

**Jewish Memories, Memoirs, and History**  
**Professor Jeffrey Veidlinger**  
**University of Michigan**



This course will explore the relationship between memory and history within the modern Jewish experience through close readings of Jewish memoirs, autobiographies and life narratives. Students will examine the ways that individuals have constructed their own personal histories and how these personal stories relate to the overarching narrative of the Jewish historical experience. Students will learn how to analyze personal reflections and how to relate individual experiences to communal memories and historical study. Readings will include the works of Mary Antin, Elie Wiesel, Amos Oz, Lucette Lagnado, and others.

In addition to learning about the Jewish past, students in this course will develop historical skills, including how to approach texts from a historical perspective, how to think analytically about the past, how to formulate historically relevant questions, and how to analyze a variety of historical materials, including primary source texts and modern scholarship.

After completing this course, you will be able to:

- \* interpret personal narratives
- \* evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of using personal narratives as historical sources
- \* analyze patterns of the Jewish historical experience, including internal Jewish community experiences and interactions between Jews and others
- \* recognize the extent and impact of diversity among and between global Jewish communities
- \* reflect on ways that historical knowledge can shape your own personal, ethical, and civic responsibilities
- \* analyze historical sources
- \* differentiate between primary source texts and secondary literature
- \* evaluate different types of historical evidence within their historical and social contexts
- \* develop arguments and write persuasive essays based on historical evidence

### **This is an off-line classroom**

**All electronic devices capable of communicating with the outside world are strictly prohibited in the classroom.** Any student who attempts to connect with the outside world during class without prior permission will be asked to leave.

### **Changes in Syllabus**

This syllabus is subject to change without prior notification.

Professor Veidlinger is available for consultation during his regular office hours (**Mondays and Wednesdays 10:00-11:00 in Haven Hall 2529**) or by appointment by emailing at [jveidling@umich.edu](mailto:jveidling@umich.edu). You do not need to make an appointment to come during office hours. I generally respond to email quickly, but email is not an appropriate medium for detailed questions or long discussions; these are better held in person during office hours.

## **SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND READINGS**

### **September 4: Introduction**

#### **September 9: Truth and Truthiness in Self-Narrative**

Readings: Andre Aciman, "How Memoirists Mold the Truth"  
Critics Notebook, "Bending the Truth in a Million Little Ways"

#### **September 11: Youthful Sins**

Readings: Moses Leib Lilienblum, "Sins of my Youth"  
**Essay #1 Due: "Sins of my youth"**

#### **September 16: The Haskalah**

Readings: Solomon Maimon, *Autobiography*, 1-186

#### **September 18: Solomon Maimon Discussion**

Readings: Solomon Maimon, *Autobiography*, 187-307

#### **September 23: Memory Self-Fashioning**

Readings: Michael Stanislawski, *Autobiographical Jews* (excerpts)  
Marcus Mosely, "Autobiography and Memoir"  
**Essay #2 Due: Solomon Maimon**

#### **September 25: Psychology of Memory**

Listenings: Radiolab podcast: Memory and Forgetting  
Readings: John F. Kihlstrom, "Memory, Autobiography, History"

#### **September 30: Polotzk and the East European Jewish Experience**

Readings: Mary Antin, *The Promised Land*, 1-142

#### **October 2: Boston and *The Promised Land***

Readings: Mary Antin, *The Promised Land*, 143-298

#### **October 9: Mary Antin and Rereading the Promised Land**

Readings: Keren McGinity, "The Real Mary Antin: Woman on a Mission in the Promised Land"  
Michael Kramer, "'The Promised Land'"  
**Essay #3 Due: The Promised Land**

#### **October 14: FALL BREAK**

#### **October 16: Old Cairo**

Readings: Lucette Lagnado, *The Man in the White Sharkskin Suit: A Jewish Family's Exodus from Old Cairo to the New World*, 1-160  
**Submit Final Paper Topics and Bibliography**

#### **October 21: The New World**

Readings: Lucette Lagnado, *The Man in the White Sharkskin Suit: A Jewish Family's Exodus from Old Cairo to the New World*, 163-332

