Representations of Jews in the American Public Sphere

The University of Texas at Austin, Fall 2011
Ant 325L; JS 365; RS 346
31040, 40030, 43615
T TH 9:30–11:00am
SAC 4.174

Instructor: Dr. Suzanne Seriff
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Course Description:

This course explores an aspect of Jewish cultural studies that analyses what is thought by and about Jews—and the idea of Jewishness—in the American public sphere of national words, images, exhibits, performances, and events—even such unlikely places as institutions of public health and immigration. Special attention will be paid to a number of performative genres and display practices of American public culture including cartoons, museum exhibits, photographic displays, film, fiction, tv shows and screenplays. We will focus especially on the historical context of these displays, and the ways in which these broader national contexts are both reflective and constitutive of the particular image of the “Jew” in American public culture at particular times. We pay particular attention to specific moments in American and international public history when these “agencies of display” were used in the service of nation-building to forward distinct—and often competing—notions of Jews in American life as either “curiosities, freaks or racial specimens” on the one hand, or enthusiastic representations of the American assimilationist dream, on the other. Students will have the opportunity to participate directly in analysing this process of cultural production—either through original field research, planning and designing a specific mode of display, or providing a critical analysis of an historic example of this production.

Readings and Requirements

The class format will be structured around seminar-style discussions, in-class activities, out of class fieldwork, films, and lectures. Two short critical papers, weekly discussion blogs based on the readings, and a final
research project (which will include a class presentation as well as a final paper) are required for this class.

REQUIRED TEXTS
The books will be available at The University Co-op on Guadalupe Street. If they are not available the first week of class, check back frequently as some may come in a week or two later. The course packet is only available at IT Copy at 512 W MLK Blvd. Phone 512–476–6662. Be prepared with the course information/my name to request the packet. All books and the course packet are required texts and must be purchased for this class.

- Jonathan D. Sarna, ed. The American Jewish Experience. Holmes and Meier, 2986 (AJE)
- Arthur Miller, Focus, Penguin Books 1945
- Course Packet: Representations of Jews in American Public Culture. (CP) (From IT Copy)
- Blackboard chapters from Norman L. Kleeblatt, Too Jewish?: Challenging Traditional Identities. The Jewish Museum, NY and Rutgers University Press, 1997 (TJ) (The book was out of print so I will xerox chapters and put on Blackboard under Course Documents)

Course Requirements and Grading:
Your grade for the course will be based on the following:

- Papers (1st 15%; 2nd 20%) 35%
- Final Research/Performative Project 35%
- Class Participation/Attendance 30%
  - Attendance and weekly input (10%)
  - Online Comments (10%)
  - Lead Class (5%)

Grading:

1. Short Papers (35%)
Two short papers (5 pages each) based on readings, in-class materials, and student initiated research. I will hand out specific project assignments at least two weeks in advance of each due date. Both assignments will ask you to analyse the representations of Jews in a piece of American public culture—a performance, cartoon, document, movie, play, or piece of fiction—in terms of the historical context in which they are performed or produced (the first from the 19th or early 20th century; the second from post WWII era. Please follow the instructions for the projects carefully. No credit will be given for projects that are handed in late without prior approval of the instructor. The first paper is worth 15% of your grade; the second is worth 20% of the grade.

2. Final Presentation and Paper (35%)
Each student will be required to do a final project which includes both a final multi-media presentation to the class as well as a final paper to be submitted on the final exam day of class. Possible topics for these projects will be discussed during class and in private one-on-one consultation with the instructor. Projects can be based on academic library research, first-hand ethnographic field research, analysis of a body of public cultural production or representations in the daily media and can be undertaken as a group of 2 or 3 students if desired.

