



HILLEL'S JOSEPH MEYERHOFF
CENTER FOR JEWISH LEARNING

A PLAGUE ON ALL YOUR ART HOUSES- FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

<http://www.guiltandpleasure.com/hasids>

In this article by Nathaniel Deutsch, the myth of the wandering, homeless Jew is turned on its head. The article reveals how a sect of Hasidic Jews in Brooklyn are attempting to preserve a sacred *shtetl* they have created in the face of a changing world. The author addresses this complex story from many perspectives (politics, sociology, economics, linguistics, religion) and touches on issues ranging from gentrification, to sacred space, cultural preservation, rabbi veneration. Among the many topics addressed in the article, this is a chance for students to learn about the revolutionary origins of Hasidic Judaism and the diversity of a movement which is often thought of as one-dimensional and monolithic.

The article is likely to illicit many diverse and interesting reactions from salon participants and it is a great idea to invite people to your salon who you know will have interesting things to say about this article. Keep in mind that different people come to the table with different knowledge and lack of knowledge (i.e. New York culture, Hasidism, Jewish history, gentrification, artsy/hipsterdom) and that it is important to create a space where terms and references are defined and questions are encouraged. Your job as the facilitator is not to push the conversation in any specific direction, but to help the conversation flow naturally and help draw everyone into the discussion. Sometimes great conversation happens on its own, and sometimes it is necessary to pose questions to the group which can spark discussion or advance the conversation after a lull.

Here are some sample discussion prompt questions to ask at your salon:

1. What is this article about? What parts of the article most speak to you?
2. How are the Hasidic Jews depicted in the article? The artists, hipsters, and yuppies? Does this article test or support your preconceived notions about these groups?
3. Did your opinion of the Satmar Hasidim and of Williamsburg change or evolve throughout the course of reading the article? How?
4. What did you find surprising about the facts introduced in this article? What resonated with you? What made you feel uncomfortable?
5. What is your impression of sacred space as it is described in the article? Do you have sacred space(s)?
6. Is there a person or institution which you place on a pedestal the way the *rebbe*-leader is revered by the Hasidic community?
7. Is this a Jewish story? How does it differ from any other story about the clashes that exist in a gentrifying neighborhood?
8. What does it mean to create a *shtetl* (Jewish village) in America? Is it even possible?
9. Is this article biased or balanced? What else do you wish you knew while reading this article?

Additional opportunities to share with students:

1. "Hats on, Gloves off." An article which appeared recently in *New York Magazine* which tells another side to the story of Williamsburg Hasidim.
<http://nymag.com/news/cityside/16864/>
2. "The Scene: Generation W." An article which appeared in *New York Magazine* which tells the story of how yuppies have taken over this once-bohemian neighborhood. http://nymag.com/nymetro/arts/music/features/music2002/n_7734/
3. *A Life Apart* a PBS documentary about Hasidic life in America
<http://www.pbs.org/alifeapart/index.html>