

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

University of Wisconsin, Madison
Spring 2009
Lectures: Tuesday and Thursday, 1:00-2:15
1131 Humanities

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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 the previously marginal American 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.

There will also be a course packet for sale from the Copy Center in the basement of the Humanities Bldg. It should be available by early next week.

Abraham Cahan, *The Rise of David Levinsky* (Harper & Brothers, 1917; Dover edition, 2002).

Susan Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl: Life and Labor in the Immigrant Generation* (Cornell University Press, 1990).

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

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. 24): 25%

Take-home assignment (April 9): 25%

Final exam (May 10@2:45 p.m.): 30%

NOTE: Class will be cancelled on March 26 so you can attend a lecture by Professor David Myers entitled "The Palestinian Refugees as a Jewish Question: The Lost Voice of Simon Rawidowicz." (4:00 p.m. @ Pyle Center, 702 Langdon St.) Class will also be cancelled on April 14 so you can attend one of two lectures by Professor David Hollinger: "Jews, Multi-Culturalism, and American Ethnoracial and Religious History (April 13) and "American Jewish History in a Post-Jewish Domain" (April 14). You may attend either lecture. Both will take place at the Pyle Center. *If you have a scheduling conflict, you must notify me during the first two weeks of the semester to make alternative arrangements.*

Lectures and Reading

UNIT 1: Eastern Europe: From Tradition to Revolution

Week 1 (Jan. 20-22): on the eve of modernity

#Gershon David Hundert, *Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century* (Univ. of California Press, 2004), pp. 21-31.

Week 2 (Jan. 27-29): 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.

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

Week 3 (Feb. 3-5): 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.

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

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

UNIT 2: Immigration and Settlement

Week 4 (Feb. 10-12): to the "golden land" and other places

Abraham Cahan, *The Rise of David Levinsky*, pp. 1-56.

Susan Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl*, pp. 1-49.

*Minnie Goldstein, "Success or Failure?" in Jocelyn Cohen and Daniel Soyer, eds., *My Future is in America: Autobiographies of Eastern European Jewish Immigrants* (New York Univ. Press, 2006), pp. 18-33.

Week 5 (Feb. 17-19): earning a living, making a home

Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl*, pp. 50-131

Cahan, *The Rise of David Levinsky*, pp. 57-243.

Week 6 (Feb. 24-26): the Jewish "ghetto"

(Note: in-class midterm on Feb. 24)

*Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), pp. ix-xxii, 5-40, 82-102.

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

Unit 3: Judaism and Radicalism

Week 7 (March 3-5): the "unkosher land": Judaism in crisis

Cahan, *The Rise of David Levinsky*, pp. 244-372.

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

#Annie Polland, "May a Freethinker Help a Pious Man? The Shared World of the 'Religious' and 'Secular' among Eastern European Jewish Immigrants to America," *American Jewish History*, vol. 93, no. 4 (Dec. 2007): 375-408.

Week 8 (March 10-12): the radical upsurge

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

Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl*, pp. 167-242.

Week 9 (March 17-19): spring break

Unit 4: Jewish Culture/American Culture

Week 10 (March 24-26): *Yidishe Kultur*

(Note: class is cancelled on March 26 for David Myers' lecture. See second page of the syllabus).

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

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

Week 11 (March 31-April 2): popular Yiddish culture

#Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers* (Random House, 1976), 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 12 (April 7-9): immigrant Jews and American popular culture

(Note: take home assignment due on April 9.)

#Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (Anchor Books, 1988), pp. 1-183.

Week 13 (April 14-16): the "Melting Pot" and its critics

(Note: class is cancelled on April 14 for David Hollinger's lectures. See second page of syllabus.)

#Eric Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton Univ. Press, 2006), pp. 86-115.

*Israel Zangwill, *The Melting Pot* (1909), pages to be determined.

*Edward Ross, *The Old World in the New* (1914), pp. 1-2, 143-167.

*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).

UNIT 6: The Post-Immigration Period

Week 14 (April 21-23): World War I and its aftermath

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

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

Week 15 (April 28-30): Communism and the Jews

Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts*, pp. 216-259.

*Kenneth Kahn, *Joseph Rappaport: The Life of a Jewish Radical* (Temple Univ. Press, 1981), pp. ix-xix, 109-125.

Week 16 (May 5-7): looking backward: the immigrant experience remembered

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

FINAL EXAM: Sunday, May 10 (2:45-4:45)