3. In Class Attendance and Participation (30%)
• Attendance: You are expected to attend all class meetings on time and are responsible for signing in each class. If you miss class for any reason, including illness or personal crisis, you are required to “make up” your absence by bringing in a piece of popular culture that “represents” Jews in some form, or discusses the representation of Jews based on the topic/time period of the week—this could be an advertisement, a newspaper article, a movie clip, a youtube comedy sketch, etc. (After 5 absences, you can no longer make up points with pop culture contributions). Hint: The weekly English Language newspaper called The Forward has many great articles that are frequently apropos of the topics in our class. Your presence and participation in each class is worth 1/2% of your final grade, for a total of 15 points (15%)
• Blackboard: Students should do a careful reading of the material for each class and respond to a question that I will post about the reading for the following week. The success of the class will depend on student participation and enthusiasm and you are responsible for not only posting your own response, but for reading the responses of others in the class. Your blackboard entry will be due at 9pm on Monday, the day before our Tuesday class. There will be 10 entries in all, worth a total of 10 points for the class. (10%)
• **Leading Class:** Students will be assigned to lead a 15 min. discussion about the reading material once during the semester. Students are encouraged to be creative in engaging the class (using media, audio, etc.). Students will be graded based on delivering a brief summary of the readings and contributing questions to prompt a lively discussion. These student-led discussions will be held on Tuesday morning each week, unless we have a guest speaker or some other unusual circumstance. This will be worth 5% of your class grade.

**CLASS RESTRICTIONS:** Please place cell phones on silent or vibrate mode during class. **Laptop-use is restricted to course-relevant purposes only.** No laptops are allowed during discussions, only for taking notes during a lecture.

**UNIVERSITY POLICIES**

**Scholastic Dishonesty:** Students are required to do their own research and work. All students are responsible for knowing the standards of academic honesty: [http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/scholdis.php](http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/scholdis.php). Plagiarism, using research without citations or using a created production without crediting a source, is forbidden; will result in a grade of zero for the assignment or for the class, depending on the severity of the plagiarism.

**Disabilities:** If you have a disability and need a special accommodation, consult with the Coordinator of Health Disabilities Services, and then discuss the accommodation with me.

**Incompletes:** A grade of "I" is only given in cases of documented emergency or special circumstances late in the semester, provided that you have been making satisfactory progress. A grade contract must be completed and the criteria adhered to.

**Withdrawals:** Students are responsible for finding out the appropriate dates for dropping the course and/or withdrawing without penalties.

**Use of Blackboard and Electronic Reserves**
The course has a Blackboard website which will be demonstrated during the first weeks of the class. It includes an electronic gradebook and access to announcements and assignments.

Announcements concerning the course will also be made on Blackboard. Students in the class are responsible for checking this website regularly, which you can access by clicking on “Blackboard” under “Popular Sites” on the upper left side of the UT home page. Students are also responsible for regularly checking the e-mail account that is registered with the University. All e-mails to the professor should either be done through Blackboard, or include “Rep of Jews” in the subject line; otherwise they may inadvertently be missed.
**SCHEDULE** (Note: Subject to change depending on the needs of the class.)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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| Wk 1 Aug. 25 | Course Introduction  
What does a Jew “look like?” |
| Wk 2 Aug 30th, Sept. 1st | Image and History: The Visual Representation of Jews  
How are Jews seen, rendered and understood?  
What do we learn from studying the image of the Jew? |
(Note: This reading will be available on Blackboard under “Course Documents”) |
| Wk 3 Sept. 6–8 | America’s Famous Open Society: Colonial and Revolutionary America  
How were the earliest American Jews thought of by their Christian neighbors? Were they welcomed into the new society? How did Jews think differently about themselves in America?  
What was the impact of the American Revolution on how Jews were represented in the American public sphere? |
| Readings: | Jonathon Sarna , “The American Jewish Community Takes Shape” pgs. 3–5 (AJE)  
Jacob R. Marcus, “The American Colonial Jew” pgs. 6–17 (AJE)  
Leonard Dinnerstein, “Colonial Beginnings “ in Anti Semitism in America pgs. 3–13 (CP) |
Wk 4 Sept. 13th, 15th

The Pivotal Century: From German to East European Immigration: Jewish Self-Representation in 19th century America

How did representation of German Jews in the mid 19th century differ from the public representation of East European Jews toward the end of the 19th century? What might account for this difference?

