

HINDUISM IN AMERICA
CAS RN 313/RN 313 HP/RN 611

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Description

This course explores the transplantation and transformation of the ideas, institutions, and practices of Hinduism in the United States. We will attend to the ways that Asian Americans and European Americans alike have adapted Hinduism to American circumstances and, in the process, changed the course of American religious history and even the history of Hinduism itself. Emphasis on close readings of primary sources, including memoirs of converts, autobiographies of gurus, Supreme Court cases, and the controversial literature of “anti-cult” critics. Themes include: Americanization, creolization, and pluralism.

Requirements

1. Class participation: 10%
2. Site Visit, Written Report, and In-Class Presentation: 10%.
Visit a Boston-area Hindu (or Hindu-influenced) site. (For suggested sites, see “World Religions in Boston” (<http://www.pluralism.org/wrb.html>). Write a report (3 double-spaced, typed pages) regarding the site and your experiences there. Analyze, as best as you can, the community (demographics, such as gender, age, race, ethnicity), practices, beliefs, architecture, and location. Describe your impressions of the people, their place, and their activities. Then analyze your impressions. How did these people and their place meet your expectations? Frustrate them? Written report **due on April 12** at the beginning of class (2 p.m.). In-class presentation of your site and your experiences (presentation of approximately 10 minutes) are scheduled on the syllabus below.
3. Two book reviews (15% each). Choose from two of the following three options: Jackson, *Vedanta in the West* (**due on February 8** at the beginning of class); and/or Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Swami* (**due on February 27** at the beginning of class); and/or Muster, *Betrayal of the Spirit* (**due on March 27** at the beginning of class).
4. Contribution to our Web site on American Hinduism (details to be announced) (25%).
5. Final take-home essay examination (**due on May 8**) (25%).

Late Papers/Makeup Exam Policy

Exams will not be rescheduled. Papers are due at the beginning of class on the due date. Papers *may* be handed in late, but late papers will be marked down **one half grade** for each day or portion thereof they are late. (No excuses necessary.) **Plagiarism** will not be tolerated. See Boston University's academic conduct handbook.

Required Texts

- Thomas A. Tweed and Stephen Prothero, *Asian Religions in America: A Documentary History* (Oxford University Press, 1998). (Abbreviated here as TP.)
- Carl T. Jackson, *Vedanta for the West: The Ramakrishna Movement in the United States* (Indiana University Press, 1994).
- Paramahansa Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi* (Self-Realization Fellowship, 1979).
- Nora J. Muster, *Betrayal of the Spirit: My Life Behind the Headlines of the Hare Krishna Movement* (University of Illinois Press, 1996).
- J. Isamu Yamamoto, *Hinduism, TM & Hare Krishna* (Zondervan, 1998)
- Ed Viswanathan, *Am I a Hindu? The Hinduism Primer* (Halo Books, 1992)
- Course Packet (CP).

Internet Resources

- Hinduism Today* (<http://www.hinduismtoday.com>)
- American Hindus Against Defamation (AHAD) (<http://www.hindunet.org/ahad>)
- Hindu Web Universe (<http://www.hinduweb.org>)
- Beliefnet (<http://www.beliefnet.com>)

INTRODUCTION

- Jan 16 Introduction: The United States and East/West Encounters
- Jan 18 Introduction: Basic Hinduism
Reading: Ed Viswanathan, *Am I a Hindu?*
- Jan 23 Introduction: Basic Hinduism
Reading: Ed Viswanathan, *Am I a Hindu?*
- Jan 25 Madonna, Yoga, and Pop Hinduism
Reading: Review AHAD Web Site (<http://www.hindunet.org/ahad>).
Assignment/Discussion: Bring to class one example of Hinduism in American popular culture (art, advertisement, music, TV, etc.). Is this use of Hindu symbols, terms, divinities a good or a bad thing? Why?

ENCOUNTERS: LITERARY AND INTERPERSONAL

- Jan 30 Face-to-Face Encounters Abroad: Missionaries and Travelers
Reading: "Orientations, 1784 to 1840," in TP, 25-27; Amasa Delano, *A Narrative of Voyages and Travels* (1817) in TP, 29-32; *Christian Disciple*, "An Account of the Sikhs in India" (1814) in TP, 32-35; Joseph Priestley, *A Comparison of the Institutions of Moses with Those of the Hindoos and other Ancient Nations* (1799) in TP, 44-48; "John Adams to Thomas Jefferson" (1813-14), in TP, 48-51;
- Feb 1 Literary Encounters: Unitarians and Transcendentalists Romance the Orient

Reading: “Encounters, 1840-1924” in TP, 61-65; Hannah Adams, *A Dictionary of All Religions* (1817) in TP, 54-57; Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Brahma” and “Plato” (1857, 1850) in TP, 92-95; Henry David Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849) in TP, 95-98.

Feb 6 Pioneers in American Hinduism: The Vedanta Society
Reading: Carl T. Jackson, *Vedanta in the West*

Feb 8 Pioneers in American Hinduism: The Vedanta Society
Reading: Carl T. Jackson, *Vedanta in the West*
**** Book Review Due at Beginning of Class ****

ASIAN INDIAN IMMIGRATION: THE FIRST WAVE (1900-1924)

Feb 13 Asian Indian Immigration and its Discontents
Reading: Saint Nihal Singh, “The Picturesque Immigrant from India's Coral Strand” (1909) in TP, 82-86; *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* (1923) in TP, 88-91; Asian Exclusion Act (1924) in TP, 163-64

Feb 15 Mother India’s Scandalous Swamis
Reading: Mersene Sloan, *The Indian Menace* (1929) in TP, 212-215; selected newspaper articles regarding the Ole Bull case of 1911 (CP).

