

RELIGIOUS WORLDS OF NEW YORK

Fall 2000
Wednesday 9-10.50

Professors:

[John S. Hawley](#)

219A Milbank
4-5292; jsh3@columbia.edu
Office hours: TW 11-12

[Courtney Bender](#)

613 Kent Hall
4-3716; cb337@columbia.edu
Office hours: Wed 4-6

Seminar goals:

The course 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 learn to "read experience." We hope to develop the capability to observe religion as lived.

2) New York religion.

We expect, through readings and projects already structured into this syllabus and through sustained exposure to projects of students' own devising, to learn something of the complex texture of religious life in New York City.

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, especially insofar as it encompasses a variety of ethnic and immigrant groups and individuals; encourages the generation of 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.

Seminar requirements:

Attendance and participation in class discussions

Field observation: three projects of growing intensity, with accompanying write-ups

1. Mapping the religious landscape:

You and a partner will canvass a discrete 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.

2. Initial religious investigations:

A one-time visit to a Hindu temple. You will write field notes and a short field report based on your visit. You will also read others' reports and generate reflections on the differences or similarities in field reports based on the same events. This project will provide you with some excellent experience in "the field," and a chance to think specifically about the ways that different styles and pre-existing assumptions influence the field research project.

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

3. "In-depth" religious encounters:

You will select a religious community or site to visit individually on an ongoing basis throughout the term. To best facilitate learning in this course, we ask that you choose to investigate a religious community in which you

have not previously participated in any extended way. Your visits to this site or community will form the backbone of

your seminar paper.

Assignment: Seminar paper (10-15 pages).

Class presentation

Texts:

The following texts will be on reserve in Butler, and available for purchase at [Labyrinth Books](#).

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Other required readings will be distributed in class or made available to photocopy.

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

Lis Harris, *Holy Days, the World of a Hasidic Family*

Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*

H. Wolcott, *The Art of Field Work*

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

Johanna Lessinger, *From Ganges to the Hudson*

All books are on reserve in the Barnard library.

In addition, the following books on ethnographic practice may be of interest. They are on reserve at Barnard.

Robert Emerson, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (California)

Lofland and Lofland, *Analyzing Social Settings* (Wadsworth)

G. McCracken, *The Long Interview* (Sage)

John van Maanen, *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography* (Chicago)

Robert Emerson, ed., *Contemporary Field Research* (Waveland)

Other resources (web based):

Columbia University Library guide to [New York resources](#)
[New York Public Library](#).
[New York Religion Links](#)

Schedule:

6 September
Introductions

13 September
Encounters

Assignment:

Mapping project

Readings:

"Crossing the City Line," Robert Orsi (introduction to *Gods of the City*)
Excerpts from *One Nation Under God*, Kosmin and Lachman
"Religion" in *Encyclopedia of New York*, Kenneth Jackson, ed.

20 September
Field Work: time, space, ethnographer

Assignment: 1-2 page independent project proposal

Readings:

Wolcott, *The Art of Fieldwork* ch. 5
William H. Whyte, "The Social Life of Streets" in *City*
Emerson, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* chs. 1-3

22 and 24 September: class visits to temples on Bowne Street, Queens

27 September
Hinduism in New York

Assignment:

Fieldnotes and field report from Queens

Readings:

Lessinger, *From Ganges to the Hudson*

4 October

Hinduism continued

Assignment:

Critical reflection on field report and notes

Readings:

Diana L. Eck, "Negotiating Hindu Identities in America"

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*

Anand Mohan et al., "The Pilgrimage" and other snippets, in *Asian Religions in America*

R. Scott Hanson, "Sri Maha Vallabha Ganapati Devasthanam of Flushing, New York."

Compare the temple website at <http://www.indianet.com/ganesh>.

Raymond Brady Williams, *Religions of Immigrants from India and Pakistan: New Threads in an American Tapestry* chapter 5 pp. 152-185.

Compare the website at <http://www.swaminarayan-baps.org>.

Gregg Hansbury, "Twice Exiled: Devotion, Community, and Education in a Guyanese-American Mandir," paper for "Religious World of New York," 1999.

Michelle Caswell, "Hindu Sacred Space on American Soil: The Divya Dham Temple of Woodside, Queens," paper for "Religious Worlds of New York," Columbia University, 1996.

<http://www.barnard.edu/religion/pages/students.html>

11 October

Fieldwork discussions

Readings:

Emerson, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, chapters 4 and 6 (recommended: ch. 5)

Samuel Freedman, "Return to the Rock"

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

Gary Alan Fine, "Ten Fictions of Ethnography"

18 October

Congregation and community: religious people adapt to the American urban context

Assignment:

Field notes, analytical notes and "theme"

Readings:

R. Stephen Warner, "The Place of the Congregation in American Religious History" in *American Congregations*

Nancy Ammerman, "Bowling Together"

Scott Cormode, "Churches and Secular Voluntary Associations in the Turn of the Century City" in *Sacred Companies*

Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf, "Structural Adaptations in an Immigrant Muslim Congregation in New York" in *Gatherings in the Diaspora*

25 October

Religion on the street

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*

Diane Winston, "Cathedral of the Open Air" in *Gods of the City*

1 November

Reading New York's Religious Worlds

Reading:

Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*

8 November

Reading New York's Religious Worlds II

Assignment:

Field notes and analytical writing

Reading:

Lis Harris, *Holy Days: The World of a Hasidic Family*

15 November

Reading New York's Religious Worlds III

Reading:

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

22 November NO CLASS MEETING

Assignment:

Draft of project due 12 noon

28 November TUESDAY EVENING

Class presentations: Professor Hawley's residence, 7-9 p.m.

29 November and 6 December

Class presentations

MONDAY 11 December

Final draft of independent project due

Last updated: 6 September 2000