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College of *Arts and Sciences*

e-News Issue 33: January 2016

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U.S. response to Paris attacks explored by lecture series

Olga Bonfiglio
College of Arts and Sciences staff writer

Over 100 people showed up on Tuesday, December 8 at the Bernhard Center to talk about about the recent terrorist shootings in Paris and the American response.

Dr. Laura Hastings and Dr. John Clark from the Department of Political Science participated as well as Susan Reed, managing attorney with the Michigan Immigrant Rights Center in Kalamazoo.



Why Paris?

“It was a great media opportunity,” said Hastings regarding the terrorists’ motive in the attack. “The terrorists meant to create a reaction, and they did.”

Paris is a global center like New York, so the drama of an important place got the world’s attention the terrorists wanted. Baghdad and Beirut were attacked on the same day with little mention or discussion in the media, she said.

Hastings had other reasons to explain why she thought Paris was the target.

France is uncomfortable with its own diversity, even though it is the nexus of Arab and French culture.

“There is no Arab-French identity like the Arab-American identity in the United States,” she said.

Neither does France have an official record of its Arab population because ethnic statistics are forbidden by law, although some estimates number about 5 million. Most Arabs who live in France settled during the economic boom years of the 1960s and early 1970s. Many of these immigrants brought their families after 1973 and settled mainly in the industrial regions in France, especially the Paris region.

French embracement of the Arab community is sorely lacking beginning in its colonial era of 130 years ago. Algeria, for example, was incorporated into French territory, with the condition that natives renounce their citizen status as Algerians.

“Colonial relations still exist today,” said Hastings. “Second and third generation Muslims live in poor areas in the outskirts of Paris that resemble a kind of colonial shanty town where they remain unemployed and open to radicalization.”

Finally, Islam has not been recognized as a French religion in this primarily Catholic country, even though Judaism is, she said. In 1905 “secularism” or the separation of Church and state, was adopted by the parliament. Today, that policy forbids “ostentatious signs of religion” and violators can be arrested for wearing hijab (a head covering worn by Muslim women) or the Jewish kippah or skullcap.

“With this background of history, it is difficult for French Muslims to feel French,” said Hastings. “Meanwhile, the French government (and the US government as well) should address these underlying social issues with its Muslim citizens instead of reacting to the terrorism by bombing ISIS targets.”

The American response

To illustrate the American response to the Paris attacks, John Clark drew the distinction between a policy response and a political response.

A policy response occurs when some action takes place in government, like the passing of a law. For example, after the church shooting in Charleston on June 17, 2015, the South Carolina state legislature voted to remove the Confederate battle flag from its capitol building.

In contrast, a political response is all about who gets what, when, why and how. It is typically used pejoratively, but in truth, it’s not a bad thing. Clark cited the examples of the Columbine High School shooting on April 20, 1999, and the mass shooting in Tucson, Arizona on January 8, 2011, when U.S. Rep. Gabby Giffords was shot in the head.

“After Columbine, local school districts were encouraged to think about their response strategies in case of another shooting, but no policy was made,” said Clark.

“After Tucson, we saw Democrats and Republicans engage in ‘date night’ at the State of the Union address where they sat together and showed they could reach across the aisle. Immediately after the speech, however, such cooperation was over.”

The response from government so far has been a political response about how to gain advantage from the Paris attacks even though there have been a number of opportunities to make a policy response, he said.

“But they haven’t done it—and probably won’t—even after the San Bernadino attacks.”

What politicians did latch on to was a political response to refugees, said Clark. The House passed a bill to halt the admission of Syrian refugees into the U.S. until they undergo a more stringent vetting process. Governors in 31 states refused to admit refugees even though that issue

is not under state jurisdiction. Some Republican presidential candidates tried to advance their candidacy by calling for more refugee policy reform.

“It was not a well-thought-out response,” said Clark who added that American politicians often advance certain issues to make it look as though they are solving problems—especially if American citizens are ignorant of the issue as in the case of refugee policy.

Meanwhile, faith-based groups all across the religious spectrum spoke out on behalf of refugees because their faith leads them to policy that is different from political rhetoric.

“Catholics, evangelicals and Jews are all agreeing on refugee resettlement,” said Clark.

