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Office Hours:

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Penn State

**JEWISH STUDIES/RELIGIOUS STUDIES/HISTORY 115:
AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORY & CULTURE**
Tues/Thurs 11:15-12:30, 140 Fenske

University and Course Background

Penn State is a large state school located in Central Pennsylvania. Penn State students' level of preparedness for college can vary quite widely. The majority of students I teach have grown up practicing some religion, and, as might be expected, about 30% of the students are usually Jewish in courses about Judaism and Jewish history (although only about 10% of the student body is Jewish).

American Jewish History and Culture is a new course that I will be teaching for the first time this fall. The course satisfies a couple of different curricular requirements (General Humanities and Intercultural Competence), so I anticipate it will attract students from many non-humanities majors. This course is crosslisted in the History department and the Jewish Studies and Religious Studies programs. The History department is quite large, while the other two programs are much smaller. My hope is that some history students will take the course and then decide to explore other offerings in Religious Studies or Jewish Studies, programs they might have otherwise overlooked.

Course Rationale

Recently, the American Jewish Historical Society has entered the business of selling baseball cards. For \$100, baseball fans can purchase a set of 142 cards with "every identifiable Jewish Major League baseball player from 1871 to the 2003 All-Star break." Baseball, like apple pie or the Fourth of July, often stands as a kind of shorthand for what is distinctly American. These cards, beyond serving the fundraising needs of the American Jewish Historical Society, represent some of the complexities of Jewish life in America. Do the cards symbolize the Americanness of Jews, or do they indicate just how Jewish something so American (like baseball) truly is?

This course is about how two seemingly contradictory goals—to integrate into America and to remain distinctive from other Americans—have shaped the history and experience of Jews in the United States and have influenced the way Americans think about diversity and pluralism. As one of the earliest non-Christian immigrant populations, American Jews have struggled to explain how they could nonetheless fit into American cultural, political and social life. At the same time, many Jews have been concerned with their own survival as a distinctive group, unwilling to cede those practices, behaviors or traits that designate them as a people apart from other Americans.

The student of American-Jewish history must be attuned to the multiple ways that Jewishness has been defined: as a race, a religion, a nationality, and an ethnicity. In this course, far from choosing just one of these designations, we will explore Jewish life from many different

angles. Topics to be considered include religious reform, immigrant experience, political activism, popular culture, and struggles over community authority and membership. In addition to reading interpretive books and articles about Jewish life in America, we will also focus on primary sources—that is text, art, film and literature created by those who lived during the events and eras we discuss. Attendance and engaged participation are crucial to your success and enjoyment (I hope) of this class.

Course Format and Approach

This course meets twice a week for an hour and fifteen minutes. The enrollment is capped at forty students. My instinct is to lead the class like a seminar, but the number of students can make that difficult. Instead, I intend to mix lectures with some discussions. This decision reflects, in part, my philosophy about the “coverage” issue. Although I don’t intend my students to leave this class knowing every fact, date, and debate in American Jewish history, I do want them to gain an understanding of certain basic information: waves of immigration, religious movements, demographic shifts. Aside from using lectures to set the framework for class, I hope to facilitate class discussions and debates in a variety of ways. Sometimes I will bring in a new source—a clip from a film, a photograph, an excerpt from a speech, letter or memoir—and ask the students to analyze it together. Other times, I will break the students into small groups for discussion. The bottom line is that I want to engage as many students as possible.

On a basic level, this course is guided by a chronological approach. I start with Jews in colonial America and conclude with questions about the future of Jewish life in America. (To be fair, however, I clearly emphasize Jewish life in America after the mid-nineteenth century, when the Jewish population started to expand first with the “German” wave of immigration and then with the Eastern European wave.) Within that chronological format, I have tried to introduce certain themes. The strength of this model is that I can encourage students to learn about how Jewish life changed over time, especially in relationship to major trends in American history and American self-understanding. The weakness of the model is that few themes or topics will be traced across time; instead students could leave the class with the impression that, for example, Jewish-American literature only existed in the 1960s (when Philip Roth wrote the short stories we’ll be reading).