Readings:
(The first three readings provide a good intro to the settlement of German Jews in NY and America in mid–1800s. Skim through each of these chapters to get a sense of how the German Jews saw themselves in relation to their Christian neighbors in America. Then read the last three articles (Rischin, Goldstein, and Erdman) thoroughly.


Naomi W. Cohen, “The Christian Agenda (AJE) pgs. 84–97

Barry E. Supple, A Business Elite: German Jewish Financiers in Nineteenth Century New York (AJE) optional, pgs. 99–112

*Moses Rischin, “Germans versus Russians,” with Sarna intro (AJE) pgs. 136–153


Harley Erdman “Making the Jewish Villain Visible: American Approaches to Shylocks and Sheenies,” In Staging the Jew, (CP) pgs. 17–39

First Paper Assignment Handed out to Students: Due Date: Oct. 4th

Wk. 5 Sept. 20–22

The Rise of Nativism and Anti-Semitism in America During the Progressive Era

Readings:
Seriff
Rep of Jews in the American Public Sphere

Eric L. Goldstein, “The Unstable Other: Locating Jews in Progressive Era American Racial Discourse” In The Price of Whiteness (PW), pgs. 35–50

Wk 6 Sept. 27 Disease, Contagion, and Deportation: The Case Against the Undesirable “Hebrew” Aliens (The Galveston Movement Case Study)

Note: Jewish Holiday of Rosh Hashonah falls on Thursday, Sept. 29th. There will be no class.

Readings:
Howard Markel, “The Microbe as Social Leveller” In Quarantine!: East European Jewish Immigrants and the New York City Epidemics of 1892. (CP) pgs. 183–194

First Written Paper Due, Oct. 4th

Wk. 7 Oct. 4–6 WWII and America’s Representations and Coverage of the Jews and the Holocaust
From Opinion Polls to Military ditties to Presidential Imperatives


Wk 8 Oct. 11–13 The Aftermath of WWII in America
How are Jews seen, rendered and understood in the immediate post–WWII context?

Readings and Film:
Elia Kazan, Director, Gentleman’s Agreement (film)
Arthur Miller, Focus

Wk 9  Oct. 18–20  Re–Imagining the Jewish Body: Representations of Jewish Masculinity at the end of the 20th century

Readings:
Maurice Berger, “The Mouse That Never Roars: Jewish Masculinity on American Television” In Too Jewish? (TJ) pgs. 93–107

Wk 10 Oct. 25–27  “How Jews Became Sexy”: From Jewish Mother to Jewish American Princess

Readings:
Holly A. Pearse, “As Goyish as Lime Jell-O?: Jack Benny and the American Construction of Jewishness,” In Jewishness: Expression, Identity, and
Second Paper Assignment Handed out to Students: Due Date: Nov. 10

Wk 11 Nov. 1,3 Jews in the Photographic Imaginary: The Orientalized Subject
How are American Jews Represented—or Represent Themselves—through the Photographic Lens?

Readings:
MacDonald Moore and Deborah Dash Moore, “Observant Jews and the Photographic Arena of Looks,” In You Should See Yourself (YSSY), pgs. 176–204

Wk 12 Nov. 8–10 Displaying American Jewish Life: Representation of Jews in Museum Exhibits.
How do we understand the growth of American Jewish Museums, exhibits and historical sites? What is good and bad about these displays? How do they grapple with issues of representation of the American Jew? Are Jews displayed as a religious group? A culture? Or the exotic other? What do controversies over exhibits tell us about the performance of Jewishness in American public culture?

Norman Kleeblatt, “Passing into Multiculturalism” In Too Jewish? (TJ) pgs. 3–38.

Second Written Paper Assignment Due: Nov. 10

Wk 13 Nov. 15–17 Jewish Enough? Too Jewish?: Jews in a Postmodern “Multicultural America

Readings:
Eric Goldstein, “Jews, Whiteness and “Tribalism” in Multicultural America (PW)
Wk 14 Nov.22  Class Review and Preparation for Student Presentations

Nov 24:  Thanksgiving Holiday–No Class

Wk 15 Nov. 29, Dec.1  Student Presentations

Final Exam Period TBD  Student Presentations