

**\*THIS IS A WORKING DRAFT OF THE SYLLABUS. CHANGES MAY BE MADE\***

History 150-401  
Jewish Studies 130-401  
Religious Studies 124-401

Fall 2017  
Mon-Wed 2:00-3:30

### **THE AMERICAN JEWISH EXPERIENCE**

INSTRUCTOR: Beth S. Wenger  
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and by appointment

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**\* Fulfills College requirement for Cultural Diversity in the U.S.\***

#### COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course surveys the major developments in American Jewish life from the colonial period to the present. We will discuss the various waves of Jewish immigration to the United States and examine the evolution of Jewish social, political, religious, and cultural patterns in America. Special attention will be paid to issues of ethnicity, acculturation, and identity. We will also explore the relationship between Jews and American culture, considering how Jews are represented and how they represent themselves in film and media.

Curiosity about American Jewish history and the desire to explore its drama and complexity are the only prerequisites for this course. No prior knowledge of the subject is assumed. The course will have very brief lectures, but also a great deal of discussion, and participatory assignments. Students will initiate discussion at almost every class meeting. Regular attendance at class sessions is expected; required readings should be completed prior to the class for which they are assigned. Students should be prepared to analyze and discuss the readings and primary documents assigned for each class. Films and artifacts will be treated as texts and students are expected to view them critically and analytically.

#### COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- Attendance and participation in class: Debate and discussion will be a regular part of class. Students are required to participate actively. We will also have many classroom interactions as well as students sometimes taking responsibility for initiating class discussion. Preparation and participation in all these tasks will be considered as part of the final grade.
- 1 Critical Reading of a Primary Source: A 5-7-page analysis of a primary source, from the list of 3 choices offered. These papers will be due at the time when the documents

are discussed in class. **You are only required to write about 1 of these 3 sources**, and you may choose which source you wish to evaluate.

- 2 Film Responses: We will screen the films *The Jazz Singer* and *Gentleman's Agreement* during the semester. Students will be asked to write a 1-2 paragraph reactions of the films in a threaded discussion on Canvas. These should be critical assessments of the films, considering how they portray Jews and Jewish life.

- 1 Review Paper: A 6-8-page evaluation of the museum exhibition at the National Museum of American Jewish History that we will view toward the end of the semester.

- Final Exam

\*\* A detailed outline of all writing assignments appears on the last page of this syllabus.

### GRADING:

Attendance and Participation (includes participation in discussions throughout the semester)	15%
2 Film Responses	10%
Primary Source Analysis	25%
Review Paper	25%
Final Exam	25%

**\*\* NO LATE WORK WILL BE ACCEPTED -- NO EXCEPTIONS! \*\***

### REQUIRED READINGS AVAILABLE AT PENN BOOK CENTER:

Jonathan D. Sarna, ed., *The American Jewish Experience*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.

Pamela S. Nadell, ed., *American Jewish Women's History: A Reader*.

- All other readings are available on the Canvas site for History 150.
- All books ordered for purchase are also on reserve in the library.

### CLASS SCHEDULE:

<b>Wed. Aug. 30</b>	<b>Introduction: American Jewish history in context</b>
<b>Mon. Sept. 4</b>	<b>NO CLASS: LABOR DAY</b>
<b>Wed. Sept. 6</b>	<b>Colonial American Jewry</b>

Jacob R. Marcus, "The American Colonial Jew: A Study in Acculturation," in Jonathan Sarna, ed., *The American Jewish Experience*, pp. 6-19.

Ellen Smith, "Portraits of a Community: The Image and Experience of Early American Jews," in Pamela Nadell ed., *American Jewish Women's History: A Reader*, pp. 13-23.

Documents: Peter Stuyvesant and the Jews, in *The Jew in the Modern World*, eds. Paul Mendes Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, pp. 452-54.

"A Mother Bemoans her Daughter's Marriage: Abigail Franks," in Beth S. Wenger, *The Jewish Americans: Three Centuries of Jewish Voices in America*, pp. 32-34.