I intend to teach the students tools for thinking about historical questions: how do things change over time, how can we interpret and understand primary sources. But I am also interested in drawing on some of the methods cultural and literary studies, especially to talk about issues of how Jews represent and present themselves to Americans (looking, for example, at Jewish jokes and stereotypes).

Finally, I am aware that some students will be what I call “quest students;” that is, students enrolled in the class as a kind of identity act to understand themselves and their families. Although I am sympathetic to this motivation for taking a course, I also think it needs to be managed carefully. I see it as my task to teach these students how to put their biographies in productive conversation with larger historical or theoretical issues. They should learn that their experiences are not the final arbiters on a particular question but they can also be quite relevant. At the same time, I need to balance the quest students with other students so that all kinds of students feel comfortable engaging the material we cover. This can certainly pose a challenge.

Course Assignments and Grading

Short-Answer Responses: 20%

Two short in-class assignments covering readings and class themes.

In-Class Essay Midterm: 25%

A list of three possible questions will be handed out ahead of time. Students will then be asked to write on two of them, which I will choose at random on the day of the exam.

Focus Questions and Discussion Leaders: 20%

Throughout the semester, I will distribute focus questions to guide students through reading assignments. The class will be divided into two groups (A and B). Depending on the day, each group will be responsible for turning in written responses to these questions and helping to lead discussion. Grades for these assignments will reflect both written work and involvement in our class discussion for that day.

Final Paper: 25%

A 4-5-page paper due on the last day of class explaining students' predictions for the future of Jewish life in America and supporting their predictions with clear examples from the history we've studied.

Attendance and Participation: 10%

Attendance is a requirement of the course and will be taken at each meeting. Unless students contact me prior to class, all missed classes will be considered unexcused absences. They are expected to have completed the reading and other assignments and be prepared to participate in class discussion.

Books and Reading Packet

The following books are required reading. They may be purchased at the Penn State Bookstore or other area bookstores. One copy of each is also on reserve at Pattee Library, so you are not required to purchase the books (although you must read them!).

Karla Goldman, *Beyond the Synagogue Gallery: Finding a Place for Women in American Judaism*

Calvin Goldscheider, *Studying the Jewish Future*

Jenna Weissman Joselit, *The Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture, 1880-1950*

Philip Roth, *Goodbye, Columbus and Five Short Stories*

Jonathan Sarna, ed. *The American Jewish Experience*

Michael Staub, *Torn at the Roots*

There are also **required** course readings that I have posted online; these readings are marked with an asterisk (*) on the syllabus. You may link to them through Angel (www.angel.psu.edu) by going to the course syllabus and clicking on the title of the reading assignment. (You may also access them through the library's CAT page [<http://cat.libraries.psu.edu/>]. Once on the page, click on "course reserves" and search under my name and the course number for the specific assignment.) I recommend you print these out, read the hardcopies and bring them to class.

Disability Access Statement

Penn State encourages qualified people with disabilities to participate in its programs and activities and is committed to the policy that all people shall have equal access to programs, facilities, and admissions without regard to personal characteristics not related to ability, performance, or qualifications as determined by University policy or by state or federal

authorities. If you anticipate needing any type of accommodation in this course or have questions about physical access, please tell the instructor as soon as possible.

Academic Integrity

From Faculty Senate Policy 49-20: “Penn State defines academic integrity as the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest and responsible manner. All students should act with personal integrity, respect other students’ dignity, rights and property, and help create and maintain an environment in which all can succeed through the fruits of their efforts.”

Dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated in this course. Dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarizing, fabricating information or citations, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, having unauthorized possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students. Students must be extraordinarily cautious when using Internet sources; proper citation is expected at all times. Using the text or ideas from a website and passing it off as one’s own work will be considered a serious breach of academic integrity, carrying the same penalties as any other kind of plagiarism.

For guidelines relating to academic integrity and sanctions for dishonest academic behavior, please see <http://www.la.psu.edu/undergrad/integrity/integrity.htm>.