Feb 20 **** NO CLASS** (Monday schedule meets instead because of Monday holiday)

Feb 22 Pioneers in American Hinduism: Yogananda and the Self-Realization Fellowship
Reading: “Exclusion, 1924 to 1965” in TP, 159-62; Paramahansa Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi* (1946).

Feb 27 Pioneers in American Hinduism: Yogananda and the Self-Realization Fellowship
Reading: Paramahansa Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi* (1946).
**** Book Review Due at Beginning of Class ****

Mar 1 The Oriental Christ
Reading: Swami Paramananda, *Christ and Oriental Ideals* (1923) in TP, 86-88; Stephen Prothero, “The Oriental Christ” (CP).

**** SPRING BREAK (March 3-11) ****

ASIAN INDIAN IMMIGRATION: THE SECOND WAVE (1965-present)

EXPORT HINDUISM

- Mar 13 Hinduism for the Counterculture: Transcendental Meditation (TM), the Hare Krishnas (ISKCON), Ram Dass, and Sai Baba
Reading: A TM Catechism” (1975) in TP, 241-44; “The Beatles and A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada Search for Liberation” (1981), in TP, 244-48; Ram Dass, *The Only Dance There Is* (1974) in TP, 235-40; Elsie Cowan, “Sai Baba and the Resurrection of Walter Cowan” (1976) in TP, 257-60.
- Mar 15 African-American Hinduism: The Case of Alice Coltrane
- Mar 20 Christian Critiques of Hinduism (and a Hindu Response)
Reading: J. Isamu Yamamoto, et al, *Hinduism, TM, and Hare Krishna* (1998); “A Contrast of Convictions,” in TP, 304-306.
- Mar 22 ISKCON Criticized
Reading: Nora Muster, *Betrayal of the Spirit*
- Mar 27 ISKCON Criticized
Reading: Nora Muster, *Betrayal of the Spirit* (continued)
**** Book Review Due at Beginning of Class ****
- Mar 29 Indian Religions and the Law
Reading: Chief Justice William Rehnquist, “The Krishna Religion” (1992) in TP, 383-85; “Sikh Kirpans in the Public Schools” (1994) in TP, 385-87.

IMMIGRANT HINDUISM

- Apr 3 Hindu Temples in the United States: Adaptation and Accommodation
Reading: Joanne Wagnorne, “The Hindu Gods in a Split-level World: The Sri Siva-Vishnu Temple in Suburban Washington, D.C.,” in Robert Orsi, ed., *Gods of the City* (Indiana University Press, 1999); Anand Mohan, “The Pilgrimage” (1994) in TP, 289-94; “Rituals at Sri Venkateswara Temple” (1995) in TP, 294-99; Sri Ganesha Temple, Nashville, “Recounting History and Nurturing Youth (1985-95) in TP, 299-303.
- Apr 5 Recent Asian Indian Immigration and Identity Politics
Reading: “Passages, 1965 to the Present,” in TP, 223-27; Prema Kurien, “Becoming American by Becoming Hindu: Indian Americans Take Their Place at the Multicultural Table,” in R. Stephen Warner and Judith G. Wittner, *Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious Communities and the New Immigration* (CP)
- Apr 10 The Swaminarayan Movement and Indian Transnationalism

- Reading:** Raymond Brady Williams, “Transnational Growth of Swaminarayan Hinduism” (CP).
- Apr 12 Issues in American Hinduism: The Hindu Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism: Silicon Valley Hindus
Discussion Question: According to the *Washington Times*, the 300,000 Indian Americans living in the Silicon Valley take home \$60 billion annually. They also hold down roughly 40 per cent of the high-tech jobs there and have started some of its most successful new businesses. Why in your view are Indian Americans so successful in the New Economy? Is their religion central to their success? Are Asian Indians the “model minority”? To prepare for this meeting, you must research this topic (on the Internet and/or via Lexus/Nexus) and come to class prepared to discuss it.
- Apr 17 Issues in American Hinduism: Guru Scandals
Discussion Question: Consider the cases of Rajneesh, Sai Baba, and Swami Muktananda. All were accused of violating the trust of their students. Are these just trumped up charges invented by an anti-Hindu media? Or are these teachers actually guilty of exploiting their students financially and sexually? To prepare for this meeting, you must research at least one of these cases (on the Internet and/or via Lexus/Nexus) on the Internet and come to class prepared to discuss it.
- Apr 19 Issues in American Hinduism: Americanization and Intergenerational Conflict
Discussion Question: Older and younger Hindus in the United States do not always see eye-to-eye. Frequently they disagree about a variety of matters--language, clothing, diet, and gender relations--that also vexed Catholic and Jewish immigrants in the nineteenth century. What in your view are the key “flashpoints” for conflict and compromise between older generations of Hindu Americans and the younger generations?
- Apr 24 Web work
- Apr 26 Web work
- May 1 Conclusion