Refugee resettlement

Susan Reed spoke on the issue of refugee resettlement from a legal perspective.

The definition of a refugee is a matter of international law, which resulted from the horror of not protecting Jewish refugees fleeing Hitler’s genocide during World War II, she said. In the United States, refugee status was not codified until 1980.

In order to be identified as refugees or asylees, they must prove they are unable to return to their country because of a well-founded fear of persecution based on one of five protected categories including race, religion, national origin, political opinion and membership in a particular social group. The last basis is constantly evolving, however. For example, in 1994, a case was decided where gays and lesbians would be considered in some countries part of a particular social group with a well-founded fear of persecutio. Then, because of the civil war in Syria, many Syrians also meet the legal definition of refugees for a variety of the possible reasons.

"Asylum seekers get into this country by showing up at our front door—a port of entry,” said Reed. “Although this is not illegal, they will be detained. They then must prove that they meet the legal definition of a refugee in a complex legal process.”

Those who are actually admitted to the U.S. as refugees go through a more complicated process abroad, but they have a clear legal immigration status and a path to U.S. citizenship. First, they must be identified outside the United States and brought in from a refugee camp or another location abroad by the U.S. working in partnership with another international partner such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Potential refugees then go through a 13-step process, the highest level of security of any group seeking entry into the U.S. that involves referral, clearance, in-person interviews with the refugees and others connected to them, medical screening and matching families with agencies. For this last part, various non-profit agencies engage in a bidding process to handle the refugees’ cases. This involves cultural orientation, security clearances and placement for housing, education, medical care and the like.

Reed gave a more in-depth explanation of refugee policy and Governor Snyder's role in tripping off other governors' rush to restrict Syrian and Iraqi resettlement. To get the details on this issue, view her blog: [Michigan Immigrant](#).

The afternoon event was sponsored by the Diether H. Haenicke Institute for Global Education as part of its lecture series on pressing current events.

Past talks included:

- Ukraine and Russia: A Panel Discussion on the Growing Conflict (March 13, 2014)
- Ebola: A Panel Discussion on the Current Outbreak in West Africa (Oct. 2, 2014)

Engaging the Muslims

Olga Bonfiglio
College of Arts and Sciences staff writer

Renowned Middle East expert Juan Cole tried to clarify misperceptions about Muslims and terrorism to a packed house of about 500 people at the Fetzer Center on Wednesday, December 9.



The talk was part of the [Department of Comparative Religion's Islam in Global Perspectives speaker series](#).

The American public remains largely uninformed about the world in general, Cole said, but when it comes to the Middle East, it focuses only on the violence and fundamentalism there. Meanwhile, it overlooks the wave of fundamentalism going on in other parts of the world like India where the far right-wing party just won the elections to govern the 1.5 billion population.

“If this happened in the Middle East, it would be big news,” he said.

Cole also pounced on the media's record of both perpetuating myths about Islam and the Middle East and its preoccupation with terrorism while it ignores things going on in most other regions of the world.

“Cable news seems to have a tremendous influence on public opinion even though it has small audiences of 500,000 viewers and only two to three million on a good day,” he said.

He pointed out that the climate change conference going on in Paris, which is the most important issue for humankind, wasn't much covered on cable TV news before Saturday's breakthrough.

“Climate change is simply not in the national conversation,” he said, “but violence in the Middle East makes headlines.”

Likewise, during the late 1990s to the early 2000s, 5.4 million people were killed in the central African wars but the NBC evening news never reported this even though the United States imported several minerals from that region.

The American media doesn't report much on Europe either, he said, that is until the November terrorist attacks in Paris.

"The attacks were done to polarize people and make Christians want to beat up on Muslims," he said. "It was meant to trick policymakers, and they fell for it."

Three days after the bombings President Francois Hollande declared that France was now at war with Islamic State.

"Terrorism is not an act of war," said Cole. "It is a criminal act of a violent gang. The Paris terrorists were screw-ups from the city's suburbs. They thought they could infiltrate the stadium in Paris and blow up their belt bombs during the game in order to create an enormous global spectacle."

Cole explained that only one of three bombers was able to scalp a ticket to the game, and he wasn't admitted. When the other terrorists realized they couldn't accomplish their goal at the stadium, they went to a Cambodian restaurant and started shooting.

