

OPPOSITION TO PLACES OF WORSHIP & RELIGIOUS PRACTICES IN THE U.S.

Fact Sheet

There is a long history of opposition to building places of worship in New York and the U.S. at large. The following are just a few examples of religions that have been targeted since the very beginning of our country:

Jews

Historic opposition:

In the 1650s, the Dutch governor of New York (then New Amsterdam), Peter Stuyvesant, banned all religions, practices and places of worship other than the Dutch Reformed Church. He tried to evict all Jews from the city as well. Stuyvesant's superiors in Holland overruled him, citing economic and political considerations.

The Upper West Side synagogue, Congregation Shearith Israel, was founded in 1654, while Peter Stuyvesant was still governor of New Amsterdam. It is the oldest Jewish congregation in the United States, now located at Central Park West and 70th Street.ⁱ Notwithstanding its founding, Stuyvesant kept trying to restrict Jews to practicing their religion "in all quietness" and "within their houses."

When the British were in control of New York City in the late 1600s, Jews again had to fight for their right to worship in public, when the British declared that public worship would only be allowed for those who professed faith in Christ.ⁱⁱ

Contemporary opposition:

Since the 1950s, the Orthodox Jewish synagogue in New Rochelle, New York has grown from just two dozen to over 325 families.ⁱⁱⁱ In 2003, when the synagogue announced plans to build an auxiliary 600-seat sanctuary and social hall down the street to accommodate its growing congregation, local residents (including non-Orthodox Jews) protested.^{iv} They formed "Neighbors of New Rochelle" and complained that the structure would endanger nearby wetlands and disturb traffic flow.

Many synagogue members believe that the protestors were actually afraid that their neighborhood would become overwhelmingly Orthodox. Opponents of the expanded synagogue used the term "The Brooklynization of New Rochelle" referring to Brooklyn neighborhoods that are primarily comprised of Orthodox residents and shops that cater to them.^v Though the town's zoning board ultimately approved the project in 2003, the synagogue was embroiled in lawsuits from neighbors for several years. In 2006, the congregation was able to begin construction^{vi} and the new building opened in 2008.ⁱⁱⁱ

As of 2010, Jews comprise approximately 8.3% of the New York State population.^{vii}

Quakers

Peter Stuyvesant also prohibited Quakers from meeting during his tenure in New Amsterdam during the 1650s. The Quakers responded with an appeal to Stuyvesant for the right to freely practice their beliefs. They submitted a petition now known as the Flushing Remonstrance, which was the first document to explicitly set forth a justification for the right to religious freedom in the colonies. Although scholars have not determined whether the Flushing Remonstrance directly influenced the authors of the Bill of Rights, it served as a precursor to the First Amendment. The Flushing Remonstrance, signed by non-Quakers, also took a stand on behalf of Jews who had been persecuted for building their synagogues. Though the Flushing Remonstrance did not immediately achieve its goal, greater freedom to practice different traditions did occur in the years that followed.^{viii}

As of 2000, Quakers comprise approximately 0.02% of the New York State population.^{ix}

Catholics

Although many British colonists were fleeing religious persecution by the Church of England, they did not all practice religious tolerance toward others, after they settled in the U.S. For example, anti-Catholic sentiments were rampant in the thirteen colonies. Many colonial charters barred Roman Catholics from having any political power. In the 1640s, the Colony of Virginia and the Massachusetts Bay Colony legally prohibited Catholic settlers. Because of such opposition, it took more than 150 years after the first Catholics arrived in the colonies for St. Peter's Catholic Church in New York City to be built.^{viii}

As of 2008, Catholics comprise approximately 37.1% of the New York State population.^x

Hindus

In Chino Hills, California in 2004, there was widespread opposition to proposals for building a very large Hindu temple and cultural center, called the Bochasanwasi Shree Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS Hindu Temple), to serve the large Indian Hindu population in southern California. A 2004 *Los Angeles Times* article reported that one opponent concluded that the cultural center "would turn Chino Hills into a 'Third World city' and a haven for terrorists. One petition to stop the project argued that the temple would play a role in 'changing the city's demographics forever.'"^{xi}

BAPS is currently in the process of being built with parts of the complex open for use.^{xii}

As of 2001, Hindus comprise approximately 0.4% of the U.S. population.^{xiii}

Wiccans

In Oregon Township, Michigan in 2004, residents asked the Township Board to shut down "the devil worshippers," a group of Wiccans who were using a house in the neighborhood to practice their faith and advertising it as "The Temple of the Oak."^{xiv} The Township Board found that the residents of the house had violated one ordinance: their sign advertising the temple was too big.^{xv}

Wiccans of the Ozark Avalon Church of Nature in Missouri made a reservation at the Hannibal Inn in 2005 to celebrate Imbolc, a Wiccan holiday that celebrates the cross-quarter day between the Winter Solstice and Spring Equinox. After local ministers complained, the hotel cancelled the Church's reservation for fear of boycotts and protests. After the incident, the ACLU released a statement saying Ozark Avalon had a potential religious discrimination case, but there is no reliable information on whether or not they ultimately filed suit.^{xvi}

There is no reliable data on the number of Wiccan adherents in the U.S.

