

RELS 0088: Penitentiaries to PILOTs
Religion and Institutions in Pennsylvania

First-year Seminar
Fulfills: Sector IV (Humanities & Social Sciences)

This first-year seminar examines how religion works on, in, and through institutions such as penitentiaries, residential facilities for Native children, private universities, for-profit corporations, and public schools. Focusing on the State of Pennsylvania and the City of Philadelphia as examples of broader national trends, we investigate the fraught religious history of many local educational and correctional institutions. We consider topics such as the role of religion in prison culture, perceptions of public education as a right and as a duty, federal and supreme court cases related to schoolhouse ritual, the 1985 MOVE bombing and its aftermath, and the public consequences of tax exemption for private mega-nonprofits.

Each week emphasizes a specific skill that you will use throughout your career at Penn. It trains you in how to read old stuff from the 18th and 19th centuries, how to read abstract “theory,” how to read legal cases, and how to read academic genres like history and ethnography.

Class sessions are 3 hours long with a short break. During our sessions we will spend a lot of time examining specific passages in the reading. I’ll come to each class session with some focused questions for us to discuss, and I’ll also build in time for some in-class writing responses and short reactions to things like documentary films, podcasts, and journalism.



Scan or [click](#) for the video syllabus.

Assignments and Assessment

This course is graded on a 100-point scale. Regular attendance and engaged participation at all class meetings is important, although I will readily excuse absences for legitimate reasons like illness. (Do not come to class if you are sick.) We have fourteen meetings over the course of the term, and you get one point for every class session you attend, plus one additional point for substantive engagement across the term. Attendance is 15% of your grade.

We will use Perusall to collectively comment on the things we are reading for this course. As you do the reading each week, you should highlight passages that you would like to discuss or make notes with questions that you have about the text. Marking up the text in this way is a key assignment and is therefore assessed as part of your course grade. You must comment on the assigned text at least **ten times** during the term, not only by highlighting but also by including a marginal note for your classmates. This kind of engagement is worth 10% of your grade.

You have several smaller assignments, including two very short response papers in the first few weeks of the term, a presentation based on digital documents preserved at the Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center and an accompanying midterm paper, and another response paper based on a walking tour through Center City that you should complete at some point

during the last half of the term. You also have a final project, which you will select from one of the options listed at the end of this document.

Assignments and Assessment at a Glance

- Attendance and Participation: 15%
- Reading Annotations/Responses (on Perusall): 10%
- Response Paper #1: Eastern State Penitentiary (5%)
- Response Paper #2: Foucault and Prisons (5%)
- Presentation #1: Primary Sources at the Carlisle School (10%)
- Midterm Assignment: Carlisle Indian School Essay (20%)
- Walking Tour and Response Essay #3: (5%)
- Final Project Source Selection and Plan: (5%)
- Final Project Abstract: (5%)
- Final Project Submission: (20%)



A shot of a hallway at Eastern State Penitentiary.



Members of the Penn community call on the university to make Payments in Lieu of Taxes to support Philly Schools, 30 March 2021.

Photo credit: Nicholas Hernandez for the *Daily Pennsylvanian*.

Original story: <https://www.thedp.com/article/2021/03/penn-pilots-protest-university-city-drexel>

How to Prepare for Class: THOMAS

This course involves reading different types of academic work. Some of these genres will probably be unfamiliar to you, but the following mnemonic device will help you make your way through them. (I wish I could lay claim to the mnemonic, but the fact that it aligns with my surname is just a happy coincidence!)

THOMAS: A Useful Mnemonic for Reading Scholarship

Dr. Danna Agmon, Virginia Tech, with clarifying edits and additions by Jolyon Thomas

The following mnemonic is a helpful tool to keep in mind as you prepare for class. All the questions are key for understanding the assigned work, but they are arranged in ascending order of importance, from least to most important.

Topic: The basic questions: When? Where? What is this book/article about?

- Read the abstract first (if an article) to get the gist.
- Read outside-in: first the introduction and conclusion, then the rest.
- If there is an opening anecdote, lede, or “hook,” look for the explanatory text immediately after it where the author explains why they’ve told this story.

Historiography: What are the scholarly conversations in which this work participates? What does it add to these conversations?

- When was the book published?
- Who published the book? What is their academic discipline, and where do they work? Where did they do their graduate training?
- Who do they cite or critique? Are they picking a fight? Building on someone else’s ideas?

