Jewish Culture in America: History, Literature, Film

Jewish Studies 101: Online
NOTE: This is a syllabus for the Spring semester. For the summer session, I will of course change things, but this will give you a sense of the topics covered.

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Office Hours: Tues/Thurs 12:30 – 1:30, and by appointment

Course Online Access:
Desire to Learn at http://d2l.uwm.edu
Any problems with access, please contact help@uwm.edu or call (414)229-4040

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“I drive him around or I sit with him or I eat with him and I am thinking that the real work, the invisible, huge job that he did all his life, that his whole generation of Jews did, was making themselves American. Europe stopped with him.”

Philip Roth, from Patrimony

Overview: This course provides an introduction to Jewish culture in America. It looks at the symbiotic relationship between Jewish minority culture and American culture – investigating how Jews have contributed to American culture, and how America has shaped the contemporary understanding of what it means to be Jewish.

While Judaism as a religion has certainly affected American culture, in this course we will be particularly concerned with Judaism as a culture, distinct from its religious underpinnings. While religious Judaism is alive and well, the fact remains that approximately half of American Jews do not express any kind of religious or institutional affiliation. Yet such Jews often feel a great passion about their Jewishness, seeing themselves as part of Jewish history and culture. By the end of this course, you will have
a deeper understanding of such feelings, and knowledge of the rich and varied legacy of Jewish culture.

Of course, any course such as this one is by its very nature, selective. There are many, many aspects to Jewish culture that could simply not be included in this 16 week course. My goal in this class is to raise the questions of Jewish American culture, with the hope that you will continue to think about this topic after the class has ended.

**Online Education:** Online courses might also be called “self-directed learning.” Online courses allow students to more easily fit their learning into their schedule of work, family, and other courses. Yet the workload is just as stringent as the workload for a face-to-face course – perhaps even more so, because rather than sitting in class for 75 minutes a week, you will be sitting in front of your computer during that time, in addition to completing the reading and writing assignments of the course. This course in particular lends itself to online learning, because it is a course filled with media – films, video clips, mp3s, and so on. If you stick with the work, I know you will have a valuable, enriching, and fun time. **But you must keep up with the work!** The schedule is set up in such a way as to prevent you from falling behind – Keep up with the assignments, and you will be fine! If you have questions or start to fall behind, be sure to contact me. This is even more important in an online course than in a face-to-face course.

**Required Reading:**

Other texts will be delivered electronically, via D2L.

**Course Outcomes**
**By the end of this course, you will be able to:**
- Describe the major themes of the Jewish-American experience
- Explain what it means to “become American” and identify the major strategies used by Jewish-American immigrants in becoming American
- Identify well-known people, places, and events from the Jewish-American experience
- Analyze the role of popular culture in the Americanization of Jewish-Americans
- Analyze and interpret literature and film as historically situated cultural texts
- Evaluate and critique/defend interpretations of cultural products such as film, literature, and theatre

**Required Electronic Literacy:**
Because this is an online class, the following basic skills are assumed. If you do not have these skills, please take steps immediately to learn them so you can succeed in the course.

- Open, edit, save, and store files in MS-Word format. Transfer data between applications through cut & paste.
• Create, send, receive and read email, including attachments, using UWM email. You must use your UWM email account and no other for this course. If you have another email address, you might consider forwarding your UWM email to it.
• Use D2L to read assignments & post your work.
• Use Adobe Reader 6.0 or 7.0 to read course documents. This is a free download available from D2L’s Links page.
• Use the help files as needed for D2L at: https://uwm.courses.wisconsin.edu

Checking D2L regularly: Because this is an online class, you must make an effort to “come to class” regularly. Please check D2L on Mondays for your work for that week/unit, and plan on checking in at least every other day to read the forums, see if there are announcements, etc. You will not be able to see the entire course at once, but will receive each unit on the Monday on which it begins. Most units are 2 weeks long.

Facebook: I have started using Facebook in all of my courses and really love it! It is a great resource for classes, especially online classes. It allows things that are harder in D2L and does so in an easy format. If you “like” our class page (UWM Jewish 101 Spring 2012), you will receive the class posts in your news feed. There is a link to our page in the D2L navigation bar.

