

Wesleyan University, Fall 2009

Religion 272 • Anthropology 255 • American Studies 297

Religious Worlds of New York

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Class Meetings:
Mon/Wed, 2:40 - 4:00
in Hall-Atwater 84

Office Hours: Wed 10 - 12,
or other times by appointment

Course Description:

This course will explore the religious diversity of New York City – the “promised city” for many new Americans from throughout the world. It will not try to survey the full range of New York’s diversity, but will focus instead in three sets of issues that touch the lives of many New Yorkers: 1) The efforts of religious communities to define both geographic and social spaces in the city – neighborhoods, congregations, households, etc. 2) The ways that religion shapes the incorporation of immigrant communities into American society, while also helping transnational communities maintain enduring connections to their homelands. And 3) The complex ties among religion, race, ethnicity, class, and other forms of collective identity. By focusing on the bewildering diversity of a single city the course will also raise a number of underlying theoretical and political questions: How do different communities imagine – and produce – their own distinct worlds within a shared urban space? How can communities living in different sociocultural worlds negotiate a common public sphere? Can we speak of New York – or America – as a single society, given this religious and cultural diversity?

Students will explore these questions through required readings, lectures, and discussions, as well as two formal papers and a number of brief reading responses.

Required Readings:

Five texts will be available to purchase at Broad Street Books, and on reserve at Olin:

Kenneth Guest, *God in Chinatown*
Henry Goldschmidt, *Race and Religion among the Chosen Peoples of Crown Heights*
Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*
Robert Orsi, ed., *Gods of the City*
Moses Rischin, *The Promised City*

A packet of photocopied readings is also required, and will be available to purchase at Pip Printing (179 Main Street -- order in advance at pipmid.com). The reader will also be on reserve at Olin, and the readings will be available as pdfs on Blackboard. If you access the readings at Olin or on Blackboard you are strongly advised to copy them or print them out. Texts from the reader are marked with an (R) in the schedule of readings and assignments.

Course Requirements:

Reading: This is a fairly reading intensive course. You will need to keep up with the schedule of readings on the syllabus, read carefully, and come to every class with a solid grasp on the texts.

Attendance and Participation: Regular attendance is required, and I'll take attendance in each class. New material will be introduced in lectures, for which you may be held responsible. Class participation is encouraged, although not required (the class is just too big). There will be some opportunity for discussion during regular class meetings, and we'll break the class into small discussion groups occasionally.

Reading Responses: You will write five brief reading response papers, of 1 - 2 pages each, over the course of the semester. You can write on whatever weeks of readings you like, but you must submit three responses before Fall Pause, and two afterward. Your responses will generally be due in class on the Wednesday of the week you're writing about, and no later. If students would like me to, I can also set up a system for you to read and comment on each other's reading responses on Blackboard, but this will not be required. We will discuss my expectations for these reading responses in more detail in class.

Short Papers: You will also write two more formal papers on the course readings, of about 5 - 6 pages each. These papers are scheduled on the syllabus, and we'll discuss my expectations for them in class.

Final Grades: Your grade in the course will be based on your two papers (about 25% of the final grade for each paper), and your five reading responses (about 10% of the final grade for each response). This equation may not be precise, however. In addition, your final grade will suffer if you have a significant number of absences.

Fair Warnings: You'll find that I am reasonably flexible about assignment deadlines when students face medical or personal issues, but I will penalize late papers and reading responses if you don't communicate with me about these issues in a timely manner. I only give incompletes to students facing medical or personal crises at the end of the semester. And finally, you should know that I am an anti-plagiarism fanatic. I will have *zero tolerance* for plagiarism, and I will refer any intentional plagiarism to the Honor Board for disciplinary action.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

9/9 Introduction to the Course. No reading.

