



Annual Fellows Seminar 2013-2014

Global Early Modern Studies

Co-organizers: Lisa Pon, Associate Professor, Art History, and Kathleen Wellman, Professor and Chair, History

Description

The terms "global" and "early modern" both already provide a conceptual and historiographical framework for reimagining the period between 1400 and 1800 throughout the world. "Global" at once draws together scholarship traditionally focused along (at times later) national boundaries and emphasizes local, regional and transregional confluences along more fluid economic, religious, and political lines. Similarly, "early modern" encompasses the chronological span from 1400 to 1800, including the Renaissance, Scientific Revolution, Baroque, and Enlightenment—all specific areas of inquiry susceptible to interdisciplinary methods and global dimensions. Recent studies engage a variety of provocative themes: religious negotiation and conflicts on a global scale; the crisis of conscience provoked by European exposure to other civilizations; the development of new systems of knowledge through experimentation, collection, and classification of the natural and fabricated world; reciprocal cultural, material, and intellectual exchanges and influences; and the adaptative mutual encounters between different cultures.

One of the goals of the seminar is to enrich the global dimension of each scholar's own pursuits, while the seminar will cultivate a collective understanding of the impact of global research on the broader concerns of scholarship on the early modern period, it will also enhance each scholar's individual progress towards his or her own further research and publication. This cross-disciplinary seminar will also create a collegial group of astute readers and critics. Thus the seminar will lay a foundation of collaborative interdisciplinary work for years to come among a group of scholars with common interests who are primed for a productive synergy in teaching and research.

Seminar Participants/Fellows

- Edward Countryman, Department of History, Dedman College
- Rubén Sánchez Godoy, World Languages
- Gretchen Smith, Division of Theater, Meadows School of the Arts
- Bethany Williamson, Ph.D. Candidate, Department of English
- Alicia Zuese, World Languages

Religion and American Public Life: The Challenge of Pluralism

Co-organizers: Matthew Wilson, Associate Professor of Political Science and Mark Chancey, Professor of Religious Studies

Description

American society has always been marked by a paradox: we have one of the world's oldest and strictest institutional separations of church and state, but also a level of national piety and religious influence in public life almost unparalleled among affluent democratic societies. We live in a society where professed religious belief is widespread, but specific manifestations of that belief have always been diverse and are becoming even more so. Our seminar will examine these tensions, both as they have been resolved over time and as they continue to play out today, considering questions such as:

Can we simultaneously accommodate the widespread desires, expressed continually by majorities in public opinion surveys, for religious freedom and non-discrimination and for a robust role of religion in our public life?

What effects have demographic shifts had on our nation's approach to religious questions?

Is it possible always to protect both of the principles outlined in the First Amendment, non-establishment of religion and free exercise of religion? If not, which should take precedence under what circumstances?

Such questions are especially timely in light of the fact that 2013 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Supreme Court's landmark but controversial decision in *Abington School District v. Schempp*, which found Bible-reading and group prayer in public schools to be unconstitutional. They are also given heightened impetus by the ongoing debate over the contraception coverage mandate in the recent health care reform law.

Seminar Participants/Fellows

- Kate Engel, Department of Religious Studies, Dedman College
- Brian Franklin, Associate Director of the Center for Presidential History
- Rita Kirk, Communication Studies and Director of the Maguire Center for Ethics and Public Responsibility
- Joshua Mauldin, PhD. Candidate, Theology and Religious Studies
- Ben Voth, Communication Studies, Meadows School of the Arts