Course Schedule (*I’ve included parenthetical italicized comments in a few places where the subject matter of a text isn’t evident from its title.*)

Sept 5 (T): Course Introduction

Sept 7 (Th): Frameworks for American-Jewish History: Nostalgia, Loss, Renewal, and Futures

*Irving Howe, “Immigrant Chic,” *New York* 19 (May 12 1986)

*Douglas Gourney, “Into the Woods,” *Moment* (April 2005): 34 (*about a movement among college students to hang out in the woods [back to nature] and do Jewishy things*)

Excerpt from Thomas Morgan, “The Vanishing American Jew,” *Look* 28 (May 5, 1964)

Sept 12 (T): Frameworks for American-Jewish Identity: Religion, Race, Nationality, Culture, Ethnicity **Focus Question Group A (FQA)**

Justin Shubow, “Playing Who’s a Jew? And Other Virtual Games,” *Forward* (Nov 5, 1999)

Recording of Adam Sandler’s “Chanukah Song”

Sheryl Gay Stolberg, “Concern Among Jews Is Heightened as Scientists Deepen Gene Studies,” *New York Times* (April 22, 1998)

Sept 14 (Th): Jews in the Colonies and the Early Republic

Jacob Rader Marcus, “The American Colonial Jew,” (from *The American Jewish Experience*, Jonathan Sarna, ed.)

* “Petition to Expel the Jews from New Amsterdam,” “Reply to Stuyvesant’s Petition,” and “Rights of the Jews of New Amsterdam,” (from *The Jew in the Modern World*, Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, eds.)

*U.S. Constitution Article VI and Amendment I (from *The Jew in the Modern World*, Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, eds.)

Sept 19 (T): Becoming Early Americans: Synagogues, Intermarriages, Apostasies, Migrations, **FQB**

Malcolm Stern, "The 1820s: American Jewry Comes of Age," (from *The American Jewish Experience*, Jonathan Sarna, ed.)

*Simeon Abrams, "Intermarrying with Gentiles," *Occident* 2 (March 1845)
<http://www.jewish-history.com/occident/volume2/mar1845/intermarry.html>

Sept 21 (Th): New Immigrants and the Paradigm of Jewish Immigration

Karla Goldman, *Beyond the Synagogue Gallery*, Introduction and chapter 1 (*An interesting account of religious reform through the lens of gender issues: how did women and their status in Judaism become a flashpoint for rethinking American Judaism?*)

Sept 26 (T): Reform Judaism: Where It Came From, **FQA**

Goldman, *Beyond the Synagogue Gallery*, chapters 3 and 4

*Pittsburgh Platform (from *The Jew in the Modern World*, Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, eds.)

Sept 28 (Th): Reform Judaism: What It Became **Short-Answer Assignment (I)**

Goldman, *Beyond the Synagogue Gallery*, chapters 5 and 6

**Trefa Banquet Menu* (*A menu from a meeting of Reform rabbis that reveals just how uninterested the rabbis were in the Jewish dietary laws*)

Oct 3 (T): Green Jews and the Pale **FQB**

*Excerpt from Mary Antin, *The Promised Land*

Oct 5 (Th): Immigrant Work and Politics

Paula Hyman, "Immigrant Women and Consumer Protest: The New York City Kosher Meat Boycott of 1902," (from *The American Jewish Experience*, Jonathan Sarna, ed.)

Oct 10 (T): Lower East Side in Fact, Fiction and Memory **FQA**

*Beth Wenger, "Memory as Identity: The Invention of the Lower East Side" *American Jewish History* 85 (1997): 3-27.

FILM: "The New Old Country"

Oct 12 (Th): American Judaism, **FQB**

Jeffery Gurock, "The Emergence of the American Synagogue," (from *The American Jewish Experience*, Jonathan Sarna, ed.)

Documents from *The Jew in the Modern World*, Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, eds.:

*David Philipson, "American Judaism Will Not Be Ghettoized"

*Solomon Schechter, "Catholic Israel"

*Mordecai Kaplan, "The Reconstruction of Judaism in America"

*Bernard Revel, "The American Yeshiva"

Oct 17 (T): Americanizing Jewish Families

Jenna Weissman Joselit, *The Wonders of America*, 9-70 (Mainly about the material culture of Jewish life.)

