



The cornerstone of the Assyrian Orthodox Church of Virgin Mary Paramus, NJ. ca1960.

RELS 3100 /6100

Orthodox America

an SNF Paideia designated course

Fall 2023 | Tuesday 1:45pm – 4:30pm | Place: Kislak Center 625

Professor: Reyhan Durmaz | rdurmaz@upenn.edu
Office Hours: Thursday 11am–1pm, Claudia Cohen Hall 230

Course Description

This seminar surveys the rich history of Orthodox Christian communities in North America from the 19th century to now. In this period, Orthodox Christians immigrating from the Middle East, eastern Europe, Russia, Armenia, Ethiopia, and elsewhere, have contributed significantly to America's religious, political, legal, literary, and material landscapes. However, their stories are overlooked in the often Protestant-centric narratives of the history of religion in America. Through the lenses of post-colonialism, immigration and diaspora, gender, media, and religious studies, this course surveys the literature, art, material culture, and religious practice of Orthodox Christian communities in North America.

The classes will consist of robust study of primary sources, discussing scholarly works with theoretical, historical, and ethnographic approach, and analyses of representations of Orthodox Christians in social media and popular culture. We will also visit museums and churches and explore the archives at the Kislak Center and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

This course is part of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF) Paideia Program, which serves as a hub for dialogue in undergraduate education at Penn. SNF Paideia designated courses integrate students' personal, professional, and civic development through "dialogue across difference" – i.e., engaging with diverse ideas and people for the purposes of mutual understanding, collective problem solving, and individual and community wellness. Engage further with Paideia's mission to "educate the whole person" at <https://snfpaideia.upenn.edu>.

Course Goals and Objectives

By the end of this course, you will:

- Learn about the history of immigration to the USA
- Have a good grasp of the history of the various Orthodox Christian communities in America
- Learn about the various archival sources and critical scholarly literature related to the history of Orthodox Christians in America
- Develop a nuanced understanding of the relationship between religion and race
- Be able to articulate the gaps in the Protestant-centric narratives of the history of Christianity in America
- Appreciate the religious diversity in American history
- Develop skills to articulate and debate the various issues related to the diaspora communities and religious minorities in the USA

Class Meetings

The classes will meet either at the Kislak Center Room 625 or at the [Historical Society of Pennsylvania](#) on 1300 Locust St. Note that we will have a field trip to New York instead of one of the class meetings.

Most classes will consist of the discussion of the assigned material based on your reading responses submitted prior to the meeting. I may summarize the readings and give a brief lecture for background, but the overall learning that happens in the classroom will depend on your participation. Some weeks we will have the author of the readings join us for discussion.

In the two weeks in which we meet at the HSP, there will be no readings. We will explore a variety of sources together at the HSP, including epitaphs, church council minutes, legal documents, photograph collections, among others. You will pick one archival source from these visits and write a report about it. More on this assignment below.

Assessment

Attendance and participation %20
Weekly reading responses %20
Archive report %15
Abstract and bibliography for the final project %10
Final presentation %20
Final project %15

- Active participation is key in this course. You do not need any special skills or prior knowledge for the discussions; completing the readings and analytically reflecting on them is enough. Please note that while you are encouraged to bring your personal experiences and participate in discussions with enthusiasm and passion, you, me, and our guest speakers are all expected to be respectful, thoughtful, and compassionate in our engagements with one another. There is no place for dismissive and unrespectful language, insults, and other forms of expressions that will be detrimental to the dialogue we are trying to create.
- The weekly responses are due Monday before class, to be uploaded on Canvas. These responses should include 2 or 3 well informed questions based on your careful reading of the assigned material. We will begin the classes with these questions you've submitted the day before. Note that on the weeks we visit an archive or museum, you don't need to submit a response.
- You will pick one of the sources we explored at the HSP and write a **report** on it. Briefly introduce the source, comment on its importance, and give a short bibliography. You can think about this as a blog post written for a public audience. Due **November 26**.
- You will submit an **abstract and bibliography** explaining your final project, research question(s) with a 10-item bibliography in the second half of the term.
- In the final class (**December 5**), you will present your final project. This will be a 20-minute presentation followed by a discussion.
- Your final project can be an academic paper, an exhibition, an ethnographic work, or any other project exploring Orthodox Christians in America past or present. The final version of this project is due **December 18**.

