

Bush Faculty Development Program
Perspectives Proposal (Revised)
Jews at the Margins: History and Media Culture
David Itzkowitz and Clay Steinman
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SECTION A: PROPOSAL SUMMARY

We propose to do work in Summer 2004, with follow-up during Fall 2004 and Spring 2005, that will prepare a cluster of two first-year seminars in Fall 2005 under the general name: Jews at the Margins: History and Media Culture. Together these courses will explore questions of racial formation in modern U.S. culture as they intersect with the particular and radically changing experiences of Jews over the last century, with the relations between Jews and other raced groups in the U.S., especially African Americans, and with a growing interest of ours, the specific forms of masculinity instantiated in U.S. Jewish life. Individually, the courses will investigate relevant topics in history and in media and cultural studies—which include within them critical race studies and gender/sexuality studies. This broad range of topics seems appropriate to the introductory level of a first-year seminar, in which students learn selected foundational concepts and are exposed to several case studies illustrative of what they might explore in more advanced courses—in History, in Humanities, Media, and Cultural Studies, or in courses in departments working with American Studies: Comparative Racial Formations. The semester will conclude with a mini-conference at which students will present original research on topics covered by the cluster. At present, Macalester has no organized curriculum (perhaps appropriately) and only a few courses in Jewish Studies or in what might be called Whiteness Studies. The proposed course would provide a sustained contribution to both.

SECTION B: PROPOSAL NARRATIVE

Increasing numbers of faculty at Macalester are teaching courses that serve the College mission of multiculturalism in a context of academic excellence. These courses come in two kinds: those centrally aimed at meeting the requirements to serve Women's and Gender Studies or American Studies: Comparative Racial Formations; and those whose concerns are more oriented toward discipline-based content but are diversity-sensitive. A difficult task facing courses in the latter group has been to avoid concentration on one register of difference: class, gender, race, or sexuality. We propose to develop a cluster of courses that individually and together will tackle this pedagogical problem by looking at an area not taught extensively at Macalester, the secular experiences of Jews in the United States over the last century, considering multiple intersections, but concentrating on those of race, gender, and sexuality—in two disciplinary contexts, in history and in media and cultural studies.

We seek funding to spend Summer 2004 reading, discussing between ourselves, and consulting with others as we do most of the preparations for a cluster of courses to be offered Fall 2005. The cluster would be called Jews at the Margins: History and Media Culture, and the two courses would be HCST 194 Jews at the Margins: Media Culture and HIST 194 Jews at the Margins: History. Both would be scheduled at the same time. About two-fifths of the classes would meet together, with common readings and occasional guest lectures. The rest would meet separately. Subject to

much further reading on our part, we suggest that common readings for both courses might be chosen from among the following:

- David Biale et al., eds. *Insider/Outsider: American Jews and Multiculturalism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
- Daniel Boyarin. *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
- Daniel Boyarin et al. *Queer Theory and the Jewish Question*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003. (selections)
- Marla Brettschneider, ed. *The Narrow Bridge: Jewish Views on Multiculturalism*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996.
- Karen Brodtkin. *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999.
- Matthew Frye Jacobson. *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.
- Stuart Hall et al. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage, 1997. (selections)
- David A. Hollinger. *Science, Jews, and Secular Culture: Studies in Mid-Twentieth Century American Intellectual History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- Michael Omi and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 1994. (selections)
- Ella Shohat and Robert Stam. "Ethnicities-in-Relation" in *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*. London: Routledge, 1994. 220-247.
- Stuart Svonkin. *Jews Against Prejudice: American Jews and the Fight for Civil Liberties*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

Readings for the two individual sections might include:

HCST 194:

- Neil Gabler. *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood*. New York: Anchor, 1989.
- J. Hoberman. *Bridge of Light: Yiddish Film Between Two Worlds*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995. (selections)
- J. Hoberman and Jeffrey Shandler. *Entertaining America: Jews, Movies, and Broadcasting*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.
- Michael Rogin. *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.

