Early in January, the Religion department hosted a lunch to welcome back students and faculty for the new term, and to reflect together on how religion matters in international work, both in and after college. The event showcased junior religion majors, who reflected on how their recent study-abroad experiences made them think in new ways about religion, as well as two recent alums, who spoke about their international work after college and its connection to their current careers in politics, housing, and health-care advocacy.

**Claire Rostov '17** talked about her **semester in Jerusalem** and shared her observations on the ways in which sacred places have the ability to shape a region’s politics. She reflected on the variety and diversity of sacred spaces in Jerusalem and their influence on the contradictory political motives that operate within the city. **Gus Leinbach '17** shared his experiences in **Shanghai** with the Alliance for Global Education, where he studied Mandarin Chinese and the sociology of Urban China. According to Gus, both his classes and his travels within China alerted him to the religious diversity in the country, and how the syncretism that characterizes Buddhism and Taoism brings schemes of religious categorization into question. **Nick Lorenz '17** reflected on how his study at the Arabic Language Institute in **Fes, Morocco**, deepened his understanding of the practice and texture of Islam as it is lived by a variety of people in the places he lived and visited, while **Connor Rechtzigel '17** spoke about his work in anthropology and politics in the SIT Arts, Religion, and Social Change program in **Indonesia**.

The event also featured Skype presentations by two religion major alumni, **Amanda Otero '09** and **Micah Lemons '06**, who spoke about the value of the religion major for their careers in international and domestic non-profit work after college. Immediately after college, Otero worked for 5 years at an international non-profit in Nicaragua, focusing on youth education related to values and gender awareness, and also working with communities experiencing poverty and violence. She now works at TakeAction MN, a non-profit working with local communities on health-care issues. After doing the Peace Corps in Kazakhstan, Lemons attended law school and has now had a long career in housing policy and housing rights, first working with a Veteran’s Organization and now for the Housing and Urban Development Office in Washington, D.C.

**ON FEB. 25th, Professor Noah Salomon delivered the Grimke Lecture sponsored by Carleton’s African/African American Studies program.** He focused on Sudan’s experiments with the ideal of an Islamic state. Here is an abstract: “Can the problems that the political ideal of the Islamic state raises be transcended, either in terms of its coherence as an Islamic political project or its difficult fit with international human rights norms? In the second decade of the 21st century, Sudanese intellectuals and average folk alike are asking this question after a lengthy period of experimenting with such a political form. This talk traces two distinct attempts to escape the quagmires of Sudan's Islamic state project: one, Sudanese students who have left Sudan's Islamic state to join ISIS, a political movement that rejects the modern nation-state as a container for Islamic political ambitions; and, two, South Sudan's attempt to escape the human rights challenges of the Islamic state through secession and the establishment of a secular polity. While the first group tries to escape the political form of the state and the compromises to its vision of Islam it requires, the second tries to escape the state’s religious character as a means of fulfilling political equality. This lecture explores the reasons for the difficulties each has experienced in achieving either goal.”
On February 25th, 2016, Ruth Vanita, Professor of Liberal Studies at the University of Montana, delivered the annual Lindesmith Lecture in South Asian Studies, titled "Courtesans and Hindu-Muslim Syncretism in Bombay Cinema." Professor Vanita began her talk with an introduction to the figure of the courtesan in Hindu cinema and the important influence the courtesan had on the erotic, political and religious imagination of the Indian public. She described how these highly educated courtesans who were accomplished women living in matrilineal communities made up some of the most physically mobile groups in 19th century India, allowing them access to different cultural and religious realms.

Professor Vanita then went on to talk about the notion of Hindu-Muslim syncretism in courtesan centered films by outlining the various ways in which syncretism took shape, both on-screen and off-screen. She noted how Sufi shrines were a location for syncretism in the movies, as these were the locations in which courtesans often performed. Professor Vanita also remarked on the Indo-Persian clothing that the courtesans wore, allowing them to keep their religious identity ambiguous for both the viewers. Finally, she mentioned how syncretism extended behind the scenes with Muslim poets writing Hindu devotional hymns for the movies, allowing a “blending” of religions to occur before the movie even began.

After her talk, Professor Vanita took questions from the audience, addressing the connections between the courtesan and the figure of the “item girl” that dominates modern Indian cinema, and she spoke about how her inspiration for the project came from identifying courtesan voices in Urdu poetry.