#### **October 23: Collective Memory**

Readings: Maurice Halbwachs, "Individual Memory and Collective Memory"  
**Essay #4 Due: Lagnado and Antin**

**October 28: Film: Nobody's Business**

Readings: Michael Renov, "Family Secrets: Alan Berliner's Nobody's Business and the (American) Jewish Autobiographical Film"

**October 30: The Yishuv**

Readings: Amos Oz, *Tale of Love and Darkness*, 1-150 (especially 17-34; 45-75; 87-89; 95-106; 112-121; 126-128)

**November 4: Amos Oz**

Readings: Amos Oz, *Tale of Love and Darkness*, 151-311 (especially 170-177; 186-206; 210-221; 249-255; 269-270; 281-284; 295-299; 304-311)

**November 6: The Sabra Experience**

Readings: Amos Oz, *Tale of Love and Darkness*, 311-538 (especially, 314-347; 352-377; 413-423; 482-495)

Eran Kaplan, "Amos Oz' A Tale of Love and Darkness and the Sabra Myth"

**November 13: Traumatic Memory**

Readings: Crombag, Wagenaar, Van Koppen "Crashing Memories and the Problem of Source monitoring."

Brown and Kulik, "Flashbulb Memories"

**Essay #5 Due**

**November 18: Holocaust**

Readings: Elie Wiesel, *Night*

Naomi Seidman, "Elie Wiesel and the Scandal of Jewish Rage"

**Submit Final Paper outline**

**November 20: Oral Testimonies**

Readings: Aleida Assmann, "History, Memory, and the Genre of Testimony" *Poetics Today* 27, no. 2 (Summer 2006).

Exploring: [www.aheym.org](http://www.aheym.org)

**November 25: Oral Testimonies 2**

**Essay #6 Due**

**November 27: Communism**

Readings: Joseph Brodsky, "Less Than One"

**December 2: Inherited Memory**

Readings: Ariel Sabar, *My Father's Paradise: A Son's Search for His Family's Past*

**December 4: Paper workshop**

**Submit Final Paper Drafts**

**December 9: The Jewish Quest for the Self**

Film: Pearl Gluck, *Divan*

**December 11: Final Papers Due**

Course requirements will include regular short response papers as well as one longer research paper.

**Grading:**

Regular Assignments:	50%
Final Paper:	30%
Class Participation:	20%

**Class Participation**

This course is structured as a seminar rather than a lecture. This means that you should be prepared to participate actively in class discussions. Your mere presence, while appreciated, is not enough to merit classroom participation points. You are expected to come to class with questions in mind about the readings. While being respectful of others, you should feel free to express your own opinions in this classroom, and at the same time be prepared to have your opinions challenged by others.

Absences will negatively impact your grade. You should not miss this class unless you have an emergency.

**Assignments**

Students will be required to complete writing assignments on a regular basis as well as submit a final paper of approximately 2500-3000 words (10 pages). The grading system for this course will place primary emphasis on written work. Substantial segments of class time will be spent developing historical writing skills, including both narrative and analytical skills. In order to help model writing skills and develop content-based knowledge, students will also be expected to read approximately 250 pages per week, mostly of memoirs, as well as some scholarly articles and short pieces on writing.

**Peer Reviews**

We will regularly conduct peer reviews of your writing in class. It is therefore essential that you bring hard copies of your writing to class and that you have your writing completed on time. After discussing your paper with a peer, you will have an opportunity to revise it prior to submission. All papers must be submitted via CTools as Word files by 5:00pm the Thursday after class.

**Final Paper**

Students will be required to submit a final paper of approximately 2500-3000 words (10 pages) on a topic of their choice. The paper should address some of the texts we have read in class as well as some of the theoretical and historical issues we have raised in this class. Students are encouraged to build upon arguments they may have introduced in the smaller assignments. The final paper should present a coherent argument, be written in a fluid manner, and demonstrate significant research beyond that which has been discussed in class. Students will be graded both on the basis of the final paper and on the steps we undertake to complete the paper.

