Introductory Observations:

Anti-Semitism and Racism in United States History

The purpose of this course is to examine how Anti-Semitism became a distinctly American phenomenon, by separating it from its ideological origins in Europe, and by comparing it to the broader topic of American Racism. Our purpose will not be to determine whether anti-Semitism was more or less severe in the United States than elsewhere, but how anti-Semitism became part of public life in America, and how its expression illuminates the treatment of Jews compared to other American ethnic and racial groups. Anti-Semitism, when studied in conjunction with other American ethnic stigmas, leads not to the definition of an ideological construct, but provides distinctive insights into the basic fissures in American life. In addition, we will also want to examine the changing place of Jews in American society, the way these changes affected expressions of anti-Semitic stigma, and how Jews through their own defense organizations responded to these moral and political challenges.

Through much of American History Jews and Catholics have been treated differently in federal and most state law codes than have people of African and Asian descent, and both vigilante violence and legitimate politics have reflected these differences. Unlike Irish Catholics before the Civil War and both the Chinese and African Americans afterwards, Jews did not become victims of persistent mob violence. But like all of these groups, Jews have experienced social discrimination and exclusion through restrictions on their immigration. So, studying anti-Semitism as a kind of ideological reflex should allow us to examine certain anxieties characteristic of a society like the United States that has valued economic growth yet has dreaded its social consequence. The comparative approach that this course takes should allow us to learn how people discriminating against Jews identified one set of anxieties, while people attacking African-Americans, or the Chinese may have seen other, perhaps deeper, sources of conflict.

Because anti-Semitism arose in Europe, we will examine those ideological origins. In order to establish patterns for comparison we will look at one European event with an extensive historiography, the Dreyfus Affair of the 1890s. Through examining this prolonged legal and political “affair” we can establish how the various antagonists used anti-Semitism to interpret major social and cultural conflicts in the French Third Republic. We can then apply that method of social analysis to the United States by examining the circumstances under which anti-Semitism was expressed in the years before and just after the American Civil War, when so many more Jews arrived. We will bring focus to this discussion by first comparing the treatment of Jews to the Irish on the East Coast; Irish Catholics arrived in much larger numbers than did Jews and immediately became the victims of vigilante violence and of third party politics. We will then
examine the experience of Jews in the American West by comparing their treatment with that of the Chinese, who arrived in large numbers, but were ineligible to be naturalized as citizens. To further emphasize the importance of differences in region, we will then examine the Atlanta riot (1906) and the trial and lynching of Leo Frank, between 1913 and 1915. As opposed to the newly settled West, the South was undergoing agricultural transition and slow industrial expansion, with a settled population rather than an aggregate of ethnically diverse newcomers. The South was divided between emancipated slaves, displaced white farmers, and wealthy railroad builders, whose headquarters were in New York. The Atlanta riot and the Leo Frank trial and lynching reveal how Jews were entering a region whose racial, economic and political cleavages were deep-seated and explosive.

Anti-Semitism, then, has been expressed in different ways, at different moments by different kinds of Americans. In some historical eras anti-Semitism carried a distinctly religious tone and differed substantially from political crusades against Irish Catholics or the Chinese. At other times and under very different economic conditions, especially at the turn of the 20th century, Jews were explicitly included in a racial hierarchy, and faced the same patterns of exclusion experienced by Catholic immigrants from eastern and southern Europe. We will focus particularly on how and why anti-Semitism hardened into a variant of racial stereotyping at the moment when the size of the Jewish immigrant population dramatically expanded and when its class status deteriorated. We will also want to know why anti-Semitism radically changed yet again after World War II at the same time as did the stereotyping of east European Catholics, and at the moment when a “Great Migration” of African Americans moved from the rural South to the cities of the Northeast, the Great Lakes, and the Pacific Coast. At that moment Jews experienced exceptional social mobility, became politically active in their own defense, and many younger Jews joined a new civil rights coalition. When anti-Semitic rhetoric emerged in the 1960s, it was expressed by wildly disparate groups on the fringes of American society, grew from different issues, and had different intents.

