

**Jews and the City: ReligYinz Post**  
**Spring 2020**

**ASSIGNMENT:**

Your assignment is to write a case study for *ReligYinz* (<https://religyinz.wordpress.com>), an online exhibit – still under construction -- that highlights and analyzes examples of lived, vernacular religion in Pittsburgh.

As the home page describes it:

*ReligYinz explores the diversity of religious Pittsburgh in ways that are as colloquial, unexpected, and quintessentially Pittsburgh as our second-person plural pronoun, “yinz.” Featuring centuries-old Torah scrolls, family-owned grocery stores, football monuments, and diya lamps, we take a deeper look at the religions that created Pittsburgh and the religions that Pittsburgh creates.*

As students in a class about Jewish urban experience, you are in a great position to meaningfully contribute to this exhibit. Over the next month, each one of you will compose a single case study for *ReligYinz* highlighting some aspect of Jewish life in Pittsburgh. Successful pages may become a permanent part of the *ReligYinz* exhibition.

**Deadlines:**

By Friday, February 14<sup>th</sup>, please email me a list of 3 case studies that you would be happy to explore for this project (you can find the list in appendix #1). If you have your own idea about a case study you would like to explore, please send it to me *along with* three options from the list that I gave you. I will do my best to ensure that everyone gets to work on one of their preferred options.

On March 19<sup>th</sup>, we will have an in-class peer review of your pages, so that you can get feedback from your peers before submitting a final draft. To prepare, please bring a hard copy of the written portion of your page (you can find the template at the end of this sheet) to class with you. Please also bring in your photographs (on a device is fine, or you can print them out).

- Also, on March 19<sup>th</sup>: please email me the written portion of your page as well as the photographs. We will upload your drafts to the ReligYinz site in preparation for the event at the Heinz History Center.

On Sunday, March 22<sup>nd</sup>, you will present your page drafts to the public at the Heinz History Center, 10:30am -12:30pm. *You will mostly be discussing your research and*

*showing the photographs, so please don't worry if the written portion is not yet in perfect shape.* Please feel free to invite family and friends to the event, as they will likely be excited to discuss your research with you.

You must email me your final, edited posts and photographs by April 17<sup>th</sup>, 5pm.

### **Getting Started:**

Choose case 3 studies from the attached list that you suspect will tell us something significant about Jewish life in Pittsburgh, past or present.

You can also suggest your own case study. If you do, make sure that it fits within one of the RelgYinz themes: displays, foods, memories, objects, rituals, sounds, spaces.

### **Specifications:**

The written component of your page should be short (approximately 400-500 words). It should be written in simple, lively, clear, and accessible language. Remember that you are trying to *engage* visitors who come to *ReligYinz*, most of whom will have no specialized knowledge about Jewish history, religious history, or the history of Pittsburgh. Your post should *convince* visitors that your case study is fascinating and important (see addendum for tips on how to keep your language clear and lively).

The written section of your post should have the following components:

1. Introduction: This paragraph should tell visitors basic information about your case study (what/where is it), and relay a clear thesis explaining why you believe that your case study tells us something significant about Jewish life in Pittsburgh.
2. Substance: In the rest of your post, *prove* that your case study is as interesting as you claim it is in your introduction. This section should offer concrete examples from your field notes or the archives that support the thesis you laid out in your introduction.

In addition:

Your page must contain at least 3 images (photographs that you take yourself – you may not use photographs from the internet) and an embedded google map of where you can find the site, object, or event that you analyzed (look at the template for instructions).

### **Gathering evidence:**

You can gather evidence in two ways: through archives and field notes.

- Those of you who are researching a historical site should go to the Rauh Jewish archive to get relevant documents (Eric Lidji will have them all prepared for you), and **also** go the location where your site once was so you can document its current state.
- Those of you who are researching a current site should go to the site and take field notes. You can find a helpful guide to taking field notes here:  
<https://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/fieldnotes>
  - Please note: if you are visiting a synagogue, school, restaurant, store, or other private space, please be sure to call or email first to let someone know that you will be arriving.
- Remember to take photographs, when you are at your site and when you are at the archives. The purpose of your images is twofold: 1. to give your readers a general sense of the site that you are analyzing and 2. To offer *specific points of evidence* for your thesis. Your images should accomplish both things.

How do I keep my writing lively and accessible?

### **Avoid introductory clichés.**

In spite of what your high school instructors may have told you, no one enjoys reading clichés or generalities. Do **not** begin your post with a general statement about the broad nature of anything. Avoid general statements about Jews, cities,

or religion, and any sentence that begins with “since the beginning of time.” To draw your reader into your case study, you want to keep your writing *interesting* and *specific*.

For your posts, begin your introduction with interesting and specific information about your case study. Once you have set the scene, clearly explain your thesis. The posts that are currently on the ReligYinz site can give you some examples of how to do this.