Cole said the terrorists were clumsy and stupid. Even so, one newsman characterized the incident as a "superbly orchestrated military attack."

"Terrorists aim at psychological attack in order to breed fear and hatred," said Cole. "Don't fall for these acts of terrorism. You can't overthrow the French government by attacking a Cambodian restaurant."

Terrorism is the weapon of the weak, he continued. It is illegitimate and always wrong. Terrorists were not elected to govern yet they commit violence against civilians to push their politics. Cole likened Robert Dear's November attack on the Planned Parenthood facility in Colorado Springs as a terrorist's attempt to change *Roe v. Wade*.

"So being Muslim is not the issue with terrorism," he said, "radicalism is. We have this blind spot."

American politicians' response to the terrorist attacks in Paris was equally reactive when they proposed a change in U.S. refugee policy, he said.

The United States has accepted 750,000 refugees, including many from Afghanistan and Iraq since September 11. Only two refugees were deported for suspected terrorist activity, which involved sending money to Lebanon. Over the past year America has let in 16,000 refugees from Iraq alone.

“Refugees are an upright group of people who are carefully vetted for 18 months,” said Cole, who reminded the audience that the U.S. invasion of Iraq produced these refugees where at least 200,000 Iraqis were killed and 4 million were displaced by U.S. bombings. (He also acknowledged that 4,500 Americans lost their lives in Iraq and over 2,200 in Afghanistan.)

“Where is our sense of social morality?” asked Cole, who said that the United States also refused to let in Jewish refugees from Europe during World War II because it was afraid they were German secret agents.

“The United States is a great country,” said Cole, “but we sometimes have these ugly periods” like slavery, racism and the Know Nothings of the 1850s who tried to stop the immigration of Irish and German Catholics because they regarded these newcomers as hostile to republican values and controlled by the Pope in Rome.

Trying to stop Iraqi and Syrian refugees from coming into the United States feeds the anti-Islamic craze, said Cole. In order to counteract such reactions, he encouraged the audience to become more informed about Islam, to go to a mosque to meet Muslims and to help first generation Muslims integrate themselves into the local community.

“And be active in politics,” said Cole. “Write your congressional representatives. In America, if there is no public voice, you're a sitting duck. The problem is that we vote and then forget about politics. That's when the corporations move in and monopolize the conversation and the policies.”

During the question-answer period, the audience was keen on knowing how to fight terrorism.

“Refuse to be afraid and refuse to hate,” said Cole amid loud applause. “Too many people also fall for the propaganda of Islamic State or Daesh, as it is called. Daesh uses the term ‘Islamic State’ to trick us. They are like a Mexican drug cartel announcing that it's the Vatican. No journalist would fall for that.

While the media portray Daesh as conquering vast territories, the reality is that they have overtaken only a few desert towns, said Cole.

“They have no port, no airport and no air force,” he said. “They are not a state but rather a set of desert pirates who loot people and call it taxation.”

When the leader of Daesh called himself a caliph, the Arab people laughed, said Cole.

“What Daesh is really doing is defaming 1.5 billion people.”

Cole emphasized the fact that Iraq and Syria are like the Wild West, and the only place where Daesh can exist.

“To consider them a state is ridiculous,” said Cole.

So, how can Daesh be defeated?

“We have to get the Baghdad government to stiffen the resolve of the Iraqi army,” said Cole. “We also have to realize that while Daesh took 40 percent of Iraqi territory in summer 2014, the Iraqis have since recaptured 25 percent of it.”

Cole also suggested that a free Syrian army must fight Daesh as well as the Saudis who seem more focused on fighting Yemen.

“We sold them our fighter jets,” said Cole, “let’s have a talk with their king and tell him we are not happy with him.”

Cole also agreed with President Obama’s four-point plan that includes:

1. Hunting down terrorist plotters throughout the world and using air strikes to take out Daesh leaders and their infrastructure in Iraq and Syria.
2. Continuing to provide training and equipment to Iraqi and Syrian forces fighting Daesh on the ground and deploying Special Operations forces that can accelerate that offensive.
3. Continuing to lead a coalition of 65 countries to stop Daesh’s operations by disrupting plots, cutting off their financing and preventing them from recruiting more fighters.
4. Pursuing cease-fires and a political resolution to the Syrian civil war so that Syria and all countries can focus on destroying Daesh.

