

JACKSON SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

JEWISH STUDIES PROGRAM
Autumn 2006 M-TH 11:30-12:20

SISJE 250 *Introduction to Jewish Cultural History*

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Phone: 543-9846 Office: Thomson 415 Hours: By Appointment

Course Description: This course surveys the astonishing number of regional cultures produced by the Jews in their long history. The main “theoretical” angle of the course is that the diverse Jewish cultures we shall explore are always co-produced in conversation with other peoples in the non-Jewish world. Speaking metaphorically, Jewish cultures are “filtration systems” that operate at two simultaneous levels. At a conscious, often ideologically explicit level, Jews will permit some cultural traditions of “non-Jews” to enter into the Jewish cultural vocabulary only after great scrutiny (e.g., representations of the Zodiac in ancient and medieval synagogues). They will also explicitly reject others for various reasons (e.g., polygamy among Jews in medieval Christian lands). At a more sub-conscious level, however, traditions of the surrounding “non-Jewish” cultures often penetrate the “ideological filters” with scarce notice, and come to be regarded as “essential” markers of Jewish identity (e.g., the long kaftans of Hasidic Jews and, as it happens, matzah balls, bagels, and, even, *klezmer* music!). Thus, while most Jewish cultures DO perceive an essentially “Jewish” identity that incorporates the present community into a long history of the Jews, historians of Jewish cultures perceive “Jewish culture” as something undergoing constant reinvention under the pressure of the ongoing relationships between Jews and non-Jews.

Required Texts (* = available at UWBS or Odegaard Reserve)

*R. Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jews* (Oxford U).

This is a readable and reliable introductory survey of Jewish history. It will prepare you for the much more demanding readings in the following volume.

*D. Biale, ed., *Cultures of the Jews*, vols. 1-3 (Schocken).

A collection of often brilliant and remarkably knowledgeable essays by contemporary scholars on the entire sweep of Jewish cultural history. Most class assignments will include reading of one of these essays, some of which are quite lengthy. But you won't be able to grasp lectures without this book.

In addition to conventional textbooks, the final unit of the course, on the role of American popular music in American Jewish culture in the 20th century, is dependent upon readings found only in websites. These are below. I have also compiled a multi-CD musical anthology to accompany the lectures in this unit of the course. Guaranteed, you'll want to dance at least once.

<http://www.insideout.org/documentaries/jewsandblues/notebook.asp> (Jews & Blues)

<http://www.jass.com/jazzo.html> (Jazz history)

<http://www.history-of-rock.com/blues.htm> (Blues history)
<http://www.chazzanut.com/rosenblatt/rosenblatt-notes.html> (cantorial music)
<http://borzykowski.users.ch/EnglMCKlezmer.htm> (Klezmer music)
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scott_Joplin (Scott Joplin)
<http://www.redhotjazz.com/louie.html> (Louis Armstrong)
http://www.galegroup.com/free_resources/bhm/bio/holiday_b.htm (Billie Holiday)
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cab_Calloway (Cab Calloway)
<http://www.gershwin.com/> (George and Ira Gershwin)
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al_Jolson (Al Jolson)
<http://www.kcmetro.cc.mo.us/pennvalley/biology/lewis/crosby/berlin.htm> (Irving Berlin)
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benny_Goodman (Benny Goodman)
<http://www.history-of-rock.com/indx.html> (history of rock)
<http://jewsrock.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=words.view&wordid=E0736A45-3930-4C77-AC40547568A63145> (Boβ Δυλαβ)
<http://www.felderpomus.com/docpomus1.html#ShortBio> (Doc Pomus)
<http://www.warr.org/cking.html> (Carol King)
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leonard_Cohen (Leonard Cohen)
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phil_Spector (Phil Spector)
<http://clevelandjewishradio.tripod.com/hattitude.html> (Black Hattitude)
<http://www.answers.com/topic/allan-sherman> (Allan Sherman)
<http://www.myjewishlearning.com/culture/Music/AmericanJewishMusicTO/DebbieFriedman.htm> (Debbie Friedman)
<http://www.stat.tamu.edu/~sherman/Jmusic/lenny.htm> (Shlock Rock)
<http://www.arigoldman.com/articles/carlebach.html> (Shlomo Carlebach)
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matisyahu> (Matisyahu)

Grading and Course Requirements:

Your grade will be computed on the basis of **three** kinds of evidence:

--A short-answer exam (taken in class on 10/16) in which you'll be asked to assess the historical significance of several key events or eras in the history of the Jews (20% of final grade)

--A 5 page essay on **one** of the following topics (40% of final grade):

- a) The problem of the "essence" of Jewish culture in light of our discussions of the composite character of Jewish cultures in antiquity (due 10/30), **OR**
- b) The problem of the "self/other dialectic" of Jewish culture in light of our discussions of medieval Jewish cultural identities (due 11/9), **OR**
- c) The problem of the "religion/culture distinction" in light of our discussions of Jewish cultures in modernity (due 11/28).

