

Religious Worlds of New York

Religion W4620

Spring 2007 Monday 2:10-4

80 Claremont – Room 101

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Office Hours Wednesdays 4-6

Mondays 4-5:30 and by appointment

This seminar has a set of interrelated, but in some ways rather different, goals. As follows:

- 1) Observing religion. Much work in the Religion Departments at Barnard and Columbia is text-based. We will read in this course too, but a major objective here is to “read experience.” We hope to develop the capability to observe religion as lived.
- 2) New York religion. We expect to learn something of the complex texture of religious life in New York City. We will accomplish this objective through readings and projects structured into the syllabus and through sustained exposure to projects of students’ own devising.
- 3) Urban/metropolitan religion. The argument is sometimes made that religion in dense urban spaces is characteristically very different from religion as it appears elsewhere. New York provides numerous ways to explore that idea, insofar as it encompasses a variety of ethnic and immigrant groups and individuals; generates new, complex, and hybrid forms of cultural life that are less possible in smaller populations; and is in places unusually “virtual” and transnational in its sense of itself.

Texts:

The following texts are available for purchase at Labyrinth Books and on reserve at the Barnard Library. In addition, a reader is available to buy at the Village Copier (Broadway between 111th and 112th Streets)

Karen Brown, *Mama Lola, A Voodoo Priestess in Brooklyn*

Courtney Bender, *Heaven’s Kitchen: Living Religion at God’s Love We Deliver.*

Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*

Robert Emerson, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*

Robert Orsi, ed., *Gods of the City*

Seminar requirements:

- Attendance and participation in class, including a class presentation
- Seminar paper
- Field work as described below

Fieldwork

Mapping the religious landscape: with a partner, you will canvass an area of Morningside Heights for public displays of religion.

This project will introduce you to the variety of ways that religion is manifest throughout daily life in the city, and (with any luck) expand your vision of religious life in New York.

Assignment: a visual map and a short written analysis.

Initial religious investigation: A one-time visit to a Hindu temple (with the class). You will write field notes and a short field report based on your visit. Then you will read and reflect on the others' reports, generating reflections on the differences or similarities in field reports of the same events.

This project will give you some excellent experience in the field.

Assignment: (a) Field notes (no page limit), (b) field report (3-5 pages) and (c) written critique of the process (5-7 pages).

"In-depth" religious encounter: You will select a religious community or site to visit individually on an ongoing basis throughout the term. Fieldwork in this community will be ongoing and should commence early in the term. Your visits to this site or community will form the backbone of your seminar paper.

Assignment: Seminar paper (10-15 pages).

Grading and fine print:

- Class participation and presentation: 30%
- Hinduism project (all components): 20%
- Seminar paper: 50%

All assignments are due at the beginning of class on the day listed in the syllabus. As assignments will often form the basis of class discussion, late work will not be accepted.

22 January: Introductions

Readings:

Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City" (.pdf file)

29 January: Encounters

Assignment:

Mapping project

Readings:

Robert Orsi, "Crossing the City Line," (introduction to *Gods of the City*)

(p) "Religion" in *Encyclopedia of New York*, Kenneth Jackson, ed.

(p) William H. Whyte, "The Social Life of Streets" in *City*

5 February: Field Work – Time, Space, Ethnographer

Readings:

(p) Wolcott, *The Art of Fieldwork* ch. 5

Emerson, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* chapters 1-3

"Morningside Human Subjects Training Course" (go to www.rascal.columbia.edu).

Take the training course BEFORE our field trip to Queens.

10 and 11 February: class visits to Hindu temples on Bowne Street, Flushing, Queens

Our primary focus will be on the venerable (1977) Ganesha Temple in Flushing, more formally known as the Sri Maha Vallabha Ganapati Devasthanam or alternately as the Hindu Temple Society of North America.

Group 1: Every Saturday at 11:00 the deity Venkateswara, a form of Vishnu, is the main focus of temple worship-- *abhisekha* or lustration. We will attend on February 10. Plan to arrive at the temple at 10:30 a.m. for an opportunity to visit other spaces within the temple complex before the service begins. This is also a time when many of the educational activities of the temple are in full swing.

