

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

University of Wisconsin, Madison
Fall 2011
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, 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.

Books

Eric Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton Univ. Press, 2006)
Tony Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York* (Harvard Univ. Press, 2005)
Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (Yale Univ. Press, 2004)
Michael Staub, *Torn at the Roots: The Crisis of Jewish Liberalism in Postwar America* (Columbia Univ. Press, 2002)

All assigned books are on reserve at College Library. They are also available for purchase at the Rainbow Bookstore Cooperative located at 426 W. Gilman.

The required course packet is available for purchase at the Copy Center on the first floor of the Humanities Building.

= scholarly articles in course packet

* = primary documents in course packet

Course Requirements

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 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. Plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the course. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, then please consult with the teaching assistant or me. Finally, computers or any other electronic devices are not permitted during lectures and discussions.

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. 14): 25%

Final exam (Dec. 17 @ 7:25-9:25 p.m.): 30%

The Center for Jewish Studies is sponsoring two afternoon lectures that you are required to attend. The first by Prof. Jonathan Sarna (Brandeis University) is on Sept. 26 @ 4:00 and the second by Prof. Nathaniel Deutsch (University of California, Santa Cruz) is on Oct. 24 @ 4:00. More details will be forthcoming.

Lectures and Reading

Week 1 (Sept. 2): Introduction

Week 2 (Sept. 7-9): Becoming Citizens: Jews in Colonial and Early America

(Note: class cancelled on Sept. 5 for Labor Day)

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

Course Packet:

*Article VI and the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States of

America (1789).

Week 3 (Sept. 12-16): The Rise of American Jewry

Sarna, American Judaism, pp. 62-134.

Eric Goldstein, The Price of Whiteness, pp. 1-31.

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. 19-23): The Great Eastern European Migration

Sarna, American Judaism, pp. 135-207.

Goldstein, The Price of Whiteness, pp 35-115.

Course Packet:

*Michael Gold, Jews Without Money (1930).

Week 5 (Sept. 26-28): Jews in Revolt

Tony Michels, A Fire in Their Hearts, pp. 1-124.

Course Packet

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

*Emma Goldman, "Marriage," *Firebrand*, 18 July 1897.

Week 6 (Oct. 3-7): Yiddish Culture

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

Course Packet:

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

*Workmen's Circle, *The Beginnings of Secular Jewish Schools* (1918-1920).

Week 7 (Oct. 10-14): At Home in America?

(Note: midterm exam on October 10)

Eric Goldstein, The Price of Whiteness, pp. 119-186.

Course Packet:

#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 8 (Oct. 17-21): Judaism Reconstructed

Sarna, American Judaism, pp. 208-271.

Course Packet:

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

*Ludwig Lewisohn, "The Fallacies of Assimilation" (1925).

Week 8 (Oct. 24-26): Jews in American Popular Culture

Course Packet:

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

Michael Rogin, "Black Sacrifice, Jewish Redemption," in African Americans and Jews in the Twentieth Century, eds. V. P. Franklin, et. al. (Univ. of Missouri Press, 1998), pp. 87-101.

*Samson Raphaelson, "How I Came to Write 'The Jazz Singer'" (1927).

Week 9 (Oct. 31-Nov. 4): The "Red Decade"

Course Packet:

#Howard Sachar, "The Era of the Great Depression," A History of the Jews in America (Vintage, 1992), pp. 428-464.

#Beth S. Wenger, New York Jews and the Great Depression (Yale Univ. Press, 1996), pp. 103-135.

*Irving Howe, "A Memoir of the Thirties" (1961).

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

Week 10 (Nov. 7-11): World War II, the Holocaust, and the State of Israel

Sarna, American Judaism, pp. 272-306.

Course Packet:

#Aaron Berman, Nazism, the Jews and American Zionism, 1933-1948 (Wayne State Univ. Press, 1990), pp. 96-184.

*Central Conference of American Rabbis, "The Columbus Platform" (1937).

*American Council for Judaism, "Statement of Policy" (1944).

Week 11 (Nov. 14-18): Contentment and Its Costs: Jews in Post-War America

(Note: take-home assignment due on Nov. 14)

Course Packet:

#Deborah Dash Moore, To The Golden Cities: Pursuing the American Jewish Dream in Miami and L.A. (Harvard Univ. Press, 1994), pp. 53-92, 153-187.

#Riv-Ellen Prell, Fighting to Become Americans: Jews, Gender, and the Anxiety of Assimilation, (Beacon Press, 1999), pp. 142-208.

*Arlene Peck, "Coming of Age in the South: The Southern Jewish American Princess in the Fabulous Fifties" in The Ethnic American Woman, ed. Edith Blinksilver (1978).

*Irving Leibowitz, "Treat Your Sister Like a Little Lady," *Indianapolis Times* (May 2, 1958).

Week 12 (Nov. 21): Communal Consensus and Conflict
(Note: class cancelled Nov. 23-25 for Thanksgiving)

Michael Staub, Torn at the Roots, pp. 1-152.

Week 13 (Nov. 28-Dec. 2): Communal Consensus and Conflict, cont.

Staub, Torn at the Roots, pp. 153-308.

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 14: (Dec. 5-9): Jews in American Popular Culture (act 2)

Course Packet:

#David Zurawick, The Jews of Prime Time (Brandeis Univ. Press, 2003), pp. 78-139.

#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 15 (Dec. 12-14): Assimilation or Renewal?

Sarna, American Judaism, pp. 306-374.

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

Final Exam: Dec. 17 @ 7:25-9:25 p. m.