### **Show, Don't Tell**

Support your thesis -- and all of your claims -- with concrete evidence and examples from the archives or your field notes. Concrete examples, rather than broad generalizations, will keep your readers engaged in the argument you are trying to make.

### **Active voice.**

You are writing for the general public, so don't use jargon, abbreviations or complex terms. Your writing can address complicated matters, but your sentences should be brief and written with common vocabulary.

Write in an active voice, so that your reader always knows who is performing the action. This will help keep your writing lively and engaging.

- Example of passive voice: The babka is placed into the oven as the delicious smell of chocolate and cinnamon fills the room.
- Example of active voice: Each of the participants places her babka into the oven as the delicious smell of chocolate and cinnamon fills the room.

[Pro tip: If you can add “by zombies” to the sentence and it still makes grammatical sense, you know that you wrote it in passive voice. For instance: The

babka was placed into the oven by zombies = makes perfect grammatical sense. Therefore, you should rework the sentence so that it is in active voice.]

### **Accessibility.**

When you write your case study, you will draw from your close observations, from your secondary sources, and from your specialized knowledge of Jewish urban life. However, the general public reading your piece will not have had your experiences. Make sure that you translate any non-English words, and that you explain your historical and academic references.

### **Brevity.**

Your post is short, since on-line readers have notoriously short attention spans. Be sure to keep your writing tight and focused.

### **Secondary Sources.**

In order to find out as much as you can about your case study, you will need to look at some secondary sources in order to contextualize your archival evidence and field notes. Depending on what you are researching, the secondary sources from your syllabus (currently posted on courseweb) may be very helpful in getting you information that you need. I am also happy to suggest some secondary sources for your particular case study.

Since you are writing for the general public, you do not need to specifically cite your sources. Instead, include a “For Further Reading” section at the end of your post. Please note that while you can cite newspaper articles in this section, you **cannot** use Wikipedia or any unverified article from the internet. You also cannot cite my lectures. If you would like to mention something that I said in class, please ask me where I found the information.

For general information about Jews and Jewish history, the **Encyclopedia Judaica** is a reputable and excellent resource that should have much of the information you need. The full text is available through the Pitt library catalogue.

For information about religion in Pittsburgh, I would strongly suggest looking through the following library guide:

<https://pitt.libguides.com/religionpgh/reference>

#### Appendix 1: Case Studies

1. Israel Heritage Room
2. Murray Avenue Kosher Supermarket (Squirrel Hill)
3. Joe Hammer Square
4. Sophie Masloff Way
5. Pittsburgh Playhouse (old site of Tree of Life)
6. Rabbi Hailperin Room at Duquesne University
7. Klein's Restaurant (no longer in business)
8. Craftivism: Heart/Star Ornaments in Squirrel Hill to offer support after the Tree of Life shooting/ Purple Felt Roses to offer support after the death of Antwon Rose
9. Silberberg's Bakery (no longer in business)
10. Bnai Israel plaques at Adat Shalom (in Fox Chapel – need a car to access)
11. Homestead plaques at Beth Shalom
12. Concordia Club/Ohara Student Center
13. Western PA Sports Hall of Fame
14. Schugar's Funeral Home
15. Pittsburgh Eruv
16. YMWHA/Bellefield Hall
17. Lubavitch/Yeshiva Building on Dawson Street
18. Pinsker's Judaica Shop
19. NU Restaurant
20. Tryp Hotel: Brick Shop Restaurant
21. Pigeon Bagels
22. Havdalah (or another program) at Ratzon Center for Healing and Resistance  
<https://www.ratzonpgh.org>
23. Purim celebration, happens on March 9-10. (More than one person can do this if you choose different places to celebrate.)
24. March 4th: communal "babka bake," run by Rebetzin Chani Altein (Chabad Lubavitch)
25. Lando Grand Theater

## Appendix 2: Template for Your Case Study

# [Name of Your Case Study]

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By [First and last name]  
[Month, year]

[Your 400-500 word posting. Do not indent your paragraphs. Please italicize Non-English words and define them in parentheses. Example: *tallit* (Jewish prayer shawl).]

[Copy and paste a Google maps html to be embedded. For directions, click [here](#).]

< In a separate .zip file (for directions, click [here](#)), include three or more separate, good-quality images in .jpg or .png format. At least one image should be taken in a wide frame (i.e. at a distance) for visual context. You must personally photograph these images. Each file must have a name that contains the last name of the author and the name of your case study (Examples: Smith\_HeinzChapel.zip; Smith\_HeinzChapel1.jpg). >

File name: [Last name\_ Case Study] 1  
[Title, short description, date]

File name: [Last name\_ Case Study] 2  
[Title, short description, date]

File name: [Last name\_ Case Study] 3  
[Title, short description, date]

### **Further Reading**

[In MLA format, include two or more relevant references for further reading. Do not indent.]

