

SAS 371: THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMUNITY

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Course Objectives

This course looks at the American Jewish community from a sociological perspective. It examines the behavior patterns of American Jews and traces how the American Jewish community developed into its present situation. It considers the community's major sources of strength as well as its major challenges. It reviews the most significant controversies in American Jewish life and the bases of the various positions in those controversies. This course should help students see how various aspects of a society are related to one another, how ideas shape individual behavior and institutional patterns, how the same data can yield different interpretations, and how several intellectual frameworks can be brought together to understand human behavior.

Course Outline

(Dates are not given for the topics because the pace will depend on students' interests.)

- I. How To Study the Jews: Some Preliminary Considerations
 - A. Whom are we studying? Problems in identifying and classifying the Jews
 - B. "Like everybody else" or "a unique people"
 - C. Ideas and behaviors: the "definition of the situation"
 - D. The factual basis: how "hard" are the data?

- II. Foundations of American Jewish Life
The major "waves" of Jewish immigration to the United States

- III. The Shaping of Contemporary Jewish Identity
 - A. Sources of Jewish self-definition
 - B. The "first" generation: immigrants to a new world
 - C. Marginality and its children: the "second" and "third" generations
 - D. Mid-20th century shocks and their effects
 - E. The "fourth" generation: integration and polarization
 - F. The 21st Century: autonomy and individuality

- IV. Inter-marriage
 - A. Inter-marriage rates
 - B. The changing meaning of exogamy
 - C. The consequences of inter-marriage
 - for individual families
 - for the Jewish community and its institutions

V. American Jewry's Demographic Profile

- A. How demographic data are gathered
- B. Major demographic patterns

VI. Antisemitism

- A. Sources of antisemitism
 - psychological roots
 - cultural and ideological contexts
 - structural and situational inducements
- B. Jewish responses
 - a typology of approaches: "*sba shtill*," "never again," "it depends"
 - Jewish self-hatred
 - the "defense agencies" and their styles

VII. Religious Patterns

- A. The "Movements" – their histories and organizational patterns
- B. The "Movements" – differences in ideology and practice, among and within
- C. "Official" and "popular" religion: mixed motivation and its impact
- D. Synagogues: structure and functions
- E. Is Orthodoxy moving "right" or "left"? – data and theories

VIII. Communal Organization

- A. Defining "the Jewish community"
- B. Jewish organizational structures
- C. The "federal" character of the organized Jewish community
- D. Leadership – criteria, recruitment, authority
- E. Recent trends in Jewish philanthropy

IX. Israel-Diaspora Relations

- A. Comparison of Jewish identity in Israel and in the diaspora
- B. Zionist and diaspora ideologies
- C. Israel in American Jewish identity and activity
- D. Israel and American Jewry: organizational links

X. Politics

- A. Jews in American politics
- B. Jewish "liberalism" – theories about its roots
- C. Israel as an issue in the politics of American Jews

XI. Jewish Family Patterns

- A. Classical family norms
- B. Contemporary trends and their bases

XII. Jewish Education

- A. The relationship of educational systems to other institutions
- B. Varieties of Jewish education and Jewish identity

Reading

There is no current comprehensive work that can serve as a textbook on contemporary American Jewry. The essential material will be covered in class. The reading that each student does, therefore, will be a way to pursue individual interests. Each student will prepare an individual reading list that highlights special interests. These lists will be reviewed and must be approved by the instructor. By the third week of the course, each student should submit a statement of interests and a proposed set of readings.

The following list is a selection of books on contemporary American Jewish life. Some are “classics,” and, though they may not be recent, they are important, both as background for current patterns and as examples of solid analysis. Others are some of the more significant recent works. Some are collections of articles. These volumes were not chosen because the instructor agrees with everything in them, but because they show the style and range of work in the field. They are a way into the literature and will lead students to additional material. At the beginning of the semester the instructor will briefly describe these works. Of course, students are not limited to the works in this list. In all cases, *read critically*.