I will use Facebook as an important part of our class – to send reminders, updates, interesting articles, videos, etc. When I post articles & videos, they are intended as a value-added part of the course – e.g., they are optional. Anything that is required for the class will be on D2L. That said, because I will use FB for reminders and class announcements, I ask that you check the page regularly. If you are already on FB, all you have to do is to “like” the page. If you are not on FB, please plan on checking the FB page about once a week. You can access it through the link on the D2L menu bar. This will go a long way in helping you to feel connected to the class.

Although I have tried to make the syllabus as complete as possible, I will put special instructions and additional information on the D2L site, under Announcements, and on Facebook. Be sure to check one or both regularly. (Again, anything essential to the class will always be on D2L, but I will duplicate on FB when I can.)

ASSIGNMENTS:
When an assignment has a due date, it means that the assignment must be completed by MIDNIGHT of that day. If a forum post is due on Sunday, therefore, it means that you have until midnight Sunday night.

1. Forum Postings: 420 points (60 pts each)
Forums are the online version of in-class discussion. They are vital to our course, because they give you an opportunity to work through the issues of the course, and to engage in discussion about them with your classmates. They also offer me a chance to see your thinking about the issues and to raise some of the key concerns of the course. You must respond to the question I have asked, and your post must be a minimum of 250 words. You will probably want to write the post in a Word document and then cut and paste it to D2L. (you will probably need to use the keyboard shortcut keys to make this work, since browsers often don’t let you cut & paste into D2L using the mouse). This will let you think through your ideas, quote from the text, correct your spelling, and make sure that you have reached the word requirement.

Forum posts will be graded on a scale of 0 - 6. Responses will be graded on a scale of 0 – 3. Full assignment on D2L.

For most of the discussion forums, you will be in a group of 5 - 7 students. This will let you really participate in the forums without having a burdensome number of posts to read, and will let you get to know the students in your forum better.

2. **Forum Responses: 180 points (30 points each)**

These are brief (minimum 100 word) responses to the posts made by your classmates. The more thoughtful you make these, the better class discussion will be.

3. **Quizzes: 200 points (50 points each)**

There are four quizzes throughout the semester. These are graded immediately on D2L.

4. **Final Exam: 150 points**

Your final exam will be a combination of D2L multiple choice/short answer, like the quizzes, and a brief essay, which you will turn into the drop box. The final exam will cover the material from the entire semester. Each section of the final exam is weighted equally (i.e., the short answer section is worth 50% of the grade, and the essay is worth 50% of the grade).

5. **Introduction/Response 50 points:** Post your introduction in the first week and get 30 points! Post a response for 20 points!

**Extra Credit:** There will be extra credit in the class offered through Jewish 101 Epic Win, which is a game with extra credit missions. More on that in a separate document soon!

**GRADING:**

The grading for this course is based on 1000 points. Your final grade will be computed thusly:
950 – 1000 points = A
900 – 949 = A-
860 – 899 = B+
821 – 859 = B
800 – 820 = B-
760 – 799 = C+
721 – 759 = C
700 – 720 = C-
650 – 699 = D+
600 – 649 = D
Below 600 points = F

POLICIES:

Participation by Students with Disabilities:
If you need special accommodations in order to meet any of the requirements of this course, please contact me as soon as possible.

Accommodation for Religious Observances:
Students will be allowed to complete examinations or other requirements that are missed because of a religious observance.

Academic Misconduct
Students are responsible for the honest completion and representation of their work, for the appropriate citation of sources, and for respect of others' academic endeavors. Claiming other people’s writing or ideas as your own is a serious offense. Be sure to credit your sources – including information you’ve gotten off of the Internet – in your work. If you are unsure how to do this, be sure to see me.

The University Policy about these issues and others (e.g., students called to active military duty, discriminatory conduct, incompletes, etc.) can be found at:
http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/SyllabusLinks.pdf

Email Etiquette: I check my email regularly and will usually respond to email within 24 hours. Please make the subject line something identifiable, such as Jewish Studies 101, so that I don’t accidentally delete your message. Should you not hear from me within a day, please resend it.

