



RELIGION AND THE CITY

Religion and the Modern World, Religion V2800

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Fall 2006 Monday-Wednesday 11-12.15

304 Hamilton Hall

The city holds a complex and storied place in the American religious imagination. While some religious groups have cast cities as sinful, vice-filled and their inhabitants ever in need of redemption, other groups envision cities as natural places for building community and religious identity, or even as ennobled sites for religious engagement. Sociologists and historians have also

represented the city and its religious inhabitants in surprisingly divergent ways. Generations of scholars have looked to the city as the vanguard of secularization. Pluralism, capitalism, religious heterogeneity and “cosmopolitanism” have all been located in our imagination of the city. Scholarly myths thus have also shaped our view of religious life in the city. Stories like these often tell us more about what Americans imagine religious life to be in cities than about how religious lives are actually cultivated.

This semester we will use the city to address and investigate a number of central concepts in the study of religion, including ritual, community, worldview, conflict, tradition, and discourse. We begin by addressing *how religious groups and institutions shape neighborhoods or districts*, and analyze the contributions of religious institutions, histories and theologies to these urban regions. We will then address the ways that *religious communities interact with each other as they share space* or contest the boundaries of neighborhoods, analyzing how religious groups can foster both civic participation and social violence and disruption. Next, we will *consider the various public settings wherein religious language, practice, and performance take place*. We will then turn to the ways that religions in the city are shaped by *new patterns of migration and globalization*. Finally, we turn to focus specifically to the poetics of religion by dwelling on the ways that the city is *imagined, “read” and remembered through religious memory and social action*.

We will investigate these topics using anthropological, historical and sociological approaches. Of particular interest this semester are the ways that religions take place in place. We will explore together what we can learn about religions by focusing on place, location, and context.

New York City is an important frame in which to explore broader questions that lie at the heart of the social scientific study of religion. With the city as our frame, you will be encouraged – indeed, required - to understand the living realities of religious life within the context of the city in which we live. Many, but not all, of the readings assigned focus on New York, and class assignments will require you to venture out into the city.

Readings:

The following books are available at Labyrinth Books (112th between Amsterdam and Broadway).

Goldschmidt, Henry. *Race and Religion Among the Chosen Peoples of Crown Heights*. Rutgers University Press 2006.

Guest, Kenneth. *God in Chinatown*, NYU Press 2003.

McGreevy, James. *Parish Boundaries*. University of Chicago Press 1996.

McRoberts, Omar, *Streets of Glory*. University of Chicago Press 2003.

Orsi, Robert, ed. *Gods of the City* Indiana University Press 1999

White, E.B. *Here is New York*.

In addition, a course reader is available at the Village Copier (119th and Amsterdam). All readings are also on reserve in Butler library.

Assignments:

Careful reading of all of the required texts, **attendance at lectures**, and regular **participation in discussion sections**. These will meet once weekly, and will be scheduled during the first week of the term. (20%).

Completion of a three-part assignment on a religious site of your choosing on which you will conduct historical and sociological observation during the term. Your assignments will contribute to a multi-year multi-class project to map various types of religious organizations and activities ongoing in the city, and important sites in New York's religious pasts and present. This project will be divided into three distinct parts:

a. A **4 page paper** about your site due on September 18 (10%).

b. A **6-8 page paper** on the history and change of your site through time, due on October 23 (25%).

c. A **6-8 page report** on the current life of your site, due on November 20 (20%).

A **final paper**, 8-10 pages on your site incorporating observational and historical research on your site that will be suitable for addition to the course map. This will be due on the Registrar's examination date. (25%).

Office hours, contact information and fine print:

Professor Bender: Wednesday 2-4, 80 Claremont Room 202

Mr. Joel Bourdeaux: Monday 4-5, 80 Claremont Room 202

Late work is not accepted.

Plagiarism, defined as representing others' work as your own, is an action committed against the scholarly community of which you are a part. It is a serious offense and one that will result in disciplinary action. If you have questions about how to properly cite or draw from others' work, please ask us before your assignment is due.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Sept 6, 11

Religions in New York City, introductions: walking and marking

(p) de Certeau, Michel. "Walking in the City," *Practice of Everyday Life*

(p) Trillin, Calvin, "Drawing the Line," *The New Yorker*

(p) Malkin, Elliott, "eRuv: A Street History in Semacode."

September 13, 18

Studying religion through and with space

(p) Linenthal, Edward and David Chidester, "Introduction" to *American Sacred Space*. Oxford University Press.

(p) Tweed, Thomas. "Confluences," in *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*. Harvard University Press.

