

History 500/Jewish Studies 631: Blacks and Jews in Urban America

Tuesdays, 1:20-3:15
(Humanities 5257)

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Course Description

This seminar is an exploration of the experiences of two migrant groups to northern cities for the purpose of illuminating the history of race and ethnicity in the United States. Both African-Americans and Jews were persecuted minorities in their places of origin and continued to suffer discrimination after their respective migrations. Yet their positions in American society differed in key respects. Jews were an immigrant group who came voluntarily to the United States; most African Americans were forcibly brought to the United State as slaves. Jews attained equality before the law with less difficulty than Blacks and suffered less discrimination and violence. With recognition of these and other differences, we will investigate in a comparative fashion how Blacks and Jews adapted to life in the urban north in the twentieth century. As a seminar, this course does not survey comprehensively the histories of African Americans and Jews. Rather, it selectively examines topics important to the histories of both groups and provides a beginning to further examination.

Requirements and Grades

Active participation is crucial. I urge you to take risks, test ideas, and raise questions regardless of whether you're convinced you are "right." A successful seminar is one with lively, probing, freewheeling conversation.

DISCUSSION PARTICIPATION (40% of total grade): I will assess your participation in three ways:

1. a) **General class participation (25%):** You should come to each session prepared for engaged discussion.
2. b) **Discussion leading (10%):** In addition to participating every week, two students will lead discussion for the first half of a seminar on more than one occasion. Take a look at the syllabus to consider the weeks in which you would like to lead discussion. You will send 3 discussion questions by 9am the Friday before the class meets.
3. c) **Quick responses (5%):** Each week, all students should write a response (around 200 words) to one of the central issues posed in the scholarly readings by 9:00 am on the day of class. These responses will be given a pass/fail grade without comments (unless you would like to discuss them with me).

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS (60% of total grade):

a) **Book Summary (10%):** All students should write a 500-word summary of the major argument in Eric Goldstein's book *The Price of Whiteness*. The summary is due on October 17th.

b) **Book Review (15%):** There will be one short book review assignment for which you will review Wendell Pritchett, *Brownsville, Brooklyn*. The essay should be 1,200 words. The review is due on Nov. 14th. I recommend you consult a recent issue of *The American Historical Review* for examples.

c) **Final Assignment (35%):** For undergraduate students: 2,500-3,500 words; for graduate students: 4,500-4,700 words. The assignment is due on Dec. 19th.

Plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the course and disciplinary action. **This includes the use of generative AI in the completion of assignments.** If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please consult with the teaching assistant or the professor.

READINGS

The following books are available electronically and you are responsible for downloading them from Memorial Library's database:

Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton Univ. Press, 2001)

Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton Univ. Press, 2006)

Daniel B. Schwartz, *Ghetto: The History of a Word* (Harvard Univ. Press, 2019)

Mitchell Duneier, *Ghetto: The Invention of a Place, The History of An Idea* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux (2016)

Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century* (Princeton Univ. Press, 2006)

You are responsible for purchasing or otherwise obtaining the following books, which are not available electronically through Memorial Library:

Wendell Pritchett, *Brownsville, Brooklyn: Blacks, Jews, and the Changing Face of the Ghetto* (University of Chicago Press, 2002)

Jennifer Lee, *Civility in the City: Blacks, Jews, and Koreans in Urban America* (Harvard Univ. Press, 2002)

Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century* (Princeton Univ. Press, 2006)

Finally, I will send you via email the four essays assigned for Sept. 19th.

Sept. 12: Introduction

Sept. 19: Talking about Blacks and Jews

James Baldwin, "Negroes Are Anti-Semitic Because They're Anti-White" (1967)

bell hooks, "Keeping a Shared Legacy of Struggle" (1992)

Paul Berman, "The Other and the Almost the Same" (1994)

Laurence Thomas, "Group Autonomy and Narrative Identity: Blacks and Jews" (1994)

Sept. 26: Race and Nation

Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton Univ. Press, 2001), pp. 1-127

Oct. 3: Race and Nation, cont.

Gerstle, *American Crucible*, pp. 128-237

Oct. 10: Whiteness

Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton Univ. Press, 2006), pp. 1-116

Oct. 17: Whiteness, cont.

Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness*, pp. 119-240

Oct. 24: "The Ghetto"

Daniel B. Schwartz, *Ghetto: The History of a Word* (Harvard Univ. Press, 2019), pp. 1-124

Oct. 31: "The Ghetto," cont.

Schwartz, *Ghetto: The History of a Word*, pp. 125-202

Mitchell Duneier, *Ghetto: The Invention of a Place, The History of An Idea* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux (2016), pp. IX-XII, 85-138

Nov. 7: Case Study: Brooklyn

Wendell Pritchett, *Brownsville, Brooklyn: Blacks, Jews, and the Changing Face of the Ghetto* (University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 1-145

Nov. 14: Brooklyn, cont.

Pritchett, *Brownsville, Brooklyn*, pp. 147-275

Nov. 21: no class for Thanksgiving

Nov. 28: Merchants and Customers

Jennifer Lee, *Civility in the City: Blacks, Jews, and Koreans in Urban America* (Harvard Univ. Press, 2002), pp. 1-92

Dec. 5: Merchants and Customers, cont.

Lee, *Civility in the City*, pp. 93-197

Dec. 12: Civil Rights

Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century* (Princeton Univ. Press, 2006), pp. 1-14, 114-168, 205-255