



RELIGION AND THE CITY

Religion V3604
Spring 2009 MW 9-10.15

516 Hamilton Hall

Professor Courtney Bender (cb337@columbia.edu)
Office hours: Monday 11-1
80 Claremont Avenue Room 202

Mr. Daniel Vaca (daniel.vaca@columbia.edu)

Mr. Gregory Scott (gas2122@columbia.edu)

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 also have 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 imaginings of the city. Scholarly myths thus also have 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 on the poetics of religion by dwelling on the ways that the city is *imagined, “read,” and remembered through religious memory and social action*.

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 to understand the living realities of religious life within the context of the city in which we live.

Readings:

The following books are available at Book Culture (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.
Johnson, Paul and Sean Wilentz, *The Kingdom of Matthias*. Oxford 1995.
McGreevy, John. *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 selection of readings will be available on Sacred Gotham, the course wiki's "Course Readings" page. The articles on Sacred Gotham are marked (sg). Articles marked with an (i) are available via the internet, e.g. Google Scholar (NB: when accessing electronic journals from off campus, you may find it necessary to log into the journal through the "E-Journals" portal on the Columbia Libraries website).

Sacred Gotham: <http://sacredgotham.wikispaces.columbia.edu/>

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 four-part assignment on a religious site of your choosing. 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 four parts:

- a. A **4 page paper** about your site due **February 2** (10%).
- b. A **6-8 page paper** on the history of your site through time due **March 2** (25%).
- c. A **6-8 page paper** on the current activities at your site, due **April 8** (20%).
- d. A final **10-12 page paper** on your site that draws on comparisons with other sites on Sacred Gotham (25%).

COURSE SCHEDULE

21 January

Religions in New York City, introductions: walking and marking; studying religions with and through space

26 January, 28 January

Studying religion through and with space

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

(i) Gieryn, Thomas. "City as Truth Spot: Laboratories and Field Sites in Urban Studies" *Social Studies of Science*, 2006.

(sg) deCerteau, Michel. "Walking in the City," *Practice of Everyday Life*

(i) Malkin, Elliott, "eRuv: A Street History in Semacode" <http://www.dziga.com/idea/>

(watch the video lecture link – approx 18 minutes – and read the following documentation page: <http://www.dziga.com/laser/>

2 February, 4 February

Religion in the warp and woof of city life – courts, pamphlets, commerce, charity, congregations

Johnson, Paul and Sean Wilentz, *The Kingdom of Matthias*

(sg) Schmidt, Leigh. "Christmas Bazaar," in *Consumer Rites: The Buying and Selling of American Holidays*.

Religious communities and urban life

9 February, 11 February

Theologizing the city

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

16 February, 18 February

Plural New York

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

Orsi, Robert. "The Religious Boundaries of an In-between People: Street Feste and the Problem of the Dark-Skinned Other in Italian Harlem, 1920-1990" in *Gods of the City*.

23 February, 25 February

Religions and conflict

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

Religion in the streets

2 March, 4 March

Daily encounter

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

(sg) Bender, Courtney. "What We Talk About When We Talk About Religion," and "Doing Something About AIDS" from *Heaven's Kitchen: Living Religion at God's Love We Deliver*.

(sg) Wolcott, Harry. "Field Work: The Basic Arts" in *The Art of Fieldwork*.

9 March, 11 March

Public performance, procession, 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*.

(sg) 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

March 23, March 25, March 30, April 1

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

(sg) Vasquez, Manuel and Marie Friedman Marquardt, "Theorizing Globalization and Religion" in *The Transnational Studies Reader*.

(i) Galvez, Alyshia. "La Virgen meets Eliot Spitzer: Articulating Labor Rights for Mexican Immigrants." *Social Text* 2006.

(sg) MacAlister, Elizabeth. "The Madonna of 115th Street Revisited: Vodou and Haitian Catholicism in the Age of Transnationalism," in *Gatherings in the Diaspora*.

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

April 6, April 8

Nostalgia

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

(sg) Diner, Hasia. "Food Fights: Immigrant Jews and the Lure of America," in *Hungering for America*.

(i) Hirsch, Marianne. "Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile," *Poetics Today* 1996.

April 13, April 15

Saving the city

(sg) Walter Rauschenbusch, "The Present Crisis," chapter 5 in *Christianity and the Social Crisis*.

Billy Graham New York City 1957 Crusade, online exhibit

<http://www.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/exhibits/NYC57/00welcome.htm>

Reverend Billy and the Church of Stop Shopping;

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S_K34GmUwoY

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HUBUyDnxJQM>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6exJLbQGnj8>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u8H4YATaX1k>

April 20, April 22

Public memorials, architecture, religious traces, and sacralization

(sg) Todd, Terry. "The Temple of Religion and the Politics of Pluralism"

(sg) Frohne, Andrea. "Reclaiming Space: The African-American Burial Ground in New York City" in *We Shall Independent Be*.

