

**JEWS IN AMERICAN ENTERTAINMENT: FROM SARA BERNHARDT TO
SARAH SILVERMAN
JS 364/HIS 350R/AMS 370**

**Schusterman Center for Jewish Studies
University of Texas at Austin**

**Dr. Chris Ernst
cernst@austin.utexas.edu**

**Office Hours: T and TH 1-2pm CLA 2.402
(Library of the Schusterman Center for Jewish Studies)**

Class meets: T and TH 2:00-3:30pm in GDC 5.304

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores the vital role played by commercial amusements such as theater, Broadway, radio, television and film in creating American culture. From the middle of the nineteenth century to the present day, Jews have helped shape this culture of entertainment—and in so doing, profoundly influenced American identity. Students will examine the representations and performance strategies of Jewish Americans through the lens of public entertainment. We will focus on how Jews, as actors and actresses, writers and composers, singers and celebrities, producers and directors have negotiated their Jewish identity within the larger society. Students will gain an understanding of how Jews have used the entertainment industry as a forum for grappling with important questions of American identity.

Throughout the course, we will read cutting-edge scholarship and analyze compelling primary sources. Students will become adept at interpreting images, deconstructing texts, evaluating historical evidence and writing historical essays.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Most readings will be available through Blackboard under Course Documents. Please note that some readings will be links to websites and other material will be accessed online through University of Texas Libraries.

FILMS

Please note, some weeks we will be discussing films in class. You are responsible for having watched the film by the first class of each week and should come to class

prepared to talk about the film as a primary source for historians. The syllabus notes where these films are available, such as through the Fine Arts Library, iTunes and Netflix. It's worth checking your local video store as well. Vulcan Video has locations in both north and south Austin.

EVALUATION

Attendance and class participation	30%
Response 1 (1000 words)	10%
Response 2 (1000 words)	10%
Midterm	15%
Final Essay (2000 words)	35%

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Students will be required to write 2 Response Assignments, one midterm and a final essay. In addition, class discussion forms a significant portion of your final grade. Students are expected to make meaningful contributions to our discussions. Thus, attendance is mandatory and students are expected to keep up with the assigned readings.

COURSE FORMAT

This is a seminar course and will meet Tuesdays and Thursdays, from 2:00-3:30pm.

The discussion and debate of ideas is central to every meeting. All viewpoints and perspectives are welcome as long as they meet the following criteria: they are delivered in a **respectful manner** and they are **based on the course readings, lectures or texts (films, images, primary sources) used in class**. 30% of your overall grade is based on you having done the readings/viewings before class as well as your ability to engage with them and your fellow students. These discussions are critical to the overall success of the course and students must be prepared to contribute meaningfully to our conversation. Please be advised, however, if you do not do the readings/viewings, you will not do well in this course.

COURSE POLICIES

A Note on Attendance and Participation

Attendance and participation for this course are mandatory. This means that you are expected to have done all the readings before you arrive in class. Every class depends upon a vigorous discussion of—amongst other things—the readings and the questions they raise. Your grade—and the success of this class as a whole—thus depends on your commitment to attendance and participation.

A Note on Late Penalties

The late penalty is 5% per calendar day, including weekends. **Please note, no electronic versions of assignments will be accepted.**

A Note on the Use of Personal Electronic Devices

Unless you have a note from a medical doctor explaining why, the use of electronic devices will not be permitted during class. This includes, but is not limited to: **laptops**, tablets, mobile phones, iPods, mp3 players and digital recorders. In case it's not obvious, there will be no texting or phone calls during class. Students caught using any of these devices, or otherwise violating the course policies with regard to the use of personal electronic devices, will be removed from class and forfeit any and all attendance and participation grades for said class. If a student violates these policies two or more times, they will receive 0% participation and attendance for the entire course.

A Note on Classroom Behavior

You have the right to learn in every class you attend. With that right, however, comes an important responsibility. You must ensure that your fellow students are able to exercise their own right to learn. Please be respectful of your fellow students. Discuss readings rationally and in a way that makes others feel comfortable contributing to the conversation. Do not dominate or intimidate your colleagues during class. You will lose participation marks if you stifle our discussions. On the other hand, if you are able to make the discussion flow in a way that encourages the participation of others, you will do well. In addition, make sure you come to class on time. Don't leave early. If you must arrive late or leave early, let me know in advance and sit close to the door to minimize disruption.

A Note on Scholastic Dishonesty

Scholastic dishonesty includes, but is not necessarily limited to, cheating on assignments or examinations; plagiarizing, which means misrepresenting as your own work any part of work done by another; submitting the same paper, or substantially similar papers, to meet requirements of more than one course without the approval and consent of all instructors concerned; depriving another student of necessary course materials; or interfering with another student's work. Acts of scholastic dishonesty will result in an F for the course and additional disciplinary action.

