IAH 211C

Area Studies in the Americas:

Beyond Sandler and Seinfeld: An Introduction to American Jewish Culture

Fall 2016

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This class is designed to introduce students to some key issues and debates in modern American Jewish culture. Rather than examining Jewish culture as one integrated body, we will look at the different ways that different Jewish people throughout the country construct their identities, their heritage, and their religion. We will also examine the conflicts that have arisen among Jews because of these differences, as well as the unities that make Jews see themselves as one people.

As an IAH course, this class is also designed "to help students to become more familiar  
with ways of knowing in the arts and humanities and to be more knowledgeable  
and capable in a range of intellectual and expressive abilities.  IAH courses encourage students to engage critically with their own society, history, and culture(s) or to learn more about the history and culture of other societies.  They focus on key ideas and issues in human experience; encourage appreciation of the roles of knowledge and of values in shaping and understanding human behavior; emphasize the responsibilities and opportunities of democratic citizenship, highlight the importance of language, and the value of the creative arts, and alert us to important issues that occur and re-occur among peoples in an increasingly interconnected, interdependent world."

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

Miryam Kabakov, ed., *Keep Your Wives Away From Them*

Loolwa Khazzoom, ed., *The Flying Camel*

Art Spiegelman, *Maus I* and *Maus II*

Paul Zakrzewski, ed., *Lost Tribe*

Fermaglich, Document packet, IAH 211C, (materials in this packet are listed on the syllabus as “Document 1,” “Document 2,” and so on)

**OPTIONAL TEXTS**

Raymond Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People*

Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism*

All texts are available at the Student Bookstore, 421 Grand River Ave., 351-4210

The Document Packet is **ONLY** available at the Student Bookstore listed above.

All texts, except the Document Packet, are also available on 2-hour reserve at the Main Library, 884-0844.

**REQUIRED FILMS**

*The Chosen* (1981; dir. Jeremy Kagan)

*Everything is Illuminated* (2005; dir. Liev Schreiber)

*Half the Kingdom* (1989; dir. Roushell Goldstein and Francine Zuckerman)

*In Search of Bene Israel* (2008; dir. Sadia Shepard)

*Trembling Before G-d* (2001; dir. Sandi Simcha Dubrowski)

Films will be available on reserve at the Digital and Multimedia Center (DMC) at the Main Library (4W). Films on reserve must be viewed in the DMC; please call the DMC for hours and other details (432-6123 x288).

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

**Class participation**: **20 percent**

Course participation includes ***attendance***, ***preparation*** and ***participation***.

***Attendance:*** I do not take attendance, but I do expect you to attend class regularly. If you miss classes, you must contact other students in the class to get detailed lecture notes and other information. You are responsible for anything you miss while you are absent.

***Preparation***: You must read the material due every day for class. You are also responsible for bringing in the texts due each day. (if you do not plan to buy books, please be prepared for class discussion with detailed notes)

***Participation***: You need to participate in class discussions each day. Participation can mean asking a question, answering a question, or offering an opinion. You cannot remain silent or passive in class and get a good grade for participation. Participation also includes respectful engagement with others in class: students who are rude or dismissive of others’ comments will see their participation grades reduced.

***Grading scale for class participation:***

4.0 You attend class just about every day, are always prepared, follow lecture attentively, and you participate in class conversation constructively at least once a day.

3.0 You attend class frequently (although you may have been absent 2 or 3 days), and you sometimes participate constructively in class conversation

2.0 You attend class regularly (although you may have been absent 4 or 5 days), and you are generally awake in class, but you never participate in class discussions.

1.0 You are frequently absent from class or you are actively disruptive in class (doing the crossword puzzle, doing work for other classes, text messaging on your phone, checking Facebook or surfing the Web, passing notes or talking to other students, sleeping, rudely dismissing others, etc.)

0.0 You only show up to class to drop off or pick up papers; I couldn't pick you out of a lineup.

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**Response questions**: **20 percent**

Throughout the semester, I will post on D2L a set of questions for the readings that are due in class. **Your responses to these questions are due posted to the class dropbox on D2L by 12 pm the day of class**.

I will only grade these responses with a check or check minus (you'll receive a minus only if you turn in the responses late, or if it's clear you haven't done the reading or haven’t thought at all about your answers).

I am interested in seeing you think about the questions. You should write roughly two or three sentences to answer each question—a paragraph maximum.

You will **not** be graded on writing style, organization or content.