Questions to consider: How did Jews come to arrive in the colonies? How were they received? What were the conditions of the Jewish settlement in the colonies? How would you evaluate the religious and communal life of early American Jewry?

### **Mon. Sept. 11            The American Revolution and Jewish Political Rights**

Jonathan Sarna, "The Impact of the American Revolution on American Jews," in Sarna, *The American Jewish Experience*, pp. 20-28.

Documents: "A Plea for Jewish Rights in the New Nation: Jonas Phillips," and "'To Bigotry No Sanction': George Washington and Newport, Rhode Island Jews," in Wenger, *The Jewish Americans: Three Centuries of Jewish Voices in America*, pp. 24-31.

The Maryland "Jew Bill," Joseph L. Blau and Salo W. Baron, eds., *The Jews in the U.S., 1790-1840: A Documentary History*, Vol. I, pp. 50-55.

### **Wed. Sept. 13            Central European Migration: Settlement and Occupations**

Hasia Diner, *A Time for Gathering: The Second Migration, 1820-1880*, pp. 36-85.

Documents: "A Refuge for Jews in Upstate New York: Mordecai Noah," in Wenger, *The Jewish Americans: Three Centuries of Jewish Voices in America*, pp. 44-48.

Jacob Marcus, *Memoirs of American Jews*, Vol. II, pp. 1-20. [**This is primary source assignment #1 --Due in class TODAY-- Sept. 13**]

Questions to consider: What can we learn about the experience of Jewish immigrants from the memoirs of Abraham Kohn? What do memoirs offer as an historical source? What are their strengths and limitations as historical documents?

**Mon. Sept. 18            The "Golden Age" of Central European Jewry:  
Mobility and Community**

Hasia Diner, *A Time for Gathering*, pp. 86-113.

Documents: "A Union Soldier's Passover Seder: J.A. Joel," "From Immigrant to Department Store Owner: Isidor Straus," and "Success and Exclusion: Joseph Seligman," in Wenger, *The Jewish Americans: Three Centuries of Jewish Voices in America*, pp. 68-71, 81-86.

**Wed. Sept. 20            NO CLASS: ROSH HASHANAH**

**Mon. Sept. 25            Studying American Jewry through Material Objects: The  
Arnold and Deanne Collection of Early American Judaica**

**\* MEET ON THE 6<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR OF VAN PELT LIBRARY \***

Arthur Kiron, "Introduction: Constellations of Atlantic Jewish History," in *Constellations of Atlantic Jewish History, 1555-1890*, pp. 1-23.

**Wed. Sept. 27            Americanizing Judaism**

Dianne Ashton, "The Lessons of the Hebrew Sunday School," in Nadell, *American Jewish Women's History: A Reader*, pp. 26-42.

Michael Meyer, "America: The Reform Movement's Land of Promise," in Sarna, *The American Jewish Experience*, pp. 60-81.

Documents: "The Petition of Forty-Seven Members of Charleston's Beth Elohim Synagogue, 1824," in Marc Lee Raphael, *Jews and Judaism in the United States: A Documentary History*, pp. 186-92.

The Pittsburgh Platform (1885).

Questions to consider: What do the records of the first Reform congregation reveal about the progress of American Judaism? How did the unique conditions of American society shape the religious organizations and identities of American Jews? How would you characterize American Reform Judaism in the mid-nineteenth century?

**Mon. Oct. 2              East European Immigration: Migration and Settlement**

Gerald Sorin, *A Time for Building*, pp. 38-68.

Deborah Dwork, "Immigrant Jews on the Lower East Side of New York, 1880-1914," in Sarna, *The American Jewish Experience*, pp. 120-35.

Documents: "Jewish Immigration into the United States: 1881-1914," in *The Jew in the Modern World*, eds. Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, pp. 472.

"The Journey to America: Alexander Harkavy," and "Going West: Rachel Calof," in Wenger, *The Jewish Americans: Three Centuries of Jewish Voices in America*, pp. 114-22.

