/1: Bless Me Ultima
Reading: Bless Me Ultima, chapters siete (7)-once (11)
Film: Bless Me Ultima

11/3: Bless Me Ultima
Reading: Bless Me Ultima, chapters doce (12)-diecisiete (17)
Film: Bless Me Ultima
**Homework question:** Write 1-2 paragraphs on one of the following:
1. What are the values of the Marez family? What are the values of the Lunas? How do they relate to the different ways of life depicted in the novel?
2. What sorts of expectations are placed on Tony by his family members and by Ultima? What conflicts do these expectations create in him? How do you think he will choose?
3. This novel is set during and immediately after WWII. How does the war affect the town and Tony’s family? How does it affect his brothers and their relationship with his parents?

11/5: Bless Me Ultima
Reading: Bless Me Ultima, chapters Diecocho (18)-veintidos (22)

Homework question: write 2-3 paragraphs on ONE of the following questions. Note that today’s homework assignment is worth 30 points instead of 20 points!

1. How would you describe Ultima? What can you say about her spiritual life? What is her relationship to Catholicism? What seem to be her most important values?
2. The theme of Tony’s “loss of innocence” looms large in this novel. Do you think he does, in fact, lose his innocence, or not? If he does, what event or events causes this? If not, why not?
3. How does Tony imagine God, the Virgin Mary and the Golden Carp in the novel? How does he describe them? What are the costs of being a follower of one (or more) of them?
4. Why do you think the film left out the entire plotline about the Golden Carp? Does that affect your reading of Florence’s death? Do you think Florence’s death (either in the film or in the novel) was supposed to symbolize something, and if so, what?

11/7: The Day of the dead
Film: La Ofrenda

11/10: Religious syncretism and hybridity

Homework question: Write on ONE of the following questions:

1. What are some of the traditional practices associated with the Mexican Days of the Dead? Do any of these seem to involve blending of two or more religious traditions?
2. What are some of the religious beliefs and practices of Lisa Swanstrom’s family members? How do they blend elements of Christianity with those of other religions? What similarities do their beliefs have to those described in Bless Me Ultima?

Unit Five: Native American/ American Indian Religious Experience
11/12: Indigenous religion in America

11/14: Case study in Native American religion: Lakota religion
Reading: Ella Deloria, excerpts from Waterlily (Blackboard)
11/17: Cultural Conflict: the Lakota and the Ghost Dance Movement
Reading: Joel Martin, “New Religions in the West,” (Blackboard)
Film: Ghost Dance (from The West)

11/19: Native American experience and resistance
Reading: Selections from Mary Crow Dog, Lakota Woman (Blackboard)
Homework question: Write 1-2 paragraphs about the following: What does Mary Crow Dog have to say about the goals and early actions of AIM (the American Indian Movement)? In what way was it a spiritual movement?

11/21: Cultural conflict: what counts as religion? The debate over sacred land
Reading: Winona LaDuke, “Introduction” from All Our Relations (Blackboard)
Film: In the Light of Reverence

12/1: The debate over American Indian sacred lands
Homework question: Based on “In the Light of Reverence” and the Deloria essay, how are Native American concepts of holy places similar to/different from Judeo-Christian concepts of sacred places? How do the differences affect Amerindian religious freedom?

12/3: California Indians

Film: Dancing the Salmon Home

12/8: The Wintu and the Salmon
Reading: “Winnemem Wintu: Recent Controversies”
Homework question: What is the relationship between the Wintu and the salmon? Why did the Wintu go on the journey to New Zealand?

12/10: Religion and America’s ethnic minorities: final reflections

12/12: Review for final exam

12/17: Final exam in the regular classroom at 10 a.m.

Please note that this calendar is subject to revision if necessary!