(i) Wynn, Jonathan R. "Guiding Practices: Storytelling Tricks for Reproducing the Urban Landscape" *Qualitative Sociology* 28, 2005.

Religious communities in American cities

Sept. 20, 27, Oct 2 Oct 4

Cultures, neighborhoods, territories

McRoberts, Omar. *Streets of Glory*. University of Chicago Press 2003.

McGreevy, James. *Parish Boundaries*. University of Chicago Press 1996.

Oct 9, Oct 11

Inter-religious and inter-cultural interactions and cooperation

(p) Sanjek, Roger. "The New Multicultural Geography of Elmhurst-Corona" and "Bonds of Interracial Cooperation" in *The Future of us All*. Cornell University Press 1998.

(p) Wood, Richard. "Faith-Based Organizing in Action: The Local Organizing Committee and St. Elizabeth Catholic Church" in *Faith in Action: Religion, Race and Democratic Organizing in America*. University of Chicago Press 2001.

(p) Wedam, Elfriede. "If We Let the Market Prevail, We Won't Have a Neighborhood Left:" Religious Agency and Urban Restructuring on Chicago's Southwest Side." *City and Society* 2005.

Oct 16, Oct 18

Religious and conflict

Goldschmidt, Henry. *Race and Religion Among the Chosen Peoples of Crown Heights*. Rutgers University Press 2006.

Religion in the streets

Oct 23, Oct 25

The spaces of daily encounter

(p) Oldenburg, Ray. "The Problem of Place in America" in *The Great Good Place*. Marlowe and Co. 1989.

(p) Whyte, William H. "The Design of Spaces" and "The Sensory Street" *City: Rediscovering the Center*. Doubleday 1975.

(p) Bender, Courtney "What We Talk About When We Talk About Religion" in *Heaven's Kitchen* University of Chicago Press 2003.

(p) Smith, Elta and Courtney Bender. "The Creation of an Urban Niche Religion: South Asian Taxi Drivers in New York City" in *Asian American Religions*, NYU Press 2004.

Oct 30, Nov 1

Public performances and protests

Winston, Diane. "The Cathedral of the Open Air: The Salvation Army's Sacralization of Secular Space, New York City, 1880-1910" in *Gods of the City*

Ashley, Wayne. "The Stations of the Cross: Christ, Politics, and Processions on New York's Lower East Side" in *Gods of the City*.

(p) Slyomovics, Susan "The Muslim World Day Parade and 'Storefront' Mosques of New York City" in *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe*. University of California Press 1994

Religions and cities in global networks

Nov 8

(i) Levitt, Peggy. "You Know, Abraham Was Really the First Immigrant," *International Migration Review* 37 (143): 847-874 2003.

(p) Sassen, Saskia. "The Impact of New Technologies and Globalization on Cities." In *The City Reader*, Routledge 1996.

Nov 13, Nov 15

Guest, Kenneth. *God in Chinatown*. NYU Press 2003.

The city in the religious imagination: vice, nostalgia, cosmopolitanism

Nov 20

Nostalgia and movement

(i) Wenger, Beth. "Memory as Identity: The Invention of the Lower East Side" *American Jewish History* 1997.

Kugelmass, Jack. "Moses of the South Bronx: Aging and Dying in the Old Neighborhood" in *Gods of the City*.

(p) Moore, Debra Dash. "Permanent Tourists" and "Spiritual Recreation" in *To the Golden Cities*. Harvard University Press 1994.

Nov 27, Nov 29
Saving the city

Orsi, Robert. "Introduction" to *Gods of the City*.

(i) Chambre, Susan. "The Changing Nature of "Faith" in Faith-Based Organizations: Secularization and Ecumenicism in Four AIDS Organizations in New York City." *Social Service Review* 75, 3, September 2001, pp. 435-455.

(p) Lang, Kurt and Gladys Engel Lang. "Decisions for Christ: Billy Graham in New York City," in *Identity and Anxiety; Survival of the Person in Mass Society*. Free Press 1962.

(p) Cox, Harvey. "The Epoch of the Secular City," in *The Secular City*. Macmillan 1967.

Dec 4, Dec 6

Public memorials, architecture, religious traces, and sacralization

(p) Parker, Betsee. "'Send Thou Me': God's Weeping and the Sanctification of Ground Zero," in Hawley and Patton, eds. *Holy Tears: Weeping in the Religious Imagination*. Princeton University Press 2004.