**Wed. Oct. 4                      Film: *The Jazz Singer* (1927)**

View on your own outside of class. Available for view on Penn Video Network:  
<http://www.upenn.edu/video/>

**\*\*View the 1927 film, not other versions.**

**Mon. Oct. 9                      East European Immigration: Work and Family**

Paula Hyman, "Immigrant Women and Consumer Protest: The Kosher Meat Boycott of 1902," in Sarna, *The American Jewish Experience*, pp. 153-64.

Reena Sigman Friedman, "'Send Me My Husband Who is in New York City': Husband Desertion in the American Jewish Community, 1900-1926," *Jewish Social Studies* 44:1 (Winter 1982): 1-18.

Documents: Isaac Metzker, ed., *A Bintel Brief*, pp. 54-85, 106-09.

**[This is primary source assignment #2--Due in class today, Oct. 9. The book will be available on reserve in the library. Those who choose this writing assignment should consult the book, not simply write the paper using the excerpts assigned for class.]**

"An Immigrant Jewish Girl from Poland: Sadie Frowne," and "Jewish Women on Strike: The Kosher Meat Boycott of 1902," in Wenger, *The Jewish Americans: Three Centuries of Jewish Voices in America*, pp. 142-49, 175-77.

Questions to consider: What can we learn from these "Dear Abby" style letters to the Yiddish-language *Jewish Daily Forward*? What do they reveal about the nature of Jewish immigrant life? Are these reliable sources?

**Wed. Oct. 11                      The Acculturation of Immigrants: Philanthropy,  
Immigrant Choices, and Jewish Cultural Life**

Daniel Soyer. *Jewish Immigrant Associations and American Identity in New York, 1880–1939*, pp. 81-112.

Andrew Heinze, “Adapting to Abundance: Luxuries, Holidays, and Jewish Identity,” in Sarna, *The American Jewish Experience*, pp. 166-82.

Documents: “Landsmanshaftn: Jewish Hometown Societies,” “Popular Idol of the Yiddish Stage: Boris Thomashefsky,” and “The Jewish King Lear: Jacob Adler,” in Wenger, *The Jewish Americans: Three Centuries of Jewish Voices in America*, pp. 123-26, 164-71.

Discussion of *The Jazz Singer*.

Questions to consider: What does it mean for immigrants to “Americanize”? How do immigrants acculturate and “Americanize” on their own terms? How do they transform Jewish culture?

### **Mon. Oct. 16            Jewish Socialism and the Labor Movement**

Tony Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York*, pp. 1-25.

Alice Kessler-Harris, “Organizing the Unorganizable: Three Jewish Women and Their Unions,” in Nadell, *American Jewish Women’s History: A Reader*, pp. 100-115.

Documents: Chaim Zhitlowsky, “Our Future in America,” in *The Jew in the Modern World*, eds. Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, pp. 491-92.

“Voice of the Immigrant Jewish Community: Abraham Cahan,” “Organizing the Workers: Clara Lemlich,” and “Protesting Lives Lost: Rose Schneiderman,” in Wenger, *The Jewish Americans: Three Centuries of Jewish Voices in America*, pp. 131-35, 159-63.

Questions to consider: What factors helped to spark the Jewish labor movement? What was distinctly Jewish about Jewish socialism and the labor movement?

### **Wed. Oct. 18            Literary Representations of the Immigrant Experience**

Students should read both of these two immigrant literary works. You will be responsible for discussing these works in class:

Anzia Yezierska, “The Fat of the Land” in *Hungry Hearts*

Abraham Cahan, “A Sweatshop Romance,” in *Yekl and the Imported Bridegroom and Other Stories of Yiddish New York*.

\*Read the brief biographical notes on these two authors on Canvas.

**[This is primary source assignment #3--Due in class today, Oct. 18]**

FILM: Suzanne Wasserman, "Sweatshop Cinderella," — screened in class.

Questions to consider: What prevailing themes in American Jewish life emerge in these works? How can historians use literary works, like these, as historical sources? What are their strengths and limitations?

**Mon. Oct. 23            American Zionism**

Melvin I. Urofsky, "Zionism: An American Experience," in Sarna, *The American Jewish Experience*, pp. 245-55.