Major/Minor in Jewish Studies
This course fulfills a requirement for the Jewish Studies major and minor. The major offers two tracks: Hebrew Studies and Jewish Cultural Studies (which does not require
Hebrew language). With its combination of core courses and electives, the Jewish Studies program allows students to create a course of study that can focus on religion, culture, Israel, Holocaust, media, or immigration. A dynamic and innovative major, Jewish Studies prepares students to work in our multicultural world.
For more information on the Jewish Studies major and minor, please contact me, as I am coordinator of the Jewish Studies program.

**CALENDAR**
subject to change

This class is broken up into units. With each unit, you will be expected to read, watch videos, take a quiz on the reading, post on the forum, and respond to a post. I have clearly stated what is expected in each unit, and have created a visual schedule for each unit to help you manage your time. The lectures will sometimes have hotlinks in them, where I want you to watch a clip online. Watch the clip and then return to the lecture. If you have any questions about any of this, don’t hesitate to ask by posting to our class FB page or posting to the HELP! forum.

**WEEK ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE CLASS**
January 23 – January 29

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<td>Week of 1/23</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Introduction/Response due</td>
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Hello! This is week one of the class! I want you to jump right in and get familiar with the D2L site, so you can keep up with the work. This is going to be a fun class, but you will also learn a lot – but only if you keep up! So here’s the plan for this week:

**Read**: Syllabus, welcome letter. Familiarize yourself with D2L. Post any questions to the “Help!” forum – unless you don’t know how to do that, in which case, email me!

**Read/Watch**: Read “Week one lecture”. Be sure to click on all of the hot links in the document, because I’ve included some media! I’ve checked all the links, but if you have any trouble, please google it and locate the video. I always tell you what you are about to watch, so you should have no problems finding it again in Google if need be. If you have issues, email me.

**Respond**: On the discussion forums, put up your introduction (instructions on D2L). Look under WEEK ONE (in the discussions section) to find it. Put up your post by
Friday, and respond to at least one other person’s post by next Sunday at midnight. (We won’t necessarily have a ton to respond right now, but I want you to get the feel for using the forums, if you haven’t used them in another course.)

**Buy:** Norton Anthology of Jewish-American Literature.

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**PART ONE: 1880-1920**

**WEEK TWO & THREE: JEWISH IMMIGRATION TO THE NEW WORLD**

January 30 – February 12

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<tr>
<td>Week of 1/30</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Quiz on Reading</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week of 2/6</td>
<td>Watch <em>Hester Street</em></td>
<td>Forum Post</td>
<td>Forum Response</td>
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**Lecture:** Lecture on waves of Jewish Immigration to U.S.

**Read:**

*Be sure to read the introductory paragraphs on each author*

Rebecca Samuel, “Letters to her Parents” (p 38-41, *NA*)

Isaac Mayer Wise, “Fourth of July 1858” (p 83-86, *NA*)

Emma Lazarus (p 101-107, *NA*)


George Washington’s Letter to the Hebrew Congregation at Newport:


**Watch:** *The Jewish Americans* (all parts); *Hester Street* (all parts).

You will find these videos on the D2L site, under this unit. After each video, it says, flash video, and tells you how long the video is. This will be useful to you in planning your schedules. The videos need not be watched all at one time, of course, and you can stop them & restart at any point.

**Respond:** Write a forum post to the following question: To what extent do you think that the early Jewish immigrants had to choose between their Jewish identities and their American identities? Be sure to give examples from the texts.

Forum post due by Thurs, Feb 9. Response due by Sunday, 2/12

**PART TWO: 1920 - 1950**

**WEEKS FOUR & FIVE: JEWISH IMMIGRANTS FIND A VOICE: COMIC BOOKS & BROADWAY**

February 13 – February 26

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<tr>
<td>Week of 2/13</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Quiz</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week of 2/20</td>
<td>Watch videos (in lecture)</td>
<td>Forum Post</td>
<td>Forum Response due</td>
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**Read:**
Arie Kaplan, “A Brief History of Jews in Comic Books”
Simcha Weinstein, “Superman: From Cleveland to Krypton: The Man of Steel’s Jewish Roots”

These first two essays can be found on the web. I have included the URLs at the end of Lecture 3 as well as on D2L.