--A 5 page essay (due 12/11), on a topic of your choice, connected to the issue of interpreting the role of popular music in American Jewish culture (40% of final grade).

Syllabus:

9/27 Organizational Session

I A Survey of Jewish History

9/28 The “Biblical” Period: Scheindlin, 1-23

10/2 NO CLASS: YOM KIPPUR

10/3 The Second Temple and Hellenistic Periods: Scheindlin, 25-49

10/4 The Formation of Classical Rabbinic Judaism in Late Antiquity: Scheindlin, 51-71

10/5 Jews and Judaism under Islam and Christendom: Scheindlin, 71-121

10/9 “Early Modern” Judaism in the Middle East and Europe: Scheindlin, 123-171

10/11 The “New World” Context of Judaism: Scheindlin, 173-197

10/12 The Jewish Twentieth Century: Scheindlin, 199-263

10/16 First Mid-Term Exam (In Class)

II “Composite” Jewish Cultures in Antiquity

10/17 Frame of Analysis: The Idea of “Essential” Cultural Identity

10/18 Canaan and Israelite Cultural Origins: Biale 1:43-75 (Hendel)

10/19 Greek Hellenism and the Jewish Diaspora: Biale 1:77-132 (Gruen)

10/23 Hebraic Hellenism and Palestinian Jewry: Biale 1: 135-179 (Meyers)

10/24 Rabbinic Culture in Orthodox Christian Byzantium: Biale 1:181-221 (Irshai)

10/25 Rabbinic Culture in Zoroastrian Babylonia: Biale: 1: 223-265 (Gafni)

10/26 Arabian Jewry at the Dawn of Islam: Biale 1: 267-302 (Firestone)

10/30 First optional essay due at the beginning of class

III The “Self/Other” Dialectic in Medieval Ashkenaz and Sefarad

10/30 Frame of Analysis: Communal Boundaries of “Self” & “Other”

11/1 Islam in the Construction of Sephardic Culture: Biale 2: 11-84 (Scheindlin)

11/2 The Creation of Sephardic Identity: Biale 2: 87-145 (Gampel)

11/6 Christianity in Ashkenazic Culture: Biale 2: 147-214 (Marcus)

11/7 The Yeshivah World of Polish Ashkenaz: Biale 2: 217-268 (Rosman)

11/8 Jewish Cultures: “High” and “Folk”: Biale 2: 369-420 (Sabar)

11/9 Second optional essay due at beginning of class

IV “Religion” and “Culture” in Jewish Modernity

11/13 Frame of Analysis: Defining “Religion” & “Culture”

11/14 The Sephardic Diaspora of Northern Europe: Biale 2: 337-367 (Kaplan)

11/15 The Urban Landscape of Western Ashkenaz: Biale 3: 9-75 (Cohen)

11/16 Cultural Upheaval in Eastern Ashkenaz: Biale 3:77-139 (Biale)

11/20 The Modernization of Ottoman Jewry: Biale 3:141-163 (Rodrigue)

11/21 Zionism and Israeli Modernism: Biale 3: 289-339 (Hirschfeld)

11/22-23: NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING

11/27 Israeli Sub- and Counter-Cultures: Biale 3:341-375 (Yassif)

11/28 Third optional essay due at beginning of class

V A Case Study in Cultural Interpretation: Ashkenazic Jews & the Blues

11/28 American-Jewish Popular Culture: Biale 3: 377-424

11/29, 12/4 The Immigrant Founders: Al Jolson, Irving Berlin, the Gershwins
<http://www.insideout.org/documentaries/jewsandblues/notebook.asp> (Jews & Blues)

12/5-6 Invisible Ethnicity: Doc Pomus, Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen

<http://www.history-of-rock.com/indx.html>

<http://jewsrock.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=words.view&wordid=E0736A45-3930-4C77-AC40547568A63145>

<http://www.felderpomus.com/docpomus1.html#ShortBio>

<http://www.warr.org/cking.html>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leonard_Cohen

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phil_Spector

12/7-9 Jewish Rock Out of the Closet: From Allan Sherman to Matisyahu

<http://clevelandjewishradio.tripod.com/hattitude.html>

<http://www.answers.com/topic/allan-sherman>

<http://www.myjewishlearning.com/culture/Music/AmericanJewishMusicTO/DebbieFriedman.htm>

<http://www.stat.tamu.edu/~sherman/Jmusic/lenny.htm>

<http://www.arigoldman.com/articles/carlebach.html>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matisyahu>

12/11 Final essay due at 12:30 pm in my office/mailbox