HIST 194:

- Hasia Diner. *In the Almost Promised Land: American Jews and Blacks, 1915-1935*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.
- Jennifer Lee. *Civility in the City: Blacks, Jews, and Koreans in Urban America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.
- Jeffrey Melnick. *A Right to Sing the Blues: African Americans, Jews, and American Popular Song*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Riv-Ellen Prell. *Fighting to Become Americans: Jews, Gender, and the Anxiety of Assimilation*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1999.

- Wendell E. Pritchett. *Brownsville Brooklyn: Blacks, Jews and the Changing Face of the Ghetto*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.
- Jack Salzman, ed. *Struggles in the Promised Land: Toward a History of Black-Jewish Relations in the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Laurence Mordekhai Thomas. *Vessels of Evil: American Slavery and the Holocaust*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994.

At the end of the semester, we would hold a mini-conference for all three sections and invite the campus and the community, featuring a learned speaker from the Twin Cities. Students would present papers (collaboration would be encouraged). If there were adequate interest, one of us would do a 2-credit independent study with students from the class in the spring, in which the students would design and edit an Internet journal describing the course and its results, and featuring the best student work along with the talk of the conference speaker.

Advancement of faculty expertise:

One dominant theme in Jewish Studies in recent years has been an examination of the ways that Jews have negotiated their dual status in America as minority and as members of a (racialized white) majority. For David, what became increasingly clear as, funded by Bush, he developed *Jews in America* was the extent to which identity for Jews was not only dual but multiple, in overlapping spheres of, for example, class/work, gender, nationality, and sexuality. It also became increasingly clear that these identities are the product of both group-internal and group-external perceptions. Previously funded to develop the Advanced Topics Seminar *Whiteness and the Media* with Leola Johnson (which has been team-taught by Clay and Leola and taught by Leola herself and will continue to be taught by them separately or together as schedules permit), Clay was able to scratch the surface of the literature of Jews and whiteness as he and Leola read extensively in whiteness theory and analysis and now feels prepared and eager to pursue the topic in more depth, particularly to investigate how that whiteness was achieved by the adoption of racist discourses developed by gentile whites. Our collaboration this summer will enable us to explore much more fully how the development of these multiple identities has contributed to the experience of Jews in America and in the world, and in doing so will enhance our understanding of identities as an analytical concept.

While both of us have read in race and Jewish studies, our expertise is uneven, and the topic of masculinity and Jewishness is a new one. The different themes we propose to study and teach are, of course, interrelated, and we propose as our underlying theme not so much the “racialization” of Jewishness as the “racialization” of different ancestral groups now in the United States, and its intersection with other modes of identity. The racialization of difference in this country poses particular problems for the study of Jews because current academic discourse tends to deny that Jews are racialized as anything other than white, and, therefore, Jews are often excluded from discussions of ancestral difference. Our preliminary belief is that this mystifies what was until comparatively recently a complexly racialized history of Jews in the United States—and in doing so obscures residual racialization that many Jews continue to believe affects their experience in terms of class, gender, and sexuality. At the same time, study of Jews and whiteness makes plain the historical and cultural character of whiteness itself.

The following briefly summarizes our teaching and scholarship in relevant areas:

David Itzkowitz

David has been teaching courses on Jewish history at Macalester since the early 1990s. His research interests include the construction of Jewish identity in nineteenth-century Britain, and he has published two articles on that subject. For the past several years, David has also been teaching at least one Jewish Studies course each year, including special topics courses and two courses in secular Jewish studies in the Macalester catalog, HIST 365, Jewish History, and HIST 367, History of the Holocaust. He has a special interest in the place of American Jews in the discourse of multiculturalism, and this grant would support his adding a third catalog course in Jewish Studies to his rotation.

