History/Jewish Studies 219: The American Jewish Experience: From Shtetl to Suburb
University of Wisconsin, Madison
Fall 2019
Humanities 1651
M-W-F: 1:20-2:10

Prof. Tony Michels
Office: 4103 Mosse Humanities Building
Office hours: Thursdays, 3:30-5:30
Office phone: (608) 265-2521
E-mail: aemichels@wisc.edu

Teaching Assistants
Erin Faigin
Office hours: Wed. 2:30-4:30
Office: 4274 Mosse Humanities Building
Mailbox: 4088
E-mail: faigin@wisc.edu

Course Description
A century and a half ago, the United States was a backwater of the Jewish world, then centered in Europe. (There were significant Jewish communities in the Ottoman Turkish Empire and elsewhere in the world.) Yet, by the 1950s, the United States became home to the largest 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 to the 21st century. Using Jews as the primary, though not only, case, the course examines themes in the history of immigration, race, and assimilation. By examining processes of cultural integration and differentiation of Jews in United States society, the course attempts to address broad questions about the nature of American national identity. Topics include patterns of politics, social mobility, Jewish culture in Yiddish and English, inter-ethnic group relations, gender and sexuality, religion, and problems in community building. The course combines lectures, in-class discussions, film, and audio recordings. Readings consist of secondary and primary sources.

Learning Outcomes
A major objective of this course is the development of critical analytical skills, that is, the ability to formulate and examine questions as they relate to the course topics. As students of history, we will not seek to determine who was “right” or “wrong.”
Although such considerations are surely relevant in determining personal convictions, they do not necessarily help us to understand historical events, processes, and phenomena. Instead, we will ask why people thought and behaved as they did, especially in regard to processes of adaptation to an American society crosscut by religious, racial, gender, and class differences and hierarchies. What did it mean to become “American” across time and place? A starting premise of this course is that Jews make an illuminating case through which to explore this question. For historical reasons explored in this course, Jews have experienced, to an unusual degree, divergent trajectories of cultural assimilation and differentiation, social integration and segregation, economic advancement and poverty, and sympathy and anti-semitism. Finally, the history of Jews cannot be understood in isolation from other ethnic, racial, and religious groups. (As we will see, Jews have been understood by others and have understood themselves as an ethnicity, race, and religious community—sometimes all at once—throughout their history in the United States.) In lectures and readings, this course will examine Jews within a comparative framework involving minority and majority groups with whom Jews interacted. In this regard, the course works on two levels: as a course on Jews in all their internal diversity and a course on American diversity with its attendant inequalities and shifting boundaries of inclusion and exclusion.

**Credit Policy Statement**
This 4-credit course has 4 hours of group meetings per week (each 50-minute segment of lecture and discussion counts as one hour according to UW-Madison’s credit hour policy). The course also carries the expectation that you will spend an average of at least 2 hours outside of class for every hour in the classroom. In other words, in addition to class time, plan to allot an average of at least 8 hours per week for reading, writing, preparing for discussions, and/or studying for quizzes and exams for this class.

**Books**
The following books are available for purchase at the University Bookstore.


The required course packet is available for purchase at the Social Science Copy Center (6120 Social Science Bldg.).

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

**Course Requirements**
Attainment of knowledge is a central goal of this course. This requires mastery of the information in the readings, lectures, and other course materials, in addition to the concepts that help us understand that information.
You are required to attend lectures and discussion sections. Failure to participate actively in the discussions will result in a failing grade for participation (see below). The assigned reading should be completed before your discussion section. Your TAs may give you brief assignments for sections.

Plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the course and disciplinary action. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please consult with the teaching assistant or me.

Computers or any other electronic devices are not permitted during lectures and discussions. Students who use these in class—even once—will receive a failing grade for participation, with or without notification from us.

An in-class midterm exam, two paper assignments (3-pages in length each), and a final exam are required.

