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Penn State: Symbol and Myth

Gary G. DeSantis
University of South Florida

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Penn State: Symbol and Myth

by

Gary G. DeSantis

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
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College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Robert E. Snyder, Ph.D.
Daniel Belgrad, Ph.D.
James Cavendish, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis will focus on the popular culture iconography of the Pennsylvania State University: the Nittany Lion—as a symbol and apolitical mascot; Happy Valley, the geographic area in which the university is located, as a kind of sacred place and utopia in the Keystone State; football—its hallowed shrines, legendary coaches, and heroic players; regional foods and delicacies—from the unique offerings of the area’s diners to the University Creamery (where patrons yearly consume more than 750,000 ice cream cones); and Lion Shrine and the adjacent Nittany Lion Inn—where the faithful have made pilgrimages since the early-twentieth century. The sum of these parts contributes to the pastoral image of Happy Valley—an image that is a constant reality in the mind of the Penn Stater.

The Happy Valley myth is perpetuated by socio-cultural activities indigenous to “Lion Country.” Certain activities are mandatory to be a real Penn Stater: sitting on the Nittany Lion Statue, going to a football game, buying a sticky bun at the College Diner, eating an ice cream cone from the University Creamery, and staying the night at the Nittany Lion Inn.

Sociological texts, such as Emile Durkheim’s *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, are central to the theme of the thesis. Durkheim’s work explains how symbols or

totems represent the force of the group, thereby giving religious meaning to secular institutions. Moreover, anthropological theories of Clifford Geertz—taken from *The Interpretations of Culture*—are indispensable in realizing how integral the use of signs and symbols are to that of the group’s fundamental understanding of its own worldview.

These cultural phenomena occupy a large part in the mindset and mentality of students, alumni, locals, and fans alike. Furthermore, the sacred iconic image of the Nittany Lion permeates the local psyche, media, and overall reality of the area.

Ultimately, this constant reinforcement of local cultural values contributes to the bucolic image of Happy Valley as a kind of utopia, where the problems of urban life dissipate into the mountain air.

Introduction

Emile Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* defines religion as unified sets of beliefs and practices that revolve around a sacred focus, which serve to unify a community.¹ Durkheim approaches religion from a functionalist perspective; his interest was in how a religion functions, or what functions it performs for a society or group. The overarching life system of the society is represented by the group's totemic image, which is the icon or symbol that represents the group itself. The group's rituals are simply a way to worship the micro-society and its values. Much of Durkheim's analysis of religion is applicable to *Penn State: Symbol and Myth*.

In this thesis, I examine Penn State and its iconography as a construction of secular religion. Using a Durkheimian "functional" approach to religion, one can establish how community icons—which appear everywhere, represent the community, function in the capacity of a religion, and are a means to exalt the society's values—play such an important role in the construction of a group's belief system. This thesis applies Durkheim's "functional" definition of religion, whereby he envisions what functions religion performs for the society or group. One of the functions of the college religion at Penn State is to reinforce group solidarity and identity, which serve to perpetuate the institution itself. Through the use of rituals, the group generates "collective effervescence." These religious sentiments for the group rise and fall with repeated

group practices. The social energy created binds individuals to the community through the shared emotional mood made possible by group practices and rites.

This thesis defines college religion as a vernacular religion. A religion that is of and by the people, outside of formal organized religion, but draws upon iconography, beliefs, and practices related to sacred things of an institutional religion. Sociologist Robert Bellah has termed this form of societal self-worship “civil religion”—a religion of American self-worship celebrated in symbols, rituals, and beliefs.² As John Sears notes, important sacred symbols lend themselves to “cultural preeminence,”³ thereby endowing sacredness, and leading devotees to believe in the superiority of its society. Charles Reagan Smith defines civil religion as a regional or cultural religion used to “sanctify” the society’s experience, while glorifying a culture’s way of life.⁴ Similarly, this cultural religion, which this thesis calls “college religion”, is a religion of self-worship. The monuments, festivals, and mythic narratives, function as ways to celebrate the social construction of Penn State life. Moreover, the resulting student and alumni loyalty is financially lucrative for the university, which allows the institution of the college to perpetuate itself indefinitely.

The Pennsylvania Farmer’s High School— which after a series of name changes would eventually become the Pennsylvania State University—was established in 1855 as part of the Morrill Act. Not only did the Federal government provide financial assistance for the construction of agriculture and mechanical arts colleges, but also each state received 30,000 acres of land per Congressional member to support the college.⁵ From the beginning, the college was very resourceful in its use of socially constructed iconography. Local and national publications chronicled the changes in school symbols,

icons, signs, popular heroes, mascots, and architecture, while simultaneously explaining the motives behind college students, alumni, and other interested individuals in doing so. Therefore, the history and iconography of land grant institutions, like Penn State, are significant to not only Pennsylvanians and college students, but to our nation as well.

This thesis engages an area of current scholarly interest—the iconography of communities in the construction of college religion. This thesis establishes how community icons play such an important role in the construction of Penn State’s college religion. Michael Geisler, who has researched the role of symbols, concludes that historical memory is reflected in signs and iconography. Subsequently, these signs or symbols are reinforced daily through constant rehearsal.⁶ Similarly, Lauren Berlant contends symbols “suture” individuals to the collective, thus defining the group’s identity.⁷ Anthony D. Smith, who has done research in a similar vein, adds to these symbols: “flags, anthems, parades...memorials...as well as...national recreations, the countryside, popular heroes, tales...architecture, art...town planning...and educational practices.”⁸ These customs and shared feelings of the members of a community are more than cultural symbols; these highly visible icons, which appear everywhere, represent the community, function in the capacity of a secular religion, and are a means to exalt the society’s values.

This thesis illuminates, builds on, and challenges materials published by the Pennsylvania State University Press. These books are Bibles to the faithful, and extremely important because they contain a wealth of information about the history of the institution, including information about the Lion. However, since these books are limited only to the history of the university, the authors give no further explanation or thought to

the sociological and anthropological underpinnings of the college. This thesis reveals the socio-religious base of many of the school's traditions, which are purposely constructed to uphold the micro-society's values, and bind members to the community.

In chapter one, discussion centers on the importance of the totemic image of the Nittany Lion to the institution—from the incarnation of the Lion as the school's mascot, and the later construction of the famed statue; to the establishment of the university's own hotel, the Nittany Lion Inn; as well as the importance of the marketable logo. The main point is how integral and essential the image of the mascot is in the daily life of the Penn Stater. The Lion permeates the culture. Its presence is everywhere: mascots, logos, sports teams, and local businesses.

The Nittany Lion Shrine offers an occasion to explore the nature and relationship of sacred space, and what it means to different cultures. The Nittany Lion Inn provides an opportunity to look into the general and architectural history of the establishment, which functions as a training ground for majors in hotel management as well as a convenient resting place. Since the academic calendar plays an important part in many collegiate traditions, the peak times of the year for visitors are examined as well.

The second chapter focuses on football history at the storied institution, and the effect the secularized role of religion has had on the university over the years. In addition, the chapter delves into the history and rise of football at the agricultural college, documenting the need for the sport, and the purpose the game supplies for the institution. The nature of the paternalism in football, and the need for a charismatic hero, similar to legendary coach Joe Paterno, are also explored. Moreover, the historically secularized role of religion in sports and what effect it has had on the university over the years is

documented. Furthermore, Durkheim's theory of collective effervescence is paramount to the chapter, showing just how large a place football occupies in the Penn State mindset, and why the fans and devotees view the games as crusades.

The last chapter, which is devoted to food rituals of the micro-society of Penn State, describes how the Creamery, and sticky buns, became symbols, within the context of the role of Penn State as a land grant college. This chapter provides a better understanding of the social and cultural dynamics related to food consumption. The history of the Creamery, and another Penn State tradition—the cinnamon sticky—are the centerpiece of the third chapter, and used to show how powerful a symbol food is to group identity. The chapter discusses how the recipe for the cinnamon sticky evolved over time, and the different diners and supermarkets that offer the local, buttery rolls.

A system of ritualistic consumption has been ingrained within the micro-society of Penn State, whereby ice cream and grilled stickies have become synonymous with group identity and solidarity. These ritualistic foods are more than simply sustenance; the Creamery's ice cream and local diner grilled stickies are a cultural statement. Both of these foods, which successfully accomplish the tasks of religion from a functionalist perspective, simultaneously integrate individuals to the larger community, while offering them a tasty treat.

The aforementioned cultural iconography and group practices are only a few of the ways to illustrate how Penn State successfully accomplishes these religious tasks as understood from a Durkheimian functionalist perspective. There are probably many other symbols that perform in the capacity of a college religion at Penn State.

Notes

¹ Emile Durkheim. *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. New York: Free Press, 1915. 62.

² Robert Bellah. "Civil Religion in America." *Daedalus: Journal of American Academy of Arts and Sciences*. v 96. n2. Winter, 1967. 349.

³ John F. Sears. *Sacred Places*. New York: Oxford, 1989. 12.

⁴ Charle R. Smith. *Judgement and Grace in Dixie*. Athens: University of Georgia, 1995. xv.

⁵ John E. Wise. *The History of Education: An Analytic Survey*. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964. 357.

⁶ Michael Geisler, *National Symbols, Fractured Identities*. Hanover: University Press of New England, 2005, pp.5-34.

⁷ Lauren Berlant, *Anatomy of National Fantasy*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1991, p. 25.

⁸ Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity*. Reno: University of Nevada, 1991, p. 77.

Chapter I

The Totemic Image

The importance of the Nittany Lion to the Pennsylvania State University is tantamount to a sacred icon; its importance in myth and reality cannot be understated. The image of the totem—in this case the Nittany Lion—is integral and essential in the daily life of the Penn Stater. Freud referred to “totemism” as both a religion and a social system, citing how members of the same clan call themselves by the name of the totem, and in some instances believe themselves to be actually descended from it.⁹ In addition, the group is bound together by common obligations to each other, and by a common faith in the totem.¹⁰ Similarly, Emile Durkheim, one of the founders of sociology, believed totems to be not only the outward and visible form of the clan’s god, but also the symbol, sign, flag, and emblem marked on everything. This led Durkheim to believe that the god of the clan or totemic principle, whether it is in the form of an animal or vegetable, represents and personifies the clan itself, thus giving the group its power.¹¹ Therefore, social life is centered on the totemic emblem. In the case of Penn State, the Nittany Lion functions as the clan’s totem, and represents the society or group itself.