“The Golden Age of the Broadway Song” (p 961-977, NA)

**Lecture:** Lecture #3 and Lecture #3-1. Also, lecture on “What is Assimilation?”

**Assessment:** Quiz due Sunday, February 19, 2012.

**Watch:** Clips of Superman, Bugs Bunny (*Herr vs. Hare*) (these are in the lecture);

**Respond:** Write a forum post to ONE of the following questions:

1. The texts for this week include disguises (Bugs Bunny, Superman) and also Jewish writers writing as if they were other people (e.g., “Old Man River,” “White Christmas”). What purpose do you think these disguises served for the writers of these texts? Do you think they represent a desire to move away from their own Jewishness, or is there something else going on?
2. To what extent does the Jewishness of the creators of Superman and the other superheroes matter? Do you think that Jewish scholars are reading too much into these texts?
Forum Post due by Thursday, February 23\textsuperscript{th}. Response to another post due by Sunday, Feb 26th.

WEEK SIX & SEVEN: JEWISH IMMIGRANTS FIND A VOICE, PART II: THE HOLLYWOOD INDUSTRY
February 27 – March 11

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<tr>
<td>Week of 2/27</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Watch Films</td>
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<td>Week of 3/5</td>
<td>Watch Films</td>
<td>Forum Post</td>
<td>Forum Response</td>
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**Lecture:** Lecture #4 on Hollywood, Lecture #4-1 on *The Jazz Singer* and the use of blackface. Also read, “American Antisemitism.”

**Read:** Irving Saposnik, “Jolson, Judy, and Jewish Memory”
Irving Saposnik, “Jolson, the Jazz Singer, and the Jewish Mother”

Optional: Michael Rogin’s “Blackface, White Noise”. This essay is 37 pages and too much to ask you to read, but I am uploading it to D2L for those of you who might want to investigate the issue of blackface further. It is a provocative piece and one sure to spur conversation/thought for those who read it.

**Watch:** Clips from *Hollywood: An Empire of Their Own*
Clips from *The Jazz Singer*

**Write:** Write a forum post to the following question: What do you think of Al Jolson’s use of black face in *The Jazz Singer*? Does its use as a disguise seem similar to the uses of disguise that we studied in weeks three and four? Why would a disguise as a black man help Jewish Al Jolson to Americanize? Are you disturbed by the racism of the use of blackface? If so, write a post in which you explore what specifically you find problematic. (I realize I am giving you several questions here – Please answer the questions you feel most drawn to.)


**PART THREE: 1950 - 1964**

WEEK EIGHT: JEWS AND AMERICAN POLITICS, PART ONE: Labor Unions and the development of left-wing politics
March 12 – March 18
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<tr>
<td>Week of 3/12</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Reading &amp; Pinsky poem</td>
<td>Forum Post</td>
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**Lecture:** Lecture #5 on Triangle Shirtwaist Fire; development of labor unions

**Read:** “The Jewish Daily Forward Reports the Triangle Tragedy”
“From the Ashes of Tragedy” (American Jewish Historical Society)
Robert Pinsky, “Shirt” (Be sure to listen to Pinsky read the poem)
Morris Rosenfeld poems (p 134- 137, *NA*)
David Edelshtadt poems (p 137-139, *NA*)
Cornell University website on the Triangle Fire (on D2L) – Look around the site and read some of the first-hand accounts.

**Respond:** Write a forum post. Analyze one or more of the poems in detail. What does the poem mean? How does the author create that meaning? What images, particular words, etc, does the author use? You can include questions that you have as well as your answers.

