



REAL GEOGRAPHY

EXPLORING THE GEOGRAPHY OF EVERYDAY LIFE

McGraw-Hill Higher Education

“Religion & Everyday Life in America” by Jon C. Malinowski, Ph.D.

Religion is often thought of as something that guides the moral and ethical direction of a culture, and it certainly can and does. But as you learn about culture and cultural landscapes, it's important to think about religion more broadly, for its influence can be felt in many common elements of daily life.

First of all, religion has affected our language. Some Americans refer to getting dressed up as putting on their “Sunday Best”, a reference to the Christian Sabbath. In football, fans refer to the “Hail Mary” pass, recalling a common Christian prayer.

Our work lives are also structured by religion. Most workers have Saturday and Sunday off, the Jewish and Christian Sabbaths. Nearly all Americans, regardless of religious background, receive a day-off from work for Christmas. Many schools systems give holidays for Yom Kippur and/or Good Friday. Mardi Gras and Hallow-

een also have religious origins.

Popular culture is affected by religion, too. Christian-oriented rock bands have experienced great success in recent years. A version of the Christian “Lord’s Prayer” by an Australian nun actually made the top five on the pop charts in 1974. Numerous cable television channels are now devoted entirely to religious broadcasting.

Movies are also heavily affected by religion. Countless vampire movies, for example, utilize Christian themes familiar to most Americans. Films and books that deal with certain religious topics can become extremely controversial. Examples from recent years include Mel Gibson’s film *Passion*, Martin Scorsese’s *The Last Temptation of Christ*, and Salman Rushdie’s book *Satanic Verses*.

Shopping is also affected by religion. In many areas of the United States, alcohol cannot be sold on Sunday mornings. Prohibited by what were known as “blue laws,” this prohibition goes back over 300 years to colonial Christian areas of New England. In many areas that have high Jewish populations, stores close on Friday afternoons and don’t reopen until Saturday night or Sunday be-



Mardi Gras, New Orleans, 2003

cause of the Jewish Sabbath.

religious beliefs.

Finally, politics are strongly influenced by religious ideas. Many of our most divisive political and social issues have wrapped in religious beliefs. Abortion, capital punishment, prayer in schools, and gay marriage are issues strongly tied to

Now that you understand a bit more about how religion affects American culture and daily life, don’t underestimate the ability of religious ideas to affect countless aspects of cultures around the world.

Further Research

1. How does religion affect the daily life, customs, or schedule in your community?
2. Read the first chapter of *Religion and Popular Culture in America* online at the link to right. What is the author’s point?

Links:

- Journal of Religion and Popular Culture <http://www.usask.ca/relst/jrpc/>
- Religion & Popular Culture in America (Chapter 1) <http://www.ucpress.edu/books/pages/8741/8741.ch01.html>