Grade Scale

98-100:A+	87-89: B+	77-79: C+	67-69: D+
94-97: A	83-86: B	73-76: C	63-66: D
90-93: A-	80-82: B-	70-72: C-	60-62: D-

Statement on Inclusion and Diversity in the Classroom

University of Pennsylvania considers the diversity of its students, faculty, and staff to be a strength and critical to its educational mission. Accordingly, all participants in this course are expected to contribute proactively and constructively toward creating an inclusive and respectful climate for everyone involved, both inside and outside of the classroom space. Dimensions of diversity can include sex, race, age, national origin, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, intellectual and physical ability, sexual orientation, income, faith and non-faith perspectives, socio-economic class, political ideology, education, primary language, family status, military experience, cognitive style, and communication style. As part of our shared academic endeavor as a community of scholars, it is essential that we honor the intersection of these experiences and characteristics as a core value. In this context, please note that Title IX specifically prohibits sex discrimination, including sexual misconduct, violence, harassment, and retaliation. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you can find confidential resources and information concerning reporting options at <https://www.diversity.upenn.edu>. In this context, this course is also firmly committed to supporting the work of the Office of Student Disabilities Services, which aims to “ensure equal access to all University programs activities and services.” For further information and resources, see <https://www.vpul.upenn.edu>. If you need to request academic accommodations, feel free to speak with me after class, during office hours, or via email. For all participants in this course, the cultivation of the classroom as a healthy, equitable, and inclusive workspace is the topmost priority.

Statement on Academic Integrity

Students are expected to adhere to the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity in this course. The Pennbook contains our Code of Academic Integrity. These standards include the responsible use and citation of sources, as well as robust intellectual engagement with others in the academic conversations fostered by the course. For more information, see: <https://catalog.upenn.edu/pennbook/code-of-academic-integrity/>

Schedule and Weekly Readings

All readings will be available on Canvas or linked to online sources.

Week 1	Introduction: Religion and the World’s Religions in America
Aug 29	Edward Siecienski, <i>Orthodox Christianity: A Very Short Introduction</i>
Kislak Room625	Brent Nongbri, <i>Before Religion</i>
	<i>Recommended: Tomoko Masuzawa, Invention of World’s Religions</i>
	No reading responses this week

Week 2

Race and religion in America I

Sep 5

Anthea Butler, *White Evangelical Racism*

**Kislak
Room625**

Chapters from: Elliot Robert Barkan, ed., *Making It in America*

Week 3

Race and religion in America II

Sep 12

Guest scholar: [Elena Kravchenko](#), Washington University in St. Louis

Elena Kravchenko, "The matter of race," *JAAR*

**Kislak
Room625**

Elena Kravchenko, "Black Orthodox 'visual piety,'" *Journal of Africana Religions*

Week 4

Negotiating race and whiteness

Sep 19

Chapters from: Sarah Gualtieri, *Becoming White*

Chapters from: Alixa Naff, *Becoming American*

**Kislak
Room625**

Reyhan Durmaz, "Religion, race, and letterpress," *JAAR*

Recommended:

George Kiraz, *Syrian Orthodox in America*; Linda Jacobs, *Strangers in the West*

Week 5

Orientalism and heritage

Sep 26

Chapters from: Jay Price, *Wichita's Lebanese Heritage*

**Kislak
Room625**

Matthew Stiffler, "Consuming orientalism," *Mashriq & Mahjar*

Week 6

Historical Society of Pennsylvania Archives

Oct 3

** No response papers this week**

Martyrdom

Week 7

Guest scholar: [Candace Lukasik](#), Mississippi State University

Oct 10

Candace Lukasik, "[Religious publicity and transnational minority politics](#)," *The Immanent Frame*

**Kislak
Room625**

Candace Lukasik, "Postcolonial solidarities," *JES*

Candace Lukasik, "[American politics of Coptic martyrdom](#)," Chicago Divinity School

Oct 12 – 15 Fall Term Break

Democracy

Week 8

Chapters from: G. Demacopoulos and D. Dzalto, eds., *Orthodoxy and Fundamentalism*

Oct 17

Chapters from: G. Demacopoulos and A. Papanikolaou, eds., *Christianity, Democracy, and the Shadow of Constantine*

**Kislak
Room625**

Trey Popp, "[The American Byzantine](#)"

Recommended:

Alexander Kitroeff, *The Greek Orthodox Church in America*

Week 9

Gender and Orthodox Christianity

Guest scholar: [Sarah Riccardi-Swartz](#), Northeastern University

Oct 24

Chapters from: Sarah Riccardi-Swartz, *Between Heaven and Russia*.

**Kislak
Room625**

Sarah Riccardi-Swartz, "Head coverings, vaccines, and gender politics," in *Women and Religiosity in Orthodox Christianity*, ed. I. Merdjanova (2021), pp.241–274.

Week 10

NYC trip [Arrangements in progress, the date for this trip might change]

Oct 31

****No reading responses this week****

Week 11 **Historical Society of Pennsylvania Archives**

Nov 7 ****No reading responses this week****

Week 12

Memory and community

Nov 14

Chapters from: Richard Hovannisian, ed., *The Armenian Genocide*

**Kislak
Room625**

Harry Kezelian, "[Racine community celebrates century of roots in Midwest.](#)"

Week 13 **Class cancelled for SBL/AAR**

Nov 21 **Work on your archive reports (due Nov. 26)**

Nov 23–26 Thanksgiving Break

Week 14

Making home

Nov 28

Chapters from: Solomon Addis Getahun, *The History of Ethiopian Immigrants and Refugees in America*

**Kislak
Room625**

Week 15

Dec 5

Final presentations

**Kislak
Room625**