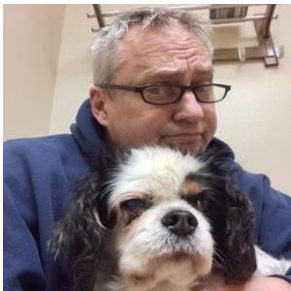


Religious Worlds of New York

July 2019 Summer Scholars and Staff



Hello, I'm **Jonathon Allen** from Charleston, SC, and now living in Los Angeles, CA. I am the Department Chair of History and Social Sciences at the Marlborough School, an all girls' school in L.A. I teach 9th-grade Honors History, 11th-grade AP World History, and a seminar entitled 20th-century Democracies and Dictatorships. I was on a show on PBS entitled "Colonial House" where, for 5 months, I lived as an indentured servant in a puritanical New England colony in the year 1628, and I have been on Wheel of Fortune. I'm Japanese, Irish, and Creek Indian. My hobbies are horror movies, hip-hop dancing and choreography, and learning foreign languages.



My name is **Daniel Andersen** and I hail from the Twin Cities of Minnesota. Although I live smack dab in the midst of the city, I consider myself an organic, urban farmer boasting a mall apple orchard in my tiny yard, blueberries and raspberry bushes in the boulevard and eight head of laying hens. After an extensive career in elementary education, I'm presently a reading teacher at a residential, correctional/therapeutic facility for young men where my mission is to increase reading and writing confidence, achievement and joy through a project-based learning approach.



I'm **Gordon Baldwin** and I am an artist / educator who lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. I am a 26-year veteran of the New York City Department of Education where I teach Digital Photography and Fine Arts at Dewey MS in the Sunset Park neighborhood. My photo students spend most of the year investigating the essential question: "How do we see ourselves?" And this is why I wanted to attend this seminar. As a photographer, I am most attracted to the NYC Subway system where I take most of my photographs. I consider it to be one of the most democratic of places in the city.



My name is **Luke Bolton**. When I graduated from college with a degree in International Relations and Middle Eastern Studies, I thought I wanted to work in diplomacy abroad. This soon changed when I started mentoring in a Baha'i-inspired youth spiritual empowerment program in New York City. It was the first time I had seen myself in the role of a mentor and teacher to youth, and I quickly realized this was the career I wanted. I later enrolled in Columbia Teachers College where I got a degree in Social Studies Education and started teaching at a new charter school in the Bronx. After two years I had the opportunity to help start a new public middle school in Harlem where I came on faculty as a humanities teacher with a focus on character education. I have taught at the school for three years, building a 6th grade curriculum and developing systems and techniques to support students developing skills and personal qualities as well as content knowledge. After taking a break for a year to teach at an international school in Zanzibar, Tanzania while my wife did her PhD research, I am back at Hamilton Grange Middle School trying to further develop the work I started.



My name is **Larry Borst** and I'm from Grand Rapids, Michigan. I was a Philosophy major in college, and after college I had no idea what to do with a Philosophy major, so I went to Seminary. I was pretty sure I did not want to preach and run a church, so next I got a teaching degree. I have been teaching Religion at a Christian high school for the past 27 years. I paint houses in the summer with what might be the world's greatest painting crew. I am married to an English teacher and have three children. With the youngest now in college, I have experienced something of a Renaissance in my teaching and the rest of life. I very much look forward to meeting and working with others this summer.



Tara Ann Carter is a teacher and English Department Chair at St. Petersburg Catholic High School. As an educator, Tara seeks to provide students with opportunities to engage with non-traditional texts, both in format and content. As the English Department Chair, she has put into practice a mandate for inclusive instruction of voices of marginalized persons across all English courses. The research done in her graduate work at Villanova University, as well as fellowships through the University of Pennsylvania and Yale University, is the foundation of a carefully crafted curriculum resulting in numerous publications on the pedagogical uses of graphic novels, television and online mediums centered around the voices of women and people of color. Her professional mantra is the teacher is a window through which students can peer into the realities of citizenship and everyday life around the globe. Tara has recently transitioned from nearly a decade of working in Philadelphia public schools to a smaller Catholic community in Florida. She seeks to empower young people to move from passive viewers to impassioned citizens and active agents of change by creating awareness, putting into action a shift from apathy and sympathy to activism and empathy.