(i) "World Trade Center Memorial Jury Statement for Winning Design"

Dec 11

Conclusions

White, E.B. *Here is New York*

(i) Whitman, Walt. "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry"

Mapping New York City Religions

Purpose and goals

The goals of this multi-part assignment are to (a) introduce you to several disciplinary approaches to studying religion and (b) provide the opportunity for you to examine and use the ideas developed in class readings to apply to an actual case. An additional goal is to begin to build a map of New York City religions where individuals' projects contribute to a broader view from which we can make inferences about social life, religious interaction, diversity, and continuity.

Turning in Assignments and posting them to the wiki, "SacredGotham"

All assignments are due at 3 p.m. on the dates noted. You are required to turn in a hard (paper) copy of your assignment. If you do not turn it in during class on the due date, you must put it in my mailbox inside the front entrance of 80 Claremont Avenue. Paper copies should include the images that you use in your paper (remember they do not count toward the page total), and can be printed in black and white. Given that all deadlines for all work is announced at the beginning of the term, we will not accept late papers except in exceptional circumstances (illness, death in family, etc.).

After you submit your paper, you will have 48 hours to post your completed assignment on SacredGotham. We will grade the paper *that you turn in*, as the materials mounted on SacredGotham will likely change and be modified throughout the term. However, we will check to make sure that you have posted on the wiki as well.

SacredGotham

This semester we are launching SacredGotham, a wiki for this class and future classes at Columbia studying city religions. All work in progress and finished projects will be posted on this wiki, and part of the class' joint work will be building the site's beginning content. A "wiki" is an interactive environment (you are likely already familiar with wikipedia.org). Our wiki runs on the same technology, but is password protected for class members (thus, not public like wikipedia). During the semester and starting the second week you will have a number of small assignments that will encourage you to post your own material on this board and comment on others' postings as well. We will also use it to collect a shared set of resources including including secondary and primary documents: bibliographies, archives, images, and video. These small assignments will help to "jump start" this environment and get it dynamically moving.

Assignment #1 due 18 September CHOOSING A SITE

Your first assignment **is to locate a religious site** on which the rest of your assignments will be based. You can choose a congregation/religious building (Marble Collegiate Church, Eldridge St. Synagogue), a neighborhood (4-8 blocks, e.g. a stretch of 125 St.), a monument or cemetery (e.g. Grant's Tomb).

Ideally you should choose to site with which you are not intimately familiar. This is a chance to do some exploration, and you are encouraged to be adventurous! Take a walk in an unfamiliar

neighborhood, consult walking tour guides for “landmark” religious sites that might be interesting, and pay attention to the newspapers for stories that lead you to interesting places.

The field is open, with the following restrictions:

(a) You must choose a place that has some *explicit* religious content or activity. For example, you should not choose “Central Park” on the grounds that people who love nature and feel connected with the transcendent when they go there (this is interesting, but choosing a site like this will make it very difficult for you to complete the project). In contrast, however, if you have learned that a group gathers on Great Hill in Central Park to regularly practice tai chi you might consider that site. If you are doubt about whether your choice is a good one, please talk to one of us.

(b) You must choose a site **in Manhattan** that you can visit without too much difficulty during the semester and (if your choice is a religious organization) one that you will be able to visit or observe during its liturgical/worship events.

(c) Every student will choose a unique site. Post your choice of site on Courseworks (week of 11-17 September) as soon as you have decided, but be sure to make sure that no more than one other person else has already chosen your site before you do so.

The 4 page report. After you have chosen a site and posted your intention, write a report reflecting on why you find the site interesting and the kinds of questions that your site raises or might raise for you. Your short paper should introduce us to your site and its surroundings. Describe your site, including its neighborhood characteristics, how you think it connects to the rest of the city (does it feel like an “urban village” or part of a “religious district” or not, and why so?). Provide some brief details about the religious significance of the site, including the specific religious group(s) that use or shape the site.

Reports can include photographs of the building/site, or other sketches or “maps.” Indeed, we encourage it! But **PLEASE NOTE**: Images do not count toward your page total.

Assignment #2 due 23 October YOUR SITE THROUGH TIME

In this assignment you will explore the changes that your site or community has undergone through time. How do religious communities or settings change through time, and how do larger changes in the city influence or impact the ways that religions are experienced?

This assignment will ask and allow you to analyze how the site and its uses may change through time. For example, when was the church/synagogue/temple that you are looking at founded? Did it first meet where it does now, or at some other place? What was on the property/area prior to it? How has the neighborhood changed? As you investigate these changes you should contextualize them as much as you can with regard to broader changes in the city: for example, what changes in immigrant populations, or what kinds of changes in New York’s local economies might have impacted the founding and longevity of your site? Likewise, what changes in the history or demographics of your religious group influence these changes?