Such totemic images, icons, symbols, and logos, which are repeatedly seen, form the basis of the group’s belief system.¹² These sentiments embed themselves in each individual consciousness, and consequently one believes him or herself as acting naturally, instead of just being caught up in the shared emotional mood of the group.¹³

Therefore, social life is made possible strictly by vast symbolism.¹⁴ In the case of Penn State, oft-repeated rituals, such as attending football games and sitting on the Lion statue, are a way of exalting the micro-society of the college and its values.¹⁵

In a similar vein, children's books, such as *When I Grow Up I Want to be a Nittany Lion*, glorify school traditions and memorials to children of alumni, instilling a love for the institution, its colors, and its icons—especially the Lion. The little boy in the story “is named after a great educator and legendary coach”; his parents call him Joey for short. The first thing Joey encounters when he and his parents visit the institution is a Nittany Lion “prowling through the trees.” The child is understandably scared, until he gets closer and realizes the Lion is “just a big statue.” Moreover, the book acquaints youngsters with other influential landmarks of local iconography, including Beaver Stadium, the Creamery, and the Happy Valley—home of the Nittany Lion.¹⁶

Function of the Mascot

Every school relies on some kind of mascot for identity, Penn State being no exception. However, the Nittany Lion has not always been the school's symbol. Students utilized different traditions and symbols to suit their particular tastes and needs. During different eras, there have been no less than a handful of different mascots. Among the most colorful were a bulldog and “Old Coaly,” the mule. Coaly had been instrumental in hauling stone for the construction of the school's first building—Old Main.¹⁷

In the spring of 1904, Joe Mason, a Penn State baseball player and editor of the unsanctioned student-published newspaper, *The Lemon*, boasted the land-grant school's indigenous Nittany Lion was more ferocious than the opponent's Princeton Bengal Tiger,

the mascot of the elite school the State team was to play that afternoon. While the State team won the baseball game that day, more importantly, the fledging school gained an invaluable icon—the apolitical image of the Nittany Lion.

A totemic image or mascot is essential in creating group identity. Society uses positive integration to instill admirable values, build solidarity, and reinforce acceptable behavior. Conversely, communities often use negative integration to exclude outsiders, and to protect the cultural interests of the group.¹⁸ Unlike Penn State, other schools and sports teams that have adopted less politically correct mascots— The University of Illinois Fighting Illini, Washington Redskins, and Atlanta Braves—are racially insensitive and demeaning and lend themselves to controversy. As a result, many team mascots have come under attack in recent years. By way of example, fellow Big Ten (and land grant) school, The University of Illinois has been using Chief Illiniwek to represent its sports teams since 1926. Unfortunately, the mascot is a misrepresentation of Native American woodland peoples, and adds to a dangerous set of stereotypes that create a negative climate through misunderstanding, undermining the educational role of the university. Furthermore, the sentimental attachment many students hold for the Chief precludes any desire for accurate understanding.¹⁹ By way of comparison, the apolitical image of the Nittany Lion—a ferocious opponent, on or off the field, standing for pride and integrity—is not controversial in the least.

History of the Lion

The word “Nittany” derived from a Native American term meaning “single mountain.” The first settlers, in the 1700s, adopted the term when they named the mountain—Mount Nittany.²⁰ Subsequently, the local mountain lions that roamed central Pennsylvania until the 1880s were also known by the same moniker. The hills of central Pennsylvania once were plentiful with mountain lions; however, at the end of 1856, a local hunter named Samuel Brush shot one of the last in Susquehanna County.²¹ The last reported kill in Centre County (the county in which Penn State is located) occurred in 1893. During the same year, the Brush Lion was donated to the State College. Later that year, the cat was part of the Pennsylvania exhibit at the storied “White City” of the Columbian Exposition in Chicago; the Brush Lion was located near the Liberty Bell.²² The specimen returned to State College where it was successively installed at several locations: the wildlife museum in Old Main, the Zoology Department, and finally the basement of the Agriculture Building, where it languished for years.²³ Eventually, it ended up on an extended hiatus at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Pittsburgh. The famed Brush Lion would be away from the university for the next forty years.²⁴ Remarkably, the Brush Lion is one of the best examples of mid-nineteenth century taxidermy. More importantly, it is the most complete specimen of the Pennsylvania mountain lion—*Felis concolor*— in existence.²⁵

The Nittany Lion Mascot

At any university, the most well known of collegiate symbols is undoubtedly the school mascot. To promote loyalty to one’s campus, colleges adopted institutional colors and mascots during the late nineteenth century to the early part of the twentieth century.²⁶

For the purposes of this paper, the person in the mascot costume will be referred to as the living mascot. A living mascot, who plays a role similar to a high priest, embodies group sentiment and spirit by performing ritualistic dances and chanting, which greatly contribute to group solidarity.²⁷ The Nittany Lion living mascot becomes the focus of attention, and is the literal embodiment of school spirit and also the main cheerleader. “You never see the Lion standing still. Even if he’s just standing there, he’s kicking his feet. You never get bored watching the Lion, because he is always active, always doing something,” says Mike Zollars, who wore the suit in 2003.²⁸

The first mascot, “Nittany Leo I,” appeared in 1921 to the delight of football fans.²⁹ The second “man in the suit” was a student who worked in the Creamery, and was involved in the cheese-making laboratory.³⁰ By the 1950s, the initial costume had seen better days. Occasionally, the sometimes worn-out looking suit (which was actually made of rabbit fur) was sewn up, and patched with sheepskin.³¹

The living mascot is important not only in building group solidarity, but also an arbiter of powerful magicality. Therefore, the living mascot’s anonymity is essential, similar to a shaman that guards ritualistic dances.³² No one should know the power the living mascot possesses, or there is the danger that the mascot will become less powerful. In the past, there was such an allure and mystique surrounding the team mascot that many of the performers remained anonymous until forced to reveal their identities.

Today the Lion mascot, after removing a detachable tail, dives into the student section at Beaver Stadium and “crowd surfs.”³³ This ever-popular crowd activity, which often finds the living mascot approaching the upper reaches of Beaver Stadium, is equivalent to similar acts engaged in by other religions in an attempt to raise the sacred

above the earthly plane. Thus, the celebratory act of touching the living mascot as the costumed individual is passed overhead through the crowd³⁴ simply reinforces group identity, giving members a sense of belonging to the Penn State community.³⁵

The Lion, as a living mascot, is so popular among sports enthusiasts that in a 2002 Mascot of the Year Contest sponsored by the bank Capital One, the Lion started with a strong lead and garnered over thirty percent of the vote. Georgia Tech's "Buzz the Yellow jacket," and The University of Florida's "Albert the Gator," were next in the voting, receiving eleven and nine percent respectively.³⁶ The most-telling cultural and entertainment statistic of all might be that the giant of sports news, ESPN, cites the Lion as the country's most recognizable mascot.³⁷

The Lion Shrine

Every religion seeks to set the sacred aside from the merely profane. Sacred places, such as temples, churches, and shrines are constructed to give devotees a place to gather and to exalt the group's values. Thus, the group creates sacred space physically and figuratively, out of the environment.³⁸ It is no different for a college religion such as Penn State's.

For many years, there had been talk and speculation of some kind about a shrine on campus to instill pride in students and alumni. Nothing was done until 1940, when the graduating class took a special interest in the project, and actively pursued a permanent Lion shrine on campus. The idea had been proposed years earlier in an issue of *The Lemon* by none other than Joe Mason. In an impassioned plea for school spirit, he wrote, "What a lasting and fitting memorial it would be for some class to place on campus a huge figure of this champion of the forest, 'Old Nittany!'"³⁹

The Lion Shrine was voted the Senior Class Gift of 1940—the class had raised \$5,340, a sizeable amount at the time.⁴⁰ Initially, two noted sculptors, Heinz Warneke and John B. Flanagan, signified interest in the project.⁴¹ Coincidentally, Warneke had displayed work earlier at the college’s first international sculpture exhibition in 1937.⁴² Eventually, Warneke, a noted German animal sculptor, who is responsible for the bronze elephants that stand guard at the entrance of the Philadelphia Zoo, was chosen to be the shrine’s sculptor. Warneke is one sculptor who “spurns the ‘crushed automobile’ school of modernism.”⁴³ That was what art professor, Francis Hyslop, who was on a faculty committee that recommended the German sculptor for the project, said of Warneke.⁴⁴ Warneke himself said, “I believe in the work the College is doing for the sake of art, and I will try to traditionalize the figure of the lion.”⁴⁵

According to the contract, the work was to take place in the open air of the campus. Joseph Garatti did the “roughing out” work, which consisted of cutting the huge block of white Indiana limestone down to within a half-inch of the final size of the Lion. Garatti’s part of the work finished ahead of schedule; he quietly left campus, and received very little credit from students for having done anything.⁴⁶ Warneke proceeded to sculpt a masterpiece in front of wide-eyed spectators and students on the college lawn.⁴⁷

The Nittany Lion Shrine was completed in less than four months, and dedicated during the season’s first football game with Bucknell.⁴⁸ Warneke was not present that day, but he sent a letter stating, “Tell the students that I hope the Lion roars them to victory after victory.”⁴⁹ Although not specifically religious in nature, some rituals mark a sacred event that celebrates the values of the group, while simultaneously referring to the

beginnings of institutional traditions.⁵⁰ The collegiate religion of Penn State differs little from other religious systems, which are also grounded in authoritative mythic accounts.⁵¹ No other than Joe Mason, the man who had fixed the sacred totem, which would become synonymous with the college that fateful day versus Princeton in 1906, was in attendance. Never one to shy away from an opportunity to speak, Mason chose his words carefully. “The origin of the Nittany Lion, which in truth, I cannot give you, as Old Man Lion was in charge over yonder on Mount Nittany long before Columbus discovered America, and likely fifty-thousand years before that.”⁵² Quite fittingly, years later, as testament to the immortality ascribed to the totem in transcending even the death of its creator, the Nittany Lion mascot was among those who attended a tribute to Harrison Denning ‘Joe’ Mason at Mason’s gravesite outside Pittsburgh.⁵³ Myth orders time in terms of what is timeless.⁵⁴ Accordingly, a culture’s identity depends heavily on narratives that disclose the fundamental basis of life, while articulating the relationship of the believer to this reality.⁵⁵

The micro-society of the college rallies around its totem, lives a common lifestyle, denoted by participating in the common rituals while at the university. Rituals, such as a pilgrimage to the shrine or sitting on the Nittany Lion statue, serve to endow social identity and support social order.⁵⁶ Thus, it is strictly a matter of reinforcing group identity. Consequently, the Lion Shrine has taken on a life of its own. On graduation day, everyone wants his or her picture taken with the Lion. It is the place that Penn Staters return to with their loved ones and families. Many alumni’s children have been photographed sitting on top of the Lion. The Lion is not only the athletic symbol of the

university; it is also one of the university's most famous trademarks and attractions.⁵⁷ Moreover, the shrine is the most photographed site on campus.⁵⁸