On February 6, Professor Lori Pearson led a discussion on “At the River I Stand,” a documentary about the sanitation workers strike in Memphis, TN in 1968 that became a central moment in the civil rights movement in the months leading up to Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination and the launching of the poor people’s campaign. Professor Pearson chose this documentary for her “Liberation Theology” class to touch upon the important issues that can be addressed both within a liberal arts college community, and in the context of the larger society. According to Professor Pearson, “At the River I Stand” shows, among other things, the grassroots nature of the civil rights movement, and the multiple voices and styles of leadership, activism and engagement that it included. It also provides, according to her, an important corrective to the sanitized and palatable image of Martin Luther King, Jr. that de-radicalizes him and serves ultimately, to keep white Americans from confronting more uncomfortable truths about the country’s history.

Professor Pearson explained how Martin Luther King, Jr. in this documentary, is a thorough-going critic of white supremacy and a controversial figure who is targeted and attacked by mainstream institutions such as the press, city councils, and national governing bodies. She also stressed the role of religion in the documentary and stated that the presence of religion in relation to struggles for and against social change is the principle theme that intersects with the issues that are central to her class.
The 2016 lecture in the Ian Barbour Lecture series was delivered by Eddie Glaude Jr., Princeton University Professor of Religion and African-American studies, and author of *Democracy in Black: How Race Still Enslaves the American Soul*. Glaude’s book has already been heralded as “a landmark book on race in America” especially in light of current national debates about police brutality, the Black Lives Matter movement, the Voting Rights Act, and economic inequality. His analysis focuses on values about race in America, and the subtle habits that shape each person’s choices and actions in regard to race.

Glaude prefaced his lecture by stating that American society is currently in a “crisis of the imagination” that is causing people to lose their ability to recognize possibility and exercise empathy, making it impossible for them to understand one another. Creative imagination for Glaude, is a form of renewal and direction, and is the ground for revolutionary possibilities. Once this was established, Glaude went on to explain the concept of the “value-gap,” which is central to the arguments in his book. He defined the value gap as the fundamental belief that white people are more valuable than black people and explained how this sensibility affects the opportunities for black people in all spheres of society, be it law, education, economics, or politics. The practices informed by the value gap for Glaude, influence not only how society is organized, but also whom/what it values the most.

Glaude asserted that the value gap is held in place by the habits of the American people that are sustained by fear. He was quick to remind the audience, however, that these habits are practiced by everyone and are not exclusive to white people. According to Glaude, the only way to break away from these habits is through a revolution of value in which the American people confront the “ugliness” of who they are, face the fears that sustain their habits, and step outside their comfort zones. He maintained that this revolution would require American citizens to reevaluate their demands of the government, reconfigure their perceptions of black people, and critically question what they value in society and what this ultimately means. For Glaude, the revolution of value is based on the foundations of possibility and empathy and is in essence, the political work of the imagination in appealing to our deepest fears and demanding change.

Glaude then engaged the audience in an open conversation in which members asked him questions about the gendered nature of violence and the role of politics in sustaining the value gap. When asked about the role of religion in his analysis, Glaude explained that in making an ethical claim about democracy, he is subjecting it to the type of interrogation that is characteristic of religious studies. He also explained how his book explores the convergence of conservative Christianity and the value gap, and how these two factors influence each other. After taking questions, Glaude continued the conversation with students and faculty members as he signed copies of his book.
On March 1st 2016, Taneem Husain, Postdoctoral Fellow and Visiting Assistant Professor in Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies at Gustavus gave a public talk at Carleton exploring the portrayals of “good” Muslim women in popular American media. Husain described how this “good Muslim woman” in America must adhere to conceptions of gender and sexuality that American society is comfortable with, i.e. by presenting herself as an agentivized woman who resists patriarchal oppression. Muslim-American cultural productions, according to Husain, draw on the everyday experiences of Muslim women to present them as “tolerable ethnics” who uphold and laud the American ideal of freedom while maintaining their “ethnic” distinctiveness.

Husain drew on two productions to demonstrate her point: the book *Love InshAllah: The Secret Love Lives of American-Muslim Women* (2012), and the ABC Television thriller series “Quantico” (2015). Regarding *Love InshAllah*, Husain argued how “love” is used as a tool geared towards inclusion by making difference palatable to American society. She maintained that the romantic, hegemonic view of love that the book perpetuates has a universal appeal and that it is this generalized formulation of love that makes brownness palatable to white femininity. Husain then talked about the Muslim-American character in the television series “Quantico” and described how the character must take off her hijab to show the man she loves that she trusts him, reaffirming the notion that love negates religious and ethnic affiliations, and it is by “choosing” love that Muslim women can portray themselves as “good.” Husain concluded the lecture by pointing at the ways in which this portrayal of the “good Muslim woman” can only be achieved by marrying benign versions of Islam with a normative love and sexuality, and then stayed to take questions from the audience.