**October 16: Paper Topic and Bibliography Due**

**November 18: Outline Due**

**December 4: Draft Due**

**December 11: Paper Due**

### **Some Sample Final Paper Topics**

You need not (even should not) just pick one of these topics for your final papers, but rather use them as a guide to give you an indication of the scope of an appropriate topic. All papers should offer an informed opinion based on textual evidence, and should be clearly and convincingly written.

Food and memory in three Jewish memoirs

The migration experience in Jewish memory as portrayed in three memoirs

A psychological study of Solomon Maimon based on his Autobiography

Jewish assimilation and black "passing:" two American adaptations

The role of books in Amos Oz's *Tale of Love and Darkness*

Pauline Wengeroff's autobiography as a Bildungsroman

The role of youth movements in identity formation in interwar Poland based on the YIVO autobiographies

Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel: The literature of Holocaust memorial

The language of memory: Yiddish, Hebrew, English and Russian in Jewish memoirs

### **Late Submissions**

Submissions received after the due date will be deducted one point for every 24 hours until the paper is submitted. The only exception will be for medical or other emergencies, in which case the professor must be notified within 24 hours of the deadline.

### **All papers and assignments will be graded on the following scale:**

19-20: has a well-argued, specific and original thesis that sheds novel analytical or theoretical light on the topic. The argument is fully explored with ample evidence and is presented in a convincing and persuasive manner. The paper directly addresses the assignment. The paper has very few grammatical or spelling errors.

17-18: Has a well-argued and specific thesis. The argument is explored in detail and presented in a convincing manner. The paper directly addresses the assignment. The paper has few grammatical or spelling errors.

15-16: Has a discernible thesis, but it may be overly general, vague or obvious. The argument is mostly clear, but may digress at times or require further exploration. Insufficient evidence may be supplied to back up points. The paper generally addresses the assignment. The paper may have some grammatical or spelling errors.

13-14: Thesis may be too vague and, although there may be some good points, the paper may not develop a consistent line of argument. The paper may stray from the assignment. Grammatical and spelling errors may distract from the overall coherency of the argument.

12-13: May not have a thesis, although there may still be some good points. The paper may have no clear line of argument, or may fail to address the assignment. Grammatical and spelling errors may make it difficult to understand parts of the paper

10-11: Paper is difficult to understand due to severe structural or grammatical problems. Paper does not address the assignment.

### **5 Tips for writing better papers:**

- 1) Clearly state the topic of your paper and present the basic thesis that you have formulated in response to the question
- 2) Be sure to draw on material from the readings
- 3) Provide concrete examples from the readings to convince your reader that your argument is credible
- 4) Provide a footnote or endnote every time that you quote, paraphrase an argument, or use specific information from the readings
- 5) Proofread carefully and rewrite as many times as necessary

I expect you to follow the statement on academic honesty and intellectual integrity established by the LSA Community Standards of Academic Integrity. You can find out more about academic integrity at [www.lsa.umich.edu/academicintegrity/index.html](http://www.lsa.umich.edu/academicintegrity/index.html) Presenting someone else's work as your own (this includes the work of another student as well as information from books, articles, and web sites) is plagiarism. Other forms of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to: using unauthorized books or notes to answer examination questions; exchanging knowledge with another student verbally or in written form during a quiz; and writing for another member of the class. The penalty for academic misconduct will be a failing grade for the course and notification to the Registrar that the grade was given because of academic misconduct.

### **Statement on Classroom Civility**

In order to create and maintain a comfortable learning environment for all members of the classroom community, it is essential that we all display respect for each other. This includes attentiveness to and participation in all classroom activities. Unnecessary disruptions during class should be avoided, as they are distracting to you, your peers and your instructor. This includes any private conversations, whether they are being conducted by cell phone, email, vocalized verbalization (ie. talking), webcams, Blackberries™, iPhones, Droids, instant messaging, or semaphore. Smoke signals can be particularly disruptive and are also expressly prohibited as a fire hazard. Eating in the classroom is prohibited.