Nina Cohen teaches history at the Frisch School, an Orthodox Jewish secondary school in New Jersey. She holds a Master of Arts from the University of Pennsylvania, where she received the Penn Prize for Excellence in Teaching by Graduate Students and was a Benjamin Franklin and O. Odlozilik fellow. Nina graduated summa cum laude from Barnard College with a degree in history and religion. She has spent time working in museum education at both the Tenement Museum and the Museum at Eldridge Street, where she developed docent-training materials and walking tours of the historic Lower East Side. Nina is committed to making history engaging, interactive and enjoyable.



My name is **Debra A. Cole**. I'm heading into my 17th year of teaching, and I am thrilled to be part of this summer program. I teach Freshman Language Humanities at The Independent School in Wichita, Kansas. We are a Pre-K-12 private school in the heart of the Midwest. I am also lucky enough to teach Creative Writing, Playwriting, and Children's Theatre classes to our 6th-8th grade students. In my private life, I am a published children's playwright, mixed media artist, and champion for equality.



I'm **Bonnie Cooper**, and I live in a suburban area north of Houston, Texas. I'm *that* crazy grandma with six precious grandbabies. I teach at a rural high school of about 2,700 students, of which about 70% are economically disadvantaged. I teach on-level US Government, as well as AP US Government and Politics. I teach only seniors, so the spring semester is always crazy and stressful for all concerned. I look forward to meeting you all, learning more about religion, and crossing NYC off my bucket list.



Teresa Maria Davis. I live in my hometown of Cincinnati, Ohio, and graduated from the University of Cincinnati with a degree in the Humanities and a concentration in biblical literature. My Masters was obtained at the Athenaeum of Ohio, the seminary for the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. I've spent eleven years as a Theology Educator, teaching Scripture 1 and 2 (Christian Bible), Vocations, and Comparative World Religions. I assist in a mission service retreat in Appalachia once per year, and spiritual-growth Kairos retreat as well. I'm a member of Cincinnati's Bridges of Faith Dialogue and youth co-coordinator of the Festival of Faiths. I live with two dogs and one cat – all adorable. I love gardening, live concerts, and plays, and I sing in my church choir. My heart and head spins when thinking of the institute's opportunities and learning from all the participants.



My name is **AJ DeBonis**, and I teach in the theology department at Regis High School, an all-boys Catholic private school in Manhattan. My current teaching responsibilities include a sophomore Old and New Testament course, a junior philosophy/ethics course, and senior electives such as religious themes in literature, ethics and economics, and theories of religion. I'm originally from a small town in northeastern Pennsylvania, where I grew up attending evangelical Protestant churches. I have also lived in Philadelphia, New Haven (where I converted to Catholicism), and Brooklyn. I now live in Beacon, NY, with my wife and daughter.



Sylvia Fagin began her education career working as an HIV/AIDS educator in rural central Pennsylvania. She then served in the Peace Corps in Senegal, training community health educators; and led groups of teenagers on bilingual community service trips in Québec with Global Works. She received her MA in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) from the School for International Training in Brattleboro, Vermont, and began teaching English Learners (ELL) in 2004. She is active in equity, diversity and inclusion efforts in the Montpelier-Roxbury school district, and serves as co-advisor to the Montpelier High School Gender and Sexuality Alliance. She and her wife live in Montpelier, Vermont (the nation's smallest state capital) with their black lab Jane and a growing population of garden slugs. She absolutely can't wait to join the outdoor roller disco in Central Park!



Clay Francis teaches social science courses—including world religions—at Hutchison School in Memphis, TN, where he will be the History department chair starting next fall. He also teaches an international issues course at The TN Governor's School for International Studies at the University of Memphis. In 2014, he was a National Endowment for the Humanities summer scholar in Oaxaca, México. He holds a BA in Spanish and Political Science from Middle Tennessee State University, a Master of Environmental Law and Policy from Vermont Law School, and a Master of Science in Educational Leadership & Policy Studies from Vanderbilt University. While living in Vermont, he worked as a clean energy lobbyist in the state legislature. He has also taught environmental advocacy courses at Vermont Law School, Spanish at Oakland High School and The Webb School, and as a faculty member in residence at Middle TN State University.



My name is **Laura Gill** and I am a first generation Mexican-American, originally from Las Cruces, New Mexico, but have lived in Phoenix, Arizona for the past 14 years. I am entering my 5th year as a (mostly) ELA teacher. Prior to teaching I was involved in art-based education in museums and cultural centers for several years and then worked as a part-time librarian while raising two boys (now 9 and 12). I spend most of my free time reading YA novels, popular fiction, and self-help books.