While religion brings together those who espouse the same behaviors and values, it often simply highlights differences between opposing groups.⁵⁹ As a result, not every visitor to the Shrine is a school booster. Opposing fans have committed acts of vandalism, such as dumping paint over the Lion. Much of this can be attributed to Sue Paterno, the wife of the legendary Penn State coach. One football weekend, with an impending game against Syracuse, she and two other women covered the Lion in orange tempera paint to incite local fans to rally behind their mascot and team.⁶⁰ In a tradition that began in 1966, up to eight hundred students have guarded the Shrine to keep it safe from vandalism during particularly hostile games with other teams. "We wouldn't have the Guard the Lion Shrine tradition without Sue Paterno, so she's definitely an important part of Penn State history and tradition," said Kristin Avagliano, an avid booster.⁶¹ Other more sacrilegious acts have resulted in damage to the Lion. In the fall of 1978, Warneke had to return to repair the Lion's broken right ear.⁶² The replacement ear was damaged by vandals again in 1994, at which time a special bonding adhesive was used to reattach the broken piece. The statue was damaged again in 2003.⁶³

The nature of sacred space and its relationship to the surrounding landscape is important to community identity.⁶⁴ To many Penn Staters, the Lion Shrine is a sacred place and site specific; the sacred shrine is endowed with a magicality that emanates from its surroundings. Similar to other specialized religious architecture, such as Native American kivas or sweat lodges, the Lion Shrine is where the faithful come to purify themselves.⁶⁵ However, from time to time, there is heated debate and speculation if the

Lion Shrine should be moved to an indoor facility. Traditionalists favor keeping the Lion Shrine where it is located, while progressives would like to see it as the focal point of, perhaps, a sports complex.⁶⁶

The Nittany Lion Inn

Another sacred locus to the Penn Stater, The Nittany Lion Inn, which opened in 1931, is as an important part of Penn State tradition as football itself.⁶⁷ The inn is within walking distance of many attractions on campus, including the Nittany Lion Shrine located directly across the street. The inn's location was paramount when deciding where to build the Shrine, as it would ensure a constant stream of visitors attracted to the sacred site.⁶⁸

Similar to other religions, which celebrate specific rituals at a certain time of year, the college religion of Penn State, too, regularly follows a yearly calendar, which marks different points of the academic semester.⁶⁹ Typically, homecoming is a major event in the fall at many universities including Penn State. Over the years, many alumni have looked forward to spending their homecoming weekend at the Nittany Lion Inn, which is the only hotel located on campus. "The building, to the alumni who come back, is a gathering place," University President, John W. Oswald, said. "It's very, very important to them to stay at the Nittany Lion Inn because the inn has been a part of the college atmosphere."⁷⁰ This is additional evidence of the sacred quality of the Nittany Lion Inn as sacred space to practitioners.⁷¹

Originally, the inn was administered by the Treadway Corporation of New York City, a hotel management firm that operated hotels at private eastern colleges with an emphasis on liberal arts, such as Dartmouth, Middlebury, Amherst, and Williams.⁷²

However, none of them offered hotel, and restaurant management, like Penn State. At first, the College was not directly involved with the management and operations of the inn. The original contract was to be for twenty-five years, but in 1947, the College established control and became sole operator of the inn.⁷³ The inn, which featured the Creamery's vanilla, chocolate, or strawberry ice cream for twenty-five cents,⁷⁴ continued to be a hub of activities during the fifties. The facility added seventy-five rooms in 1954, and restaurant management students began training at the inn in 1955.

Murals are an important ingredient to sacred space. Professor Milton Osborne began painting murals on the walls of the Penn State room in 1957.⁷⁵ Similar to the symbolic themes of Henry Varnum Poor's land-grant murals that grace the walls of the school's oldest building, Old Main,⁷⁶ Osborne's hand-painted murals glorify important school landmarks and depict Penn State's history. As is the case in many other cultures, murals and designs are used as symbolic expressions depicting the origins of institutions.⁷⁷

The inn, which has been called "Penn State's living room," celebrated its seventy-fifth anniversary in 2006 by serving ice cream and cake to the public.⁷⁸ Perhaps, a 1967 promotional brochure for the inn, sums up a true Penn Stater's feelings best:⁷⁹

When the breezes of summer are sighing
Or the leaves of fall are dying,
When the snowflakes of winter are flying
Or in the spring when the flowers are vying

Come for the beautiful scenery,

Clean air, sports, and what's best—
Old loved friends and new,
The finest of food and sweet rest
Come to the Nittany Lion Inn!

This poem serves to recall not only the fond days spent at Penn State, but also elevates and separates the sacred from the merely profane by endowing specific attributes of timelessness and immortality that are related in some fashion to the totemic image—the landscape, sports and group activities, and sacred spaces. Furthermore, the poem fits in well with Durkheim's functionalist approach to religion, whereby certain beliefs and practices revolve around a sacred focus serving to unify a community.⁸⁰

The Logo

Simply put, the relation between the logo and the mascot, which is generally recognizable even to outsiders, is that the more these myths are communicated, the greater their religious significance becomes.⁸¹ A logo is more than a distinctive trademark or symbol it is a merchandisable totem. A logo allows fans the opportunity to show not only which team or clan they support, but also contributes enormously to group identity. Even though Penn State has been using the symbol of the Nittany Lion since 1906, the logo of the Nittany Lion itself was not designed until 1982⁸² when the familiar symbol referred to by sports fans as “the chipmunk” appeared. It is called so because of the Lion's sloping, chipmunk-like head. Another more stately depiction of the Lion, which is called “Pride of the Lions,” was released in 1998. Since then, the blue and white logo has become well known to sports fans across the country. Similar to other popular collegiate logos, Penn

State's revered icon—the Nittany Lion—is emblazoned on popular culture memorabilia limited only by the imagination of entrepreneurs.

Community membership is denoted through consumption. Today's sports market extends beyond male buyers. Last year, 105 billion dollars was spent on women's and children's apparel in the United States.⁸³ In order not to miss any potential sales, outfitters have begun courting female sports apparel buyers as well. New to the market this past year, lingerie giant, Victoria's Secret, joined with thirty-three universities (including Penn State) to introduce its Pink brand collegiate line of apparel designed with college logos. The new line of Penn State-themed T-shirts, sweat pants, and hoodies sell for between thirty-five and fifty-two dollars on the company's website.⁸⁴

In addition, sports merchandisers not only cater to adults; the induction of new community members begins with birth. Team Baby Entertainment, a media company that is owned by former Disney executives, promises to “Raise tomorrow's fan—today.” The company hopes exposing children to the basics of Happy Valley solidarity—team mascots, songs, colors, and more, through a thirty-five minute video—will make children fans for life. Lee Corso, an ESPN analyst, who lends his voice to the animated baby Nittany Lion in the video, acknowledges this fact saying, “You talk about getting them young? We're getting them young.”⁸⁵ Through repetition, endearing sentiments associated with the totemic image are aroused within the group, and subsequently attach themselves to the clan's symbol. Thus, the totemic image builds solidarity, and gives an identity to the group, which ultimately serves to reinforce Penn State's socially constructed reality on a daily basis.

A sacred character tends to emanate from the totemic image to everything that is connected with it.⁸⁶ The Nittany Lion is more than just a symbol, mascot, or memorial to the tens of thousands of Penn State students, alumni, and fans. On or off the field, the Nittany Lion has come to represent the academic integrity, school pride, aspirations, and commitment to a better way of life. No less than coaching legend, Joe Paterno, has observed about the Nittany Lion: “He has a lot of character, patience, and determination.”⁸⁷ Ironically, these are the exact words football fans use to describe Paterno. In this way, the group ascribes desirable personal attributes to the totem that it expects to see reflected in its champions and idols.

Notes

- ⁹ Sigmund Freud. *Totem and Taboo*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1950. 104.
- ¹⁰ Ibid. 193.
- ¹¹ Emile Durkheim. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. New York: Free Press, 1965. 236.
- ¹² Ibid. 464.
- ¹³ Ibid. 256.
- ¹⁴ Ibid. 264.
- ¹⁵ Clifford Geertz. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic, 1973. 11. In any attempt to understand cultural iconography, the importance of the semiotic, or the relationship between symbols and what they represent, cannot be overlooked. Cultural anthropologist, Clifford Geertz explores the process of interpreting culture as text in what he calls “thick” description. Geertz explains how a set of lived and integrated values in a system of symbols makes the world understandable, contributing greatly to a society’s worldview. Culture consists of whatever it takes to understand in order to operate within a society. Similar to Durkheim, Geertz asserts religious belief is mutually confirmed and reinforced by the group’s sacred icons and rituals.
- ¹⁶ Jon Franckowiak. *When I Grow Up I Want to be a Nittany Lion!* York: Poor Boy, 2002. passim.
- ¹⁷ Jackie Esposito. *The Nittany Lion: An Illustrated Tale*. University Park: Penn State, 1997. 18.
- ¹⁸ Bruce D. Forbes. *Religion and Popular Culture in America*. Berkeley: University of California, 2005. 227.
- ¹⁹ Circe Strum. “In Whose Honor? American Indian Mascots in Sports.” *American Anthropologist*. v102, n2. June 2000. 352.
- ²⁰ *What is a Nittany Lion?* (University Park: Penn State Department of University Publications, 2003.) passim.
- ²¹ Esposito. *The Nittany Lion: An Illustrated Tale*. 23.
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ John R. Thelin. *A History of American Higher Education*. Baltimore: John Hopkins, 2004. 159.
- ²⁷ Steven J. Overman. *The Influence of the Protestant Ethic on Sport and Recreation*. Avebury: Aldershot, 1997. 6.
- ²⁸ Chris A. Courogen. “Watch the Lion.” *Patriot-News*. 13 July 2003: L30.
- ²⁹ Esposito. *The Nittany Lion: An Illustrated Tale*. 76.
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Ibid.
- ³² Overman. *The Influence of the Protestant Ethic on Sport and Recreation*. 6.
- ³³ *Penn State Football: Success with Honor*. DVD. Narrated by Rosie Grier. Warner, 2006.
- ³⁴ Esposito. *The Nittany Lion: An Illustrated Tale*. 225. Inside the living mascot Lion’s head is a football helmet, which provides protection from the occasional fan that drops the living mascot on his or her head.
- ³⁵ William Kornblum. *Sociology in a Changing World*. Belmont: Thompson, 2008. 127.
- ³⁶ “Untitled.” *Patriot-News*. 8 Dec. 2002: 1.
- ³⁷ Elise Christenson. “Mascots: Is Lion King?” *Newsweek*. 25 Nov. 2002: p. 25
- ³⁸ Jacob Neusner. *World Religions in America*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994. 241.
- ³⁹ Esposito. *The Nittany Lion: An Illustrated Tale*. 91.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid. 113.
- ⁴¹ “Sculptors Like Shrine Project.” *Penn State Collegian*. 9 Jan 1940: 1.
- ⁴² “Sculpture Pieces To Go on Display.” *Penn State Collegian*. 23 Mar 1937: 1.
- ⁴³ Francis E. Hyslop. “A Rare Spiritual Innocence.” *Penn State Alumni News*. 12 Oct. 1965: 4
- ⁴⁴ “Shrine History.” *Pennsylvania Mirror*. 11 Nov 1975: A2.
- ⁴⁵ “Heinz Warneke Chosen As Lion Shrine Sculptor.” *Daily Collegian*. 30 Apr 1941: 1.