Joyce Antler, "Zion in our Hearts: Henrietta Szold and the American Jewish Women's Movement," in Nadell, *American Jewish Women's History: A Reader*, pp. 129-49.

Arthur A. Goren, "Celebrating Zion in America," in Jeffrey Shandler and Beth S. Wenger eds., *Encounters With the 'Holy Land': Place, Past, and Present in American Jewish Culture*, pp. 41-59.

Documents: Louis Brandeis, "Zionism is Consistent with American Patriotism," in *The Jew in the Modern World*, eds. Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, pp. 496-97.

"Making Zionism an American Movement: Louis Brandeis," and "Founder of Hadassah: Henrietta Szold," in Wenger, *The Jewish Americans: Three Centuries of Jewish Voices in America*, pp. 181-90.

Questions to consider: What is the nature of the Zionist movement in America? What roles did Louis Brandeis and Henrietta Szold play in shaping the movement? What cultural factors contributed to the evolution of American Zionism?

**Wed. Oct. 25            The Second-Generation Synthesis**

Deborah Dash Moore, *At Home in America: Second Generation New York Jews*, pp. 19-87.

Beth S. Wenger, "Budgets, Boycotts, and Babies: Jewish Women in the Great Depression," in Nadell, *American Jewish Women's History: A Reader*, pp. 185-200.

**Mon. Oct. 30            Transitions in American Judaism**

Jeffrey Gurock, "The Emergence of the American Synagogue," in Sarna, *The American Jewish Experience*, pp. 219-34.

Jenna Weissman Joselit, "The Jewish Home Beautiful," in Sarna, *The American Jewish Experience*, pp. 236-42.

Documents: The Columbus Platform (1937)

"Founder of Reconstructionist Judaism: Mordecai M. Kaplan," and "Crafting an American Orthodoxy: Bernard Revel," in Wenger, *The Jewish Americans: Three Centuries of Jewish Voices in America*, pp. 238-45.

Solomon Schechter, "Catholic Israel," and Mordecai Kaplan, "The Reconstruction of Judaism," in *The Jew in the Modern World*, eds. Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, pp. 497-502.

Questions to consider: How did the various religious movements in Judaism take shape in the first half of the twentieth century? Do they share any characteristics? Is there something distinctly American about the evolution of Judaism in the United States?

### **Wed. Nov. 1                    Anti-Semitism and the "Jewish Problem" in the Interwar Years**

Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race and American Identity*, pp. 119-37.

Leo Ribuffo, "Henry Ford and the *International Jew*," in Sarna, *The American Jewish Experience*, pp. 201-16.

Documents: "The International Jew," in Marc Lee Raphael, *Jews and Judaism in the United States: A Documentary History*, pp. 280-92.

"Jewish Quotas at Harvard: An Exchange Between Alfred A. Benesch and A. Lawrence Lowell," in Wenger, *The Jewish Americans: Three Centuries of Jewish Voices in America*, pp. 229-33.

Questions to consider: What is the nature of anti-Semitism in America? In what sectors of society did it emerge? How did American Jews respond?

### **Mon. Nov. 6                    Film: *Gentleman's Agreement***

View on your own outside of class. Available for view on Penn Video Network:  
<http://www.upenn.edu/video/>



**Wed. Nov. 8                    American Jews and the Holocaust**

Henry Feingold, "Who Shall Bear the Guilt for the Holocaust? The Human Dilemma," in Sarna, *The American Jewish Experience*, pp. 274-92.

Deborah Lipstadt, *Playing the Blame Game*, (lecture delivered at University of Michigan)  
<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/b/belin/13469761.0018.001/--playing-the-blame-game-american-jews-look-back-at?rgn=main;view=fulltext>

Documents: "The Anti-Nazi Boycott, 1933-38," in Marc Lee Raphael, *Jews and Judaism in the United States: A Documentary History*, pp. 319-29.

"Rabbi and Activist: Stephen S. Wise," "Advocate for Rescue: Henry Morgenthau Jr.," and "Witness to History: Ruth Gruber," in Wenger, *The Jewish Americans: Three Centuries of Jewish Voices in America*, pp. 272-82.

