History 221: Jews and American Popular Culture

University of Wisconsin, Madison
Spring 2015
Tuesday-Thursday, 4:00-5:15
Humanities 1131
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Description
This course explores the interplay between Jews and U. S. popular culture, covering such subjects as early 20th century vaudeville, the "golden age" of Hollywood, rhythm and blues music, television, and stand-up comedy. It uses lectures, films, music, and readings to explore the development of American popular culture in the 20th and 21st centuries through the experiences of Jews, as performers, writers, and businesspeople. Using Jews as the primary, though not only, case, the course examines themes in the history of immigration, race, Americanization, youth culture, and business history. By examining processes of cultural integration and differentiation of Jews in US society, the course attempts to address broad questions about the nature of American national identity.

Readings
The course packet will be available for purchase from the Social Science Copy Center (Sewell Hall, Room 6120, 1180 Observatory Drive)

On the syllabus, readings are identified by the following symbols:
# = articles and book chapters in course packet
* = primary documents in course packet

Course Requirements
You are required to attend lectures and discussion sections. Failure to participate actively in each and every discussion section will result in a failing grade for participation (see below). The assigned reading should be completed in time for your discussion section. The Teaching Assistant will give you a separate sheet explaining the
requirements (which may include brief assignments) for sections. Plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the course. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please speak with the Teaching Assistant or me. Finally, computers or any other electronic devices are not permitted during lectures and discussions.

Note: we will show several films on Wed. nights at 7:00. Attendance is mandatory. Check dates below.

You will have three assignments due on the following dates:
Feb. 24: Midterm exam
March 26: First Assignment
May 11: final assignment

We reserve the right to give pop quizzes.

The breakdown of final grades is as follows:
Participation and attendance: 20%
Midterm: 25%
First assignment (5 pages): 25%
Final assignment (10 pages): 30%

Week 1 (Jan. 20-22) Introductions

Week 2 (Jan. 27-29) Jews in American Culture: Connections and Questions

Week 3 (Feb 3-5): The Yiddish Word: Poetry as Popular Culture
Feb. 5: no class

*Morris Rosenfeld, “The Millionaire of Tears,” “The Sweatshop.”

Week 4 (Feb 10-12): From Stage to Screen: Yiddish Cinema
Feb. 11: Film: “Uncle Moses” (1932)
Feb. 12: no class

**Week 5 (Feb. 17-19): The Jews of Hollywood**


**Week 6 (Feb. 24-26): The Jazz Age**

*Midterm: Feb 24*

#Maria Damon, “Jazz-Jews, Jive, and Gender: The Ethnic Politics of Jazz Argot,” in Boyarin and Boyarin, Jews and Other Differences (Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 150-175.


**Jazz Argot**

**Week 7 (March 3-5): The Jazz Singer**

March 4: Film: “The Jazz Singer” (1927)


**Week 8 (March 10-12): Jews and Jazz**


**Week 9 (March 17-19): Rhythm & Blues**


**Week 10 (March 24-26): From Rock & Roll to Rock**

*NOTE: First assignment Due March 26*

**Week 11 (March 31-April 2): Spring Break**

**Week 12 (April 7-April 9): The Romance of Israel**
April 8: film: “Exodus” (1960)
April 9: class cancelled


**Week 13 (April 14-16): Nostalgia**
April 15: Film: “Fiddler on the Roof” (1971).
April 16 class cancelled


**Week 14 (April 21-23): In Search of Jewish Humor**

**Week 15 (April 28-30): Woody Allen**

**Week 16 (May 5-May 7): The Jews of Prime Time**
Week 17 (May 11): final assignment due