Course Description

Introduction to course content

This course will focus on how Jewish immigrants from central and eastern Europe created new communities and identities as American Jews. Jews, like all other Americans, have had continually to migrate and resettle, to seek new economic niches and to create institutions to sustain social lives. In addition, America’s political culture, based on individual citizenship rather than on group rights, has required that Jews respond to their new civil status by entering public life in new ways. We will pay particular attention to the way the religious ideologies of Reform and Conservative Judaism, and the secular philosophies of trade unionism and Liberal Pluralism have facilitated Jewish reinvention as American citizens. We will also examine how American Jewish leaders since the 1940s have reconciled their status as Americans with a revitalized Jewish nationalism (Zionism) and to the new state of Israel.

The course will proceed chronologically, beginning with upheavals in the lives of the Jews of western Europe in the 16th century. Though living in a variety of settings, Europe’s Jews from Holland to Poland, were everywhere stigmatized and subject to the interests of the ruling dynasties. In response Jews moved around Europe in search of opportunity or security. As part of that migration Jews settled in Holland and England, which were establishing colonies in the Americas. We will examines the revolutionary changes in Jewish status and identity that began there. We will then focus on the American Revolution and the federal Constitution, which for the first time disallowed a national government from supporting an official church or from interfering with the religious rights of its citizens. This freedom from political discrimination created the context for a distinctively American Jewish identity.

In the mid-19th century, America’s expanding geography drew millions of persons, including two hundred thousands Jews, to settle on farms and in cities along new trade routes to the West. Economic opportunity and pioneer status enabled Jews to acquire civic prominence and promoted among Jewish leaders a desire to transform Judaism. Rabbis like Isaac Meyer Wise and Kaufman Kohler brought Reform to Judaism by changing it from a culture made sacred by religious law into a “rational religion” that focused on practical ethics, similar in many respects to forms of Protestant Christianity. But in America Jews also encountered familiar stereotypes, which in the late 19th century came to be labeled “anti-Semitism.” We will examine how in America’s expanding economy, liberal democracy, and multi-racial society, anti-Semitism had very different origins, functions and consequences than in Europe.

The middle portion of the course will analyze the migration of about two million Jews from Eastern Europe, as well as several thousand from the Ottoman Empire, to the United States between 1880 and World War I, largely in response to America’s insatiable demand for industrial labor. We will examine how large groups of Jews, in conjunction with far more immigrants from east and south Europe, became a new proletariat that
settled into dense industrial neighborhoods. Many immigrant Jews at this time had their world view shaped less by religion than by Socialism and trade unionism, and were encouraged to express their views and organize by immigrant Socialists like Abraham Cahan and Meyer London.

The presence of so many immigrants, including Jews, led to an aggressive xenophobic reaction, with nativist voters demanding severe limits to immigration and restrictions against east and south Europeans. By the 1920s Jews—and others—were cut off from their European cultural roots, which rabbis like Mordecai Kaplun sought to revitalize in new Jewish community centers and through a new Conservative Movement in Judaism. Within a generation the children of Jewish immigrants had moved to more prosperous neighborhoods and created a distinctively American communal life and politics. We conclude this portion of the course by examining a regional variation, the Jewish migration to Los Angeles and the creation of the movie industry.

The third portion of the course will examine how American Jewry from the mid-1930s through the 1960s faced the rise of domestic anti-Semitism and then the crisis of the Holocaust and the founding of a Jewish state (Israel). After World War II, American Jewish communities managed their own further integration into the American middle class, while a leadership cadre cultivated political support for Israel through AIPAC. Major Jewish organizations became absorbed in a political campaign to assure Israel’s survival. Many younger Jews however, were working for an America in which civil rights became a political goal and pluralism became the philosophy of American culture. We conclude the course by examining how a new Jewish sense of place in a pluralistic America has affected the community’s public agenda.

**Required Readings:**
Books & a packet are available at U. of Oregon Book Store or Smith Family Bookstore;
1. Isaac Metzker, editor, *A Bintel Brief*
2. Chaim Potok, *The Chosen*
3. Packet for History 358: American Jewish History
4. additional required readings on Blackboard

**Writing Assignments: [80%] Due dates are listed on the class schedule**
Four writing assignments are required to complete this course successfully. Each one will require students to apply themes developed in the lectures and assigned readings by responding to a set of questions.

The four essay assignments are expected to be about six pages in length, with arguments and conclusions documented with references to the assigned readings. Memos that provide the specific questions on which your essays must focus will be provided about ten days before each paper is due.

The first essay assignment is attached to this syllabus.

