

HBRJD-3504

HIST-GA 3504

Professor Hasia Diner

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Wednesdays, 8:00-10:45. KJCC 324

(Office Hours: After Class and by appointment)

### Jews and the History of American Diversity

This graduate research seminar seeks to place the experience of American Jews into the context of the nation's religious, ethnic, and racial diversity from the colonial period through the later part of the twentieth century. Through our readings and through student research projects, we will explore the ways in which this minority group, which never constituted more than 4 or 5 percent of the population of United States, by necessity interacted with a wide variety of individuals representing a range of religious, ethnic and racial groups. The Jews' expectations for political, economic, and social and cultural integration required that they engage with others. Some of the Americans with whom they engaged had greater political and cultural power, while others less. Jews in America also had to cope with the ways in which these many other Americans evaluated and understood them, including but not limited to the degree to which anti-Semitism shaped public life.

The Jewish encounter with various kinds of Americans varied group by group, and each encounter represented a different kind of history. Major events in American and Jewish history left their mark on these relationships. We will ask how the Jews' concentration in the commercial sector, their whiteness in the eyes of the state, and the legacy of European anti-Semitism structured the Jewish encounters with other Americans. The Civil War, the era of mass migration, and the vast expansion of American industry, and the conquest of the North American continent will be considered. The Holocaust indeed functions as a watershed event, but the Great Depression and the New Deal, post-war suburbanization, the civil rights movement, and the turmoil of the late 1960s also proved formative. As such, the course will be organized by group, yet within each one of these histories a chronological presentation will be followed.

We will look at political developments but also literary, artistic and intellectual manifestations of how Jews constructed these other Americans, and conversely how these many others made sense of the Jews in their midst. Keep in mind that the course is not organized chronologically, but by group, but we will in the classroom lectures explore development over time and deal with the chronology that way.

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

As a research seminar, students will produce a substantial piece of research, based on primary sources, which in the ideal should resemble a journal article. The paper must pose a conceptual problem or

question and based on empirical research, provide an analytically satisfactory answer or solution to the problem.

Students also should be prepared to discuss the readings for those weeks when we are meeting. Each student will be expected to help lead the discussion at least once. We will devote the last half hour of one class a week for students to discuss their research projects. The weeks when we will not be meeting, will provide special opportunities for students to individually confer with Professor Diner.

### **SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND READINGS**

Week One: January 27

An Overview: Placing Jewish immigration and settlement patterns in context. [This week will offer students a broad outline of the history of Jewish immigration to the America, starting in the seventeenth century and will sketch out the basic nature of their settlement in America, as it changed over time, and will offer a broad perspective on how their adaptation reflected certain key issues in American life. These will involve religion, politics, race, economics, and immigration.]

Reading: Hasia Diner, *The Jews of the United States*. [If you have already read this for a different course, read, Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism*]

Week Two: February 3

The colonial period and the early nation. This week looks at the formation of the United States and the colony by colony, state by state status of the Jews and the way in which their being non-Christians shaped their political, civic, and social status. [Reading: William Pencak, *Jews and Gentiles in Early America*.

Students should be ready to discuss initial ideas about their research projects.

Week Three: February 10: No class: research preparation

Week Four: February 17

Jews and the American Religious Landscape: We will be looking at both Protestantism, the dominant American religion and Catholicism, another and very different faith community, one which like Judaism, owed its American origins to the era of immigration. How did these differ from each other vis-à-vis their engagement with Judaism and Jews? How did Jews respond to these two parts of American Christianity? Reading, Yaakov Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People*; Kevin Schultz, *Tri-Faith America*; Egal Feldman, *Catholics and Jews in Twentieth Century America*

Students will present the state of the research projects

Week Five: February 24: No Class: Research Preparation

Week Six: March 2:

Jews and Other European Immigrants: In the United States Jews came in contact, as a result of where they lived and how they made a living, with other immigrants from Europe. These included both immigrants from countries they had lived in, Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Hungary, and other parts of central and eastern Europe. They also encountered Europeans new to them, most importantly Irish and Italians. This week will explore the range of interactions between Jews and these other immigrants from Europe. Scanned articles, Ewa Morawska, "A Replica of the "Old-Country" Relationship in the Ethnic Niche: East European Jews and Gentiles in Small-Town Western Pennsylvania, 1880s-1930s" pp. 3-133, in *Polin*, Vol. 19 (2007); John F. Stack, *International Conflict in an American City: Ronald Bayor, Neighbors in Conflict*

Week Seven: March 9:

Jewish Reactions to Anti-Semitism: How did Jews in America react to anti-Semitic manifestations in the public arena and how did their reactions parallel or differ those of other stigmatized groups? Reading: Neal Baldwin, *Henry Ford and the Jews*; M. Alison Kibler, *Censoring Racial Ridicule: Irish, Jewish and African American Struggles over Race and Representation, 1890-1930*.

Week Eight: March 23

Jews and African Americans: A rich and provocative literature has examined the ways Jews made sense of and constructed relationships of various kinds with African Americans, from the era of slavery through the twentieth century, and has focused on such issues as Jewish slaveholding, Jewish business relationships with African Americans, the involvement of Jews in the civil rights movement, and the rise of tensions between the two groups on a political as well as a lived level. Given the size of the literature and the complexity of the subject, two weeks will be devoted to this topic. Readings: Hasia Diner, *In the Almost Promised Land: American Jews and Blacks, 1915-1935*; Cheryl Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters*. Both of these books focus primarily on the involvement of Jews in the civil rights struggle.

Week Nine: March 30

We will continue our discussion on Jews and African Americans, focusing more specifically on the lived relationships between the two groups and in particular on interactions in neighborhoods and places of work. Reading: Wendell Pritchett, *Brownsville Brooklyn: Jews, Blacks and the Changing Face of the Ghetto*; Leila Corwin Berman, *Metropolitan Jews*.

Week Ten: April 5: No Class Meeting: Research and Writing

Week Eleven: April 13: Jews and Americans of Asian and Hispanic Background

This vast and important subject has been relatively unstudied and only a few scholars have made any efforts to understand how Jews and Chinese, Japanese Americans, and other Asian Americans as well as Jews and Americans of Puerto Rican, Mexican, Dominican, and other Spanish-speaking origins met and interacted with each other. The works we will be reading offer some examples of this

scholarship and provide a way of conceptualizing future research. Reading: Ellen Eisenberg, *The First To Cry Injustice*; Shana Bernstein, *Bridges of Reform*, George Sanchez, ed., *Beyond Alliances: The Jewish Role in Reshaping the Racial Landscape of Southern California*] Scanned article, George Sanchez, "What's Good for Boyle Heights is Good for the Jews," *American Quarterly*, 2004

Week Twelve: April 19: We will not meet: research preparation.

Week Thirteen and Fourteen: April 26 and May 4: Student presentations of their research projects