Representations of Jews in the American Public Sphere

The University of Texas at Austin, Fall 2015
Ant 325L; JS 365; RS 346
30570, 39315, 42760
T TH 9:30–11:00am
SAC 4.118

Instructor: Dr. Suzanne Seriff
Office: SAC 4.126
Office Hours: T 11–12:15, or by appointment
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Email: sseriff@mail.utexas.edu

Course Description:

This course explores an aspect of Jewish cultural studies that analyses how Jews and Jewishness are represented in the American public sphere through words, stories, images, exhibits, performances, and events—even such unlikely places as public health and immigration documents. 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 analyzing 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 xxxxx 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.

- Vincent Brook, ed. *You Should See Yourself: Jewish Identity in Postmodern American Culture*. Rutgers University Press, 2006 (YSSY)
- Jonathan D. Sarna, ed. *The American Jewish Experience*. Holmes and Meier, 2986 (AJE)

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

Papers (1\textsuperscript{st} 15%; 2\textsuperscript{nd} 20%) 35%
Final Research/Performative Project 35%
Class Participation/Attendance 30%
Attendance and weekly input (15%)
Online Blog through Canvas (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 analyze 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 19\textsuperscript{th} or early 20\textsuperscript{th} century; the second from post WWII era. Please follow the instructions for the projects carefully. Papers must be handed in to the instructor, in person, on the date they are due. No credit will be given for projects that are handed in late, or emailed, without prior approval of the instructor. The first paper is worth 15% of your grade; the second is worth 20% of the grade. All papers will require actual library research at PCL with books and/or peer reviewed articles. We will hold an information session on how to access library resources toward the beginning of class.

2. Final Presentation and Paper (35%)

Each student will be required to do a final project which includes both a 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 in in pairs if desired, and upon prior approval by instructor.

3. In Class Attendance and Participation (30%)

- **Attendance and Participation**: You are expected to attend all class meetings on time and are responsible for signing in each class. For each unexcused absence, you will be docked one point from your final grade, up to five unexcused absences. After five unexcused absences, you will be docked the full 15 attendance points from your grade. You can receive a maximum of 10 points for attendance (10\% of final grade) and 5 points for participation (5\% of final grade). In order to receive the full five points, you must offer something insightful to the class discussion at least once every single week! (15%).
  
  An excused absence requires substantiating documentation—including a letter from a doctor, or a note from a parent or guardian confirming the reason for the excused absence (such as a death in the family.) Absences without substantiating documentation will be counted as unexcused absences.

- **Canvas Blog**: 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 Canvas blog
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 week’s topic once during the semester. Students are encouraged to be creative in engaging the class (using media, audio, etc.). While you are expected to include the major ideas of the readings for the week, a power point summary of the readings is NOT sufficient for this presentation. Rather, you are expected to lead the class in a learning exercise to introduce the topic—which might include an analysis of a video snippet, or a game, or something of that sort. These student-led presentations 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 Canvas and Electronic Reserves**

The course has a Canvas 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 Canvas. Students in the class are responsible for checking this website regularly,
which you can access by clicking on “Canvas” under “Popular Sites” on 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 Canvas, or include “Rep of Jews” in the subject line; otherwise they may inadvertently be missed.

If and when you should want to communicate with your instructor, please address me as Dr. Seriff or Professor Seriff and please sign your name so that I know to whom to respond. Thanks!

SCHEDULE (Note: Subject to change depending on the needs of the class.)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Course Topics</th>
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| Wk 1 Aug. 27 | Course Introduction  
What does a Jew “look like?”                                             |
| Wk 2, Sept. 1st, 3rd | 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? |

Readings:


| Wk 3 Sept. 8th–10th | 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:
Wk 4 Sept. 15th, 17th
The Pivotal Century: From German to East European Immigration: Jewish 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. 8th

Wk. 5 Sept. 22nd, 24th The Rise of Nativism and Anti-Semitism in America During the Progressive Era
Readings:
Eric L. Goldstein, “The Unstable Other: Locating Jews in Progressive Era
American Racial Discourse” In The Price of
Whiteness (PW), pgs. 35–50
Harley Erdman, “Breeding New Generations: Race, Sexuality, and
Interrmarriage in Progressive Era Performances”
In Staging the Jew (CP) pgs. 118–142

Wk 6 Sept. 29th, Oct 1 Disease, Contagion, and Deportation: The Case
Against the Undesireable “Hebrew” Aliens (The
Galveston Movement Case Study)

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
Alan M. Kraut, “Gezunthayt iz besser vi Krankhayt: Fighting the Stigma of
the ‘Jewish Disease’” In Silent Travelers: Germs, Genes and
the Immigrant Menace (CP) pgs.105–135
Bernard Marinbach, “Deportations!” In Galveston: The Ellis Island of the

Wk. 7 Oct. 6th–8th WWII and America’s Representations and Coverage of
the Jews and the Holocaust
From Opinion Polls to Military ditties to Presidential Imperatives

Henry L. Feingold “Who Shall Bear Guilt for the Holocaust? The Human
Dilemma. (AJE) pgs. 274–292
Leonard Dinnerstein, “Anti-Semitism at High Tide:World War II (1939–
1945) In Anti-Semitism in America (CP) pgs. 128–149

First Written Paper Due, Oct. 8th

Wk 8 Oct. 13th, 15th 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
Ethnicity on the American Stage and Screen. (AJ) pgs. 30–40
Re-Imagining the Jewish Body: Representations of Jewish Masculinity at the end of the 20th century

Readings:
Andrea Most, “Re-Imaging the Jew’s Body: From Self-Loathing to “Grepts”
In You Should See Yourself, Vincent Brooks, ed (YSSY) pgs. 19–37

Film/Television Clips: A Serious Man, Coen Brothers film; Seinfeld; Woody Allen; Curb Your Enthusiasm;

“How Jews Became Sexy”:
From Jewish Mother to Jewish American Princess

Readings:
Riv-Ellen Prell, “Why Jewish Princesses Don’t Sweat: Desire and Consumption in Postwar American Jewish Culture” In Too Jewish? (CP) pgs. 74–92

Second Paper Assignment Handed out to Students: Due Date: Nov. 10

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. 10–12 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? (pgs. 3–38. (CP)

TBD: Articles to be assigned prior to this week

Second Written Paper Assignment Due: Nov.

Wk 13 Nov. 17–19 Jewish Enough? Too Jewish?: Jews in a Postmodern “Multicultural” America

Readings:

Wk 14 Nov.24 Class Review and Preparation for Student Presentations

Nov 26: Thanksgiving Holiday–No Class

Wk 15 Dec.1–3 Student Presentations

Final Exam Period TBD Student Presentations
Seriff
Rep of Jews in the American Public Sphere, 2015