In order to complete this assignment, you will need to do some exploring in on-line and library resources. An important resource in this assignment will be the digital atlas of maps available through SacredGotham, and readable on Google Earth. You will be required to integrate at least

two maps into your analysis, and no more than five. We will discuss these maps and their possible uses in class sections.

In addition, you can consult additional historical maps of New York City available on line and at the Columbia and New York Public Libraries, “historical” photographs of your site, consult nineteenth century guidebooks to the city of New York for descriptions of buildings in an earlier era. Some religious groups (churches, synagogues) have their own websites or even published histories that might provide an insider’s history, which you might also wish to consult (and properly cite). Likewise, you will need to familiarize yourself somewhat with some of the history of the religious group(s) you are studying, particularly their presence in New York. You will find some bibliographic resources listed on the wiki, and are of course strongly encouraged to link more references to the "resources" page as you find them.

The 6-8 page report. After you have conducted some research on your site in time, you should write a paper that tells a short history of your site, indicating what you think are important changes in the setting/site over time. Your paper should contextualize your site, and reflect on the dynamic relationships between city life, social changes, political and cultural events, and your site's life.

Components will include: at least three non-web-based sources (histories, or otherwise) cited in your paper. You are strongly encouraged likewise to draw on class readings to (appropriately) bolster the theoretical, analytical, and comparative aspects of your project. As indicated you should also make use of the digital, and will integrate at least two map screen shots into your paper and no more than five (if you feel that you MUST include more than five to tell your narrative, please consult with us before hand). We encourage you to reproduce (and properly acknowledge) historical photographs if such exist.

Assignment #3 due 20 November

FIELD REPORT ASSIGNMENT

By this point, you should have spent some time observing the neighborhood around your site, and have some familiarity with its history. Perhaps also have a bit of background reading on the religious practices and community that exists there. You should draw on this knowledge as you go forward with this more intensive part of the larger assignment: observing religion in action.

Religious groups relate to their urban environments and express these connections in various ways. In this assignment, you will observe a public religious event and write a 6-8 page analytical field report. Like the second assignment, your paper in this assignment should be analytical. It should begin to answer the question of how your site's current community (or communities) interacts with and relates to its neighborhood or the city more broadly. How does this group or site imagine and understand its own relation to the city? To other religious neighbors? What theologies, rituals, or activities express or reflect these relations?

The assignment has two discrete steps.

- First, you will observe a public event and write “field notes” on what you observe.
- Second, you will write a field report that answers the questions above by presenting examples from your observations.

We will discuss both the nuts and bolts of observing and the important ethical issues that are involved even in passive observations of public religious events in sections.

The 6-8 page report. After you have made your observations and written your field notes, you should write a 6-8 page paper that engages the question set forth above about the current life of the site you are studying. More details are given below. You should cite at least three additional academic sources or class readings.

In this assignment you are asked to focus on writing and reporting. You should not take photographs of community religious events under any circumstance.

Final Report Due on the Examination Date
PRESENTING YOUR SITE

Your final project assignment is to write a comprehensive narrative of your site based on the research and reporting you have done through the term. This final project must integrate the materials that you have already developed to tell a story about the ways that religions are at work in the city. In this final project, you are encouraged to draw upon literary or artistic sources and resources, for example you might think about the ways that others (New Yorkers past and present, or non-New Yorkers) have represented or presented your neighborhood. In short, it should reflect on the politics and poetics of urban religions.

More details on this final project will be forthcoming.

Your final project should be a polished piece of writing suitable for presentation to a larger public. We hope that most of the final projects for this course will be both suitable for publication on a map of New York City that will be available as a resource in other Columbia classrooms and serve as model reports for future students who take “Religion and the City.”

Guidelines for observing and writing field reports

A. Choosing what to observe

You should plan on observing one public event at your site. “Public religious events” include most publicly advertised and announced worship services to which the general public is welcome, religious processions and festivals that occur on the streets, and other outdoor events such as revival meetings, street preaching, and pamphleteering. If you are unsure of whether the event you’ve selected is public or open to the public, please consult with one of us.

You should plan on attending an event that lasts for 1-2 hours and your notes should cover everything you observe during that period. It is always a good idea to double-check the time and date of the events that you plan to observe, and/or to call ahead.

A word to the wise: It is important that you treat the people you meet at your site with respect and civility. At the same time you are under no obligation to do anything (praying, chanting, etc.) that you do not feel comfortable with during your visit. As a sign of respect, it is generally appropriate to dress up a bit (no jeans or sneakers). Keep in mind that you may have to remove your shoes or cover your head when you visit. Watch what other people are doing and do likewise!