Questions to Consider: By what measure should we assess American Jewish responses to the Holocaust? How did American Jews respond to the Nazi threat and the reports of extermination camps?

**Mon. Nov. 13                    Post-War Jewish Life**

Arthur Goren, "A 'Golden Decade' for American Jews: 1945-1955," in Sarna, *The American Jewish Experience*, pp. 294-311.

Deborah Dash Moore, "Jewish Migration in Postwar America: The Case of Miami and Los Angeles," in Sarna, *The American Jewish Experience*, pp. 314-27.

Documents: "Commentary – A Magazine for Postwar Jewry: Elliot Cohen," "Jewish Miss America: Bess Meyerson," "America's Relationship to the New State of Israel: Jacob Blaustein," and "A Difference of Opinion on the Death Sentence of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg," in Wenger, *The Jewish Americans: Three Centuries of Jewish Voices in America*, pp. 311-27.

Discussion of film *Gentleman's Agreement*.

Questions to consider: Were the immediate postwar years a "Golden Decade" for American Jews? What new conditions and circumstances did Jews face during this period?

**Wed. Nov. 15                    Jews in Suburbia: Prosperity and Uneasiness**

Lila Corwin Berman, "American Jews and the Ambivalence of Middle-Classness," *American Jewish History* 93:4 (Dec. 2007): 409-34.

Riv-Ellen Prell, “Triumph, Accommodation, and Resistance: American Jewish Life from the End of World War II to the Six Day War ” in Marc Raphael ed., *The Columbia History of Jews and Judaism in America*, pp. 114-41.

Questions to consider: How did American Jews experience the upward mobility that accompanied the postwar years? What anxieties and uncertainties came along with prosperity and life in the suburbs?

**Mon. Nov. 20                    Varieties of Religious Jewish Expression**

Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism: A History*, pp. 274-306.

Sue Fishkoff, *The Rebbe’s Army: Inside the World of Chabad-Lubavitch*, pp. 3-32.

Documents: Reform Judaism: A Centenary Perspective (1976).

A Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism (1999).

“Reflections of America’s First Woman Rabbi: Sally Priesand,” and “Jewish Feminist Pioneers: Ezrat Nashim,” in Wenger, *The Jewish Americans: Three Centuries of Jewish Voices in America*, pp. 347-54.

Questions to consider: How did Jewish identity and community change in the post-World War II years? Evaluate the nature of Jewish religious practice, denominationalism, and culture in the last half of the twentieth century.

**Mon. Nov. 27                    Recent Jewish Identity: Black-Jewish Relations  
and New Political Expressions**

Cheryl Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century*, pp. 205-55.

Debra L. Schultz, “Going South: Jewish Women in the Civil Rights Movement,” in Nadell, *American Jewish Women’s History: A Reader*, pp. 281-96.

Documents: “Theologian and Activist: Abraham Joshua Heschel,” in Wenger, *The Jewish Americans: Three Centuries of Jewish Voices in America*, pp. 335-37.

Sam Heilman, “How Trump Split the Jewish Vote, *Haaretz*, Nov. 11, 2016.

Questions to consider: How has the relationship between Jews and African Americans evolved? How would you describe the nature of contemporary Jewish politics?

**Wed. Nov. 29                    Recent Jewish Identity: Popular Culture and Identity**

David Zurawik, *The Jews of Prime Time*, pp. 1-16.

Documents: “Creator of *The Goldbergs*: Gertrude Berg,” “Pioneer of Television Comedy: Sid Caesar,” and “Fifty Years of Comedy: Carl Reiner,” in Wenger, *The Jewish Americans: Three Centuries of Jewish Voices in America*, pp. 246-49, 328-34.

TV CLIPS: On Canvas and screened in class.

Questions to consider: How have Jews been portrayed in media and television? How do these images reflect Jewish culture and shape perceptions of Jews in American culture?