Organization: What is the organizing structure of this work? Chronological? Thematic? Geographic? How does the organization advance the argument?

Method: What sources does the author use? How do they analyze evidence? Is there an overarching theoretical or conceptual approach? How does the theory reflect the evidence?

- Evidence can include anything from interviews to archival documents. The nature and scope of the evidentiary base affects how authors tell their stories.
- Theory is the “big concept” that the author uses to organize their evidence. When authors describe a particular research project in a way that is generalizable and applicable to broad contexts beyond their specific case, we describe that as “theorizing.”

Argument: What is this author’s original thesis? What new thing does it explain?

- See if you can put the “big idea” of the book/article in one short sentence.

So what?: This could be rephrased as “significance” or “stakes.” What is important or useful about this work, beyond the confines of the topic? Why would people in this specific academic field care about this book/article, and why would non-specialists care to read it? What are its implications for policy, politics, or enhancing our general understanding of the human condition?

Now that you have the THOMAS rubric, here are your reading assignments week by week.
Please read all pages of the assigned works before our class meeting on Tuesday.

Assignments and due dates are listed in the far right column.

Week/Date/Topic	Reading/Listening	Activity/Assignment
Orientation		
Lesson 1 Introductions August 29 Skill: How to Take Charge of Your Study at Penn Religion Angle: Just What Is Religious Studies, Anyway?	No reading.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read in class: Melamed, "Inventing Solitary," <i>Philadelphia Inquirer</i> Watch in class: "Inventing Solitary" Get your Septa KeyCard at the Penn Bookstore. You will need it next week!
Part 1: Penitentiaries		
Lesson 2 The Birth of the Penitentiary September 5 Skill: How to Read Old Stuff 1 Religion Angle: Penitence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beaumont and de Tocqueville, <i>On the Penitentiary System in the United States and its Application in France</i> (1833), 34-36; 53-61; 64-91 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Class field trip to Eastern State Penitentiary
Lesson 3 Discipline September 12 Skill: How to Read "Theory" Religion Angle: Secularizing Accounts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foucault, <i>Discipline and Punish</i> (1977), 3-31; 195-228 Foucault, "Why Study Power: The Question of the Subject" (1983), 208-16 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing assignment: Write a 300-word reflection on the audio tour at Eastern State, incorporating themes from the readings for week 2. Due before class in Week 3.
Lesson 4 The Carceral System in Practice September 19 Skill: How to Read Ethnography Religion Angle: Reform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dubler, <i>Down in the Chapel</i> (2013), Preface, 3-13, 20-40, 62-73, 77-79, 97-98, 103-108, 267-271, 309-311 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing assignment: Did you think about Eastern State Penitentiary and other prisons differently after reading Foucault? What changed for you? 300 words. Due before class in Week 4.
Part II: Boarding Schools		
Lesson 5 Assimilationist Strategies September 26 Skill: How to Read History Religion Angle: Conversion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fear-Segal, <i>White Man's Club</i> (2007), xi-xxiii, 159-251 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set up a one-on-one meeting with me to discuss the course and your final project. Meetings will take place in Weeks 5 and 6.

Week/Date/Topic	Reading/Listening	Activity/Assignment
Lesson 6 Representational Tactics October 3 Skill: How to Read Primary Sources Religion Angle: You Tell Me!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visit the Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center and familiarize yourself with the stuff the digital archive holds. Then pick two images, two items from "Publications," and two items from "Documents." Dig deep! Make a short slideshow (Keynote, PowerPoint, Google Slides, Canvas, etc.) that introduces your peers to your items and explains why they caught your attention. Practice the presentation ahead of time. Slideshows should be no longer than 10 minutes. Short is good! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using your slideshow as an outline, write a short essay (500-1000 words) connecting the items you have selected. What do they tell us about the Carlisle School? Paper is due two weeks after your presentation, so you have time to incorporate feedback.
Part III: Non/Profits		
Lesson 7 Nonprofits and the Public Good October 10 Skill: How to Read Old Stuff II Religion Angle: Tax Exemption and the Public Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Franklin, "Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania (1749)," 5-30 (main text only) Eliot, "What Exemption from Taxation Means," 147 Weiner, <i>Religion Out Loud</i>, 40-76 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read in class: Peters, "A Sermon on Education, Wherein Some Account is Given of the Academy Established in the City of Philadelphia, Preach'd on the Opening Thereof, on the Seventh Day of January 1750-1," 7-20 Walking Tour (see p. 6) OPTIONAL: Candace Lukasik lecture, 5:30 PM in Cohen 402
Lesson 8 For-profit Businesses and the Public Good October 17 Skill: Skimming vs. Reading Religion Angle: Moral Uplift	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kirk, <i>Wanamaker's Temple</i> (online through Penn libraries), SKIM 1-24; READ 24-62; 69-123 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carlisle School essay due before class this week
Part IV: Schools and Courts		
Lesson 9 Schoolhouse Rituals October 24 Skill: How to Read Law & Legal History Religion Angle: Minority Religions and Freedom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gordon, <i>The Spirit of the Law</i> (2010), 15-55 <i>Minersville School District v. Gobitis</i> 310 U.S. 586, 591-600 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choose the topic of your final paper from the list below and submit a short note with your plans in the designated spot on Canvas by no later than 10/31.

