

History 416: Eastern European Jews in the United States, 1880s-1930s

University of Wisconsin, Madison
Spring 2007
Lectures: Tuesday and Thursday, 4:00-5:15
Humanities: 1641

<p>Prof. Tony Michels Office: 5220 Humanities Hours: Tuesday. 2:00-3:00; Thurs. 3:00-4:00 e-mail: aemichels@wisc.edu Phone: 265-2521</p>	<p>Teaching Assistant: Ariel Eisenberg Office: 5260 Humanities Hours: Thurs. 1:45-3:45 e-mail: eisenberg2@wisc.edu Phone: 263-2386</p>
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Course Description

Between the early 1880s and early 1920s, roughly two million Jews immigrated to the United States from eastern Europe. They and their descendents created much of what has come to be known as American Jewish culture and community. We will examine this formative period in Jewish history, a period in which a previously marginal Jewish community became the largest in the world. Why did so many Jews leave eastern Europe and settle in the United States? What were the social, political and cultural forces that shaped immigrant Jewish life? How did the immigrants respond to these conditions? And, finally, how did immigrants influence American society and vice versa? In investigating these and other related questions, the course aims to explore broad questions about the history of immigration and ethnicity in the U.S. What did "Americanization" mean? Was Americanization (however that term might be understood) coerced, something forced on immigrants by external elites and institutions? Was it voluntary: something willingly embraced by immigrants themselves? Or was Americanization some combination of the two? By exploring the history of immigrant Jews, this course aims to illuminate the broader history of immigrants in the United States.

Reading

The following books will be available for purchase at the Rainbow Bookstore Cooperative (located at 426 W. Gilman) and on reserve at the College Library.

Abraham Cahan, The Rise of David Levinsky (1917).

Jocelyn Cohen and Daniel Soyer, eds., My Future is in America: Autobiographies of Eastern European Immigrants (New York Univ. Press, 2006).

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

Gerald Sorin, A Time for Building: The Third Migration, 1880-1920 (Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2000).

There is also a course packet, which you can buy from the Humanities Copy Center, 1650 Humanities.

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

Course Requirements

Attendance in lectures and discussion sections is required. The assigned readings should be completed during the week in which they are assigned

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

Class participation: 20%

Midterm exam (Feb. 20): 25%

Take-home assignment (due March 29): 25%

Final exam (May 14@5:05 p.m.): 30%

Lectures and Reading

Week 1 (Jan. 23-25): Eastern European Jews on the eve of modernity

#Gershon David Hundert, Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century (Univ. of California Press, 2004), pp. 21-56.

Week 2 (Jan. 30-Feb.-1): the modernization of Russian Jewry

#Michael Stanislawski, "Russian Jewry, the Russian State, and the Dynamics of Jewish Emancipation," in Pierre Birnbaum and Ira Katznelson, eds., Paths to Emancipation: Jews, States, and Citizenship (Princeton Univ. Press, 1995), pp. 262-283.

#Steven J. Zipperstein, The Jews of Odessa: A Cultural History, 1794-1881 (Stanford Univ. Press, 1985), pp. 1-69.

#Eli Lederhendler, The Road to Modern Jewish Politics: Political Tradition and Political Reconstruction in the Jewish Community of Tsarist Russia (Oxford Univ. Press, 1989), pp. 84-153.

*Tsar Nicholas I, "Delineation of the Pale of Settlement," (April, 1835).

*S. J. Feun, "The Need for Enlightenment," (1840).

Week 3 (Feb. 6-8): Russian Jewry in crisis: pogroms and their aftermath

#I. Michael Aronson, "The Anti-Jewish Pogroms in Russia in 1881," in John D. Klier and Shlomo Lambroza, eds., Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), pp. 39-61.

#Alexander Orbach, "The Development of the Russian Jewish Community, 1881-1903," in Pogroms, pp. 137-160.

#Shlomo Lambroza, "The Pogroms of 1903-1906," in Pogroms, pp. 191-247.

Jocelyn Cohen and Daniel Soyer, eds., My Future is in America: Autobiographies of Eastern European Jewish Immigrants, pp. 189-203 (Rose Silverman)

*The BILU, "Manifesto," (1882).

*Pavel Axelrod, "Socialist Jews Confront the Pogroms" (1924).

*"The Massacre of Jews at Kishinev" (1903).

Week 4 (Feb. 13-15): to the "golden land" and other places

Gerald Sorin, A Time for Building, pp. 1-68

#Arcadius Kahan, "The Impact of Industrialization in Tsarist Russia on the Socio-Economic Conditions of the Jewish Population," Essays on Jewish Social and Economic History (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 1-69.