Group 2: On Sunday, February 11, we will attend the most heavily attended celebration in a normal week, focusing on the *abhisekha* of the deity Ganesha, beginning at 11:00 a.m. Plan to arrive at the temple at 10:30 a.m. for an opportunity to visit other spaces within the temple complex before the service begins.

Group 3: (Optional) Friday, February 16 provides a third chance to visit the temple, to observe the annual festival of Maha Shivaratri, "The Great Night of Shiva." This celebration lasts all night, but we will visit early in the evening at a time to be determined. Of course, you're welcome to stay.

12 February: World Religions on Bowne Street

Assignment: Fieldnotes and field report from Bowne Street

Readings:

R. Scott Hanson, *City of Gods* (unpublished manuscript), chapters 3 and 4

Compare the Ganapati temple website at <http://www.nyganesh temple.org>.

Compare the Swaminarayan temple website at

<http://www.swaminarayan.org/globalnetwork/america/newyork.htm>.

For a look at student papers from “Hinduism Here” (Spring, 2003), several of which are in Queens, see <http://www.barnard.edu/religion/hinduismhere>.

19 February: Hinduism in Queens

Assignment: Critical reflection on field report and notes

Readings:

Diana L. Eck, "Negotiating Hindu Identities in America," available at:

<http://www.netLibrary.com/urlapi.asp?action=summary&v=1&bookid=44052>

Joanne Waghorne, "The Hindu Gods in a Split-Level World: The Sri Siva-Visnu Temple in Suburban Washington, D.C.," in *Gods of the City*.

(p) Anand Mohan et al., "The Pilgrimage" and other snippets

(p) J. S. Hawley, "Global Hinduism in Gotham,"

26 February: Fieldwork discussions

Readings:

Emerson, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* chapters 4-5

(p) Robert Orsi, "Have You Ever Prayed to St. Jude?"

(p) Gary Alan Fine, "Ten Lies of Ethnography"

(p) Simon Coleman, "‘But Are They Really Christian?’ Contesting Knowledge and Identity in and out of the Field."

5 March: Congregation and community: adaptations to the American urban context

Assignment:

Field notes, analytical notes and "theme"

Readings:

(p) Feng-gang Yang and Helen Rose Ebaugh, "Transformations in New Immigrant Religions and Their Global Implications"

Jack Kugelmass. "Moses of the South Bronx" in *Gods of the City*.

(p) Kenneth Guest, "Liminal Youth among Fuzhou Chinese Undocumented Workers"

(p) Elta Smith and Courtney Bender, "The Creation of Urban Niche Religion: South Asian Taxi Drivers in New York City"

12 March: Spring Break

19 March: Religion in Unexpected Places

Readings:

Joseph Sciorra, "We Go Where the Italians Live: Religious Processions as Ethnic and Territorial Markers in a Multi-Ethnic Brooklyn Neighborhood" in Orsi, ed. *Gods of the City*

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

Edward R. Gray and Scott L. Thumma. "The Gospel Hour: Liminality, Identity and Religion in a Gay Bar"

(p) Sherry Suib Cohen, "chapter on tea-leaf readers"

26 March: Reading New York's Religious Worlds I

Reading:

Courtney Bender, *Heaven's Kitchen: Living Religion at God's Love We Deliver*.

2 April: No class, in deference to Passover. To compensate for this loss, an additional class is scheduled later in the month.

9 April: Reading New York's Religious Worlds II

Assignment:

Field notes and analytical writing

Reading:

Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*

(p) Elizabeth McAlister, "The Madonna of 115 St. Revisited: Voodoo and Haitian Catholicism in the Age of Transnationalism"

16 April: Reading New York's Religious Worlds III

Reading:

Karen Brown, *Mama Lola: A Voodoo Priestess in Brooklyn*

23 April

Class presentations-I

26 April WEDNESDAY EVENING

Class presentations-II

NB: We will meet at Professor Hawley's apartment, 380 Riverside Drive 3H (entrance on 110th Street), 7-9 p.m.

30 April

Class presentations-III