

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

University of Wisconsin, Madison
Fall 2008
M-W-F 12:05-12:55 (Science 180)

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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

- *Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century (Princeton Univ. Press, 2006)
- *Deborah Dash Moore, To the Golden Cities: Pursuing the American Jewish Dream in Miami and L.A. (Harvard Univ. Press, 1994)
- *Pamela Nadell, ed., American Jewish Women's History: A Reader (New York Univ. Press, 2003)
- *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. 15): 25%

Take-home assignment (Nov. 10): 25%

Final exam (Dec. 14): 30%

Lectures and Reading

Week 1 (Sept. 3-5): becoming citizens: Jews in colonial and early America

Jonathan Sarna, American Judaism: A History, pp. xiii-61.

Ellen Smith, "Portraits of a Community: The Image and Experience of Early American Jews" in American Jewish Women's History, pp. 13-23.

Course Packet:

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

Week 2 (Sept. 8-12): the rise of American Jewry

Course Packet:

#Hasia Diner, A Time for Gathering: The Second Migration, 1820-1880 (Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1992), pp. 60-113.

#David A. Gerber, "Cutting Out Shylock: Elite Anti-Semitism and the Quest for Moral Order in the Mid-Nineteenth Century American Market Place," Journal of American History (Dec. 1982): 615-637.

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

Week 3 (Sept. 15-19): forging American Judaism

(NOTE: class will be cancelled on Sept. 17 and Sept. 19. (Sections, however, will meet as usual.) As a replacement, you are required to attend *one* of two documentary films about Wisconsin Jewish history being shown on campus the following week. “Chosen Towns” is being shown on Sept. 23 @ 7:30 and “Built on Scrap” on Sept. 24 @ 7:00. The filmmakers will be present at each. In addition, you are required to write a one-page response paper [graded as pass/fail], due either on Sept. 24 or Sept. 26, depending on which film you choose. For more information see jewishstudies.wisc.edu .)

Sarna, *American Judaism*, pp. 62-134.

Dianne Ashton, “The Lessons of the Hebrew Sunday School,” in *American Jewish Women’s History*, pp. 26-38.

Course Packet:

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

Week 4 (Sept. 22-26): slums, sweatshops, and socialism: Eastern European Jews in urban America

(NOTE: “Chosen Towns” begins at 7:30 on Sept. 23 at the Play Circle (Union). “Built on Scrap” begins at 7:00 on Sept. 24 at the Pyle Center. Response papers are due on the class day following the film you choose to attend. For more information see jewishstudies.wisc.edu .)

Sarna, *American Judaism*, pp. 135-207.

Paula E. Hyman, “Immigrant Women and Consumer Protest: The New York City Kosher Meat Boycott of 1902” in *American Jewish Women’s History*, pp. 116-126.

Course Packet

#Tony Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York* (Harvard Univ. Press, 2005), pp. 69-124.

*Solomon Schechter, “Catholic Israel” (1896).

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

Week 5 (Sept. 29-Oct. 3): the Yiddish cultural renaissance

Course Packet

#Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers: The Journey of the East European Jews to America and the Life They Found and Made* (Harcourt Brace, 1976), pp. 417-496

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

*A *Bintl Briv* (A Bundle of Letters), 1906-1923.

Week 6 (Oct. 6-10): “the Jewish problem” in interwar America

Joan Jacobs Brumberg, “The ‘Me’ of Me: Voices of Jewish Girls in Adolescent Diaries of the 1920s and 1950s” in American Jewish Women’s History, pp. 223-237.

Course Packet:

#Eric Goldstein, The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity (Princeton Univ. Press, 2006), pp. 119-134, 165-186.

#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.

*Henry Ford, “The International Jew: The World’s Problem” (1920).

