



Place Profile

Snowball Essay #2
Race and Religion in America
Dr. Lindsey
Fall 2020

In his book *Race and Religion Among the Chosen Peoples of Crown Heights* Henry Goldschmidt writes that residents “imagine the geography” of the Brooklyn, New York, neighborhood “in terms of race, class, and religion.” Understanding these geographies—and the power they yield—cannot, he argues, be reduced to “locating a ‘neighborhood’ on a map.” Rather, we have to attend to the production of “Crown Heights” in “the history of politically charged efforts to produce such a place and distinguish it from other places.” (Goldschmidt, 84-85).

The book presents Crown Heights as a stark example of the interplay of race, class, and religion in the production of lived worlds. Yes we can point to a place called “Crown Heights” on a map, but the social histories that have produced that place yield a much more complicated portrait than Google (or other cartographies) can capture.

This essay asks you to probe the questions animating Goldschmidt’s study of Crown Heights by applying them to a place that matters to you. It’s a process essay, which means you will walk through several steps before composing your profile.

GETTING STARTED

Step 1: What is a place?

The place you select can be as specific as a room in a building or as broad as a city. If you choose a park or business or monument, you'll still want to position that place in the social history of its neighborhood and/or city, but your primary focus will be on the specific place you have selected. Start with thinking through these questions. Your essay won't answer each of them, at least not directly, but thinking through them will help you select your place and begin to study it:

- What are (or have been) some important, formative, or otherwise notable places in my life? List 3-5.
- What makes them important to me? What memories do they invoke? What are a handful of adjectives that spring to mind when I think of these places?
- How do we understand the connections between boundaries and identities? Between physical and social locations? Between the worlds we inhabit and the worlds we create? What readings from this semester help me think through this question?
- How have religion and race been coded into constructions and experiences of place? That is, what is the religio-racial history and current profile of a specific place? What do we mean by "religio-racial"?
- What tools can we use and what interpretive methods can we employ to attempt to answer these questions?
- Here are links to a couple of pieces by Dr. Lindsey to get you thinking if you're still having trouble getting started:
 - "Missouri: An Ozarks Native Crosses the Show Me State," *Religion and Politics*, September 18, 2018, <https://religionandpolitics.org/2018/09/18/missouri-an-ozarks-native-crosses-the-show-me-state/>
 - "French King, Catholic Saint, American Icon: Provoking Religion, Race, and Public Memory in an American City," *American Religions*, Summer 2020, <https://american-religion.org/apotheosis>



Step 2: Thick Description

The ethnographic method of “thick description” understands “culture” to be a semiotic network rather than fixed assembly of customs, artifacts, and identities. That is, to understand a cultural object—let’s say a cup of coffee—we start with an attentive physical description of the cup of coffee itself—size, shape, smell, taste, etc.

But we also understand the cup of coffee as a symbol within the broader cultural network of meaning. Where it is, how it got there, the meanings different people apply to the coffee, the economics and ethics of coffee production and consumption, the rituals surrounding coffee making and drinking, all of these and more become part of our “thick description” of the cup of coffee. To learn more about this method, read here (you don’t have to but I recommend it): <http://culturalstudiesnow.blogspot.com/2012/05/clifford-geertz-thick-description.html>

- If needed, go back to review Goldschmidt’s description of the laundromat and how he frames his broader study from this starting point of a particular place and time.
 - I also recommend reading this delightful short piece by Shari Rabin over at *The Immanent Frame*: <https://tif.ssrc.org/2020/02/28/space-place-rabin/>
 - How does she define the proximities between buildings, people, cities, and identities?
- If available to you (in a way that is complies with social distancing protocols and pandemic mitigation policies), go to the place you are analyzing (or a location within the place) and spend at least thirty minutes describing it in minute detail:
 - describe architecture, layout, and usable space
 - observe who is there and how they move around and/or interact with the space
 - describe its proximity to other landmarks or cultural boundaries
 - are there any other cultural signs or symbols in this place (hint, think about race, gender, class, and education—are these identities coded into the place?)
 - Your notes don’t have to be fully developed sentences but they should be sufficient to be usable when you compose your essay at a later time.
- If you can’t physically go to the place you are profiling, spend some time drafting out your thick description from memory or other documents (do you have access to audiovisual media? to archival documents?)

Step 3: Mapping

Once you have selected a place and begun drafting your thick description, switch perspectives to a bird’s eye view of your place. Here are some mapping tools that you may find useful. Your essay does not have to use or cite all of these, but they should provide new information and spark new ways of thinking about religion and race in place.

- Visit this mapping tool and record whose indigenous lands your place is on: <https://native-land.ca/> (you can also text any zipcode to 1-907-312-5085 for an automated SMS reply of indigenous lands you are on)
- Explore data sets and visualizations about religion and race in the U.S. As you explore, think about how religion and race are quantified and mapped.

Mapping Religion

Pew Religious Landscape Study <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>

The Association of Religion Data Archives <https://www.thearda.com/>

The American Values Atlas <https://www.prii.org/american-values-atlas/>

American Religious Sounds Project

https://explore.religiousthoughts.osu.edu/visualization?skip_control_screen=true&target_visualization=map

Archdiocese of St. Louis Interreligious Mapping Tool: <https://www.archstl.org/ecumenical-interreligious-affairs/resources/interreligious-mapping>

U.S. Census of Religious Bodies 1906, 1916, 1926, 1936:

https://books.google.com/books/about/Religious_Bodies_1906.html?id=Z6ZdiZWeStAC

Mapping Race

Racial Dot Map <http://racialdotmap.demographics.coopercenter.org/>

Washington Post Racial Segregation Map <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/national/segregation-us-cities/>

New York Times Mapping Segregation <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/07/08/us/census-race-map.html>

Mapping America's Futures

<https://apps.urban.org/features/mapping-americas-futures/>

Mapping Inequality <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=10/38.428/-90.289&city=st.-louis-mo&area=B24>

Mapping Decline <http://mappingdecline.lib.uiowa.edu/>

General and Historical Maps

Sanborn Maps (LOC): <https://www.loc.gov/collections/sanborn-maps>

Interactive Maps (US Census Bureau): <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/data/interactive-maps.html>

Mapping the Second Ku Klux Klan: <https://labs.library.vcu.edu/klan/>

Step 4: Shadow Maps

Shadow maps refer to the ways that different people and populations experience the same physical and cultural spaces. One of the quintessential examples of a “shadow map” in American history is found in the pages of the *Green Book* travel guide published between 1936 and 1966 (<https://publicdomain.nypl.org/greenbook-map/>)

- Read Judith Weisenfeld’s essay on “space, place” at *The Immanent Frame*: (<https://tif.ssrc.org/2020/02/28/space-place-weisenfeld/>)
 - what does she mean by “shadow map”? how might this concept apply to your place?



Writing the Essay

Whether you can physically visit your selected place or not, each essay will use ethnographic observation, demographic tools, and other sources—archives, interviews, media, maps, and more—to survey the **context** and **circumstances** of race and religion in a place that matters to you. Not every essay will build in all of these research tools, but each essay will draw on multiple forms of evidence to craft a religioracial profile of a place that matters to you.

Elements to include in your essay

- **Description** of the place you have selected
- **Claim** about the place: e.g., “St. Louis is one of the most religious urban areas in the United States. It is also one of the most racially segregated cities in modern America.”
- **Evidence** relating to religion and race (ethnographic, demographic, historical, archival, etc.)
- **So what?** question--Why does this place matter? What does it teach us?

3-5 pages. Due Friday, October 9.