Clay Steinman

Since the mid-1990s, Clay has regularly taught courses on race and the media and has occasionally taught about masculinity and queer theory. He has taught a first-year seminar on racism and the media, one section (with Jim Stewart) of Introduction to Comparative North American Studies, one section (with Leola Johnson) of a capstone topics course in Whiteness and the Media and two sections of a double course he designed with Jim Stewart, Racial Formation, Culture, and U.S. History. (With Jim's retirement, that course is now being taught by Leola with Peter Rachleff). He has published two articles about racism and whiteness theory and one article about masculinity theory and television. He has presented his research on racism and Jews and *The Jazz Singer* (1927) and he frequently teaches units about Jews and blacks and Hollywood film. He teaches Feminism/Representation/Film every year for his department and for Women's and Gender Studies. However, he has neither read nor taught systematically about the experiences of Jews and race theory or masculinity theory and looks forward to developing that expertise. While his new department, Humanities, Media, and Cultural Studies, has courses on race, this new expertise would add a course in Jewish Studies as well as more queer theory to the curriculum, thickening the weave of intersections in the department's offerings.

By teaching in a cluster, David and Clay can put into relation quite different areas of expertise. David has worked widely in Jewish history and in Jewish Studies more generally. He brings an empirical knowledge of the field. Clay has worked more extensively in film and cultural studies and in theoretical approaches to the issues raised by our topic. Clustering and team-teaching allows the two of us to learn from one another; it allows the students to learn from the two of us and additionally to learn from the disagreements between us that are certain to become manifest. While Clay would, for example, teach *The Jazz Singer* in terms of its construction as a film, its institutional-economic origins and distribution, its complicated and vexed relation to African Americans and minstrelsy, and the particular if not peculiar way in which Hollywood gendered and raced Al Jolson, its star, David would stress the mixture of historical conditions before and after immigration that helped shape how the film takes up contemporary and recent dilemmas of Jews in the United States, in terms of class, gender, race, and sexuality. This combination of history and cultural studies offers ideal possibilities for demonstrating to students (and teaching us!) the value of interdisciplinary knowledge and conversation.

Measurable Objectives (distinctive to these courses):

1. Increasing student understanding of issues in critical race studies, Jewish studies, and gender and sexuality studies—and their intersection.
2. Increasing student appreciation for the value of both disciplinary and interdisciplinary studies of cultural and historical phenomena.
3. Expanding student ability to find materials in these areas.

4. Expanding student knowledge of the topics of the course.
5. Increasing student appreciation for and skills involving collaborative research and writing and public presentation of scholarship.

SECTION C: ASSESSMENT PLAN

The assessment plan will have three components:

1. Student self-assessment of understanding, appreciation, ability, knowledge and skills in areas outlined above. We will give pre- and post-course questionnaires that we will develop with the Center for Scholarship and Teaching.
2. Student assessment of the course in response to standard evaluation questions.
3. Instructor assessment of student learning as measured in written and oral work.
4. Instructor reflection upon the contribution the collaborative work facilitated by the grant contributes to making us more effective and knowledgeable teacher-scholars. This will inform our plans for designing further offerings of the material, either in similar or different form (for example, it might be altered to be offered as a team-taught course to advanced undergraduates) and will inform what we say in future campus forums about such collaborations.

SECTION D: TIMELINE

1. June 2004: Selection of materials for collective and separate reading.
2. July and first two weeks of August 2004: Discussion of materials with each other in regular sessions throughout the summer.
3. Third week in August 2004: Several sessions devoted to developing preliminary course outline.
4. March 2005: Deadline for finalizing course descriptions, syllabus, and book orders.
5. April 2005: Deadline for securing library materials for course.
6. Fall 2005: Pretest and offerings of course, including concluding mini-conference.
7. January 2006: Review of course evaluation data and teaching and collaborative experiences.
8. Spring 2006: If there is interest, sponsoring 2-credit independents for students to edit and develop an online journal issue based on the mini-conference.

SECTION E: ITEMIZED BUDGET

For each of us:

\$2,500 summer stipend
 \$1,500 FTAR for related travel/purchases
 \$500 books/videos for the library

Total request: \$9,000.

We have asked for chair endorsements from Leola Johnson (Humanities and Cultural Studies) and Teresita Martinez-Vergne (History).