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- ⁴⁶ Robert E. Kinter. "Presentation of Nittany Lion Climaxes Two Years of Planning, Hard Work, Controversy." *Daily Collegian*. 24 Oct 1942: 12.
- ⁴⁷ Esposito. *The Nittany Lion: An Illustrated Tale*. 121.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid. 121.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid. 127.
- ⁵⁰ Jack Santino. *All Around the Year*. Urbana: University of Illinois, 1995. 10.
- ⁵¹ William E. Paden. *Religious Worlds*. Boston: Beacon, 1988. 69.
- ⁵² "Dedication of Lion Shrine." *Penn State Alumni News*. 1 Nov 1942: 1.
- ⁵³ Steve Mellon. "Untitled." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.com* 21 Apr 2004.
- ⁵⁴ Paden. *Religious Worlds*. Boston: Beacon, 1988. 75.
- ⁵⁵ Dell deChant. *Religion and Culture in the West*. Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt, 2008. 10.
- ⁵⁶ Santino. *All Around the Year*. 11.
- ⁵⁷ Steve Ostrosky. "Old Main, Lion Remain Favorite Tourist Attractions." *Daily Collegian*. 4 Sep 1973: 3.
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- ⁵⁹ Bellah. "Civil Religion in America." *Daedalus*. 352.
- ⁶⁰ Esposito. *The Nittany Lion: An Illustrated Tale*. 136.
- ⁶¹ Matthew Spolar. "Lion Shrine Safe from Vandalism." *Daily Collegian*. 23 Oct 2006: 1
- ⁶² Esposito. *The Nittany Lion: An Illustrated Tale*. 138.
- ⁶³ Ford Turner. "Nittany Lion Has Something to Growl About." *Patriot-News*. 31 July 2003: 1.
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- ⁶⁵ Neusner. *World Religions*. 12.
- ⁶⁶ Lloyd Dell. "Nittany Lion May be Moved to New Center." *Daily Collegian*. 24 Oct 1988: 1.
- ⁶⁷ Esposito. *The Nittany Lion: An Illustrated Tale*. 222.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid. 111.
- ⁶⁹ Santino. *All Around the Year*. 6.
- ⁷⁰ Jeffery Bosserman. "Inn Restorations Cost \$160,000." *Daily Collegian*. 31 Mar 1982: 2.
- ⁷¹ deChant. The Sacred Santa. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2002. 85.
- ⁷² Louis E. Silvi. *A History of the Nittany Lion Inn*. passim. MSVF File PSU Special Collections. Accessed 12 July 2008.
- ⁷³ Dina Defaro. "The Inn: Institute of Variety." *Daily Collegian*. 18 May 1981: 20.
- ⁷⁴ *Nittany Lion Inn Menu*. (State College: Pennsylvania State College, 1951)
- ⁷⁵ Silvi. *A History of the Nittany Lion Inn*. passim.
- ⁷⁶ Author's note: The Land Grant murals in Old Main, which depict the founding of the institution, replete with President Abraham Lincoln bestowing a new kind of school devoted to the agricultural arts, are among the most important public murals ever created in the United States.
- ⁷⁷ William Haviland. *Anthropology: the Human Challenge*. Belmont: Wadsworth, 2008. 208.
- ⁷⁸ *Live PSU*. The Pennsylvania State University. 5 May 2006. <<http://www.live.psu.edu/index.>>
- ⁷⁹ *Nittany Lion Inn*. (University Park: Penn State Hospitality Services, 1967)
- ⁸⁰ Bruce Forbes. *Religion and Pop Culture in America*. Berkeley: University of California, 2005. 228.
- ⁸¹ de Chant. *All Around the Year*. 85.
- ⁸² Author's note: 1982 was a pivotal year in mass media—unprecedented corporate mergers, the nascent stages of cable television, and the rapid growth of televangelism due to the conservative social mood.
- ⁸³ Bureau of Economic Activity, U.S. Department of Commerce, www.bea.gov/national/nipaweb/index.asp: accessed 19 Jan 2009.
- ⁸⁴ Jennifer Lynch. "Penn State Pink." *Daily Collegian*. 10 July 2008: 6.
- ⁸⁵ Lini S. Kadaba. "Firing Up Nittany Lion Fans Early." *Philadelphia Inquirer*. 19 Aug 2007: A1.
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- ⁸⁷ Esposito. *The Nittany Lion: An Illustrated Tale*. 134.

Chapter II

Collective Effervescence and Rituals

Emile Durkheim was interested in how religion functions, and what purpose it serves, for society. According to his theory of “collective effervescence,” religious sentiments of the group rise and fall with the practice of group rituals. Systematic rituals and other regularly recreated acts, such as prayers but also cheers, rallies, and songs, produce this effervescence. When rituals require members of the clan to organize, share a mutual focus, and share an emotional need, the social outcomes are monumental, leading to such things as group solidarity, emotional energy, and commitment to the norms of the group.

Rituals such as attending football games are a means of worshiping the group and its values.⁸⁸ Additionally, football has all the characteristics of a revival: the religious dedication and devotion displayed by participants, and a large congregation gathered to witness a ritual combat.⁸⁹ Football, which has always been enormously popular at Penn State, is a symbolic ritual that places events in a traditional and orderly view.⁹⁰ Social intensity and group fervor are the result of frequent ritual assemblies.⁹¹ To fans, football is a religion as well and has become a more appropriate display of personal religiosity than many traditional faiths.⁹² Furthermore, football, which contributes greatly to group identity and solidarity,⁹³ has been called “civil religion” by Michael Novak, “folk religion” by sociologist James Mathisen, and “cultural religion” by Catherine Albanese.⁹⁴

The sport is yet another tool the college uses to successively accomplish this religious task.

A winning football season motivates more students to apply for admission at Penn State, which, in turn, contributes greatly to group solidarity. Over seven years of declining applications ended abruptly after the 1994 squad went unbeaten, easily defeating Oregon in the Rose Bowl. More recently, applications were up 12.3%, leading Penn State President, Graham Spanier, to boast to trustees, “It probably didn’t hurt that we were ranked third in the nation in football.”⁹⁵

Football During the Progressive Era

Football emerged in eastern private colleges—Harvard, Yale, and Princeton.⁹⁶ American football officially began with the Princeton-Rutgers match in 1869.⁹⁷ During the Progressive Era, football provided a battleground which was used to test a young man’s mettle for future business endeavors. “Courage, coolness, steadiness of nerve, quickness of apprehension, resourcefulness, self-knowledge, and self-reliance,” were the words of a college president in the 1890s describing an ideal football player.⁹⁸ Football fever had spread quickly. “Football seems to be more popular at State this year than ever before,” the student newspaper observed. The paper further noted, “The coach has been working hard to bring the football team to a high state of efficiency.”⁹⁹ During the late-nineteenth century, team sports, such as football, became very important because they encouraged young men to be physically fit, while simultaneously developing “team spirit.”¹⁰⁰

In 1881, Penn State’s football tradition began unofficially. A Penn State team beat Bucknell in a game that was more closely related to rugby.¹⁰¹ Two freshmen

students formed the school's first official team. Penn State's first intercollegiate contest in 1887—which was played according to the more traditional American football rules—took the team to play against Bucknell. State was victorious that day, drubbing the opposing squad 54-0. Evidence attesting to how football builds group solidarity appears in a 1908 editorial in the school's newspaper, *The State Collegian*. “We want the team to feel that every loyal State man stands back of it, and that win or lose, we know that they will do their best to uphold the honor of Penn State.”¹⁰² In addition to regularly scheduled intercollegiate matches with perennial favorites, such as Lehigh, Dickinson, Penn, and aforementioned Bucknell, there were matches (or crusades) against professional and religious athletic clubs from Pittsburgh, Wilkesburg, Homestead, and all over the state.

Ambivalence to football at Penn State—there were conflicting opinions on the sport—attests to a means of growing identification. Despite football's overwhelming popularity at Penn State, some clearly did not see any need for the sport in the college sector. One female student wrote of her displeasure, “I think it is ridiculous the way people are raving over football. It is a brutal game, fit only for savages and barbarians.” The writer conceded she was among the minority, and qualified her argument. “I know very few agree with me. Jack (her brother) says it is a noble sport.”¹⁰³ Still, others wrote apologetically, “There is nothing occurring outside to divert our minds, and we have to furnish our own diversions.”¹⁰⁴ In this way, group members are bound together by a set of membership rights and mutual obligations, which prove highly effective in reinforcing group solidarity and community identity.¹⁰⁵

Since identity is so important in building team spirit and solidarity, groups differentiate themselves from outsiders through team colors. As mentioned in chapter one, in the late-nineteenth century colleges adopted institutional colors to promote loyalty to one's campus.¹⁰⁶ In the same spirit, shortly before departing for the Bucknell game, team members had decided that the team should have some sort of uniform. Team members picked pink and black for jerseys and pants.¹⁰⁷ Due to the sun and repeated launderings, the colors soon faded. Unfortunately, many school boosters had already bought pink and white blazers with matching straw hats, which were quite fashionable in the late nineteenth century.¹⁰⁸ In the same spirit of the Progressive era, a 1899 Penn State student newspaper editorial implored, "Fellow students' presence at games lends enthusiasm and is an incentive to those working nobly to give the college a name worthy in the great field of college football."¹⁰⁹ The colors most people associate with Penn State—blue and white—officially became the school colors in 1890.

Cheers to rally the crowd facilitate the shared emotional mood of the group. *The Free Lance*, the school newspaper during the Progressive era, avidly reported the actions, cheers, and rallies fans incorporated to enliven the group. Typical of the reports attesting to the "collective effervescence" generated by the football crowd is an 1896 editorial: "My usually well-behaved and decorous brother yelled and howled like a red Indian, and jumped up and down and waved his flag so violently that I would have been mortified had not all the men and half the girls around us been doing the same thing."¹¹⁰ Around the turn of the century, students devised cheers and songs to make one feel part of the campus tribe at athletic events.¹¹¹ Fans quickly developed Penn State's first college cheer: "Yah! Yah! (pause) Yah! Yah! Yah! Wish, Wack—Pink, Black! P! S!