“Daesh is involved in human trafficking, killing POWs and making a spectacle of death,” said Cole. “They are regularly denounced by Muslims.”

Dr. Juan Cole is the Richard P. Mitchell Collegiate Professor of History at the University of Michigan. For three decades, he has sought to put the relationship of the West and the Muslim world in historical context. His most recent books include [Engaging the Muslim World](#) and [Napoleon’s Egypt: Invading the Middle East](#). He has been a regular guest on PBS’s Lehrer News Hour, and has also appeared on ABC Nightly News, Nightline, the Today Show, Charlie Rose, Anderson Cooper 360, Democracy Now! and many others.

In addition to his extensive writings on Egypt, Iraq, and South Asia, Cole also covers the politics of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran in his regular column at The Nation. Cole continues to study and write about contemporary Islamic movements, whether mainstream or radical, whether Sunni and Salafi or Shiite. He is fluent in Arabic, Persian and Urdu, reads some Turkish, and knows both Middle Eastern and South Asian Islam. Cole is president of the Global Americana Institute, a non-profit project that aims to translate important books by great Americans and about America into Arabic. He has lived in various parts of the Muslim world for some 11 years and continues to travel widely there.

Anthropologist earns book award

Kristina Wirtz, anthropology, has received the 2015 Edward Sapir Book Prize from the Society for Linguistic Anthropology for “[Performing Afro-Cuba: Image, Voice, Spectacle in the Making of Race and History](#).” Wirtz received the honor Nov. 21 during the American Anthropological Meetings in Denver.

Her book, published by the University of Chicago Press last year, analyzes a variety of performances and the ways they construct Cuban racial and historical imaginations, thereby marrying racial studies, performance studies, anthropology and semiotics. The Sapir prize goes to a book that makes the most significant contribution to the understanding of language in society, or the ways in which language mediates historical or contemporary sociocultural processes.



English professor and poet has long been moved by Russia

Olga Bonfiglio
College of Arts and Sciences staff writer

Judith Rypma, master faculty specialist in English and one of the organizers of the Russian Festival, said putting on the event this year was essential.

“As the political relationship between the U.S. and Russia sadly continues to deteriorate, it is more important than ever that we hold events that foster better understanding between our peoples and our cultures.”

Rypma presented a multimedia reading from her collection of poems, [Looking for the Amber Room](#) (FutureCycle Press, 2015).



“It’s a tale of stolen art, but it’s also a legend that has enthralled and continues to frustrate armies of treasure hunters who at this very moment are scouring four countries in search of it,” said Rypma.

The Amber Room is a world famous chamber decorated in amber panels backed with gold leaf and mirrors located in the Catherine Palace of Tsarskoye Selo near St. Petersburg. Originally constructed in 1701 in the Berlin City Palace, Prussian King Frederick William I gave it to his ally, Peter the Great of the Russian Empire in 1716. The Amber Room covered more than 590 square feet and contained over 6 tons of amber. It was considered the “Eighth Wonder of the World.” During World War II, the Nazis removed the room, and it has never been found. In 2003, it was recreated in the Catherine Palace.

Rypma also presented information about the new [study abroad program in Russia](#) that is sponsored by the Department of English and the Haenicke Institute for Global Education at WMU. Scheduled for the first half of the 2016 summer session, students will study literature in translation at Leningrad State University in Pushkin, as well as in St. Petersburg.

Rypma has been involved with the festival for the past 18 years. Before that she participated in the Kalamazoo-Pushkin sister city program when she began to bring medical supplies to Russia in 1995.

Rypma has had an affinity for Russia since high school when she read Nicholas and Alexandra by Robert K. Massie (1969). She has visited the country 18 times after she earned a bachelor’s degree in Russian studies at Grand Valley State University.

“I fell in love with the culture, would visit the country and return and write about it,” said Rypma, who is a former travel writer for national magazines, hotel chains, tour companies and airlines. During a two-year appointment at Kalamazoo Valley Community College, she used to write plays based on Russian fairy tales and have her students perform them.

Rypma has taught in the Department of English since 1992 where she also teaches Russian literature in translation. She is currently on sabbatical researching her next book.