Amish

In 2009, 11 Amish families in Morristown, New York filed a religious discrimination suit in federal court after ten local lawsuits were brought against members of their community for building traditional style homes without building permits. In 2006, the town had changed its building codes to require that all structures “keep pace with advances in technology in fire protection and building construction.” But the Amish in Morristown, of the very traditional Old Order Swartzentruber sect, said that requirements such as fire detectors and building inspections violate their religious beliefs. After a Morristown judge held that “their religion gave them no special standing to avoid compliance with local building codes,” the Amish filed their religious discrimination suit.

The religious discrimination complaint in the federal court set forth that the Morristown Code Enforcement Officer, who was appointed in 2006, had not only issued code violations to members of the Amish community, but sometimes did so on off-hours after making unannounced visits to their homes. The complaint further alleged that the Enforcement Officer “posted messages at an anti-Amish website.”^{xvii} As of May 2011, the suit was not settled.

As of 2010, the Amish comprise approximately 0.06% of the New York State population.^{xviii}

Sikhs

For years, the Sikh congregation at Austin, Texas’ only gurdwara practiced in a manufactured home. In 2005, Austin Gurdwara Sahib (AGS) had received all the permits required to build a more contemporary building on its property, when a neighborhood couple filed a lawsuit to halt construction. They complained that the gurdwara would be an eyesore, cause traffic and lower their property values; however some of their grievances and language (such as “eyesore” and “terrorizing the neighborhood”) have been interpreted as anti-Sikh.^{xix} The couple lost their suit and the gurdwara was completed, but they appealed the ruling. In July 2010, the Appellate Court reversed the lower court’s decision and ordered the gurdwara to be torn down. AGS is currently appealing this decision.^{xx}

In 2006, after the Guru Nanak Sikh Society in California was repeatedly denied a permit to build a gurdwara after trying to do so in several different locations, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit ruled that the County of Sutter had “imposed a substantial burden on Guru Nanak’s religious exercise” that was in violation of the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA).^{xxi}

As of 2005, Sikhs comprise approximately 0.2% of the U.S. population.^{xxii}

Muslims

▪ New York, New York

In the spring 2010, a proposal to build a Muslim community center that would include a mosque on its premises was approved to be built two blocks from Ground Zero in lower Manhattan. The project was then called Cordoba House; today, the community center (but not the mosque portion of the project) is known as Park51. The location was chosen because local mosques in the area were overflowing, with a vision to create a community center for all members of the community, similar to the YMCA and Jewish Community Center models. In August 2010, widespread and internationally publicized protests and counter-protests took place in lower Manhattan and across the U.S. around the proposed community center. Much of the controversy focused on its proximity to Ground Zero. As of June 2011, the Park51 project is moving forward. It will not house a mosque. A separate non-profit entity at the same location called PrayerSpace, with a separate entrance, will be a Muslim prayer space. The Park51 community center plans include an interfaith space, while PrayerSpace is planned to be for Muslim prayer services and religious programming. For more information, please see Prepare New York’s Fact Sheets on Park51.

As of 2000, Muslims comprise approximately 1.6% of the New York metropolitan area population.^{xxiii}

▪ **Murfreesboro, Tennessee**

Plans to expand an existing Islamic Center in Murfreesboro resulted in several protests. The Center has existed in the area for almost 30 years, and has outgrown its current space. Opponents maintain that the new center will be a front for terrorism. In late August, 2010, during the month of Ramadan, trespassers broke into the site and set fire to construction equipment.^{xxiv} Kevin Fisher, Lisa Moore and Henry Golczynski filed a lawsuit to prevent the Center from winning any more building permits and lost.^{xxv} In April 2011, they re-filed the suit with an additional 14 plaintiffs.^{xxvi} The beginning phases of construction are underway.^{xxvii}

As of 2010, there are approximately 250 Muslim families in Rutherford County, Tennessee,^{xxviii} representing about 0.5% of all families in the area.^{xxix}

