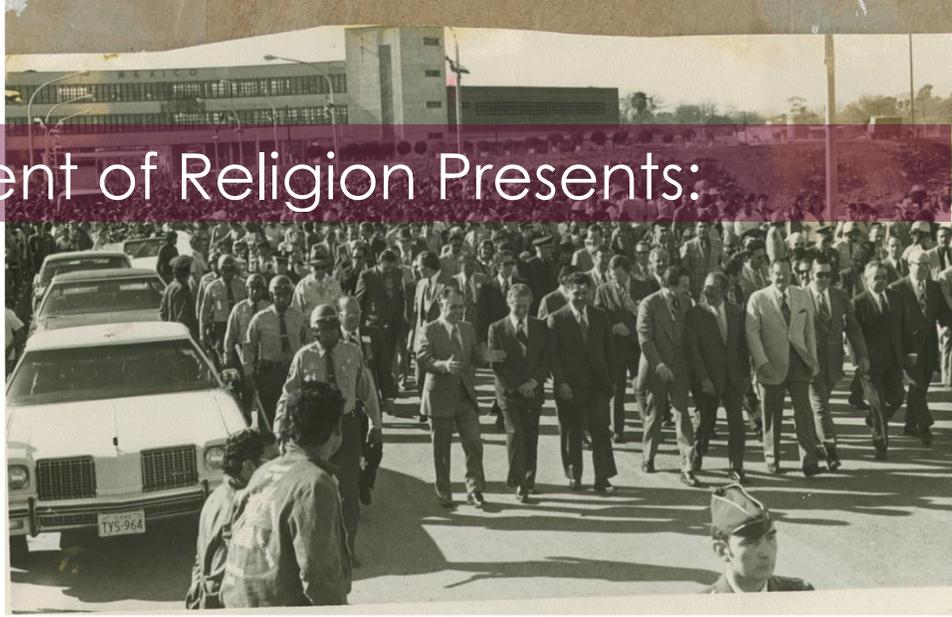


The Department of Religion Presents:

Fri | MAR 22 | 2019

PAIS 290

12 – 2 PM



George Washington Opens the U.S.-Mexico Border: Ritual and Festive Crisis Resolution at the Port-of-Laredo (1957-1975)

This presentation examines how events at the U.S. Mexico border such as toll-disagreements, climactic disasters (1954 Hurricane Alice), and inoperable, mismanaged infrastructure deepen strained relations of inequality and disparity between the two countries. It focuses on ritual and festive crisis resolution strategies deployed as part of the initiative known as *paso libre* (open border), promoted as part of the Washington's Birthday Celebration's annual International Bridge Ceremony (est. 1898). Drawing on extensive ethnographic and archival research that includes uncatalogued documents, it captures how the act of physically meeting in the middle of the bridge paired with the long-standing cross-border social and cultural expectations attached to the ritual not only made *paso libre* possible, but also sustainable (1957-1975). Engaging scholarly work in Latinx Studies, Geography of Religion, Hemispheric American Studies, and Comparative Border Studies, this talk shows how performative strategies such as this facilitate communication across federal, municipal, and civil society channels and make stakeholders out of an international public.



Prof. Elaine A. Peña is a Visiting Scholar in Social Anthropology at the University of Edinburgh; at George Washington University she is Associate Professor of American Studies. She is the author of *Performing Piety: Making Space Sacred with the Virgin of Guadalupe* (University of California Press, 2011), and with Guillermo Gómez-Peña she edited *Ethno-Tchno: Writings on Performance, Activism, and Pedagogy* (Routledge, 2005). Peña received her Ph.D. in Performance Studies from Northwestern University and has held post-doctoral positions with the University of Illinois (Latina/o Studies) and Yale University (Religious Studies and the Ethnicity, Race, and Migration Program). Her interdisciplinary research has appeared in *e-misférica*, *American Quarterly*, *American Literary History*, *The Drama Review*, *Material Religion* as well as several edited volumes.