C!”¹¹² Other cheers soon followed. The student newspaper penned a cheer in hopes of “adding a little noise” to Beaver Field: “Hit ‘em up! Hit ‘em up! Anyway to get ‘em up! Eat ‘em up! Eat ‘em up! Eat ‘em up! State!”¹¹³ In this way, repeated group acts, such as cheers, rallies, and songs, which are purposely designed to produce the required “collective effervescence,” contribute greatly to group solidarity by “suturing” individuals to the collective, thus defining group identity.¹¹⁴

History of Beaver Field

As in the Ivy League, football at Penn State was invested with manliness and godliness.¹¹⁵ Devotees have always thought of the site where Penn State’s knights of the gridiron battle as a sacred place similar to the Lion Shrine. Here, college trustees created sacred space physically and figuratively out of the natural environment.¹¹⁶ In 1887, State’s home scheduled games were first played in front of Old Main. Upgrades were made to existing facilities, and a five-hundred-seat grandstand was installed. In 1893, just in time for football season, the original Beaver Field was christened.¹¹⁷ The field was named for General James A. Beaver, a former Pennsylvania governor and president of the board of trustees.¹¹⁸

Sporting venues are similar to specialized religious architecture, such as Native American kivas and sweat lodges, where the faithful come to purify themselves.¹¹⁹ Modern Penn State football history really began in 1909, with the construction of New Beaver Field, which, at the time, was the largest athletic field in the country.¹²⁰ Throughout the twentieth century, football continued to be very popular at Penn State as evidenced by the many expansions of Beaver Field to accommodate ever-increasing throngs of football devotees. There were upgrades to Beaver Field each decade of the

twentieth century—even during the trying times of the Great Depression and after World War II. The actual structure is believed to be so sacred by devotees that in 1959 when plans were made for a new stadium, the steel structure was moved—bolt-by-bolt—one mile east to the present site.¹²¹

Currently, Beaver Stadium is the largest collegiate venue, with a seating capacity of a whopping 107,282 raucous football fans. Devotees are so emotionally charged by the collective effervescence generated by the group that the stadium becomes deafening loud. Recently, senior middle linebacker Dan Conner, commenting on the sheer size of Beaver Stadium’s crowd, said, “That was the loudest crowd I have ever been around...it was a great feeling”¹²² In addition, fans are whipped up in such an emotional frenzy that the sheer volume of the crowd has been known to cause the stadium’s steel girders to vibrate. Commenting on the elated masses of fans, defensive guard Bob White said, “You could feel the earth under your feet vibrate. I remember looking back in the stands—the crowd literally looked like human lava.”¹²³

Students make up a large contingent at football games, and as witnessed by their actions are deeply committed to the standards of the micro-society of Penn State. Even early in Penn State’s football history, some students found it morally wrong to admit unpaid guests to the sacred football shrine, thus denoting some sort of right of membership. The writer of an 1894 student newspaper editorial wanted to “protect the group’s interests by seeing that every admission to Beaver Field is paid for.” The editorial further lamented, “It is becoming quite common for people to gather at a little distance to view the contests, while refusing to pay for them.”¹²⁴ To the dismay of some students, admission was not charged until 1910; before that time, it was customary to

pass the hat.¹²⁵ In this way, the micro-society uses socialization to recruit, attract, orient, train, and govern new members.¹²⁶

Today, ESPN's *College Gameday* ranks the student section at Beaver Stadium, which is the second largest in college sports with 21,520 seats, as among the best in collegiate football. The student section has sold out in less than fifty-nine minutes.¹²⁷ Students pay homage to the legendary football coach by lovingly referring to University Park as "Paternoville," regularly setting up tents to wait for tickets outside of Beaver Stadium—rain or shine.¹²⁸ During particularly important victories, Beaver Stadium's goal-posts, which are believed to be sacred objects by student devotees, are ritually torn down and carried through the streets. On a football weekend, it is not uncommon to witness a procession of more than one thousand over enthusiastic students carrying the sacred goal-posts (or pieces of them) through the downtown streets.¹²⁹

Costume is an important ingredient in the quasi-religious festival of college football.¹³⁰ Not only do some fans engage in face painting to assume the identity of the team, but also, since 2005, Penn State has effectively used the whiteout—fans uniformly clad in white t-shirts—to build crowd solidarity.¹³¹ Additionally, devotees may paint and decorate their bodies, homes, children, pets, yards, and vehicles to show allegiance.¹³²

Another example of group solidarity is the blue bus—not a luxury bus—the team uses to go from the locker room to Beaver Stadium. "It's not a fancy thing; you're waiting for it to break down."¹³³ To the devotees of the collegiate religion of Penn State, waiting for the team to arrive is a group ritual. Similar to a conquering hero, Paterno sits in the front seat; the starting quarterback sits in the left seat. "So, if you want to know the starting quarterback that day, just stand on the left side of the bus," says one

sportswriter.¹³⁴ On game day, throngs of anxious devotees line the streets to Beaver Stadium. Defensive End, Bob White commented, “On Saturdays, when you’re taking that drive it doesn’t take long to get focused. You realize how important this is to so many people. It’s like a religion to them.”¹³⁵

Referring to the fans—the blue and white faithful of the “Nittany Nation”—Jay Paterno, son of the legendary coach (who is next in the dynasty) explained, “They believe in more than just what happens between the goal lines and the sidelines. They believe in the entire thing.”¹³⁶ Through these assemblies, the micro-society of Penn State binds individuals to the group; the intensity acts as “social glue.”¹³⁷

Alumni are equally committed to upholding the standards and norms of the Penn State community, actively partaking in ritualistic affairs and making donations to enable further crusades. Some engage in the ceremonial ritual of pregame “tailgating.” Similar to a religious feast, fans assemble in the parking lot outside the hallowed shrine (Beaver Stadium) to stage elaborate picnics replete with coolers and grills in team colors. Additionally, the 19,000-member Nittany Lion Booster Club controls most of the sections at Beaver Stadium. To qualify for mid-field seats, prospective members must donate in excess of \$25,000.¹³⁸ The seating plan generates over \$9 million annually, which rewards boosters based on the size of contributions.¹³⁹ In this way, fans are financially segregated along material culture lines in sections. Those unwilling to pay for premium seats are relegated to the less desirable sections or the “cheap seats.”¹⁴⁰ Similar to missionaries of other faiths who hope to gain converts and win back apostolates, the forty-five year old booster club sends out a glossy brochure to alumni, who are not already season-ticket holders.¹⁴¹ During home football games, Beaver Stadium, which is

the largest architectural structure in central Pennsylvania, becomes the fifth largest city (in terms of population) in Pennsylvania. Only the cities of Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Harrisburg, Erie, and Allentown have bigger populations—a fact that speaks volumes about Penn State’s storied football program and loyal base of rabid Lion fans.

The Paterno Era

By its nature, football is a paternalistic sport, which is similar to a religious crusade: a squad of gladiators or knights (the players) takes the field, under the tutelage of a patriarchal hero (the head coach), and in order to score and triumph, must acquire territory (holy land) in inches or yards by battling the opposing team. In this way, football promotes a shared identity, while contributing to group solidarity,¹⁴² and is “a form of religion,” as Michael Novak puts it, because it provides “organization and discipline while recreating cosmic struggle.”¹⁴³ According to anthropologists, leadership is paramount in the organization of group activity in society.¹⁴⁴ This is part of the function of the head coach—to provide leadership, while simultaneously building solidarity and integrating individuals to the larger group through the social energy created by team victory.

In all societies (great or small), there are individuals who stand out from the crowd and take the lead in group activity.¹⁴⁵ These paternalistic heroes are idolized by society. The heroic status of coaches stems from the belief that football coaches have a great bearing on determining the outcome of games.¹⁴⁶ As the patriarchal leader, the football coach uses his authority on behalf of the group, and exercises it in the interests of group members. In this way, the leader claims moral authority and, therefore, legitimacy for required actions.¹⁴⁷ As a result, obedience is owed to the leader.

Often in patriarchies, the leader is designated by a rule of inheritance whereby the leader chooses the successor.¹⁴⁸ The protégé is usually a personal disciple, who has exhibited loyalty to the leader and enthusiasm for the group's cause.¹⁴⁹ In addition, the leader attributes charismatic qualities to the successor, and assigns the protégé tasks to perform. This is exactly the case at Penn State. Joe Paterno arrived at Penn State in 1950 at the invitation of the head coach at the time, Rip Engle. In 1966, Paterno became head coach when he took over the job from Engle. This is quite similar to what Benedict Anderson refers to as the "dynastic realm." The ruler's legitimacy derives from a divine lineage, thereby enabling the organization to sustain its rule for long periods.¹⁵⁰

However, new leaders are often "put to the test" by the larger group, and must prove that charismatic qualities are indeed genuine and worthy of recognition by followers.¹⁵¹ Winning is paramount in college football. Penn State, who earlier had been just an average, hard-working football team, started to have winning seasons under the guidance of Paterno, thus solidifying the coach's position of power. As further evidence of increased group solidarity and emotional energy through team victory, when Paterno became head coach, Beaver Stadium's modest steel structure only had a seating capacity of 46,284.¹⁵² Thus, recognition by the group, which has become emotionally charged to fervor, legitimizes the charismatic hero's claim to authority.¹⁵³

Furthermore, the leader or chieftain of the clan is ascribed awesome or mysterious powers, and above all is believed to be sacred.¹⁵⁴ Similar to the high priest (by way of example, the head of priests at the Temple in Jerusalem was also the leader of the Jewish nation),¹⁵⁵ Paterno is responsible for performing rituals pertaining to worship at the temple (Beaver Stadium), and is the head of the "Nittany Nation" as well. Similar

to the high priest, there are conspicuous sacred garments and tools, which denote the head coach as such. Only the head coach carries the Holy Scripture (the playbook); only the head coach wears a headset (to communicate with deacons and assistants), and a windbreaker emblazoned with the team colors and logo.

Ultimately, however, the only thing that brings legitimacy to the institution and the patriarchal hero is winning—the Holy Grail of college football—the national championship. Finally, in 1982, after years of building statewide interest, Paterno and the Nittany Lions claimed the National Championship. When Penn State won the National Championship there was an incredible wave of enthusiasm that swept through the state of Pennsylvania. This was during a time of a severe economic recession, and the collective effervescence of the micro-society of Penn State spilled over into the larger statewide community. Parades, fire engines, and blaring car horns greeted the team, which flew into the state capitol and had to drive back to State College. People lined the road along State Highway 322, the entire distance back to State College. Reflecting on the time, Paterno said, “I didn’t realize how important it was for Pennsylvania to have a National Championship.”¹⁵⁶ In 1987, a year that marked one-hundred years of Penn State football, Paterno’s Nittany Lions won a second National Title, defeating a brash Miami team in the Fiesta Bowl.

