History 219: The American Jewish Experience: From Shtetl to Suburb

University of Wisconsin, Madison
Fall 2013
M-W-F 12:05-12:55 (1121 Humanities)

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Course Description
A century and a half ago, the United States was a backwater of the Jewish world, then centered in Europe and the Ottoman Turkish Empire. Yet, by the 1950s, the United States became home to the largest, most prosperous, and most secure Jewish community in modern history. Why did millions of Jews come to the United States? How has life in a liberal political and capitalist economic order shaped the Jewish experience in America? In turn, how have Jews influenced American culture, politics, and society? This course surveys the history of American Jews from the 18th century to the 21st century. Topics include patterns of politics, social mobility, Jewish culture in Yiddish and English, inter-ethnic group relations, gender and sexuality, religion, and problems in community building. The course combines lectures, in-class discussions, film, and audio recordings. Readings consist of secondary and primary sources.

Books
All assigned books are on reserve at College Library. They are also available for purchase at the Rainbow Bookstore Cooperative located at 426 W. Gilman.

The required course packet is available for purchase at the Copy Center on the first floor of the Humanities Building.

- # = scholarly articles in course packet
- * = primary documents in course packet

**Course Requirements**

You are required to attend lectures and discussion sections. Failure to participate actively in the discussions will result in a failing grade for participation (see below). The assigned reading should be completed before your discussion section. Your TAs may give you brief assignments for sections.

Plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the course and disciplinary action. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please consult with the teaching assistant or me.

Finally, computers or any other electronic devices are *not* permitted during lectures and discussions.

An in-class midterm exam, one six-page take-home assignment, and a final exam are required.

Participation and attendance: 20%
Midterm exam (Oct. 7): 25%
Take-home assignment (Nov. 8): 25%
Final exam (Dec. 17): 30%

**The Kutler Lectures**

The Center for Jewish Studies’ annual Kutler Lectures will take place on Oct. 16 and Oct. 17 @ 4:00 p.m. Please make whatever arrangements are necessary with your work or class schedules to be able to attend. Attendance at both lectures is required; absences will not be excused.

Classes will be cancelled on the Wed. and Friday of that week. Sections, however, will be held as usual.

This year’s Kutler Lecturer is Prof. Stephen Whitfield (Brandeis University) and he will speak on the following topics:
"The Unity of Prejudice: The Rise and Fall of an Idea" (Oct. 16)
"Franz Boas: The Intellectual as Anti-Racist" (Oct. 17)

**Lectures and Reading**

**Week 1 (Sept. 4-6): Introduction**
Week 2 (Sept. 9-13): Becoming Citizens: Jews in Colonial and Early America
Course Packet:
*Conference of Reform Rabbis, “The Pittsburgh Platform” (1885).
*Solomon Schechter, “Catholic Israel” (1896).
*The Orthodox Jewish Congregational Union of America (1898).

Week 3 (Sept. 16-20): The Great Eastern European Migration
Course Packet:

Week 4 (Sept. 23-27): Immigrants in Revolt
Course Packet:
*Di nyu-yorker yidishe folkstsaytung*, “Strong, Firm, and Correct Propaganda” (1886).

Week 5 (Sept. 30-Oct. 4): The Yiddish Cultural Renaissance
Course Packet:

Week 6 (Oct. 7-11): At Home in America?
(Note: midterm exam on Oct. 7)
Course Packet:
*“There is No Jewish Race!” (1910).

Week 7 (Oct. 14-18): Judaism Reconstructed
(Note: The Kutler Lectures take place on Oct. 16 and 17. As explained in the Course Requirements, class is cancelled on Wed. and Friday, but sections will be held as usual.)
Course Packet:
Week 8 (Oct. 21-25):  Jews in American Popular Culture
Course Packet:

Week 9 (Oct. 28-Nov. 1): The “Red Decade”
Course Packet:

Week 10 (Nov. 4-8): World War II, the Holocaust, and the State of Israel
(Also note: take-home assignment due on Nov. 8)
Course Packet:
#Aaron Berman, Nazism, the Jews and American Zionism, 1933-1948 (Wayne State Univ. Press, 1990), pp. 96-184.
*David Ben-Gurion and Jacob Blaustein, “An Exchange of Views” (1950).

Week 11 (Nov. 11-15): Contentment and Its Costs: Jews in Post-War America
Sarna, American Judaism, pp. 272-306.
Course Packet:
#Riv-Ellen Prell, Fighting to Become Americans: Jews, Gender, and the Anxiety of Assimilation, (Beacon Press, 1999), pp. 142-208.

Week 12 (Nov. 18-22): Community in Crisis
Course Packet:
*“Ezrat Nashim: Jewish Women Call for Change” (1972).
Week 13 (Nov. 25-29): Class Cancelled for Thanksgiving

Week 14 (Dec. 2-6): Jews in American Popular Culture (act. 2)
Course Packet:
  *Lenny Bruce, “Jewish and Goyish” (c. 1960).
  *Philip Roth, “Shikses and Other Goyim” (from the novel *Portnoy’s Complaint*, 1967).

Week 15: (Dec. 9-13): Jews and Judaism in the New Millennium
Course Packet:

Final Exam: Dec. 17 @ 7:45-9:45 a.m. Location to be announced.