Week 7 (Oct. 13-17): Judaism reconstructed

(NOTE: midterm exam on Oct. 15)

Also note: class will be cancelled on Oct. 17. (Sections are scheduled as usual.) As a replacement, you are required to attend a lecture on November 12 @ 4:00 by Professor Meri-Jane Rochelson at the Pyle Center. The lecture is entitled, “The Melting Pot: A Centennial Look Back at Israel Zangwill’s Play.” No response papers is required.

Sarna, American Judaism, pp. 208-271.

Jenna Weissman Joselit, “The Jewish Priestess and Ritual: The Sacred Life of American Orthodox Women” in American Jewish Women’s History, pp. 153-169.

Pamela Nadell, “The Women Who Would Be Rabbis” in American Jewish Women’s History, pp. 175-82.

Course Packet:

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

*Bernard Revel, “The American Yeshiva” (1926).

Week 8 (Oct. 20-24): Jews in American popular culture (act. 1)

Course Packet:

#Stephen Whitfield, In Search of American Jewish Culture, pp. 1-58.

#Michael Alexander, Jazz Age Jews (Princeton Univ. Press, 2001), pp. 133-179.

*Samson Raphaelson, “How I Came to Write ‘The Jazz Singer’,” (1927).

Week 9 (Oct. 27-31): the Great Depression and the rise of Jewish liberalism

Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century, pp. 1-73.

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

Course Packet:

*The Gentile Declaration of Independence from the Jew Dictatorship (1941)

Week 10 (Nov. 3-7): the destruction of European Jewry and its aftermath

Sarna, American Judaism, pp. 272-306.

Greenberg, Troubling the Waters, pp. 74-113.

Course Packet:

*The Columbus Platform (1937).

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

Week 11 (Nov. 10-14): Cold War America: contentment and its costs

(NOTE: take-home assignment due on Monday, Nov. 10)

Also note: Professor Meri-Jane Rochelson's lecture, "The Melting Pot: A Centennial Look Back at Israel Zangwill's Play," is taking place on Nov. 12 at 4:00 at the Pyle Center. Attendance is mandatory, but no response paper is required.

Deborah Dash Moore, To The Golden Cities: Pursuing the American Jewish Dream in Miami and L.A., 1-92, 153-226.

Greenberg, Troubling the Waters, pp. 114-204.

Course Packet:

*Arthur Hertzberg, "America Is Galut [Exile]," Jewish Frontier (July 1964).

Week 12 (Nov. 17-21): Jews in American popular culture (act 2)

Moore, To the Golden Cities, pp. 227-261.

Course Packet:

#Alan Spiegel, "The Vanishing Act: A Typology of the Jews in the Contemporary American Film," in Sarah Blacher Cohen ed., From Hester Street to Hollywood: The Jewish-American Stage and Screen (Indiana Univ. Press, 1983), pp. 257-275.

#Vincent Brook, "Bring in the Klowns: Jewish Television Comedy since the 1960s," in Paul Buhle, ed., Jews and American Popular Culture vol. 2 (Routledge, 2007), pp. 237-259.

*Lenny Bruce, "Jewish and Goyish" (c. 1960).

*Philip Roth, "Shiksas and Other Goyim" (1967).

Week 13 (Nov. 24): Jews in American popular culture (act 2, continued)

(NOTE: class cancelled on Nov. 26-28 for Thanksgiving)

No reading assigned, though sections will meet as normal.

Week 14 (Dec. 1-5): the end of consensus: the Jewish community in conflict

Greenberg, Troubling the Waters, pp. 205-255.

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:

*“Negro-Jewish Relations in America: A Symposium” (1966).

*“Aviva Cantor Zuckoff, “Oppression of America’s Jews” (1971).

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

Week 15 (Dec. 8-12): assimilation or renewal?

Sarna, American Judaism, pp. 306-374.

Moore, To The Golden Cities, pp. 263-275.

Course Packet:

#Goldstein, The Price of Whiteness, pp. 209-239.

Final Exam: Dec. 14 (7:45 -9:45 a.m.)