▪ **Temecula, California**

The Islamic Center of Temecula Valley aimed to replace the industrial building where congregants currently pray with a four-acre center. Opponents, including Tea Party members, protested at the current mosque during Friday prayers and brought dogs, an act that offended many Muslims. Organizers encouraged protestors to "bring your Bibles, flags, signs, dogs and singing voice"^{xxx} to protest a "worldwide political movement meant to dominate the world."^{xxxi} The Temecula City Council approved construction of the Islamic Center in early 2011.^{xxxii}

As of 2000, Muslims comprise approximately 0.8% of the population of California.^{xxxiii}

▪ **Wilson, Wisconsin**

The first mosque in Sheboygan County was opened in May 2010 by a doctor. At a community meeting, opponents were quoted as saying: "I know they'll say there's the violent or jihad Muslims and there's the peaceful Muslims, [but] to me it doesn't make a difference because their goal is to wipe out Christianity around the world." "The basis of this community is on Christ and Christ alone ... Do we really want this in our backyard?" "If they're against Christianity, I don't want them coming after my kids." "Lest we forget, we had some troops at Fort Hood just recently who were massacred by a doctor. He was a jihad idealist."

Shortly after it opened in a former health food store, the mosque was vandalized when a rock was thrown through a window. On August 19, 2010, a *Time* magazine article discussed this situation and its impact.^{xxxiv}

As of 2000, Muslims comprise approximately 0.15% of the population of Wisconsin.^{xxxv}

Additional Resource

[An interactive map from the PEW Forum](#), last updated in August 2011, shows 37 proposed mosques and Islamic centers that have faced opposition from community members in the prior two years.

ⁱ "The Jews of New York," Jewish Buffalo on the Web <<http://jbuff.com/c010104.htm>>.

ⁱⁱ "Dutch New York," A Nation of Immigrants Curriculum: Grade 11, The City University of New York <http://www1.cuny.edu/portal_ur/content/immigrants_curriculum/11_pdfs/Dutch_New_York%20Grade11th.pdf>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Young Israel of New Rochelle <<http://www.yinr.org/>>.

^{iv} Uriel Heilman, "New Shul or Bust," [The Jerusalem Post](#), 15 April 2003 <<http://www.urielheilman.com/yinr.html>>.

- ^v Joseph Berger, "As a Synagogue Outgrows Its Space, Its Building Plans Draw Opposition," The New York Times, 17 August 2010 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/08/17/nyregion/as-a-synagogue-outgrows-its-space-its-building-plans-draw-opposition.html?src=pm>>.
- ^{vi} "New Rochelle – Young Israel to finally start building," The Yeshiva World News, 2 September 2006 <<http://www.theyeshivaworld.com/article.php?p=2668>>.
- ^{vii} Arnold Dashefsky and Ira Sheskin, "Jewish Population in the United States, 2010," North American Jewish Data Bank, 2010 <http://www.jewishdatabank.org/Reports/Jewish_Population_in_the_United_States_2010.pdf>.
- ^{viii} Tabettha Garman, "Designed for the Good of All: The Flushing Remonstrance and Religious Freedom in America," MA thesis, East Tennessee State University, August 2006 <<http://queensbp.org/remonstrance/GarmanT080506f.pdf>>.
- ^{ix} "State Membership Report: New York," The Association of Religion Data Archives, 2000 <http://www.thearda.com/mapsReports/reports/state/36_2000.asp>.
- ^x "Background – U.S. Catholic Population by State," United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2008 <<http://www.usccb.org/comm/archives/2008/08-160.shtml>>.
- ^{xi} Hugo Martin, "Hindu Temple Plans Uncertain" The Los Angeles Times, 4 October 2004 <<http://articles.latimes.com/2004/oct/04/local/me-temple4>>.
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- ^{xiii} "Hinduism," Teaching About Religion, 2006 <<http://www.teachingaboutreligion.org/Backdrop&Context/hinduism.htm>>.
- ^{xiv} "Wiccan 'Temple of the Oak' Under Seige in MI (Oregon)," The Flint Journal, 16 October 2004 <<http://pluralism.org/news/view/9139>>.
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- ^{xvi} "Hotel Cancels on Wiccan Celebration," Associated Press, 11 February 2005 <<http://pluralism.org/news/view/9866>>.
- ^{xvii} "Amish Sue New York Town for Discrimination Over Building Code Enforcement," FOX News, 6 January 2009 <<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,477110,00.html#ixzz1Mk2IWmFv>>.
- ^{xviii} "Amish Population by State (2010)," Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies, Elizabethtown College, 2010 <http://www2.etown.edu/amishstudies/Population_by_State_2010.asp>.
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