Oct 19 (Th): Americanizing Jewish Rites of Passage **FQA**

Joselit, *The Wonders of America*, chapter 3

*Elizabeth Bernstein, "You Don't Have to Be Jewish to Want a Bar Mitzvah," *Wall Street Journal* (Jan 14, 2004)

Oct 24 (T): Jewish Consumption: Home and Holidays

Joselit, *The Wonders of America*, chapters 5 and 6

Oct 26 (Th): The Second Generation and Zionist Politics, **FQB**

Melvin Urofsky, "Zionism: An American Experience," (from *The American Jewish Experience*, Jonathan Sarna, ed.)

* Louis Brandeis, "Zionism Is Consistent with American Patriotism," (from *The Jew in the Modern World*, Mendes-Flohr and Reinhartz, eds.)

Oct 31 (T): **Mid-Term Essay Exam**

Nov 2 (Th): Yiddish Culture in America

Klezmer music selections

Yiddish poetry selections from Benjamin and Barbara Harshav, *American Yiddish Poetry* (1986)

Guest Lecturer: Aaron Lansky, Founder and President of the National Yiddish Book Center

Nov 7 (T): World War II, **FQA**

*Excerpt from Morris Kertzer, *With an H on My Dogtag* (Kertzer was a chaplain in World War II. This book is a fairly triumphalist account of Jewish experiences in the American army and the "Judeo-Christian" spirit.)

*Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (2000), Part One: The War Years

Nov 9 (Th): Antisemitism and Post-Holocaust America

FILM: "Gentleman's Agreement"

Philip Roth, "The Conversion of the Jews," in *Goodbye, Columbus and Five Short Stories*

Nov 14 (T): Suburban Jews and Symbols of Ethnicity, **FQB**

Photographs of postwar synagogues (in class)

Roth, "Eli the Fanatic" in *Goodbye, Columbus and Five Short Stories*

Nov 16 (Th): Suburban Jews, Liberalism and Anti-Communism, **Short-Answer Assignment (II)**

Michael Staub, *Torn at the Roots*, chapter 1 (Staub examines the intra-communal tensions among Jews in the United States over Zionism, the Vietnam war, and family and gender issues. One of his most interesting points is that the Holocaust—as a symbol—has been claimed as justification for diametrically opposed political agendas.)

*Carl Bernstein, “From *Loyalties: A Son’s Memoir*,” (from *Red Diapers: Growing Up in the Communist Left*, Judy Kaplan, ed.)

Nov 21-24: Thanksgiving Break (Tues, Nov 21 follows Friday schedule)

Nov 28 (T): Civil Rights, **FQA**

Staub, *Torn at the Roots*, chapter 3

*All from *The Jews in the 1960s*, Michael Staub, ed.

Albert Vorspan, “Ten Ways Out for Tired Liberals,”

Abraham Joshua Heschel, “Religion and Race,”

“Negro-Jewish Relations in America: A Symposium,”

Nov 30 (Th): The Problem of Israel and Identity Politics

Staub, *Torn at the Roots*, 112-136, chapter 6

*Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, “In the Middle of the Barbeque She Brings Up Israel,” in *My Jewish Face and Other Stories*

Dec 5 (T): Women’s Liberation and Gay Liberation, **FQB**

Staub, *Torn at the Roots*, chapter 7

*Anonymous, “In Hiding,” from *Lesbian Rabbis: The First Generation*, Rebecca Alpert, Sue Levi Elwell and Shirley Idelson, eds.

Dec 7 (Th): Jewish Jokes

FILM: *Annie Hall*

Calvin Goldscheider, *Studying the Jewish Future*, 3-9, 13-34 (Goldscheider argues on quantitative and qualitative grounds, that it is incorrect to assume a crisis mentality about the fate of Jewish life. Instead he believes that sociological indicators point to a growing Jewish population with a thriving cultural existence.)

Dec 12 (T): Jewish Anger & Confusion

Goldscheider, *Studying the Jewish Future*, 46-71

Clips from *Curb Your Enthusiasm* and *Sex in the City* (Episodes about Charlotte’s conversion and Larry’s discovery that he was adopted and his biological parents are not Jewish.)

Dec 14 (Th): Jewish Futures **Final Paper Due**

Goldscheider, *Studying the Jewish Future*, 100-128, 133-137

*Virginia Heffernan, “Twice the Annoyance, But a Tradition Emerges,” *New York Times* (Dec 16, 2004) (about mixed-faith families celebrating Chanukah and Christmas)