

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

University of Wisconsin, Madison

Fall 2015

M-W-F: 1:20-2:10 (Science 180)

Prof. Tony Michels

Office: 4103 Humanities

Office hours: Tuesday, 3:30-5:30

Office phone: (608) 265-2521

E-mail: aemichels@wisc.edu

Teaching Assistants

Sergio Gonzalez

Office: 4268

Phone: 263-1867

E-mail: smgonzalez@wisc.edu

Mailbox: 4112

Office hours: Monday, Wednesday, 11:00-12:00

Erik Hmiel

Office: 4268

Phone: 263-1867

E-mail: hmiel@wisc.edu

Mailbox: 5068

Office Hours: Monday, Wednesday, 2:30-4:00

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

Tony Michels, [A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York](#) (Harvard Univ. Press, 2005)

Jonathan Sarna, [American Judaism: A History](#) (Yale Univ. Press, 2004)

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 Social Science Copy Center (6120 Social Science Bldg.).

= 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. Students who use these in class—even once—will receive a failing grade for participation, with or without notification from us.

An in-class midterm exam, a second exam, and a final exam are required.

Participation and attendance: 20%

Midterm exam (Oct. 12): 25%

Second exam (Nov. 16): 25%

Final exam (Dec. 22): 30%

The Kutler Lectures

The Center for Jewish Studies' annual Kutler Lectures will take place at 4:00 p.m. on Monday, Nov. 9 and Tuesday, Nov. 10 in the Wisconsin Institute for Discovery (330 N. Orchard). 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.

This year's Kutler Lecturer is Prof. Lila Corwin Berman (Temple Univ.) who will speak on the following topics:

Nov. 9: "The Death and Life of Jewish Urbanism."

Nov. 10: "Who Gives? The American Jewish Philanthropic Complex."

Lectures and Reading

Week 1 (Sept. 2-4): Introduction

Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism: A History*, pp. xiii-xx.

Week 2 (Sept. 9-11): Becoming Citizens: Jews in Colonial and Early America
(Note: Class cancelled for Labor Day on Sept. 7)

Sarna, American Judaism, pp. 1-61.

Course Packet:

*Documents on the political rights of Jews in the U. S (1776-1809).

Week 3 (Sept. 16-18): The Rise of American Jewry

(Note: Class cancelled for Rosh Hashana on Sept. 14)

Sarna, American Judaism, pp. 62-134.

Course Packet:

*Conference of Reform Rabbis, The Pittsburgh Platform (1885).

Week 4 (Sept. 21, 25): The Great Eastern European Migration

(Note: class cancelled on Sept. 23 for Yom Kippur)

Tony Michels, A Fire in Their Hearts, pp. 1-25.

Sarna, American Judaism, pp. 135-207.

Course Packet:

*Lucy Robins Lang, "Rebellion Raged within Me" (1948).

*The Orthodox Jewish Congregational Union of America (1898).

Week 5 (Sept. 28-Oct. 2): Immigrants in Revolt

Michels, A Fire in Their Hearts, pp. 26-124.

Course Packet:

**Di nyu-yorker yidishe folkstsaytung*, "Strong, Firm, and Correct Propaganda" (1886).

*Alexander Berkman, "The Attempted Assassination of Henry Clay Frick" (1912).

*Rose Pastor Stokes, "The Right to Control Birth" (1916).

Week 6 (Oct. 5-9): The Yiddish Cultural Renaissance

Michels, A Fire in Their Hearts, pp. 125-216.

Course Packet:

*Chaim Zhitlovsky, "Our Future in America" (1915).

*Randolph Bourne, "The Jew and Trans-National America (1916).

Week 7 (Oct. 12-16): Judaism Reconstructed

(Note: midterm exam, Oct. 12)

Sarna, American Judaism, pp. 208-271.

Course Packet:

*Solomon Schechter, "Catholic Israel" (1896).

*Mordecai Kaplan, "The Reconstruction of Judaism" (1920).