Henry Goldschmidt is a cultural anthropologist, community educator, interfaith organizer, and fanatic New Yorker. He is currently the Director of Programs at the Interfaith Center of New York. Henry received his Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of California at Santa Cruz, and has taught religious studies and anthropology at Wesleyan University and elsewhere. He is the author of *Race and Religion among the Chosen Peoples of Crown Heights*, among other scholarly and popular publications. He lives in Brooklyn with his wife Jillian Shagan, and their children, Michael and Anabel, aged 9 and 13. He rarely has time or energy for fun (did I mention the two children?) but when he does he likes to explore the city, go out dancing, and skate in Prospect Park.



Hello, I'm **Amy Huntoon**. I am completing my 20th year of teaching at Gilman School, an all-boys private school in Baltimore, MD. I teach introductory and advanced photography, AP art history, and an art history component of a required 10th grade humanities course. After the Summer Institute, I hope to expand the 10th grade curriculum beyond the Christian Western tradition to a more inclusive global focus. Art is a passion for me and visiting art museums is one of my favorite things to do. I volunteered as a docent for 10 years at the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore. Before life as a teacher, and before the internet, I worked as a staff photographer for the Philadelphia Inquirer and a California newspaper chain. A native New Yorker (from Long Island), I have lived in Massachusetts, New York City, Palo Alto, CA, and New Jersey before moving to Baltimore in 1994. Currently single, I have 3 adult sons and two grandchildren who all live in New York City. My favorite recreational activity is biking. Spiritually, I was raised Catholic, and raised my sons Episcopalian. I do not attend church at this point in my life. Now, I have become interested in Buddhism. I look forward to spending July in New York City, making new friends, and learning about diverse spiritual practices.



My name is **Alice Jackson** and I am currently in my 3rd year teaching English as a New Language to 9th and 10th graders in the Bronx. I grew up in Durham, North Carolina and went to school at UNC Chapel Hill where I studied Global Studies and French. Before coming to New York for the Teaching Fellowship program, I worked as a teaching assistant in France and Washington, DC to see if working in education would be a good fit for me. These experiences, along with my interest in languages and social justice are ultimately what led me to a career in education. My interest in this world religion seminar comes from a desire to make my ENL curriculum more culturally responsive by integrating religious topics and language instruction.



My name is **Monika Johnston**, and I am the Head of the Department of History at Packer Collegiate Institute, an independent Pre-K-12 school in Brooklyn Heights. Currently, I teach 9th grade World History and a religion elective I created which, was influenced by my experiences working with the Religious Literacy Project. I'm a native New Yorker, born and raised in Harlem. Currently, I live in Washington Heights. I'm married and have two adult sons. While I was raised Catholic and attended Catholic elementary and high school, I am not affiliated with any religious tradition. I do meditate regularly and consider myself "spiritual, not religious." My favorite ways to spend free time include learning something new, enjoying the cultural life of NYC with friends and family, walks in nature, catching up on Netflix shows, and traveling. I'm looking forward to meeting everyone and learning together this summer.



My name is **Kelsey Knutson** and I am a Middle School Social Studies Teacher at Phoenix Country Day School in Phoenix, Arizona. I am developing a new curriculum next year called, simply, "Civilizations." I'm a project-based, collaboration-heavy educator who emphasizes human-environment interactions/impact and cultivating tolerance. I am the Director of The National SEED (Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity) Project chapter at my school. I received my B.A. from the University of Minnesota in Global Studies: Human Rights and Justice. I received a Master's in Education from Arizona State University. When I'm not teaching little humans, I love outdoor activities, backpacking abroad, and frequent live music.



My name is **Joel Lesinski**. I grew up in a small town in Northeastern Pennsylvania called Shavertown. I studied history and psychology at Temple University in Philadelphia, PA and graduated in 2008. I completed an MA in Multicultural Education at Eastern University in St. David's, PA in 2011. I moved to Brooklyn shortly thereafter and started working as a Secondary Ed. teacher in NYC public schools. I worked in New York for 6 years and loved it. However, it was expensive, and my wife was looking to change her work situation, so we moved to the Portland, Maine area. Now, I am an ESL teacher at Westbrook High School in Westbrook, Maine. I am currently teaching English and Social Studies classes to refugees and asylum seekers and I am entering my 3rd year of teaching here in Maine (9th year teaching overall).