**Participation and attendance: 20%**

- **First Paper (Oct. 11):** 10%
- **Midterm exam (Oct. 21):** 25%
- **Second Paper (Nov. 15):** 15%
- **Final exam (Dec. 16 @ 2:45-4:45):** 30%

**The Kutler Lectures:**
Established by the renowned University of Wisconsin historian, the late Stanley Kutler, these annual lectures bring leading scholars of American Jews to Madison to present two lectures. Attendance is mandatory. This year’s Kutler Lecturer is Professor James Loeffler (Univ. of Virginia).

Lecture 1: October 2, 7:00 p.m.
“Blind Justice: Jews and Hate Speech in the American 1950s” (Pyle Center)

Lecture 2: October 3, 4:00 p.m.
“Beyond the Law: Jews and Antisemitism in the Global 1960s” (Pyle Center)

**Lectures and Reading**
**Week 1 (Sept. 4-6): Introduction**

**Week 2 (Sept. 9-13): Becoming Citizens: Jews in Early American History**

Course Packet:
*Maryland Constitution, Restricting Officeholders to Christians (Nov. 11, 1776).
*New York Constitution, Making New the First State to Emancipate Jews (April 20, 1777).
*The Constitution of the United States of America (1789).
*Address of the Newport Congregation to the President of the United States of America (Aug. 17, 1790).
*Pres. George Washington to the Newport Congregation (1790).
*The First Form of the “Jew Bill” (1819).

Week 3 (Sept. 16-20): The Americanization of Judaism

Class cancelled: Sept. 16.

Sarna, American Judaism, pp. 62-207.

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. 23-27): The Great Migration


Course Packet:
*“When Spanish Is No Longer a Jewish Language: Immigrant Encounters on the Streets of New York City” (1928).

Week 5 (Oct. 2-Oct. 4): Immigrants in Revolt

Note: Class cancelled on Monday, Sept. 30, for Rosh Hashana.
Kutler Lectures on Oct. 2 (7:00 p.m.) and Oct. 3 (4:00 p.m.). Attendance mandatory.


Course Packet:
*Di nyu-yorker yidishe folkstsaytung, “Strong, Firm, and Correct Propaganda” (1886)
*Lucy Robins Lang, “Rebellion Raged within Me” (memoir, 1948).

Week 6 (Oct. 7-11): The Renaissance of Yiddish Culture

Note: class cancelled on Oct. 9 for Yom Kippur.

Course Packet:

**Week 7 (Oct. 14-18): Jewish Nationalism and American Pluralism**


Course Packet:
* Louis Brandeis, “Zionism Is Consistent with American Patriotism” (1915).

**Week 8 (Oct. 21-25): Best of Times, Worst of Times**

*Midterm Exam: Oct. 21*


Course Packet:

**Week 9 (Oct. 28-Nov. 1) Depression, War, and the Holocaust**

Course Packet:
* Charles Lindbergh, Des Moines Speech (Sept. 11, 1941).

**Week 10 (Nov. 4-8): American Zionism and the Struggle for Israel**

Course Packet:
* Alexander Bittelman, “Israel and the Struggle for Peace and Democracy” (1948).
* David Ben-Gurion and Jacob Blaustein, “An Exchange of Views” (1950).

**Week 11 (Nov. 11-15): Jews and Entertainment**

*Paper Due: Nov. 15.*
Course Packet:

**Week 12 (Nov. 18-22): Contentment and Its Costs in Post-War America**
Sarna, American Judaism, pp. 272-333.

Course Packet:

**Week 13 (Nov. 25-27): Crisis and Community in the 1960s and Beyond**
*Note: class cancelled on Nov. 29 for Thanksgiving. All sections cancelled this week.*

Course Packet:

**Week 14 (Dec. 2-6): Diversity, Fragmentation, Polarization: Jews in the Twenty-First Century**
Sarna, American Judaism, pp. 333-374.

Course Packet:
*Rabbis Joel Roth and Akiba Lubow, A Standard of Rabbinic Practice Regarding Determination of Jewish Identity (1986).
*Camille Shira Angel, “Rabbi’s Welcome” and Selections (2009).

**Week 15: (Dec. 9-11): Conclusions**

Final Exam: Dec. 16 @ 2:45-4:45. Location to be announced.