Week 8 (Oct. 19-23): At Home in America?

Course Packet:

#Eric Goldstein, The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity (Princeton Univ. Press, 2006), pp. 138-186.

#Jonathan Pollack, "Jewish Problems: Eastern and Western Jewish Identities in Conflict at the University of Wisconsin, 1919-1941," American Jewish History (June 2001): 161-180.

*"There Is No Jewish Race!" *The Maccabean* (1910).

Week 9 (Oct. 26-Oct. 30): Jews in American Popular Culture

Course Packet:

#Eric Goldman, The American Jewish Story through Cinema (Univ. of Texas, 2013), pp. 1-49.

**Dearborn Independent*, "The Jewish Aspect of the 'Movie' Problem" and "Jewish Supremacy in the Motion Picture World" (1921).

Week 10 (Nov. 2-4): Years of Depression and War

(Note: Class cancelled on Nov. 6).

Course Packet:

Mark Dollinger, Quest for Inclusion: Jews and Liberalism in Modern America (Princeton Univ. Press, 2000), pp. 41-106.

*Irving Howe, "A Memoir of the Thirties" (1961).

Week 11 (Nov. 11-13): Israel

(Note: the Kutler Lectures take place on Nov. 9-10. You are required to attend both of them.)

Course Packet:

#Aaron Berman, Nazism, the Jews and American Zionism, 1933-1948 (Wayne State Univ. Press, 1990), pp. 151-180.

#Emily Alice Katz, Bringing Zion Home: Israel in American Jewish Culture, 1948-1967 (SUNY Press, 2015), pp. 1-18, 49-80.

*American Council for Judaism, "Statement of Policy" (1944).

*David Ben-Gurion and Jacob Blaustein, "An Exchange of Views" (1950)

Week 12 (Nov. 16-20): Contentment and Its Costs: Jews in Post-War America

(Note: second exam on Nov. 16)

Course Packet:

#Arthur Goren, "The 'Golden Decade': 1945-1955" in Studies in Contemporary Jewry, Vol. VIII, A New Jewry? America Since the Second World War, ed. Peter Y. Medding (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), pp. 3-20.

#Deborah Dash Moore, To The Golden Cities: Pursuing the American Jewish Dream in Miami and L. A. (Harvard Univ. Press, 1994), pp. 1-20, 53-92.

- *Betty Friedan, "A Comfortable Concentration Camp?" (1963).
- **Midstream*, "The Meaning of *Galut* in America Today: A Symposium" (1963).

Week 13 (Nov. 23): Contentment and Its Costs (cont.)

(Note: class cancelled on Nov. 25 and 27 for Thanksgiving. All sections cancelled during the week.)

Week 14 (Nov. 30-Dec. 4): Community in Crisis

Course Packet:

- #Michael Staub, Torn at the Roots: The Crisis of Jewish Liberalism in Postwar America (Columbia Univ. Press, 2003), pp. 153-240.
- *M. Jay Rosenberg, "My Evolution as a Jew" (1970).
- *Aviva Cantor Zuckoff, "Oppression of America's Jews" (1971).

Week 15: (Dec. 7-11): Jews and Judaism at the New Millennium

Sarna, American Judaism, pp. 272-374.

Course Packet:

- *Report of the Committee on Patrilineal Descent, Central Conference of American Rabbis (1983).
- *Rabbis Joel Roth and Akiba Lubow, A Standard of Rabbinic Practice Regarding Determination of Jewish Identity (1986).
- *Rabbi David Weiss Halivni, "Letter to the Faculty Assembly of the Jewish Theological Seminary" (1983).
- *Haviva Ner-David, "Breaking the Glass Mehitza" (2004).
- *Camille Shira Angel, "Rabbi's Welcome" and Selections (2009).

- *Barak Obama, "Presidential Proclamation—Jewish American Heritage Month" (2013).

Final Exam: Dec. 22 @ 7:45-9:45 a.m. Location to be announced.