- Steven Bayme & Gladys Rosen, eds., *The Jewish Family and Jewish Continuity*. Ktav 1994.
- Jerome A. Chanes, *A Primer on the American Jewish Community (3rd Edition)*. American Jewish Committee 2008
- _____, ed., *Antisemitism in America Today: Outspoken Experts Explode the Myths and Reveal the Truths*. Carol Publishing Group 1995.
- Steven M. Cohen, *American Assimilation or Jewish Revival?* Indiana University Press 1988.
- _____, *American Modernity and Jewish Identity*. Tavistock Publishers 1983.
- Leonard Dinnerstein, *Uneasy at Home: Antisemitism and the American Jewish Experience*. Columbia University Press 1987.
- Arnold M. Eisen & Steven M. Cohen, *The Jew Within: Self, Family, and Community in America*. Indiana University Press 2000.
- Daniel J. Elazar, *Community and Polity: the Organizational Dynamics of American Jewry*. Jewish Publication Society 1976.
- _____ & Rela Mintz Geffen, *The Conservative Movement in Judaism: Dilemmas and Opportunities*. SUNY Press 2000.
- Roberta Rosenberg Farber & Chaim I. Waxman, eds., *Jews in America, A Contemporary Reader*. Brandeis University Press 1999.
- Sue Fishkoff, *The Rebbe's Army: Inside the World of Chabad-Lubavitch*, Random House 2005
- Sylvia Barak Fishman, *Double or Nothing? Jewish Families and Mixed Marriage*. Brandeis University Press 2004.
- Manfred Gerstenfeld, *American Jewry's Challenge: Conversations Confronting the Twenty-First Century*. Rowan & Littlefield 2004.
- Nathan Glazer, *American Judaism*. University of Chicago Press 1972.
- Susan A. Glenn & Naomi B. Sokoloff, *Boundaries of Jewish Identity*, University of Washington Press, 2010
- Harvey Goldberg, Steven M. Cohen & Ezra Kopelowitz, eds., *Dynamic Belonging: Contemporary Jewish Collective Identities*, Berghakan Books, 2012
- Calvin Goldscheider, *Jewish Continuity and Change: Emerging Patterns in America*. Indiana University Press 1986.
- Arthur Goren, *New York Jews and the Quest for Community*. Columbia University Press 1970.
- Jeffrey S. Gurock, ed., *American Jewish Life 1920-1990*. Routledge 1998.
- Samuel C. Heilman & Steven M. Cohen, *Cosmopolitans and Parochials: Modern Orthodox Jews in America*. University of Chicago Press 1989.
- Bernard Lazerwitz et al., *Jewish Choices: American Jewish Denominationalism*. SUNY Press 1998.
- Charles S. Liebman, *The Ambivalent American Jew*. Jewish Publication Society 1973.
- _____, *Aspects of the Religious Behavior of American Jews*. Ktav 1974.

- _____ & Steven M. Cohen, *Two Worlds of Judaism: the Israeli and American Experiences*. Yale University Press 1990.
- Norman Linzer, David Schnall, & Jerome A. Chanes, eds., *A Portrait of the American Jewish Community*. Praeger 1998.
- Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Pluralism and the Jewish Community*. Transaction Press 1990.
- _____ & Earl Raab, *Jews and the New American Scene*. Harvard University Press 1995.
- Peter I. Rose, ed., *The Ghetto and Beyond: Essays on Jewish Life in America*. Random House 1969.
- Robert M. Seltzer & Norman J. Cohen, eds., *The Americanization of the Jews*. NYU Press 1995.
- David Sidorsky, ed., *The Future of the Jewish Community in America*. Basic Books 1973.
- Marshall Sklare, *Jewish Identity on the Suburban Frontier*. University of Chicago Press 1979.
- _____, *Conservative Judaism: An American Religious Movement*. University Press of America 1985.
- _____, *America's Jews*. Random House 1971.
- _____, *Observing America's Jews*. University Press of New England 1993.
- _____, ed., *The Jew in American Society*. Behrman House 1974.
- _____, ed., *The Jewish Community in America*. Behrman House 1974.
- _____, ed., *Understanding American Jewry*. Transaction Press 1982.
- _____, ed., *The Jews, A Reader*. Behrman House 1983.
- Tom W. Smith, *Jewish Distinctiveness in America: A Statistical Portrait*. American Jewish Committee 2005.
- Bernard Susser and Charles S. Liebman, *Choosing Survival: Strategies for a Jewish Future*. Oxford University Press 1999.
- Jennifer A. Thompson, *Jewish on Their Own Terms: How Intermarried Couples are Changing American Judaism*. Rutgers University Press, 2014.
- Chaim I. Waxman, *America's Jews in Transition*. Temple University Press 1983.
- _____, *Jewish Baby Boomers: A Communal Perspective*. SUNY Press 2001.
- Jack Wertheimer, *A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America*. Basic Books 1993.
- _____, ed., *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*. Cambridge University Press 1987.
- _____, ed., *Jews in the Center: Conservative Synagogues and Their Members*. Rutgers University Press 2000.

The best place to browse the literature about American Jewry in a library is at E184.J5.

The best place to browse online is at the Berman Jewish Policy Archive.

The two biggest recent survey studies are (1) New York Jewry, done by UJA-Federation of New York in 2011, and (2) American Jewry as a whole, done by the Pew Research Center in 2013. Both are available on the web sites of the sponsoring organizations..

The following are scholarly journals or periodicals with valuable material on American Jewish life: *American Jewish Year Book*, *CCAR Journal*, *Conservative Judaism*, *Contemporary Jewry*, *Jewish Journal of Sociology*, *Jewish Social Studies*, *Judaism*, *Tradition*. Students should become generally familiar with these publications.

A good online source for high quality articles about American Jewry's current issues is Mosaic Magazine.

Grading

There will be three graded assignments: a midterm examination (30%), a final examination (40%), and a paper in which the student answers a question formulated jointly by the instructor and each student based on the student's special interests (30%).

Touro College takes academic integrity very seriously, as does the instructor of this course. Students should review the section on academic integrity in the student handbook so that they can be sure to avoid any act that is considered improper and so that they can know how the college responds to violations.