Recognition came steadily, but surely—win by win, seat by seat, adding greatly to the legendary myth of the patriarchal hero. Over his career, Paterno’s image as a charismatic leader has become a multi-million dollar promotional device for the university. For instance, cardboard replicas bearing the coach’s likeness, and affectionately called “JoePas,” have been marketed successfully since the mid-eighties,

and are mandatory at any real Penn Stater's party or tailgate. Likewise, the Penn State coach has been honored on perhaps the pinnacle of American pop culture sporting achievement—the front cover of General Mills' "Breakfast of Champions" Wheaties cereal boxes.

Along the way, Joe Paterno, who is perhaps the quintessential patriarchal hero, has transformed Penn State football into a perennial powerhouse. Penn State's high priest of football has showed his loyalty and love for Penn State and intercollegiate athletics by turning down multi-million dollar contracts to coach professional football. He would not give up the college game for the money of professional football, and not give up the values of educating young warriors for any amount of money. "But he stayed here because he could walk to work," mused wide receiver, Kenny Jackson.¹⁵⁷

No major college football coach has won more games at one school than Paterno.¹⁵⁸ At last count, the eighty-one year old coach, who has just renewed his contract, had 383 wins. The only schools that have won more are Michigan, Notre Dame, Alabama, Texas, and Nebraska.¹⁵⁹ Commenting on Alabama's legendary coach – Paul "Bear" Bryant -- but perhaps inadvertently referring to himself, Paterno has said, "He was a man who set standards not easily attainable by men."¹⁶⁰

It is through the many mentioned rituals, which generate collective effervescence by entailing assembly of the group and a mutual focus, that Penn State football games are perceived as religious crusades by fans and players alike. The players (Christian knights) are led into battle by the patriarchal hero (Paterno) under the banner of the totem (the Nittany Lion) to engage in ritualistic combat in front of a crowd charged with emotional energy, all which aim to reinforce group solidarity. Football fits in well

with the college religion of Penn State, because the sport is one of the rituals and practices used to reinforce social solidarity and unify the community.¹⁶¹

Notes

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- ⁸⁹ Steven J. Overman. *The Influence of the Protestant Ethic on Sport and Recreation*. Aldershot: Avebury, 1997. 6.
- ⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 6.
- ⁹¹ N.J. Allen. *On Durkheim's Sociology of Religion*. London: Routledge, 1998. 136.
- ⁹² Robert J. Higgs. *God in the Stadium*. Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1995. 19.
- ⁹³ Richard Giulianotti. *Football: A Sociology of the Game*. Cambridge: Polity, 1999. 15.
- ⁹⁴ Bruce D. Forbes. *Religion and Popular Culture in America*. Berkeley: University of California, 2005. 197.
- ⁹⁵ Frank Fitzpatrick. "Applications Up." *Philadelphia Inquirer*. 30 May 2006: C1.
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- ⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 380.
- ⁹⁹ "Football More Popular." *Free Lance*. 1 Oct 1901: 34.
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Chapter III

Food as Ritual

Rituals, sacred and secular, play a major role in group and individual celebration. Rituals refer to repeated symbolic customs and ceremonies that are carried out with reference to the sacred.¹⁶² Through rituals, the believer experiences the sacred realm.¹⁶³ Penn State food rituals, such as buying an ice cream cone from the Creamery or a sticky bun from one of many local diners, are a means of exalting the micro-society and its values. Often to devotees, religiously sanctioned foods are seen as a measure of piety and allegiance to the group.¹⁶⁴

Rituals are prescribed behavior that is periodically repeated to link the actions of group members to the larger metaphysical order.¹⁶⁵ When a Penn Stater stops by the Creamery for an ice cream cone or eats a sticky, he or she is carrying on a cultural tradition repeated generation after generation. Not only is the Penn Stater engaging in a consumer ritual (because consumption is a primary tool in social integration),¹⁶⁶ but also, the micro-society is collectively focused on cultural codes¹⁶⁷—in the case of Penn State: ice cream and sticky rolls.

Moreover, rituals contribute considerably to the social order.¹⁶⁸ One must know where to partake in these consumer-oriented rituals. Thus, group members are easily differentiated from outsiders, who simply would not have knowledge of local food culture, or even where to find these commodities. To use the parlance of anthropologist

Victor Turner, “manipulations of ritual create solidarity.”¹⁶⁹ In turn, food choices are shaped by social experiences, with each society selecting appropriate foods to suit its particular social environment.¹⁷⁰ A college student is more likely to be able to survive on a steady diet of ice cream and sticky rolls (and often does!) more than a middle-aged, health conscious individual might. In particular, young male students deliberately eat at diners as a way of scoffing at the danger of a diet high in sugar and cholesterol.¹⁷¹ Therefore, taste and food preference may be defined as a cultural experience that is appropriate in some contexts and not in others.¹⁷²

Besides, rituals enable groups to form a social identity.¹⁷³ Through rituals, communities convey to group members an understanding of their society.¹⁷⁴ From a functionalist perspective, foods, such as an ice cream cone from the Creamery and local diner sticky buns, are collective representations of social reality, which further serve to reinforce social identity.¹⁷⁵ Easily dismissed as junk food by critics, the Creamery’s ice cream and grilled stickies are more than just high calorie snacks. These food symbols are the vehicles for meaning that intersect to form culture.¹⁷⁶ Anthropologist Mary Douglas has stated a meal is a poem that is created within certain rules, expresses much about the social group.¹⁷⁷

Similarly, habits and behaviors are crucial to the very definition of community because they reaffirm the social order.¹⁷⁸ As Freud observed, “To eat and drink with someone was a symbol and a confirmation of social community and of the assumption of mutual obligations.”¹⁷⁹

Additionally, foods are captured through symbols, images, practices, and beliefs, which not only hold a significant place in popular culture, but also generate important

revenue.¹⁸⁰ More importantly, food reaffirms a community identity based on shared consumption.¹⁸¹

At Penn State—stickies and ice cream are two of the most popular foods, and take on a wide variety of social meanings. These two foods, which are simply yet another way to worship the micro-society of Penn State, are not only eaten during celebrations (team victories, graduations, homecoming, and local holidays), they are also eaten as a source of comfort during trying times (studying, cramming for finals, personal setbacks, and team losses) as well.

Similar to the aforementioned pilgrimages to the Nittany Lion Shrine, Nittany Lion Inn, and Beaver Stadium, locals, students, visitors, and alumni undertake additional journeys to holy places rich in the cultural tradition of Penn State¹⁸²— the Creamery and local diners. Here devotees can indulge in the community’s sacred objects of ritual consumption.¹⁸³ More than just inexpensive places to eat, due to the great sense of nostalgia, traditional eateries are an integral part of the “branding” of a college campus.¹⁸⁴

History of the Creamery

Originally, as a school dedicated to the study of agriculture in an extremely rural area—Pennsylvania Farmer’s High School was its first name—emphasis was placed on food science, animal husbandry, and cultivation techniques. The mid to late nineteenth century was also an era when science, albeit in its nascent stages, was gaining prestige and respect with the American public. During this time, many Pennsylvanian farmers were still quite skeptical of scientific agriculture.¹⁸⁵ Evidence of this well-timed agricultural and scientific significance is the school’s dairy barns were first established in

1865. Similarly, the agriculture department benefited significantly from the Hatch Act in 1887, which made funds available for agricultural experiment stations at land-grant institutions.¹⁸⁶ The original dairy facility was constructed in 1889 with part of a \$7,000 state appropriation. The college's instruction and research was an immediate asset to the state's dairy farmers.¹⁸⁷

Soon after, in 1892, due to the need for better-trained workers throughout the American dairy industry,¹⁸⁸ the school established the first university course in ice cream making.¹⁸⁹ In 1903, \$100,000 was appropriated from the state for the erection of experimental stations and a new dairy building.¹⁹⁰ In 1905, an increasing amount of agriculture classes had been added, with the ice cream course being the most popular.¹⁹¹ During the early twentieth century, ice cream had become increasingly more popular. The time was ideal to build a newer facility at Penn State.¹⁹² During the Great Depression, the Creamery was moved from the old Dairy Barns, and in 1932 was relocated to Patterson Building at a cost of approximately \$5,000.¹⁹³ The Creamery, which sold most of its products in the State College and nearby Altoona markets, would become known for its rigorous standards and high-quality milk, butter, cheese, and ice cream.

Even today, the Creamery is operated by the University as a laboratory for instructional and educational purposes.¹⁹⁴ The Creamery, which employs 60 to 80 students part-time, and another 22 full-time (up from 9 workers 23 years ago), boasts in the history of the program 100% job placement for its 90 undergraduate and 50 graduate students.¹⁹⁵ Despite this lofty goal, the Creamery has long operated a salesroom that carries many of the products made in the plant. Over the years, many students have made

a habit of eating breakfast, lunch, and dinner at the Creamery. Manager Tom Palachak said, “They’d be eating ice cream at seven in the morning if the store was open. The line looks like a World War II breadline.”¹⁹⁶ Undoubtedly, the Creamery is one of the highlights of a visit to Penn State for students, alumni, and visitors alike. Additionally, to a devotee of the civil religion of Penn State, the Creamery constitutes a sacred site.

The Creamery as a Sacred Site

Local newspaper reporter, Daryl Lang, has commented, “If the frozen dairy industry were church, Penn State would be its Vatican.”¹⁹⁷ While this remark on the surface appears to be quite patronizing, a closer look at the religious dynamic of sacred sites suggests the Creamery is a shrine to consumption complete with a hierarchal system of devotees, priests, and caretakers, each carefully assigned a specific task.