**Mon. Dec. 4                    Visit to National Museum of American Jewish History (This will be scheduled outside of class time.)**  
**\*\*SEE ASSIGNMENT NUMBER III BELOW**

**Wed. Dec. 6                    An examination of the 2013 Pew Foundation “A Portrait of Jewish Americans”**  
**• GROUPS ASSIGNED TO PRESENT PORTIONS OF THE STUDY**

<http://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey/>

**Mon. Dec. 11                    Contemporary Jewish life: A Debate**

Sylvia Barack Fishman, *Double or Nothing?: Jewish Families and Mixed Marriage*, pp. 152-67.

Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism: A History*, pp. 356-74.

Questions to consider: How has the Jewish community in America evolved and changed to reach its current character in the new millennium? Are there overriding themes of American Jewish life? What are the various assessments about Jewish identity and culture? How would you evaluate contemporary Jewish life?

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## WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

### **I. ONE Critical Reading of a Primary Source Document:**

#### **\*CHOOSE 1 OF THE THREE BELOW**

The purpose of this assignment is to focus on the primary source documents that historians use to construct the past. You should write a 5-7-page analysis of one of the following primary sources:

1. *Memoirs of Abraham Kohn*: DUE SEPT. 13  
Available on Canvas (in the readings assigned for Sept. 13), this memoir was written by a nineteenth-century Jewish immigrant. Analyze this text as an historical document: What can we learn about the experience of Jewish immigrants from the memoirs of Abraham Kohn? You might also consider what memoirs offer as an historical source?

2. Isaac Metzker, ed., *A Bintel Brief*: DUE OCT. 9  
Available on reserve in the library, this is a collection of letters written to the advice column of the Yiddish-language *Jewish Daily Forward*. These "Dear Abby" style letters reflect some of the family problems, labor struggles, political issues, and cultural adjustments of East European immigrants. What do they reveal about immigrant acculturation? You might also consider how historians can use these letters as a source.

\* For this paper, you should consult the book itself (not just the excerpts on assigned for class). The book is on reserve in the library.

3. Anzia Yezierska, "The Fat of the Land" in *Hungry Hearts* DUE OCT. 18  
AND/OR

Abraham Cahan, "A Sweatshop Romance," in *Yekl and the Imported Bridegroom and Other Stories of Yiddish New York*.

These are literary portraits of the American Jewish experience, told from the perspective of Jewish writers. What prevailing themes in American Jewish life emerge in these works? You might also consider how historians can use literary works, like these, as historical sources? Feel free to write about one of the short stories or to consider themes that emerge from both.

### **II. TWO Film Responses:**

1. *The Jazz Singer* DUE OCT. 10  
Please post on the discussion page on Canvas a 1-2 paragraph response to the film *The Jazz Singer*. Consider the film's portrayal of immigrant culture, of African Americans,

and/or the use of blackface by the main character. How might this film have been received by popular audiences at the time? You need not address all of these issues and are free to discuss others. This is merely a list of suggestions.

2. *Gentleman's Agreement*

DUE: NOV. 8

Please post on the discussion page on Canvas a 1-2 paragraph response to the film *Gentleman's Agreement*. Consider how it presents Jews in American culture, exploring how it treats Jewish identity and anti-Semitism, and evaluating it in the context of the time that it was presented to American audiences, and/or offering similar historical insights. You need not address all of these issues and are free to discuss others. This is merely a list of suggestions.

**III. ONE Review Essay of the National Museum of American Jewish History's exhibition (6-8 PAGES):**

National Museum of American Jewish History

DUE: DEC. 11

You should write this review as if you have been asked to review the exhibition for an academic journal. Ask yourself how this museum exhibition portrays the history of American Jews. How does it use artifacts to narrate history? Do you find any distortions or omissions in the exhibition? What broad themes does the visitor to this exhibition learn about American Jewish history? Is this how you would narrate American Jewish history? (You do not have to answer all or any of these questions. These are simply the sorts of questions you might keep in mind.) Do not try to cover everything raised in the exhibition; rather, create a clear thesis and support your argument with specific examples and with your knowledge of American Jewish history.