Just as with formal papers, weekly assignments should be written in your own words, but you should offer specific examples and cite pages from the text to help you answer the questions.

You **must** first write your weekly assignments on a Microsoft Word document, then cut and paste that text into D2L; your assignment will not be given a check if it was lost in D2L and you do not have a backup Microsoft Word document.

Note that some response questions are due on Mondays and others on Wednesdays—please make note of this and do not get confused.

Response questions will **not** be accepted later than one week past their due date.

Grading scale for response questions:

There are 7 sets of questions.

You get 15 points for a check; 7 points for a check minus.

If you get 105 points, you get a 4.25

If you get 95-100 points, you get a 4.0

If you get 89-94 points, you get a 3.5

If you get 79-88 points, you get a 3.0

If you get 75-78 points, you get a 2.5

If you get 70-74 points, you get a 2.0

If you get fewer than 70 points, you get a 0.0 for this portion of your grade

**Papers**: **three 5-7 page papers: each 20 percent**

**Paper 1 is due posted to D2L Friday, October 7, at 5 pm**

**Paper 2 due posted to D2L on Friday, November 11, by 5 pm**

**Paper 3 is due posted to D2L on Friday, December 9, at 5 pm**

**There is no final exam in this class. There is a final class meeting on Thursday, December 15 at 12:45 pm.**

**POLICIES**

**Lateness:**

Late papers' grades are dropped .5 each day they are late. Weekend days count as days late, and you cannot hand in a paper more than 1 week late.

Response questions turned in late automatically receive a check minus; you cannot hand in response questions more than 1 week late.

**Final exams cannot be turned in late.**

**Rewrites:**

Anyone who receives a grade equal to or lower than a 3.25 can rewrite a paper; rewrites must be turned in a week after you receive your paper back graded. I strongly encourage you to come speak with me before turning in a rewrite, but it is not required.

**Plagiarism:**

Please see the handout posted on D2L for a definition of plagiarism.

Plagiarism can result in a grade of 0.0 for a paper or in a grade of 0.0 for the class, depending on the circumstances. Do not plagiarize.

**Religious holidays:**

Please see me about any conflicts between class and religious holidays **at least a week beforehand**. I am happy to give extensions, early assignments, and other help in making up work.

**Disabilities:**

Please see me as early as possible if you have any learning disabilities. I am happy to accommodate your needs in any way I can.

**D2L:**

This class makes extensive use of D2L (www.d2l.msu.edu) for posting assignments and other materials. If you are having trouble accessing D2L, please contact (517) 355-2345 or 1-800-500-1554: the help line is open 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

**A failure of D2L is not an excuse for failing to turn in an assignment**. You should visit D2L regularly and print out assignments early so that if D2L crashes the day before an assignment, you are not caught unaware. **If you are having trouble accessing D2L when your paper is due, you should email me the paper so that you do not risk turning in your paper late.**

**Email:**

I use email quite frequently to communicate with you about class matters. Please be sure that you check email at least once a day on weekdays. In return, please know that I check email at least once a day on weekdays and will make every effort to respond to you within 24 hours of your message. I do not regularly check email on weekends, however, so please be aware that I may not be able to respond to weekend emails until Monday.

**Evaluations:**

Like all IAH courses, this course uses the online Student Instructional Rating System (SIRS) to gather student feedback (<http://rateyourclass.msu.edu/>). You will receive an e-mail during the last two weeks of class asking you to fill out the SIRS web form at your convenience. Participation in the online SIRS system means that the final grade for this course will not be accessible on STUINFO during the week following the submission of grades for this course unless the SIRS online form has been completed. You have the option on the SIRS website to decline to participate in the evaluation of the course. I do hope, however, that you will be willing to give constructive feedback—constructive criticism is a great aid to me in helping to improve my class. Once you access the online SIRS website and either complete the online SIRS form or decline to participate, you will receive the final grade in this course as usual once final grades are submitted.

**Help Rooms:**

The College of Social Science has established Help Rooms, which offer academic support to students enrolled in History courses and IAH and ISS courses taught by History professors. The Help Rooms are staffed by experienced undergraduate students majoring in history and operate in the Neighborhoods and Main Library, with numerous sessions offered throughout the week to accommodate students’ schedules. For a full list of locations, hours of operation, and upcoming workshops, please visit them at SocialScience.msu.edu/HelpRooms.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

Wednesday, August 31: Introduction to the Class

Monday, September 5: **Class canceled for Labor Day**

Wednesday, September 7: Who are the Jews, and what are they doing in America?