(sg) 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.

"National September 11 Memorial and Museum at the WTC" website

<http://www.national911memorial.org/site/PageServer?pagename=homepage2>

April 27, April 29

Reimagining the city, reimagining religion

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

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

May 4

Wrap up

Mapping New York City Religions

Purpose and goals

The goals of this multi-part assignment are to provide the opportunity to examine concepts in class readings as they apply to a specific case. An additional goal is to develop a map of New York City religious institutions, where individual projects contribute to a broader view from which we can make inferences about social life, religious interaction, diversity, and continuity.

Turning in Assignments

All assignments are due at 3 p.m. on the dates noted. You need not turn in a hard copy provided that your assignment has been properly presented on SacredGotham, the course wiki. All work in progress will be posted on this wiki, and part of our joint work will be to build content for public consumption at some future date.

We will grade the materials that are posted at the cut-off time. Any additional material that you might post after that point will be noted, but not taken into account in individual assignment grades, given that materials mounted on SacredGotham will likely change and be modified throughout the term.

SacredGotham

All course work is posted on SacredGotham. SacredGotham is password-protected and available only to enrolled class members (thus, not public like wikipedia). SacredGotham is also a growing repository of secondary and primary documents, including bibliographies, archives, images, and video.

Assignment #1

CHOOSING A SITE

Due 2 February

Your first assignment **is to locate a religious site** on which the rest of your assignments will be based, and to prepare a brief report on it. 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 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). If, however, you know that a group gathers on Great Hill in Central Park to regularly practice tai chi or yoga, that would be fine.

(b) You must choose a site **in Manhattan** that you can visit without too much difficulty during the semester, and one that you will be able to visit or observe during its regular events.

(c) Your site must be unique to the class. No two students can choose the same site. Please post your choice on SacredGotham as soon as you have made your decision.

The 4 page report. After you have chosen a site, 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 the setting and surrounding neighborhood. Describe the neighborhood/community area and its characteristics. Provide some brief details about the religious significance of the site, including the specific religious group(s) that use or shape it. At this point, you are not expected to attend or visit. That will come later. Rather, we wish you to give us a sense of the urban setting and how you imagine the religious site might relate to its milieu.

Assignment #2

YOUR SITE THROUGH TIME

Due 2 March

In this assignment you will explore the changes that your site or community has undergone through time, and allow you to focus on questions about how religious communities and urban settings change in time with regard to your site.

This assignment will ask first to investigate the origins and history of your site. 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 over time, and how has this influenced the group? As you investigate these changes you should contextualize them as much as possible with regard to broader changes in the city: for example, how has immigration or economics influenced your group's position in the city?

You will need to do some exploring in on-line and library resources. In addition to written histories, you should consult historical maps of New York City available on line and at the Columbia and New York Public Libraries, historical photographs of your site or neighborhood, and other historical texts (for example, nineteenth century guidebooks to the city of New York, or old newspapers that can be searched via ProQuest). 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 that you are studying, particularly their presence in New York. You will find some bibliographic resources listed on the wiki, and you of course are strongly encouraged to link more references to the "resources" page as you find them.

The 6-8 page report. Your report should tell a short history of your site, indicating what you believe are the most important changes in the setting/site over time. In brief, 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, and at least three visual components (maps, photographs, etc.) You are strongly encouraged likewise to draw on class readings to bolster the analytical frame.

Assignment #3
FIELD REPORT ASSIGNMENT
Due 8 April

By this point, you should have spent some time observing the neighborhood around your site, and be familiar with its history. 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. As with the second assignment, your paper should be analytical rather than descriptive. 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 lectures and 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
COMPARING YOUR SITE
Due on the examination day

In this final paper you will reflect on the theoretical aspects of studying religions through the idiom of space. Through the term we have encountered sacred space in varieties of forms - from the imagined to the physically marked, from the global and transnational to the local, from the specifically tradition-infused and bounded to the cosmopolitan and open. The wide range of sites and groups that you have individually investigated attest to the wide range of ways that religious symbols, liturgies, rituals, communities, and cultures are shaped by, and shape, religion in place.

With this in mind your final assignment is to place your own budding theoretical and analytical conclusions about your site into a comparison with one (or at most two) other projects posted on SacredGotham. The purpose of this comparison will be to reflect analytically on similar and dissimilar historical, cultural, theological, and sociological factors that influence New York City's religious sites. Importantly, we expect

that your paper will demonstrate your comprehension of the central thematic issues presented throughout the term.

More details on this assignment and the others will be forthcoming.