Unit 1: Imagining "The City" and its "Neighborhoods"

9/14 Robert Orsi, "Introduction: Crossing the City Line" (*Gods*, Introduction)

9/16 Joseph Sciorra, "We Go Where the Italians Live: Religious Processions as Ethnic and Territorial Markers" (*Gods*, chapter 8)

Wayne Ashley, "The Stations of the Cross: Christ, Politics and Processions" (*Gods*, chapter 9)

Unit 2: Changing Neighborhoods, Part One: The Lower East Side and Chinatown

- 9/21 Moses Rischin, *The Promised City*, chapters 1, 2, 4, and 5
- 9/23 Moses Rischin, *The Promised City*, chapters 3, 6, 7, and 8
- 9/28 Hasia Diner, *Lower East Side Memories*, chapters 1 and 2 (selection) (R)
Jonathan Boyarin, “The Lower East Side: A Place of Forgetting” (R)
- 9/30 Kenneth Guest, *God in Chinatown*, Introduction and chapters 1 - 2
Michael Luo, “Immigrants Hear God’s Word, in Chinese, via Conference Call” (R)
- 10/5 Kenneth Guest, *God in Chinatown*, chapters 3 - 7
- 10/7 Jack Kugelmass, “Turfig the Slum: New York City’s Tenement Museum and the Politics of Heritage” (R)
Seth Kamil, “Tripping Down Memory Lane: Walking Tours on the Jewish Lower East Side” (R)

Unit 3: Changing Neighborhoods, Part Two: Italian, Spanish, and Haitian Harlem

- 10/12 Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*, original Introduction (pp. xxxix-xlix) and chapters 1 - 2
- 10/14 Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*, chapters 3 and 6
- 10/19 Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*, chapters 7 - 8
- 10/21 Robert Orsi, “The Religious Boundaries of an In-Between People” (*Gods*, ch. 6)
Elizabeth McAlister, “The Madonna of 115th Street Revisited: Vodou and Haitian Catholicism in the Age of Transnationalism” (R)
- 10/26 Fall Pause. No class. Work on midterm papers.

Unit 4: Space and Identity in Muslim and Afro-Caribbean Religious Communities

- 10/28 Louis Cristillo, “The Muslim Population of New York City” (R)
Louis Abdellatif Cristillo and Lorraine C. Minnite, “The Changing Arab New York Community” (R)
Barbara Metcalf, “Sacred Words, Sanctioned Practice, New Communities” (R)

Midterm Paper Due in Class

- 11/2 Jerrilynn Dodds and Edward Grazda, *New York Masjid* (selections) (R)
 Elta Smith and Courtney Bender, “The Creation of Urban Niche Religion: South Asian Taxi Drivers in New York City” (R)
- 11/4 Jennifer Bryan, “Constructing ‘the True Islam’ in Hostile Times: The Impact of 9/11 on Arab Muslims in Jersey City” (R)
 Moustafa Bayoumi, *How Does it Feel to be a Problem?* (selections) (R)
- 11/9 David Brown, “Altared Spaces: Afro-Cuban Religions and the Urban Landscape in Cuba and the United States” (*Gods*, chapter 4)
- 11/11 Karen Brown, “Staying Grounded in a High-Rise Building: Ecological Dissonance and Ritual Accommodation in Haitian Vodou” (*Gods*, ch. 1)

Unit 5: New York Coming Apart? Race and Religion in Crown Heights

- 11/16 Henry Goldschmidt, *Race and Religion among the Chosen Peoples of Crown Heights*, Prologue, Introduction, and chapter 1
 In class film: Anna Deveare Smith, *Fires in the Mirror*
- 11/18 Henry Goldschmidt, *Race and Religion among the Chosen Peoples of Crown Heights*, chapter 2
- 11/23 Henry Goldschmidt, *Race and Religion among the Chosen Peoples of Crown Heights*, chapter 3
- 11/25 Thanksgiving Break. No class.
- 11/30 Henry Goldschmidt, *Race and Religion among the Chosen Peoples of Crown Heights*, chapters 4, 5, and Conclusion
- 12/2 No class. Professor away at a conference.

Unit 6: New York Coming Together? Civil Religion and Sacred Space After 9/11

- 12/7 W. Lloyd Warner, “An American Sacred Ceremony” (R)
 various authors, *New York Times* coverage of 9/11/02 memorial services (R)
- 12/9 Marita Sturken, “The Aesthetics of Absence: Rebuilding Ground Zero” (R)
 Rev. Betsee Parker, “‘Send Thou Me’: God’s Weeping and the Sanctification of Ground Zero” (R)
- 12/14 Walt Whitman, “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” (R)
- 12/21 ***Final Paper Due in My Mailbox on Monday the 21st by 12 noon.***