B. Writing preliminary field notes for your report

The first step in this assignment is to write “field notes” on the event you have observed. The best field notes are written immediately after the fact and you should plan for several hours of uninterrupted time to write field notes after your observation is finished. In general it is NOT appropriate to take notes during religious services. Remember as much as you can and take a few minutes on the subway or bus back to jot notes that will prompt you to remember details when you return to campus.

A good field note will “show” rather than “tell” what has happened. This is VERY IMPORTANT. For example, instead of writing:

“the minister gave an intercessory prayer”
you might write:

“a middle-aged white woman wearing a blue robe [identified as the assistant pastor] stood at the raised podium and told us to stand. She then read a prayer that was printed in the bulletin. The prayer was for peace of the nation, city leaders, our neighbors, the health of the congregation ...”

Try not to take things for granted as you write up these notes. As you read over your notes, think about whether they unnecessarily “summarize” the meaning of actions rather than “showing” us what is going on.

The main reason for showing rather than telling is that while you might think that you have an answer to the question about how the group relates to the city after observing part of the service. But as you reflect on the event or read other material, you may decide that your preliminary ideas were incorrect or that you now think something else is more important or interesting. The richer your field notes, the better a tool they will be to write your report.

When you are finished, consult the “checklist” (attached) to make sure you haven’t forgotten anything.

C. Interpreting field notes for your report

Your field notes are the “primary data” on which you will draw to write a report. Your report should draw upon and include important sections of your field observations to show us how you have come to understand this particular religious group’s expressed relationships to the city. Likewise, your report should make use of class readings where appropriate.

There are numerous ways that a religious group might express an understanding of its relations with the city. For example, you might find explicit reference to the city a variety of liturgical elements and rituals, announcements, and so on made during a service. You might find references to social service groups or community action meetings listed in announcements. You might reflect on the ways that the group’s building (architecture) or use of public space, its signage, and so on also express a relation. There are other possibilities as well.

Keep in mind that your findings are *preliminary* and *provisional*. When sociologists conduct field research they observe numerous times, speak to participants and amass a much larger body of data. Observing over time allows sociologists to evaluate what is anomalous and what is central in the groups that they study. We do not have that luxury in this project, but this assignment nonetheless provides a little taste of what sociologists do when they go about their work.

CHECKLIST FOR OBSERVATIONS (for observation project):

Your field notes should cover whatever you think is important and provide rich observational data. When you have finished writing your notes, use this checklist to make sure that you have taken note of all of the following:

1. Demographics

- Age, sex, social class, race-ethnic composition of the population, also whether the "congregation" differs from "leaders" in demographics

2. Physical setting

- The building or physical space -- large or small, plain or ornate, a building devoted purely to religious functions or also used for other things (such as a home)
- Dress of participants -- leaders and led both
- "Props" -- tables, chairs, benches; ritual or musical implements

3. Description of events

- Duration of time of whole event and of particular sub segments
- Number and order of segments: announcements, songs, prayers, speeches, chants, testimonies, and so on
- Description of activities - speaking, chanting, singing, clapping, marching, touching, eating, drinking, gesturing, standing, kneeling and so on
- Who participates and how?
- Tone and style of speech: uses of informal (vernacular) and ritualized/stylized language, different languages used, and so on.

4. Content of message (if applicable – and it might not be!).

Be careful here. Listen more than ask. Don't get "snowed" and likewise don't be hypercritical. Don't take everything literally, but --

- look for "doctrine," which might be articulated in the conception of how the "sacred" and "secular" worlds interact. Are the relationships close or distant, warm or cold, comforting or threatening? Keep in mind that doctrine can be expressed both through word and action (ritualized action and common interaction).
- What "morality" is proclaimed? Are people expected to care about the wide world or the home front? People who are similar to them or people who are different? Are rules set or negotiable and relative? How are these expressed (by story, metaphor, doctrine, gesture, etc.)
- What feelings do you think people leave the event with? (what feelings did you leave with?)

5. Other activities that occur

Carefully look around the building or site for signs of other activities that occur there. Does the group have social services that it runs in the building (daycare, soup kitchen, food pantry) or do other groups use the building/site (Alcoholics Anonymous, another religious group, etc.). Does it provide cultural or language classes? A music program? Many religious groups provide weekly bulletins or calendars with this information (or you can find it on the website). What other ways does the group appear to be related and linked to its "communities?"