My name is **Jody Madell**. I live in Brooklyn with my family, and have been teaching 9th grade history in NYC public schools for about 20 years. I've always been fascinated with the idea of faith and with religious practices, although I was brought up in a strongly anti-religious household. I am fortunate to teach in a school which allows me to take weekly field trips with students, so I travel with 9th graders to places of worship and museums, to study different religious practices and beliefs. I am looking forward to exploring the city with you all!



My name is **Marisa Mathias**. I live and teach in northern New Jersey, and am a Rutgers University alumnus. I have been teaching high school social studies for ten years, mostly US history courses, but have ended up teaching a little bit of everything throughout the years (some elective course titles include: Law and Human Rights, Financial Literacy, Critical Analysis of History through Film, and Religion in America). This past school year was my first time teaching the religion elective and I am so happy to work with all of you to improve the course and the learning experience of my students. Each summer I bring kids on a service trip to volunteer on the Cheyenne River Reservation in South Dakota. I also partner with the non-profit organization One Spirit, that works on the Pine Ridge Reservation. Raising awareness of indigenous history and issues is one of my passions. Another passion includes my small dog, Sophia, who I treat like a human child (yes, I am one of those people).



My name is **Amanda Pertierra** and I teach US History to juniors and seniors at Cristo Rey New York High School in East Harlem. Prior to joining Cristo Rey, I earned my Master of Education and taught middle school social studies in Brownsville, TX, through the University of Notre Dame's Alliance for Catholic Education, where I developed an affinity for bachata and relished discovering similarities and differences between my students' Mexican heritage and my own family's roots in the Philippines. Although I've largely taught in Catholic schools, I am a product of public education and grew up in Connecticut. I am eager to incorporate a more nuanced treatment of New York's religious diversity into my school's US History curriculum next year. In my free time, I am training haphazardly for a marathon and enjoy writing, reading, exploring NYC, and cooking with friends.



Steve Pinkston has been a high school teacher (Mathematics and Religious Studies), coach, and administrator for the past 40 years. Currently he serves as Christian Service Director at Bellarmine College Preparatory. In that position he promotes service-learning throughout the curriculum, coordinates and supports local and foreign immersion experiences, and advances justice concerns/issues within the larger community. He also serves as the moderator of Bellarmine's African American Student Union. Beyond his work in secondary education, Pinkston has been volunteering at Juvenile Hall, Elmwood Jail and San Quentin State Prison for 30 years. He serves as an Advisory Board member for Loyola Marymount University's L.E.A.D. Institute and as an executive Board Member for East Side Heroes' Mentoring and Scholarship Program. Pinkston holds a B.A. in Biology from Pomona College, a M.A. in Education from Claremont Graduate University and a M.A in Theology from the University of San Francisco.



Tara Seekins grew up in the Pacific Northwest. She taught fourth grade in San Jose for 4 years, and has served as an assistant principal and principal in Marin County for 8 years. She also supports new education leaders as an Assistant Instructor at UC Berkeley's Principal Leadership Institute. She holds a bachelor's degree from Smith College, a master's degree in English from the University of Colorado at Boulder, and both a master's degree in Education and a Law degree from UC Berkeley. She is National Board Certified in English Language Development and traveled to China as part of the 2015 Fulbright Hays Delegation. Tara is grateful to live in the Marin Headlands with her husband and their dog, cat, and two chickens. She loves traveling, cooking, reading, and hiking Northern California's amazing local trails.



Hello, my name is **Manoj Thadhani** and I am from New York, NY. I teach Social Studies at Manhasset Secondary School, a 7-12 public school located in the suburbs of New York City. This year, I teach 10th grade world history and 12th grade economics. I am a native New Yorker and look forward to participating in this summer institute with you all.



Nyya Toussaint recently graduated from Union Theological Seminary and The New School, with an MA in Church and Society and MA in International Affairs, respectively (the first concurrent-degree student of this kind). He was born and raised in Lawrence, NJ, and before attending Union he studied in Miami, Florida. He currently spearheads Union's program on Theologizing the Caribbean's Decolonization, which approaches Caribbean studies through the analysis of liberation theology. Nyya loves learning languages, going to the beach, and living in the City!