

JEWS IN AMERICA

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By most measures, Jews have been among the most successful of the many immigrant groups who have come to America. Though Jews account for only about two percent of the population of the United States, Jewish influence on American culture has been profound.

Aspects of Jewish culture have become a part of our increasingly multi-cultural American life. In the words of the old commercial for Levy's rye bread, "You don't have to be Jewish to like Levy's rye," -- or bagels, or matzo-ball soup, or Jerry Seinfeld, for that matter. Many Yiddish words, like *kibbitz*, *kvetch*, and *klutz* (to restrict ourselves to just one letter of the alphabet) have been incorporated into American English, and are used by Jews and non-Jews alike. Jewish characters are featured prominently in books and the media, and individual Jews have risen to positions of prominence in all walks of American life.

At the same time, however, it is hard to escape the fact that many Jews seem uneasy about the state of Jewish life in America. Often the unease is triggered not by continued signs of anti-semitism, but by the reverse. Rising levels of intermarriage, by one measure a sign of the success of American Jews in integrating into American culture, are seen by many as a threat to the future of the Jewish community. Can it be that the very success of the Jewish community in America will lead to its disappearance?

In this course, which, like Levy's rye, will be accessible to Jews and non-Jews alike, we will examine the Jewish experience in America both from a historical perspective and from the perspective of American Jewish life today. We will look at examples of writing by and about Jews drawn from both scholarly and popular sources, at portrayals of Jews in the media, and at other manifestations of the Jewish presence in the United States. This examination, we hope, will lead both to a greater understanding of the origins and current condition of Jewish life in the United States and a greater appreciation of the problems and promises of multi-culturalism in America.

REQUIRED BOOKS:

David Biale, *et. al.*, eds., *Insider/Outsider: American Jews and Multiculturalism*
Samuel G. Freedman, *Jew vs Jew: The Struggle for the Soul of American Jewry*
Susan A Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl*
Jenna Weissman Joselit, *The Wonders of America*
Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*
Riv-Ellen Prell, *Fighting to Become Americans: Assimilation and the Trouble Between Jewish Women and Jewish Men*
Philip Roth, *Goodbye Columbus*
Sydney Taylor, *All-Of-A-Kind Family*

All of these are available at Macalester Textbooks, as well as in many libraries. There will also be a number of shorter readings assigned from time to time, as well as assignments in non-literary sources.

We will meet MWF at 1:10 for lecture and discussion. Although formal attendance will not be taken beyond the first few weeks, attendance is expected and class participation will be considered in assigning grades. I also expect that the reading, **which may be considerable**, will be completed on time, and the class sessions will be based on the assumption that about 2/3 of the weeks' reading will be completed on Monday and the remainder on Wednesday.

Each student will be required to write a critical review of three (3) of the assigned readings. You may choose which readings you wish to review, but the first paper must be written on one of the readings assigned between January 28 and February 25, the second must be written on one of the readings assigned between March 3 and March 31, and the third must be written on one of the readings assigned between April 7 and April 28. **Each review is due, in class, on the Monday of the week in which the reading is due.**

Each student will also be required to write a series of three (3) analytical papers. These papers are due March 3, April 7, and May 2.

Critical Review If the book being reviewed is a secondary text, the critical review (of approximately 750-1000 words) should summarize the thesis or theses of the book, describe the issues that the book was written to discuss, and discuss what you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the book. If it is a primary text, it should discuss the text as an historical source. What does the source tell you about the issues that were important at the time of its writing?

Reasonable accommodations will be provided for students with physical, sensory, cognitive, learning, and psychological disabilities. Please contact the Disability Services Office located at Macalester Health Services, 696-6275, to discuss accessing accommodations.

COMPLETION OF ALL WRITTEN WORK IS A REQUIREMENT FOR PASSING THIS COURSE.

EXCEPT IN TRULY SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES, THERE WILL BE NO INCOMPLETES GRANTED IN THIS COURSE.

SCHEDULE

Like all things in this world, this schedule is subject to change

Week of:

- January 28 Introduction — The nature of the problem
Read: Cohen and Eisen, *The Jew Within: Self Family, and Community in America* (2000), Chapter 2, “The Sovereign Self,” Chapter 5, “Echoes of Tribalism”
Watch: Woody Allen, *Crimes and Misdemeanors*
- February 4 Introduction (continued)
Read: Biale, Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, 4
- February 11 Generation I — Immigration
Read: Excerpts from *A Bintel Brief*
Excerpts from Alexander Harkavy, *Amerikanisher Briefen-Shteler*
- February 18 Generation I (continued)
Read: Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl*
- February 25 Generation I-II
Read: Prell, Chapters 1-3
Watch: Yiddish films

FIRST ANALYTIC PAPER DUE MARCH 3

- March 3 Generation II — At Home in America
Read: Joselit, *Wonders of America*

Week of:

March 10 Generation III — Nostalgia
Read: Taylor, *All-of-a-kind Family*
Mark Silk, “Notes on the Judeo-Christian Tradition in
America,” *American Quarterly*, 36.1 (Spring 1984), 65-85.
at
<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=00030678%28198421%2936%3A1%3C65%3ANOTJTI%3E2.0.CO%3B2-O>

SPRING BREAK—MARCH 15-23

March 24 Generation III—Ambivalence
Read: Roth, *Goodbye Columbus*
Carey McWilliams, “Minneapolis: The Curious Twin” in
Common Ground (Autumn 1946)

March 31 Generation III-IV
Read: Prell, Chapters 4-7

SECOND ANALYTIC PAPER DUE APRIL 7

April 7 Generation IV and Beyond
Read: Novick, *Holocaust in American Life*

April 14 Generation IV and Beyond
Read: Biale, Chapters 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 12

April 21 Generation IV and Beyond
Read: Freedman

April 28 Generation IV and Beyond
Read: TBA

THIRD ANALYTIC PAPER DUE MAY 2

May 5 Last Day of Class