**Assignment due**: Myla Goldberg, “Bee Season” in Zakrzewski, *Lost Tribe*, 375-399.

Jonathan Safran Foer, “The Very Rigid Search,” in Zakrzewski, *Lost Tribe*, 476-504.

# PART ONE: RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES AMONG JEWS

Monday, September 12: Branches of Judaism: Traditional Judaism

Wednesday, September 14: Branches of Judaism: The Revolt of Reform

In-class reading**:** Document 1: *The Pittsburgh Platform*

Monday, September 19: Branches of Judaism: Conservatism

In-class reading: Document 2: Samuel Heilman, “Holding Firmly With an Open Hand”

Wednesday, September 21: Branches of Judaism: Varieties of Orthodoxy

**Assignment due**:

Tova Mirvis, “A Poland, a Lithuania, a Galicia” in Zakrzewski, *Lost Tribe*, 400-421.

Document 3: Stephanie Wellen Levine, *Mystics, Mavericks, Merrymakers*, 158-74

Film: *The Chosen*

Monday, September 26: Branches of Judaism: Varieties of Orthodoxy

Wednesday, September 28: Tying material together

In-class activity: paper-writing workshop

**PART TWO: GENDER, ETHNIC, AND RACIAL DIVISIONS AMONG JEWS**

*A. Ethnic and Racial Divisions*

Monday, October 3: **Class cancelled for Rosh Hashanah**

Wednesday, October 5: Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews

***Friday, October 7: paper 1 due posted to D2L at 5 pm***

Monday, October 10: In-class speaker: Bryan Roby: Mizrahi Jews in Israel

Wednesday, October 12: **Class canceled for Yom Kippur**

Monday, October 17: Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews

**Assignment due**: Iny, “Ashkenazi Eyes,”

Tompkins, “Home is Where You Make It,”

Khazzoom, “We are Here and This is Ours,”

All in Khazzoom, *Flying Camel*

Wednesday, October 19: Askenazic and Sephardic Jews

In-class viewing: *In Search of Bene Israel*

*B. Gender Divisions*

Monday, October 24: Gender among Jews: traditional roles

Wednesday, October 26: Gender among Jews: challenges of contemporary feminism

**Assignment due:** Arami, “A Synagogue of One’s Own,” in Khazzoom, *Flying Camel*

Document 4: Reguer, “*Kaddish* from the Wrong Side”

Document 5: Pogrebin, “One Man, Two Fathers”

Monday, October 31: Gender among Jews: challenges of contemporary feminism

In-class viewing: *Half the Kingdom* (excerpts)

Wednesday, November 2: Gender among Jews: challenges of gay liberation

**Assignment due**: Miryam Kabakov, “I Will See You On the Way Out,”

Ex-Yeshiva Girl, “For You, Now We Are Waiting For You”

Joy Ladin, “In the Image,”

All in *Keep Your Wives Away From Them*.

Monday, November 7: Gender among Jews: challenges of gay liberation

In-class viewing: *Trembling Before G-*d

## **PART THREE: POLITICAL DIVISIONS AMONG JEWS**

## **A. Holocaust: who owns history, survivors or artists?**

Wednesday, November 9: Holocaust and the United States: some background

***Friday, November 11: Paper 2 due posted on D2L at 5 pm***

Monday, November 14: Holocaust and the United States: some background

In-class reading: *Maus I*

Wednesday, November 16: Holocaust and the United States: understanding survivors

**Assignment due**: *Maus I* and *Maus II*

Monday, November 21: Holocaust and the United States: understanding survivors

Wednesday, November 23: **class cancelled for Thanksgiving**

Monday, November 28: The Holocaust and American Jewish Identity

**Assignment due**: Lowenthal, “Ordinary Pain,” in Zakrzewski, *Lost Tribe*, 248-64.

Kirschenbaum, “Who Knows Kaddish” in Zakrzewski, *Lost Tribe*, 171-182.

Film: *Everything is Illuminated*

Wednesday, November 30: Israel: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since 1948

***B. Israel: dilemmas of statehood***

Monday, December 5: Israel: American Jewish identity and Zionism

In-class readings: Documents 6 and 7 and 8: Diner, Feld, and Efron, *Ha’aretz* (August 2016)

Wednesday, December 7: tying everything up

***Paper 3 is due posted on D2L by Friday, December 9, at 5 pm.***

**There is a final class meeting on Thursday, December 15 at 12:45 pm. Details are TBA.**