**Class Participation [20% of grade]**
This portion of the grade will be based on class participation, which will depend on students asking questions and participating in class discussions. Students can—and should—initiate class discussion at every session by bringing questions from the assigned reading to class.
In addition, at classes designated on the syllabus to include a discussion [DISC], about half an hour will be devoted to organized discussion. Students will be required to bring written questions from selected readings to class, and students will be asked to volunteer a question to initiate a discussion. I will collect all questions at the end of class, not to assign grades to them, but to indicate that you have formally participated.

In the past some students have expressed a reticence to speak in class. I encourage students to speak up, in part to determine how the themes emphasized in the course are understood. **But I will never reduce a student’s grade below what she or he has earned through written work because of a reticence to speak in class.** Class participation can—and should-- improve a student’s grade.

**First Essay Assignment**

This essay will be due in class on Thursday, October 16, 2014.

**Question:**

**Instructions:** Answer the following two questions in about three pages each. Should you find it easier, you may combine the two questions and write one longer (six page) answer. You MUST use examples from the readings assigned for the 1st two weeks of class, and you MAY use examples from the lectures to VERIFY your conclusions. Do NOT use references to on-line sources.

1. Did the moves by Jews to New World locales like Curacao, New York or Newport in the 18th century require fundamentally different changes in their lives than did the moves around the rim of western Europe to cities like Amsterdam or London in the 17th and 18th centuries?

2. Specifically, how did the issues raised by the American Revolution—with its emphasis on democracy and its challenges to deference—shape a new view of what a Jew and a Jewish community should be? What were the primary gains or losses that a democratized Jewry portended?

---

**General expectations about essay writing:**

I include the following paragraph not to determine WHAT you write, but to explain what impresses me as a clear, well-planned answer.

Essays should have a clear introductory sentence directly addressing the question as asked, with a theme that expresses the main point of your answer. For question number 1 above, for example, you should indicate in your first sentence whether the move to the Americas posed fundamentally different challenges to Jews (and perhaps to other European migrants) than did moves to an old European city like Amsterdam. Your second sentence should explain your primary reason for thinking so. The balance of your first paragraph should sketch the evidence you will use to verify your general argument. The following paragraphs should use material from readings—and some evidence from lectures—to elaborate on your argument.

All direct quotations should never be more than one sentence in length. Each should be documented in a simple footnote with the name of the author, an abbreviated title for the essay or book, and the page from which the quotation has been taken.

Essays should be presented in Times New Roman script, 12 font, or some very similar script and an equivalent font size.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wk</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Lecture Topics</th>
<th>Assigned Readings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>9/30</td>
<td>Jewish Status in 17th C Europe</td>
<td>Ruderman. “Early Modern Jewry,” B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10/2 Jewish Migrations &amp; Reinventions: Amsterdam, et. al</td>
<td>Yerushalmi, Betw Amsterdam &amp; New Amsterdam**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>10/7</td>
<td>Jews in Colonial N. America</td>
<td>Kiron, “Mythologizing 1654”; Platt, “Slave Trade of A. Lopez”;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10/21</td>
<td>Reform Judaism in America</td>
<td>“Dr Kohler’s Paper;”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>10/28</td>
<td>East European Jewish Emigration</td>
<td>Gottheil, “Kisineff”; Poole, “Abraham Cahan”; Cahan, “Rabbi Joseph”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10/30</td>
<td>East European Jews in NY</td>
<td>Metzker, Bintel Brief; Bingham, “Foreign Criminals”; Ross, “Hebrews East Europe”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11/13</td>
<td>Holocaust &amp; American Jews</td>
<td>Potok, The Chosen; “Foreign News”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11/20</td>
<td>Founding Israel &amp; Amer Jew *[Disc]</td>
<td>Stone, Teller essays on Israel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>11/25</td>
<td>Israel &amp; American Jews</td>
<td>Hertzberg, “Israel &amp; American Jewry; Kazin, “In Israel after Triumph”; ”Middle East After Arab Defeat”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11/27</td>
<td>Thanksgiving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12/4</td>
<td>*4th Paper due by 1:00 PM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B designates available on Blackboard for History 358.

**All other short items of required reading are in the packet**
1. Yosef H Yerushalmi, “Between Amsterdam and New Amsterdam: The Place of Curacao and the Caribbean in Early Modern Jewish History,” American Jewish History XXII (1982), 172-92
7. Richard Gottheil, “Kishineff,” The Forum (July, 1903), 149-60
17. “Jews in America,” Fortune (February, 1936)
19. Theodore Irwin, “Inside the Christian Front,” The Forum (March, 1940), 102-08

**Additional Required Readings available on Blackboard for History 358**


Virginia B. Platt, “‘And Don’t Forget the Guinea Voyage’: The Slave Trade of Aaron Lopez of Newport,” *William & Mary Quarterly*, 601-18