**WEEK NINE: MARCH 19 – 25: SPRING BREAK**

**WEEK TEN & ELEVEN: JEWS & AMERICAN POLITICS, PART TWO:**

**McCARTHY & THE HOLLYWOOD TEN**
March 26 – April 8

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<tr>
<td>Week of 3/26</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Reading/Lecture 6</td>
<td>Watch Film &amp; Read Lecture 6-1</td>
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<td>Week of 4/2</td>
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<td>Forum post</td>
<td>Forum Response</td>
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**Lecture:** Lecture #6 on McCarthyism, HUAC, the Hollywood 10

**Watch:** *The Way We Were*

**Second Lecture:** After watching the film, read Lecture #6-1, on the film.

**Respond:** After watching the film, respond on the forum to the following question: Why do you think it doesn’t work out for Katie and Hubble in the film? The film shows Katie happy at the end of the film, married to another Jew (“Cohen”), no longer straightening
her hair. Does the film suggest that Jews and non-Jews are too essentially different to live together? What does this say about Jewish efforts to Americanize themselves?

Forum Post due: Thursday, April 5th
Response due: Sunday April 8th.

**WEEK TWELVE & THIRTEEN: JEWS IN AMERICA: NEGOTIATING HOLOCAUST MEMORY**

April 9 – April 22

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<td>Week of 4/9</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Quiz on Reading</td>
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<td>Week of 4/16</td>
<td>Watch Film</td>
<td>Forum Post</td>
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**Read:**
Elie Wiesel, excerpts from *Night* (899-906, *NA*)
Elie Wiesel, “Why I Write” (907-911, *NA*)
Muriel Rukeyser, “To be a Jew in the Twentieth Century” (p 538, *NA*)
Irena Kleplifisz, “Bashert” (p 1081-1083, *NA*)
Primo Levi, “Shema” (p 1165, *NA*)
Reading: Art Spiegelman, “from *Maus II*” (1093-1104, *NA*)
Melvin Jules Bukiet, “The Library of Moloch” (p 1120-1129, *NA*)

**Lecture:** Read Lecture #7 on the Holocaust.

**Watch:** Holocaust film, TBA

**Respond:** Write a forum post. Question TBA, because I’m still deciding on which film to show. Response due by Thurs, April 19th. Response due by Sun, April 22nd.

**Assessment:** Quiz on reading due Sunday, 4/15th.

**PART FOUR: 1964 - Present**

**WEEK FOURTEEN & FIFTEEN & SIXTEEN: WHAT’S SO FUNNY ABOUT BEING JEWISH?**
April 23 – May 13th

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<td>Week of 4/23</td>
<td>Lecture 8/Reading</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Quiz on Reading</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week of 4/30</td>
<td>Watch Videos/Read Lecture 8-1</td>
<td>Forum Post</td>
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Lecture Two: Lecture #8 on History of Jewish Comedy; Lecture 8-1 on *Borat* (read this lecture after you watch the clips from *Borat*).

Read: Irv Saposnik, “These Serious Jests: American Jews and Jewish Comedy”
Hillel Halkin, “Why Jews Laugh at Themselves” (CR)
“Jewish Humor”, p 309-318, *NA*
Woody Allen, p 320 – 323, *NA*
Scattering of Jewish Jokes, p 323-325, *NA*

Watch: Clips of Jewish comics, *Borat*. URLs and video clips on D2L.

Respond: Write a response to the forum in which you respond to the following question:
Many of the comedians we are studying reinforce stereotypes about Jews in their comedy: Larry David is neurotic and selfish; Joan Rivers is materialistic; Woody Allen is a *nebbish* (Yiddish word that is akin to “nerd”). Other performers try to overthrow stereotypes about Jews: neither Sarah Silverman nor Bette Midler would be considered a “nice Jewish girl,” in the traditional sense! And then there is Sasha Baron Cohen, who reinforces stereotypes about Jews in *Borat*, without identifying himself as a Jew.

To what extent do you find comedy an effective way for Jews to create a home for themselves in America? Is there a risk that some Jewish comedy actually creates stereotypes about Jews rather than challenging them?

Post due Thurs, May 3rd; Response due Sunday, May 6th.

FINAL EXAM: May 7th – May 13th. You may take the Final Exam on D2L any time during this period. The exam must be completed and the essay in the drop box by midnight on May 13th.