Week/Date/Topic	Reading/Listening	Activity/Assignment
Lesson 10 Courtroom Drama October 31 Skill: Reading Essayistic/Journalistic Accounts Religion Angle: Nonbelievers and Freedom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solomon, <i>Ellery's Protest</i>, 1-30; 132-71; 281-306 • <i>Abington School District v. Schempp</i>, 374 U.S. 203 (1963), 205-227 (Opinion of the Court). 	
Part V: Securitization and PENNtrification		
Lesson 11 Public Enemy #1 November 7 Skill: Interpreting Complicated Local History Religion Angle: Who Calls What "Religion"?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evans, <i>MOVE</i> (2020), 1-13; 123-52; 175-234 • McCrary, <i>Sincerely Held</i>, 206-35 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit a short list of 3-5 sources you plan to consult for your final paper. You may include sources on this syllabus or other sources.
Lesson 12 Penntrification November 14 Skill: Critically Interpreting Documentary Media Religion Angle: Tax Exemption for Non-Profits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hines, "The University Fix and John Edgar Wideman's <i>Philadelphia Fire</i>," 129-53 • theblackbottom.wordpress.com (Read "History" and "Community Displacement"). • Blumgart, "Blighted" • Netter Center, <i>The Anchor Institutions Toolkit</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read in class: Abdul-Aliy Muhammad, "Penn Museum Owes Reparations" • Read in class: McCrary, "Ash Like People Now," 202 • Watch in class: Oliver, <i>40 Years a Prisoner</i> (2020, 110 minutes) • Submit an abstract of 150 words outlining the main argument of your final project. Due after Thanksgiving Break.
Part VI: Taxation and Privatization		
Lesson 13 Privatization November 28 Skill: Reading Critical Social Science Religion Angle: Every Story Has One. What's One Here?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mathews, "The Philadelphia Experiment," <i>Education Next</i> (2003): 50-56 • Saltman, <i>The Edison Schools</i>, 154-79 	
Lesson 14 PILOTs December 5 Skill: Reading Local History Religion Angle: Every Story Has One. What's One Here?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Glancey, "PILOTs: Philadelphia and Pennsylvania," 211-232 • Kitzmiller, <i>The Roots of Educational Inequality: Philadelphia's Germantown High School, 1907-2014</i>, ix-12; 183-229. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read in class: Laker, Ruderman, and Purcell, "Danger: Learn at Your Own Risk" (Part One of the 2018 <i>Philadelphia Inquirer</i> series <i>Toxic City: Sick Schools</i>)

WALKING TOUR ASSIGNMENT:

Religious Architecture and Public Space in Philadelphia

- Walk east on Walnut Street.
- At 22nd and Walnut, stop on the southwest corner of the street and look north/northwest. What do you see? (Hint: It's not just a gas station.) Find the interpretive plaque and read all about it.
- Continue walking east on Walnut to Rittenhouse Square. Cut diagonally into the center of the Square and then continue east on Locust Street. Pause for a moment in front of St. Mark's Church. Thinking about Isaac Weiner's chapter, imagine how the sound of bells from the church would mingle with other sounds in the city.
- Cut south on 16th Street and walk past Monk's Bar down to Pine. Walk east over to Broad Street. What's that building across the street to the east? Based on what you have read in Nicole Kirk's book, when do you think this building might have been erected? What is in there now? Any educated guesses as to when this might have changed?
- Walk up Broad, passing through City Hall to pop out on the north side of the building. What's that big building across the street? Go have a look! Once you've looked at the building, compare its architectural features to the governmental and religious buildings nearby. What does its structure signal to you? How would you find out more about this organization if you wanted to?
- Cut back south and walk left (east) around City Hall, crossing Market Street to enter the Wanamaker Building (Macy's). Walk around inside until you find the organ. Take a photo and send it to me.
- Walk out of the Macy's south exit onto Chestnut Street. Find Juniper Street to the east and walk a block south to Walnut. Cross the street and look back up at the Witherspoon Building. What do you see?
- Walk west on Walnut back to campus.
- If you had to tell a story about the religious history of Philadelphia based just on what you saw, what would you say? 300 words, due anytime before the end of the term.

FINAL:

Choose one of the following prompts. Your final paper should be between 2000 and 3000 words. In the case of a StoryMap, we will consult on appropriate scope. The final product is due on December 15th.

1. Read Opinion of the Court, *Vidal et al. v. Philadelphia* 43 U.S. 127 (also known as the "Girard Estate Case," 1844), 1-27 and *Fulton v. Philadelphia* 593 U.S. ____ (2021), Case Syllabus 1-4; Opinion of the Court 1-15. Write an essay comparing the two cases. How do they reflect notions of religion and the public good, and how do they reflect notions of how the state (or other entities) should take care of orphaned children?

2. Analyze the *Kitzmiller v. Dover* Federal Court Decision (on Intelligent Design, 2005) against the earlier *Gobitis* (1940) and *Schempp* (1963) decisions. What reasoning about the nature and purpose of public education remains the same across these cases? What assumptions change over time? Specifically, how do the judges define “religion” and how do they understand the balance of the public good and private belief? A complete answer will probably also engage with the 1971 case *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, another Pennsylvania case that established the famed three-pronged “Lemon test” that is a key component in the *Kitzmiller* ruling. It may help you to read the courtroom drama, *40 Days and 40 Nights*, as you consider this question.
3. After reading Davarian Baldwin’s *In the Shadow of the Ivory Tower*, create a StoryMap (ArcGIS) documenting changes in Penn’s relationship with its Philadelphia home. You may want to look at the [deeds to Penn property](#) held by the University Archives alongside [theblackbottom.net](#) and other relevant materials such as the records of the West Philadelphia Corporation (held by both Penn and Temple). W.E.B. DuBois’s *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* may be a useful, if dated, source of statistical information. (Note that DuBois focuses more on South Philadelphia—the Seventh Ward—than on West Philly.)
4. Write a critical review of Osder’s 2013 documentary *Let the Fire Burn* that situates the documentary within the history provided by Richard Kent Evans, Charles McCrary, novelists such as John Edgar Wideman (*Philadelphia Fire*) and local citizen journalists such as Abdul-Aliy Muhammad. Your review should include analysis not only of the content of the film, but also of the form of the film. What techniques does the director use to plant a question in the audience’s mind and then answer it? What editing techniques provide the impression of a fluid story?
5. In 2018, a grand jury released a report on sexual abuse in six Catholic dioceses in Pennsylvania, following up on an early 2005 grand jury report on sexual abuse in the Philadelphia diocese. After reading these reports and the dioceses’ responses, write an essay on the similarities and differences between law enforcement responses to allegations of abuse in the Catholic Church and MOVE.
6. In 2020 a group of approximately 1000 Penn faculty and staff called on the university to make Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILOTs) to an educational equity fund in the City of Philadelphia. (Full disclosure: I was one of the faculty leading this call.) While Penn did not make a formal PILOT agreement with the City, it did eventually make a \$100M gift to support the Philadelphia School District pay for things like asbestos remediation. Based on our readings about the history of tax exemption and Penn’s relationships with the Black Bottom/University City neighborhood, write two op-eds of no more than 1000 words each. One should make the case for why Penn should pay PILOTs, and one should make the case for why paying PILOTs is not Penn’s responsibility. Op-eds typically don’t have bibliographies, but in this case yours should. Substantiate your claims with links in the main text, and then include a list of cited readings at the bottom.