Rypma, a poet, specializes in poems of place on Russia. Over 150 of her poems have appeared in literary journals, most recently in Concho River Review, Green Hills Literary Lantern, River Oak Review, Paterson Literary Review, and Eclipse. She has also published five chapbooks, including [Sewing Lessons](#) (FutureCycle Press).

"Climate Challenged Society" (ENVS 1000) excites students across disciplines

Dr. Denise Keele, Associate Professor of Political Science and and Environmental and Sustainability Studies

Olga Bonfiglio
College of Arts and Sciences Staff Writer

As students come into the room, they immediately move desks around to form a discussion circle. Dr. David Benac, history, will conclude his week as guest lecturer about the development of climate change perceptions, historical context and policy as students share their research on American news and science coverage of climate change during the 1970s and 80s.

Benac is one of 10 professors providing expert guest lectures from key disciplines for “Climate Challenged Society” or ENV5 1000, the introductory course for the new climate change studies minor instituted last fall. At times, Benac defers to Dr. Steve Kohler, Environmental & Sustainability Studies Program, or Dr. Denise Keele, political science, the lead instructors and facilitators for the course, for scientific and political details. At other times he invites students to recap or reflect on the different policy developments he's just described.

The students of the class seem satisfied, enlightened and engaged with today's discussion, but before they leave, Benac gives them a list of courses he will teach that relate to the environment and may be applied to the climate change studies minor.

Last fall, the minor was added to the undergraduate curriculum to apply to any major as preparation for a variety of 21st century professional fields.

It was created by an interdisciplinary working group of WMU faculty members, the Interdisciplinary Humanities Group for the Study of Climate Change, sponsored by the WMU Center for Humanities.

Sensing that climate change is the most important issue facing humankind, one of the major goals of this group was to infuse climate change into the liberal arts education.

"It was time for us to move beyond the science and let students understand the world they live in," said Keele, who serves as chair of the advisory board for the climate change studies minor. "There are challenges coming and our real hope is to teach students something that will be useful to their lives and the future."

Students seem to get it as 27 of them filled this initial course offering. Three students talked about their motivations for taking the class, the minor and their insights about climate change and sustainability.

David Bere

David Bere is a senior from Kalamazoo who is majoring in political science. He has a passion for bicycles: building them, traveling on them and promoting them as alternative transportation. Although he is not sure of his direction after graduation, he is intensely interested in sustainability.

“I got into bikes through my volunteer work with the Office of Sustainability two and a half years ago,” said Bere. “After six months of volunteering, I was hired for a student assistant job.”

Bere took ENV5 1000 because he had Dr. Keele for environmental law and liked her. He also needed a minor and decided on the climate change studies minor.

“Environmental issues are critically important,” he said. “Every day of my life I face choices that affect the environment. In fact, this issue is on everyone's mind in my generation—more than it was in the past, I think. I feel like I serve as an ambassador between generations.”

Bere said that making small choices every day about how to live is not that hard. Instead, it becomes part of one's consciousness. Perhaps that's what got him started working with bicycles and teaching other students how to fix them.

“I have a new appreciation for the energy it takes for the things I use, so I'm always looking for energy alternatives. My focal point is finding ways to make everything sustainable. I may end up an entrepreneur doing something with energy alternatives.”

Alex Farr

Alex Farr, a senior political science major from New Baltimore, took ENV5 1000 because he also liked Dr. Keele's environmental law course and wanted more background on climate change.

“The environment plays a huge role in my life, particularly on the policy side, so I'm exploring environmental law programs, he said. “Policy is the most effective way to change things, and I can't think of anything more important than the environment. Without a healthy environment, nothing else matters.”

As an opinion columnist for the **Western Herald**, Farr already sees the impact he can make through the written word. He received “tons of feedback” on his [recent column advocating bicycles for WMU parking services](#).

Farr's sensitivity for the environment comes primarily from his family, especially his “hippy grandmother.” He grew up in a neighborhood near a landfill that occasionally emitted a bad smell. He also learned about sustainability in elementary school where students found ways to “reduce, reuse and recycle.”

“The BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 really fired me up,” he said, “as well as the company's delayed response.”