A Note on Communication

Course information will be available via Blackboard and E-Gradebook. **It is your responsibility to keep your UT contact information up-to-date and check your e-mail and Blackboard regularly. It is your responsibility to monitor your own grades on e-gradebook and notify the professor of any discrepancies in a timely fashion.**

A Note on Accommodation

Accommodations will be provided for students with disabilities that have been documented by the University. If you have a disability requiring accommodation in this class, **please notify the instructor and provide appropriate UT documentation at the beginning of the course. Appropriate accommodation takes time and planning. It is your responsibility to inform me at the beginning of the course about the need to make these accommodations.**

SCHEDULE

Week 1 Situating American Jews: Historical Overview

T (Jan 14) Introduction: Introduction and discussion of syllabus, course goals, key questions, expectations, technology policy and civility

TH (16) -Nathan Abrams, "Jewish Americans: An Overview," in *Encyclopedia of American Studies*
-Hasia Diner, "Chapter 3 A Century of Migration: 1820-1924" in *The Jews of the United States*, 71-111 (Online through UT Libraries)
-Alexander Gordon, "Jewish American Folklore and Humor," in *Encyclopedia of American Studies*

Week 2 What is Public Entertainment? What is "Jewish American"? Defining Commercial Amusements and Jewish Culture

T (21) -Nathan Abrams, "Jewish Americans in Film and Theater" in *Encyclopedia of American Studies*
-Henry Bial, "Performance Studies, Mass Culture, and the Jewish Problem," in *Acting Jewish*, 1-29
-Carl Bryan Holmberg, "Stereotypes and Stereotyping," in *Encyclopedia of American Studies*

TH (23) -Andrea Most, *Theatrical Liberalism*, Chapter 2 "The Birth of Theatrical Liberalism," 39-87

Week 3 Performing Jewishness

****Response 1 on Erdman's "Taming the Exotic Jewess" due in class on Tuesday****

T (28) -Harley Erdman, "Introduction," "Making the Jewish Villain Visible," "Taming the Exotic Jewess," in *Staging the Jew*, 1-62

TH (30) -Harley Erdman, "Becoming a Jolly Good Fellow," "Managing Power," in *Staging the Jew*, 63-117

Week 4 Performing Jewishness/ African Americans, Jews and Popular Song

T (Feb 4) -Harley Erdman, "Breeding New Generations," "Getting Reformed," in *Staging the Jew*, 118-162

TH (6) -Jeffrey Melnick, "Yiddle on Your Fiddle," in *A Right to Sing the Blues*, 16-59

Week 5 African Americans, Jews and Popular Song

T (11) -Jeffrey Melnick, "I Used to be Color Blind," in *A Right to Sing the Blues*, 60-94

TH (13) - Jeffrey Melnick, "Swanee Ripples," in *A Right to Sing the Blues*, 95-140

Week 6 "Mammy, Don't You Know Me?"

****Response 2 on Rogin's "Blackface, White Noise" due in class on Tuesday****

****Tuesday Deadline to Watch: The Jazz Singer (1927)****

(Available at: Fine Arts Library; iTunes)

T (18) -Michael Rogin, "Chapter 4, Blackface, White Noise," in *Blackface, White Noise*, 73-120

TH (20) Michael Alexander, *Jazz Age Jews*, 127-79

Week 7 Theory and a Midterm

T (25) -Andrea Most, *Theatrical Liberalism*, Chapter 3 "Theatrical Liberalism Under Attack," 88-140

TH (27) ****MIDTERM in class****

Week 8 Assimilation on the Silver Screen

****Tuesday Deadline to Watch: Gentleman's Agreement (1947)****

(Available at: Fine Arts Library; Netflix; iTunes; Amazon)

Screening: *Marjorie Morningstar* (1958)

T (Mar 4) *Marjorie Morningstar* (Part 1)

TH (6) *Marjorie Morningstar* (Part 2)

Week 9 Spring Break

T (11) No Class

TH (13) No Class

Week 10 Jews and Hollywood

T (18) -Neal Gabler, "How They Lived," in *An Empire of Their Own*, 237-265

TH (20) -Neal Gabler, "Rabbi to the Stars," in *An Empire of Their Own*, 266-310

Week 11 Jews and the American Broadway Musical

****Tuesday Deadline to Watch: South Pacific (1958)****

(Available at: Fine Arts Library; iTunes)

T (25) -Andrea Most, "We Know We Belong to the Land," *Making Americans*, 101-118

-Roger Cushing Aikin, "Was Jud Jewish?" 277-83

TH (27) -Andrea Most, "You've Got to Be Carefully Taught," and "Coda," *Making Americans*, 153-182, 183-200

Week 12 Americanizing the Holocaust

Screening: *Imaginary Witness: Hollywood and the Holocaust* (2004)

T (April 1) -*Imaginary Witness: Hollywood and the Holocaust* (Part 1)

TH (3) -*Imaginary Witness: Hollywood and the Holocaust* (Part 2)

Week 13 The 1960s and Jewish Celebrity

T (8) -David E Kaufman, "Jews, Celebrity, and the Early 1960s" in *Jewhooing the Sixties*, 1-48

TH (10) - David E Kaufman, "Lenny Bruce" in *Jewhooing the Sixties*, 99-154

Week 14 The Jewish Sitcom

T (15) -Vincent Brook, "Introduction," and "The More Things Change" in *Something Ain't Kosher Here*, 1-20, 66-97

TH (17) -Vincent Brook, "Transformations of Ethnic Space from *The Goldbergs* to *Seinfeld*" and "Under the Sign of Seinfeld," in *Something Ain't Kosher Here*, 98-128

Week 15 Student Presentations

T (22)

TH (24)

Week 16 Student Presentations/ Conclusion

****Essays Due in class on Thursday****

T (29)

TH (May 1)