One of the longest running Penn State traditions is enjoying an ice cream cone from the Creamery. “I know many people who come here for football games and meetings who make the trip to the creamery store as if it were a religious experience. It’s definitely a pilgrimage-type trek,” says Dr. Aru Pollar, professor of the ice cream short course.¹⁹⁸ Similar to the *hajj*—the pilgrimage to Mecca made to the most sacred site in the Muslim world—Penn State devotees make pilgrimages to the Creamery. In this way, participants identify with other pilgrims, and gain a sense of solidarity as a group.¹⁹⁹ The manager, who is similar to a high priest, oversees the ritual, and is responsible for preserving the sacredness and purity of the site.²⁰⁰ In fact, the manager’s most immediate concern is to stock the consumer temple (the Creamery’s freezer shelves) with a large variety of sacred items (hence, 110 flavors in a rotating repertoire).²⁰¹ However, it is not

the manager, but the temple's caretakers, the sales attendants, who allow participants to fulfill the final stage of the ritual—consumption.²⁰²

Similar to other religions, the collegiate dogma of Penn State encourages offerings to its hallowed shrines. While most devotees only engage in this consumer ritual two scoops at a time for \$1.75, others bequeath more substantial sums. In 2006, the new \$45 million Food Science Building opened, which contains the sparkling new Berkey Creamery. The Berkeys are Dairy Science alumni, and had not been back to State College for years. In the summer of 2001, the couple was standing in line waiting for an ice cream cone at the Creamery. A sign on the wall indicated a new facility would soon be built. The sign's message concluded by stating, "For naming rights and donations call..."²⁰³ Following a \$3 million donation to the facility, the new ultra-modern facility bears their name. Quite fittingly, in the new building, which can hold enough ice cream to satisfy campus demand for months,²⁰⁴ the totemic image of the Nittany Lion is prominently featured above the ice cream scooping area.²⁰⁵

Today, the Creamery sells more than three-quarters of a million ice cream cones every year. Much of the Creamery's business is done during festive times that celebrate the college religion of Penn State. Columnist Erma Bombeck claims, "The stuff comes close to being a religious experience."²⁰⁶ The busiest times are Homecoming Weekend, football weekends, graduations, and during the summer.²⁰⁷ Certain rituals, which are enacted seasonally, translate enduring messages, values, and sentiments to the group.²⁰⁸ "Penn State football may be number one around here," said the Creamery's Ray Binkley, "But the Creamery is number two. The alumni hit the creamery first when they come up."²⁰⁹ "During a football weekend, we'll gross about \$12,000 worth of sales," Creamery

Manager John Foley said.²¹⁰ “The Creamery is history, it is tradition, twenty-five years from now, you’ll be heading back to the Creamery, too.”²¹¹

Similar to all religions, which impose some sort of rules or regulations on devotees, one of the more unusual traditions or rites of the Creamery is that customers are not allowed to mix flavors. In fact, because of concerns over food allergens, Creamery rules strictly prohibit the mixing of ice cream flavors in cones and cups. An urban legend suggests that the federal government has kept the Creamery’s ice cream from being sold off-campus, due to the excessively high fat content. No such ban exists as the federal government does not impose a fat content limit on ice cream. The Creamery’s ice creams contain a fat content of 14%, while FDA standards call for a 10% minimum fat content in dairy products that are listed as ice cream.²¹²

The Creamery’s ice cream is such a part of the fabric of Penn State that the dairy facility bestows “canonization” on campus academic and sports heroes.²¹³ Of course, Peachy Paterno is named for the school’s legendary football coach, while Keeney Beanie (a coffee-flavored ice cream) is named after a noted food science professor. Most recently in 2005, to celebrate the University’s 150th anniversary, the Creamery released a new flavor appropriately entitled “Sesquicentennial Sundae.” The name was chosen from over 2,500 suggestions from avid fans and devotees who suggested flavors such as, Happy Valley Vanilla, Nittany Lion Tracks, Joe Pa Stachio, and Cookies and Creamery. “The reaction was phenomenal,” said Eston Martz, agricultural publishing coordinator. “It’s a great way to raise awareness of the celebration.”²¹⁴

In addition to the ice cream that is sold on premises in half gallons, and four-ounce novelty cups, chocolate covered ice cream bars, and milk have been sold through

vending machines in the dormitories,²¹⁵ while ice cream has always been available in the dining halls. In this way, shared consumption comprises a ritual, while serving to reinforce allegiance to the micro-society of Penn State. Furthermore, the ice cream is available over the internet, and is shipped around the world in dry ice allowing devotees to indulge and reconfirm group rituals and identity while apart from the group.

Ice cream has become synonymous with “the good old days.” Undoubtedly, this longing for nostalgia makes up an important part of the allure of the Creamery; it is one of the highlights of any visit to University Park. Typical of devotees, Maria Schreffler, a 1985 graduate says, “We stop for the Creamery, stop for the stickies, and stock up on Penn State gear.”²¹⁶ Furthermore, an earlier mentioned shrine and traditional landmark, the Nittany Lion Inn serves ice cream from the Creamery, and another local treat that “reflects a Penn State tradition”—the sticky, a sugary bun.

Diner History

Simply put—a restaurant is a place that expresses the world around us. It is a mirror of its society.²¹⁷ Therefore, the diner (there are several local diners that serve stickies) holds a significant place in the Penn Stater’s identity. Sharing a meal brings people together; food is used to forge friendship.²¹⁸ In this way, the micro-society of Penn State bestows collective identity through gastronomical experience.²¹⁹

Despite the American diner’s reputation as second-rate eating establishment to some, to many patrons at State College’s diners the diner is a sacred place. Throughout much of the first half of the twentieth century, there was little in common between respectable restaurants and “greasy spoons” that slung hash for the poorer classes.²²⁰ To cater to a wider clientele, the diner increasingly found its way into a wide array of

markets—including the small college town.²²¹ Diners have long been popular in State College. Often, they offered bargain-priced meals to students who were strapped for cash. The author’s father (Class of 1957), who attended on the G.I. Bill recalls: “You could get a lot of food for the money.”²²²

The Sticky

Originally a traditional German recipe (as Pennsylvania contains a large population of German heritage), sticky buns are little sweet rolls believed to originate from German cinnamon rolls known as *schnecken*.²²³ In State College, one can trace the history and development of the sticky to the introduction of the area’s first diner. In 1926, the Club Diner was the first diner to open in State College. Shortly thereafter in 1930, Russ Adamwitz pulled a diner onto a vacant lot, and named his establishment the College Diner.²²⁴ The fledging restaurateur developed a Penn State tradition—stickies—essentially a buttery cinnamon roll. As a waitress at the neighboring Corner Room restaurant puts it, “It’s a cinnamon roll with a lot of goo on it. You grill them in butter and that’s what makes them really good.”²²⁵ Heating up the sticky buns in a pan over low heat is an essential part of the ritual, which cannot be emphasized enough. Stickies are popular with students, alumni, visitors, and “townies” (what Penn State students call State College natives) alike.

Similar to a religious pilgrimage, hordes of students regularly partake in this Penn State tradition.²²⁶ Often, students survive on a diet that subsists of cheese steaks, pizzas, sticky rolls, and coffee.²²⁷ The demand for grilled stickies is enormous at Penn State and in the surrounding State College area. “When students come back, we sell twice as many stickies,” one cashier said.²²⁸ State College diners sell over twenty-four dozen stickies on

an average weeknight, and over sixty dozen on a weekend night.²²⁹ On Homecoming Weekend, diners are quite busy as ravenous alumni devour every sticky in sight. “Last year, on Homecoming Weekend, we were busy for six or seven hours straight, and sold out of our famous stickies,” said a diner employee.²³⁰

Not only is there an annual calendar of college religion replete with its own rites, but there is a weekly ritual schedule as well that follows the rhythm of student life. Alcohol, which often plays a large part in the student’s weekly schedule, is the favored substance of abuse on college campuses.²³¹ Similar to the Jewish festival of Purim, where faithful are obliged to drink,²³² group drinking (as part of the diner pilgrimage) is condoned by the micro-society of Penn State. Besides, group drinking works quite well as a social lubricant by binding members to the community.²³³ Although considerably less palatable, when the cinnamon rolls are grilled they become quite tasty—especially when one is inebriated at five in the morning.²³⁴ College students tend to use diners later in the evening using the diner as a late-night rendezvous. This is additional evidence of a time-specific routine use of diners by college students.²³⁵ At the College Diner, the crew calls the midnight shift “the sticky rush,” this is the time when the demand for sticky buns peaks.²³⁶ Drove of students descend upon State College’s diners nightly observing this ancient Penn State ritual, which inevitably includes stickies topped with a scoop of vanilla ice cream.²³⁷ “That’s when we get people ordering stickies, singing, laughing, and having a good time after the bars,” said the manager of Ye Olde College Diner. However, a diner waiter implied night customers are often difficult to serve. “They’re drunk. A lot of them will make your job as hard as they can,” he said.²³⁸ Nevertheless, societies deliberately allow such drinking to provide a release from daily tensions.²³⁹

Due to popular demand in the State College area, stickies are available 24 hours a day at several diners.²⁴⁰ For those Pennsylvanians who cannot make a pilgrimage to State College, grilled stickies are on store shelves ranging from central Pennsylvania supermarkets to Pittsburgh area Sam's Clubs.²⁴¹ Reflecting its origins, the blue and white box in which the grilled stickies are marketed is highly reminiscent of a stainless-steel clad diner from the machine-inspired Populuxe era of the mid-twentieth century. Additionally, the top of the box has a small image of steaming cup of coffee. The image is two-fold: it allows new consumers (prospective converts to the college religion of Penn State) who are unfamiliar with grilled stickies the opportunity to see that this simple treat can be enjoyed with a cup of coffee, while allowing devotees to recall fond days of collegiate life by participating in a time-honored ritual. A visitor from South Carolina, who was astounded by the diner's specialty, summed it up best, "Stickies are just something you do."²⁴² While this statement may seem like an oversimplification, people make food choices that are cultural statements, and their eating patterns reflect contemporary social formations,²⁴³ in which consumption is vital to social integration.²⁴⁴

Notes

¹⁶² Jack Santino. *All Around the Year*. Urbana: University of Illinois, 1995. 10.

¹⁶³ Dell deChant. *Religion and Culture in the West*. Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt, 2008. 11.

¹⁶⁴ Marvin Harris. *Good to Eat*. Long Grove: Waveland, 1995. 86.

¹⁶⁵ Paula Erikson and Liam D. Murphy. *Readings for a History of Anthropological Theory*. North York: University of Toronto, 2006. 540.

¹⁶⁶ Douglas Kellner. *Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond*. Stanford: Stanford, 1989. 16.

