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

University of Wisconsin, Madison
Fall 2007
M-W-F 12:05-12:55 (1651 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 until the late 20th century. Topics include patterns of political behavior (radicalism, liberalism, and nationalism), social mobility, Jewish culture in Yiddish and English, inter-ethnic group relations, religion, and problems in community building. The course combines lectures, in-class discussions, film, and audio recordings. The readings consist of secondary and primary sources.

Reading
* Deborah Dash Moore, To the Golden Cities: Pursuing the American Jewish Dream in Miami and L.A. (Harvard Univ. Press, 1994)
* Jonathan Sarna, American Judaism: A History (Yale Univ. Press, 2004)
All assigned books will be put on reserve and available for purchase at the Rainbow Bookstore Cooperative located at 426 W. Gilman.

There is also a course packet, which you can buy from the Copy Center.

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

**Course Requirements**
You are required to attend both lectures and discussion sections. One unexcused absence is allowed for both. 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.

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

Participation and attendance:  20%
Midterm exam (Oct. 10):  25%
Take-home assignment (Nov. 9):  25%
Final exam (Dec. 22):  30%

**Lectures and Reading**

**Week 1 (Sept. 5-7): becoming citizens: Jews in colonial and early America**


Course Packet:
*Article VI and the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States of America (1789).*

**Week 2 (Sept. 10-14): the rise of American Jewry**

Course Packet:

*letters from immigrants (1853, 1854, 1860, 1880).

**Week 3 (Sept. 17-21): forging American Judaism**

Course Packet:
*Conference of Reform Rabbis, “The Pittsburgh Platform” (1885).
*Solomon Schechter, “Catholic Israel” (1896).
*The Orthodox Jewish Congregational Union of America (1898).

**Week 4 (Sept. 24-28): slums, sweatshops, and socialism: Eastern European Jews in urban America**


Course Packet


**Week 5 (Oct. 1-5): the Yiddish cultural renaissance**

Course Packet


**Week 6 (Oct. 8-12): “the Jewish problem”**
(Nota: midterm exam on Oct. 10)


Course Packet:

**Week 7 (Oct. 15-19): Judaism reconstructed**


Course Packet:

**Week 8 (Oct. 22-26): the Great Depression and the rise of Jewish liberalism**

Beth Wenger, “Budgets, Boycotts, and Babies: Jewish Women in the Great Depression,” in *American Jewish Women’s History*, pp. 185-96.

Course Packet:

**Week 9 (Oct. 29-Nov. 2): Jews in American popular culture (act. 1)**

Course Packet:


**Week 10 (Nov. 5-9): the destruction of European Jewry and its aftermath**

(NOTE: take-home assignment due on Monday, Nov. 9)


Course Packet:
* The Columbus Platform (1937).
* David Ben-Gurion and Jacob Blaustein, “An Exchange of Views” (1950).

**Week 11 (Nov. 12-16): Cold War America: contentment and its costs**


Course Packet


**Week 12 (Nov. 19): Jews in American popular culture (act 2)**

(NOTE: class cancelled on Nov. 21-23 for Thanksgiving)


**Week 13 (Nov. 26-Nov. 30): Jews in American popular culture (act 2, continued)**

Course Packet:


*Lenny Bruce, “Jewish and Goyish” (c. 1960).
*Philip Roth, “Shikses and Other Goyim” (1967).

**Week 14 (Dec. 3-7): the end of consensus: the Jewish community in conflict**

Deborah Schultz, ““Going South: Jewish Women in the Civil Rights Movement,” in *American Jewish Women’s History*, pp. 281-296.

Paula Hyman, “Jewish Feminism Faces the American Women’s Movement: Convergence and Divergence,” in *American Jewish Women’s History*, pp. 297-312.

Course Packet:

#Cheryl Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters*, pp. 205-255.

*“Ezrat Nashim: Jewish Women Call for Change” (1972).

**Week 15 (Dec. 10-14): assimilation or renewal?**


**Final Exam:** Saturday, Dec. 22 @ 10:05 a.m.