**Required Readings**

4. Packet of Readings for this class available at [U of Oregon Bookstore](#)
5. Other readings available on [Blackboard](#) for this class

**Assignments:**

Students will be required to write three papers of about ten pages each. The tentative topics are listed at pertinent points in the schedule of lectures and assigned readings. The specific question to be answered for each paper will be distributed at least ten days in advance of the due date. Each paper will be worth 30% of your grade. Ten per cent of your grade will depend on your participation in class discussions.
Lectures & Assigned Readings

A. Anti-Semitism and the Context of American Racism

Wk 1. Anti-Semitism & the Jews:
   L#1: Anti-Semitism, Racism & USA History

   L#2: European Origins of Anti-Semitism
   Read: Albert S Lindemann, *Jew Accused* (1991), 1-33,57-74

Wk 2. America Society & Centrality of Race
   L#3: Civilization & the Savages

   L#4: Slavery, and the Stigma of Race

Wk 3. Jews & Anti-Semitism in 19th Century America
   L#5: Jews of America and 19th C Opportunity
   Mark Twain, “Concerning the Jews,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* (Sept 1899), 527-35

   L#6: Jews of the West and 19th C Chinese Immigration
   Danziger, “Jews of San Francisco,” *Overland Monthly* (April, 1895), 381-410

1st Essay Question: [Topic: Antisemitism, Racism & Bourgeois Jewry]

B. Jews and the “Social Question”: Europe and America

Wk 4. “Rise of the Jews” and “Modern” Europe
   L#7: Modernity, Emancipation & the Jews
L#8: Dreyfus Affair & Anti-Semitism
Lindemann, *Jew Accused*, 94-128

**Wk 5. “Rise of the Blacks,” Atlanta Riot (1906) & Leo Frank Affair**

L#9: Black Emancipation and the New South
Read: Fredrickson, *Racism*, 97-112

L#10: Populist Anti-Semitism and Leo Frank
Lindemann, *Jew Accused*, 194-272

**Wk 6. Jews & Proletarian Threat in 20th century America**

L#11: Industrial City and America’s “Social Problem”
Read: Roediger, *Working toward Whiteness*, [Parts 1, 2], 3-130

L#12: The Hebrews and the American Proletariat

2nd Essay Question [Topic: Racism and Immigrant Jewish worker]

**Wk 7. 1920s: Immigration Restriction, Jewish Mobility, & Black Migration**

L#13: Political Solution to the Social Problem: Immigration Restriction
Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, 133-56
Henry Ford, “Jewish Supremacy in Motion Picture World,” *Dearborn Independent* (February 19, 1921)
Henry Ford’s Apology to the Jews, *The Outlook* (July 20, 1927), 372-74

L#14: Racializing the Social Problem: Black Migration to cities
Franz Boas, “The Problem of the American Negro,” *Yale Review* (January, 1921);

**C. Race, Ethnicity & American Pluralism**

8. New Deal & WW II

L#15: Anti-Semitism & Race in a Depressing Age
Read: Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, 157-224
“Jews in America,” *Fortune* (February, 1936)
Theodore Irwin, “Inside the Christian Front,” *The Forum* (March, 1940), 102-08
1939), 1017-9.

L#16: The Double V in the Racist War
Horace Cayton, “The Negro’s Challenge,” The Nation (July 3, 1943), 10-12

9. Jews and Blacks in Post-War City
L#17: Holocaust Trauma & Safety Net City
Read: Roediger, Working Toward Whiteness, 224-44
David Bernstein, “Jewish Insecurity and American Realities,” Commentary (February, 1947), 119-27
Carey McWilliams, “Does Social Discrimination Really Matter?” Commentary (November, 1947), 408-15

L#18: Black Consolidation in the New Ghetto
Kenneth Clark, “Candor About Negro-Jewish Relations, Commentary (February, 1946), 8-14

10. Urban Renewal, Civil Rights and Social Distance
L#19: Urban Renewal, Civil Rights & Black Power
Read: Carey McWilliams, “Watts: The Forgotten Slum,” The Nation (August 30, 1965), 89-90
Tom Brooks, “Negro Militants, Jewish Liberals, and the Unions, Commentary (Sept 1961), 209-16

L#20: The Suburban Jew for Israel

3rd Essay Question
[Topic: Anti-Semitism in Multi-cultural America]