Farr sees Americans coming around to more sustainable futures, but feels it is taking far too long because the issue is framed as a business vs. the environment conflict—with business deemed more important.

“I want to have kids someday,” he said, “but I don't want to bring them into a world that is environmentally unstable.”

Farr would have added the climate change studies minor to his program had it been offered earlier in his college career. He sees Keele as the perfect person to lead ENV5 1000 because she is both motivated by the subject and “incredibly knowledgeable.”

“She's also involved in community environmental projects, so she has a great deal of credibility.”

Farr participated in one of Keele's community projects as a canvasser for a proposed superfund site at the Allied Paper Mill in Kalamazoo.

He recognizes that some people feel hopeless about climate change, but he believes that through politics he can make a difference in reversing the catastrophes it forebodes.

“We can't just throw up our hands and not do anything,” he said. “By not acting on the problem, you become part of the problem. I'm young and ready to fight for the environment. And the more people who fight for it, the better off we'll all be. There are no second chances.

Ali Coutts

Ali Coutts, a senior Honors College student from Grosse Pointe, decided to major in environmental studies because she wants to educate citizens about climate change and the importance of community and local advocacy.

“I think climate change is extremely important. It's happening now and nothing will change it unless we learn what to do about it.”

For example, on a small scale people can buy local products or ride bicycles, she said. On a larger scale people need to know what government is doing and then vote for environmentally-oriented candidates.

During her college years Coutts has interned with Greening of Detroit, a collaborative group of organizations whose aim is to inspire “sustainable growth of a healthy urban community through trees, green spaces, food, education, training and job opportunities.”

However, what she's discovering in the ENV5 1000 class is that even though students and faculty come from different disciplines, they are concerned about climate change and what they can do about it.

“It's extremely enlightening to find out that climate change touches so many different disciplines,” said Coutts who hasn't taken courses in physics, advanced English literature, or history. “But they're all a part of ENV5 1000, and now I'm exposed to these perspectives on climate change, which ultimately broaden my perspective.

Coutts reported that other members of the class—art students, business students, anthropology students and English students—are all worried about climate change.

“I thought it was just us environmental studies majors who cared. I’m glad to be sadly mistaken.”

In fact, she believes saving the environment is definitely an issue for her generation and that most students have already been exposed to the facts about climate change.

“That alone gives us a greater sensitivity to the issue as well as a greater advantage to doing something about it,” said Coutts.

Keele is very pleased with student and faculty response to the climate change studies minor and the ENV5 1000 course. The minor was created by a working group of over 20 faculty from the Interdisciplinary Humanities Group for the Study of Climate Change, and is administered by a seven-member interdisciplinary faculty advisory board.

“They are the most dedicated, hard-working people I know on this issue. They spent all of summer 2014 to put together the program,” said Keele. “These people care, and they want to make sure our students are prepared. They also want to make sure WMU makes a good start in this area—and I think they succeeded.”

ENV5 1000 provides students with the necessary science-based background and a broad understanding of the human relationship to climate change, including the social and environmental causes, challenges and opportunities for mitigation and adaptation. The goal of the program is to develop informed and engaged citizens who can use information from multiple disciplines to draw appropriate conclusions and constructively contribute to societal adaptation to global environmental change.

Four courses in the minor are offered in Spring 2016 and the goal is to have at least 20 students minoring in Climate Change Studies by next year, said Keele.

One of two options to enter the minor, Climate Challenged Society (ENV5 1000), is led and facilitated by Keele and Kohler with week-long guest lectures taught by Allen Webb, English; David Benac, history; David Karowe, biological sciences; Lei Meng, geography; Duane Hampton, geosciences; Steve Bertman, chemistry; John Miller, chemistry; Paul Pancella, physics; Carson Reeling, economics.

“Climate change can be a depressing issue, but our students are faced with questions about how to be in a world experiencing climate change and how they can support each other in it,” said Keele. “Now, that’s an accomplishment!”

Climate change studies advisory board members:

Steve Bertman, Chemistry

James Cousins, CAS Dean’s Office

Lisa DeChano-Cook (Program Adviser), Geography

Duane Hampton, Geosciences

Dave Karowe, Biological Sciences

Denise Keele (Chair), Political Science, Environmental and Sustainability Studies

Allen Webb, English