Cohen and Soyer, eds., My Future Is in America, pp. 18-33 (Minnie Goldstein), 160-187 (Rose Schoenfeld), 204-230 (Bertha Fox).

Abraham Cahan, The Rise of David Levinsky, pp. v-xii, 3-111.

Week 5 (Feb. 20-22): earning a living, making a home (Note: in-class midterm on Feb. 20)

#Jacob Riis, How the Other Half Lives (1890), pp. ix-xxii, 5-40, 92-102.

Cohen and Soyer, My Future is in America, pp. 288-310 (Minnie Kusnetz)

Cahan, The Rise of David Levinsky, pp. 115-307.

Week 6 (Feb. 27-March 1): out in the streets

*Riis, How the Other Half Lives (1890), pp. 82-91.

*Michael Gold, Jews Without Money (1930), pp. 13-60, 156-190.

Week 7 (March 6-8): the "unkosher land": Judaism in crisis

Sorin, A Time for Planting, pp. 170-190.

Cohen and Soyer, My Future is in America, pp. 106-122 (Shmuel Krone), 233-283 (Chaim Kusnetz)

*Hutchins Hapgood, The Spirit of the Ghetto (1902), 44-70.

*Jonathan Sarna, "Editor's Introduction," pp. 4-29 to Moses Weinberger, Jews and Judaism in New York (1887), pp. 40-56.

Week 8 (March 13-15): the radical upsurge

Sorin, A Time for Planting, pp. 191-218.

Tony Michels, A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York, 1-124.

Cohen and Soyer, My Future Is in America, pp. 35-102 (Ben Reisman).

Cahan, The Rise of David Levinsky, pp. 311-530.

Week 9 (March 20-22): the Melting Pot and its critics

Sorin, A Time for Planting, pp. 219-235.

Michels, A Fire in Their Hearts, pp. 125-178.

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

*Horace Kallen, "Democracy versus the Melting Pot: A Study of American Nationality," (1915), pp. 67-92.

*Kaufmann Kohler, "The Concordance of Judaism and Americanism," (1916).

Week 10 (March 27-29): Yiddish high culture (Note: take home assignment due on March 29)

Michels, A Fire in Their Hearts, pp. 179-216.

#Irving Howe, World of Our Fathers, pp. 417-459.

Cohen and Soyer, My Future is in America, pp. 124-156 (Aaron Domnitz).

Week 11 (April 3-5): spring break

Week 12 (April 10-12): popular Yiddish culture

#Irving Howe, World of Our Fathers, pp. 460-496, 518-551.

#Ellen Kellman, "Entertaining New Americans: Serialized Fiction in the *Forverts* (1910-1930)," in Paul Buhle, ed. Jews and American Popular Culture vol. 2 (Praeger, 2007), pp. 199-211.

*"Bintl Briv" (letters to the *Forverts*, 1910-1914), pp. 110-129.

Week 13 (April 17-19): immigrant Jews and American popular culture

#Eddie Portnoy and Paul Buhle, ““Comic Strips, Comic Books,” Jews and American Popular Culture, vol. 2, pp. 313-341.

#Dennis B. Klein, “The Movies: Notes on the Ethnic Origins of an American Obsession,” in Jews and American Popular Culture, vol. 1, pp. 1-12.

#Dan M. Bronstein, “Making a Scene: Jews, Stooges, and Censors in Pre-World Hollywood,” in Jews and American Popular Culture, vol. 1, pp. 73-84.

Week 14 (April 24-26): World War I and its aftermath

(Note: class is cancelled on April 24 for a visiting lecturer by Prof. Mitchell Hart. The title of his lecture is “From Shtetl to Jungle: Darwinism, Eugenics, and the Reinterpretation of Jewish History.” Attendance at that lecture, which takes place elsewhere in the building at 4:00, is mandatory.)

#Jonathan Frankel, Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862-1917 (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981), pp. 453-551.

Michels, A Fire in Their Hearts, pp. 216-250.

*Resolutions of the American Jewish Congress, Philadelphia (Dec. 1918).

Week 15 (May 1-3): looking backward: remembering the immigrant experience

#Hasia Diner, Lower East Side Memories: A Jewish Place in America (Princeton Univ. Press, 2000), pp. 52-126.

Week 16 (May 8-10): wrap-up

FINAL EXAM: Monday, May 14 @ 5:05 p.m.