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- ¹⁶⁷ Alberto Melucci. *Nomads of the Present*. London: Hutchinson/Radius, 1989. 60.
- ¹⁶⁸ Santino. *All Around the Year*. 11.
- ¹⁶⁹ Erikson and Liam D. Murphy. *Readings for a History of Anthropological Theory*. North York: University of Toronto, 2006. 541.
- ¹⁷⁰ Alan Beardsworth. *Sociology on the Menu*. London: Routledge, 1997. 243.
- ¹⁷¹ Jeremy MacClancy. *Consuming Culture*. New York: Henry Holt, 1992. 202.
- ¹⁷² Beardsworth. *Sociology on the Menu*. 249.
- ¹⁷³ Santino. *All Around the Year*. 11.
- ¹⁷⁴ Ronald M. Green. *Religious and Moral Reason*. New York: Oxford, 1988. 134.
- ¹⁷⁵ Beardsworth. *Sociology on the Menu*. 532.
- ¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 541.
- ¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 25.
- ¹⁷⁸ Carole M. Counihan. *The Anthropology of Food and Body*. New York: Routledge, 1999. 13.
- ¹⁷⁹ Sigmund Freud. *Totem and Taboo*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1950. 174.
- ¹⁸⁰ Fabio Parasecoli. *Bite Me: Food in Popular Culture*. New York: Berg, 2008. 14.
- ¹⁸¹ *Ibid.* 150.
- ¹⁸² Jacob Neusner. *World Religions*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994. 112.
- ¹⁸³ Dell deChant. *The Religious Dynamic of Consumer Culture: Selections from the Sacred Santa*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2008. 63.
- ¹⁸⁴ David Burrick. "The Destination Eatery." <<http://www.daily pennsylvanian.com/news/2005/02/17/The Destination Eatery.html>>
- ¹⁸⁵ Michael Bezilla. *Penn State: An Illustrated History*. University Park: Penn State, 1985. 37.
- ¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 35.
- ¹⁸⁷ Bezilla. "The Creamery." *College of Agricultural History*. 1987. 5.
- ¹⁸⁸ Author's note: Following the Civil War, not only did the American market for ice cream expand greatly, but also the number of ice cream vendors on the streets of such cities as New York and Philadelphia significantly increased as well. These street vendors were referred to commonly as hokey-pokey men; the stereotypical vendor was an Italian immigrant. Even in places like Philadelphia, where vendors had a reputation for selling a quality product, hokey-pokey often denoted an inferior product that was highly suspect due to concerns regarding the often less than sanitary production methods. Linguists trace the development of "hokey-pokey": to an Italian expression uttered by street hawkers—*O, che poco*—meaning "Oh, how little! Or "Oh, how cheap!
- ¹⁸⁹ Ann Funderburg. *Chocolate, Strawberry, and Vanilla*. Lexington: University of Kentucky, 2003. 66.
- ¹⁹⁰ "Untitled." *Free Lance*. 1 June 1903: 34.
- ¹⁹¹ Bezilla. *Penn State: An Illustrated History*. 49.
- ¹⁹² Author's note: The democratization and subsequent popular acceptance of America's favorite frosty treat can be attributed to advances in refrigeration during the 1830s; growth in transportation and marketing also fueled development. Moreover, ice cream has a long and colorful history in America that dates back to the introduction by Italian confectioners, who mainly catered to the elite. During the eighteenth century, ice cream was a decadent treat reserved for a few privileged European aristocrats. Landed gentry-types such as Washington, Jefferson, Hamilton, and Madison—a list that reads like the founding fathers—enjoyed the fashionable dessert at lavish dinners and balls.
- ¹⁹³ William Collins. *Summer Practicum*. 1942. 1.
- ¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 1.
- ¹⁹⁵ Adam Smeltz. "The Big Mooove." *Centre Daily Times*. 24 July 2006: 1.
- ¹⁹⁶ Tom Gibb. "Grilled Stickies On Shelves." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. 12 Sep 1999: C1.
- ¹⁹⁷ Daryl Lang. "Getting the Scoop." *Patriot-News*. 14 Jan 2001: B17.
- ¹⁹⁸ *Ice Cream Show*. WPBS. Air date: 18 July 2008.
- ¹⁹⁹ Conrad Phillip Kottak. *On Being Different*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2008. 90.
- ²⁰⁰ deChant. *The Religious Dynamic of Consumer Culture: Selections from the Sacred Santa*. 83.
- ²⁰¹ *Ibid.* 84.
- ²⁰² *Ibid.* 82.
- ²⁰³ Dawn Fallik. "How a Cone Led to a Heap of Cash." *Philadelphia Inquirer*. 3 Jan 2007: D1.

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- ²⁰⁴ Smeltz. "The Big Mooove." 1.
- ²⁰⁵ Travis Larchuk. "Ice-Cold Flop or Cream of the Crop." *Daily Collegian*. 6 Sep 2006: 1.
- ²⁰⁶ Maria Koklanaris. "Creamery Fare Cream of Crop." *Daily Collegian*. 17 Jan 1986: 2.
- ²⁰⁷ Brandy Winemiller. "Weather-Weary Get Licks In." *Daily Collegian*. 14 Feb 1982: 8.
- ²⁰⁸ Kottak. *On Being Different*. 91.
- ²⁰⁹ Debbie Golini. "Crème de la Creamery." *Perceptions*. spring 1986: 9.
- ²¹⁰ Lisa Marrongelli. "Creamery—Ice Cream and More." *Daily Collegian*. 15 March 1979: 6.
- ²¹¹ Ibid. 8.
- ²¹² Smeltz. "The Big Mooove." 1.
- ²¹³ Gibb. "Grilled Stickies on Shelves." C1.
- ²¹⁴ "Ice Cream Flavor Marks Penn State Sesquicentennial." <<http://www.live.psu.edu/story/7388>> accessed 18 March 18, 2009.
- ²¹⁵ Steve Cimbala. "Growth of University Creamery Traced." *Daily Collegian*. 7 Nov 1962: 2.
- ²¹⁶ Keith Frederick. "Finding Flavors." 16 Aug 2006. <<http://www.altoonamirror.com>> accessed 10 July 2008.
- ²¹⁷ R. Pillsbury. *From Boarding House to Bistro*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990. 225.
- ²¹⁸ MacClancy. *Consuming Culture*. 108.
- ²¹⁹ N.J. Allen. *On Durkheim's Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. London: Routledge, 1998. 102.
- ²²⁰ Andrew Hurley. *Diners, Bowling Alleys, and Trailer Parks*. New York: Basic, 2001. 33.
- ²²¹ Ibid. 43.
- ²²² Interview by the author: 17 Jul 2007.
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Conclusion

This thesis engaged the iconography of communities in the construction of secular religion. Utilizing a Durkheimian functionalist approach, which theorizes how a religion functions for a particular group or micro-society, the thesis looked at how community iconography, and rituals, generate feelings among members of “collective effervescence.” Social life consists of symbols, while rituals are a means to worship the micro-society and its values. These repetitive images and practices—a type of self-worship this thesis termed “college religion”—form the basis of the micro-society’s belief system.

The importance of the Nittany Lion to the Pennsylvania State University is equal to a sacred icon. The totemic image of the Lion is the single unifying factor in the college religion of the micro-society of Penn State. The image permeates the local community, which forms the basis of the group’s belief system. A sacred icon spreads from the totemic image to everything connected with it. Thus, the resulting group solidarity and identity reinforce the socially constructed world of Penn State on a daily basis.

Mascots are essential in creating group solidarity. While many different ones have been utilized by the school over the years, Penn State can trace the creation of its mascot to the college’s early-twentieth century sporting heritage.

The most familiar collegiate symbol is the living mascot—the person who dons the garb of the mascot. Similar to a religious leader, the living mascot is also the group’s

main cheerleader, rallying the crowd through animated cheers and songs. Again, these activities reinforce group solidarity, which bind members firmly to the micro-society.

Societies intentionally set the sacred aside from the profane. Sacred places give devotees a place to gather together to exalt the group's values, which reinforce commitment to community norms. Similar to other specialized religious architecture, the Lion Shrine is where the blue and white faithful of Penn State come to purify themselves. The Lion Shrine was endowed as a class gift, and because of its sacredness to devotees, many engage in routine pilgrimages, making it the most photographed site on campus.

The only hotel on campus—the Nittany Lion Inn—is a another sacred place, and an important part of Penn State tradition. Many alumni and devotees of the college religion of Penn State look forward to staying at “Penn State’s living room,” because it is such a large part of the college atmosphere.

A logo is another symbol that contributes greatly to group solidarity. More than just a marketable icon, the merchandisable totem allows devotees to show which team they support, which contributes greatly to community identity. Since group membership is denoted through consumption, fans of all ages and genders are avidly courted: men, women, and children alike.

Rituals, such as attending Penn State football games, are paramount in worshipping the community and its values. Repeated group actions, such as cheers, rallies, and songs produce “collective effervescence,” which lead to group solidarity, emotional energy, and commitment to the norms of the community. Due to the extraordinary benefits generated through collective effervescence, such as cheers to

facilitate the shared emotions of the group, football has been used to successively accomplish the school's task of building solidarity.

Similar to the Lion Shrine, Beaver Stadium—the home of the Nittany Lions—is also thought of as a sacred site or temple by devotees. This “collective effervescence” is evidenced by the constant upgrades to Beaver Stadium to accommodate the ever-growing number of Penn Staters that want to attend a football game. Due to the extremely committed devotees (who engage in the many rituals designed to build solidarity), Beaver Stadium is the largest collegiate stadium in the nation.

Football fits in well with the college religion of Penn State. The rituals and practices, related to football, reinforce solidarity and unify the community. Football is a paternalistic sport, which is very similar to a religious crusade. Therefore, it is only appropriate that the patriarchal hero (the head coach) leads the team (gladiators) into battle in order to acquire territory (holy land), which enables the team to triumph. The head coach is similar to a religious leader. The coach performs the rituals for the congregation in the temple (stadium), and is denoted by particular garments and tools, which are indicative of the sacred position.

However, victory is the only thing that brings legitimacy to the paternalistic hero. In college football, winning the National Championship is everything, and can propel a head coach to fame, replete with an unprecedented level of multi-million endorsements.

The final chapter gives the reader a better understanding of the social and cultural dynamics of foods of the micro-society of Penn State. Rituals also play a major part in this group celebration. Through rituals, devotees experience the sacred realm. Foods at Penn State, such as ice cream and stickie buns, are another way to worship the micro-

society and its values. Not only is the Penn Stater carrying on a cultural tradition that has been repeated generation after generation, but also in this way, participants are focusing on cultural codes (ice cream and stickies) pertinent to the community.

Moreover, these consumer rituals constitute an important ingredient in group solidarity and the construction of identity. Similar to treks made to the Lion Shrine, the Nittany Lion Inn, and Beaver Stadium, devotees of Penn State's college religion also make pilgrimages to the Penn State Creamery and local diners, where they can indulge in the sacred foods of the micro-society.

In summation, community iconography is paramount in the construction of secular religion. The college religion of the micro-society of Penn State is constructed via the use of repetitive images and practices described herein. These symbols and rites, which are reinforced through constant rehearsal, are very important because they integrate the individual to the larger group. Finally, these highly visible icons, and shared customs are more than just cultural symbols, which represent the Penn State community. These cultural icons are specifically designed to function in the capacity of religion, and represent a means to exalt the values of the micro-society. The ensuing loyalty of students, alumni, and fans, which is the result of the intense social energy created through regularly enacted group rituals, is financially lucrative for the university. Moreover, devotees of the micro-society of Penn State (namely alumni) bequeath substantial endowments and donations to the university, which allows the institution to continue its mission of education and socialization, thereby perpetuating itself indefinitely.

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