

## **Jews and Hollywood**

Spring, 2019

M,W,F | Period 4 (10:40 AM - 11:30 AM)

Keene-Flint 105

AMH 3931 Section 11A6

JST 3930, section 4D09

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Office hours: Tuesdays 2-4 pm., and by appointment

The course explores the history of Jews and Hollywood, i.e., the film and television industries. We will look at how and why Jews became involved with motion pictures in the early twentieth century, the rise of the studio system, the representation of Jews on screen (or the absence of this representation), Jewish actors, writers, and producers, and how the overrepresentation of Jews in Hollywood was interpreted (and misinterpreted) by other Americans. We'll explore how Jews used culture in order to integrate into American society, and we will also examine how the very contours of American culture were transformed because of this engagement. The course will introduce students to the main themes of modern American Jewish history—immigration, assimilation, secularization, identity politics— through discussions of popular visual culture. It will also explore images of gender, class, religion and ethnicity as it pertains to the representation of Jews and Judaism.

The main theme that will be traced through this course is the shifting comfort and discomfort Jews and non-Jews have felt in the public representation, the visibility, of Jews, Judaism, and Jewishness, and the way in which such representations both reflect and shape Jews' relationship to the United States.

### **REQUIRED TEXTS:**

Eric A. Goldman, *The American Jewish Story Through Cinema*. This book is required and can be purchased at the UF bookstore.

All other assigned readings are to be found in Canvas. These are essays and book

chapters that have been turned into pdf files. **These are also required readings for the course.**

NOTE THAT DURING THE COURSE OF THE SEMESTER I MAY ADD FILES TO THE CANVAS PAGE, AND THAT THESE ARE ALSO PART OF THE REQUIRED READINGS. I WILL TELL YOU IN CLASS AND/OR THROUGH EMAIL WHEN I DO THIS.

Suggested further reading, though not required: Neil Gabler, *An Empire of their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood*

## **Course Requirements:**

Attendance is required. More than three unexcused absences and your final grade will be affected.

There will be two in-class exams in this course and one take-home essay assignment.

The **in-class midterms** will test your familiarity with the material covered in class lectures and discussions, and the reading of the assigned books and articles.

**THE FIRST IN-CLASS MIDTERM WILL BE GIVEN ON FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 15.  
IT WILL BE WORTH 25% OF THE FINAL GRADE.**

**THE SECOND IN-CLASS MIDTERM EXAM WILL BE ON WEDNESDAY, APRIL 24.  
IT IS WORTH 35% OF THE FINAL GRADE.**

**THE TAKE-HOME ESSAY ASSIGNMENT CAN BE FOUND IN A SEPARATE FILE IN  
CANVASS. THIS ASSIGNMENT IS WORTH 40% OF THE FINAL GRADE.**

Grades are based on a number of interconnected factors: mastery of assigned material, analytical skills, and writing ability. Quality counts over quantity. To the extent that we can judge such things, effort also counts. This does not mean that you get credit just for showing up and doing the minimal amount of work. Rather, it means that you get some credit if your work conveys an investment of time and mental energy on your part, even if the final product is not perfect.

**Organization of the Course:** The lectures and discussions are organized thematically. We will spend as much time as necessary on a theme and then move on to the next. Classroom meetings will consist of a combination of general historical background and focused analysis of a particular example of culture. The reading assignments are designed to supplement these thematic discussions. If you attend class on a regular basis you should have no trouble matching the readings to the lectures.

### **1. Introduction: Jews Visible and Invisible**

#### **Reading:**

Eric Goldman, *American Jewish Story*, pages 1-16.

Stephen J. Whitfield, "Movies," from *American Space, Jewish Time*

### **2. The Silent Era, 1907-1927**

**Reading:**

Lester Friedman, "Celluloid Assimilation: Jews in American Silent Movies," *Journal of Popular Film and Television*

**3. The Rise of the "Jewish Studios"**

Film: *Hollywoodism*

**Reading:**

Thomas Cripps, "Hollywood becomes HOLLYWOOD", from *Hollywood's High Noon*

Wheeler Winston-Dixon, "'A Rotten Bunch of Vile People with no Respect for Anything Beyond the Making of Money'," from *Hollywood's Chosen People*

Eric Goldstein, "The Great Wave: Eastern European Jewish Immigration to the United States, 1880-1924," in *The Columbia History of Jews and Judaism in America*

**4. The Anxieties of Americanization**

Film: *The Jazz Singer* (1927, 89 min)

**Reading:**

Goldman, *Jewish Story*, pages 17-49

Gerald Sorin, "New York as the Promised City," in *A Time for Building: The Third Migration, 1880-1920*

**5. Hitler and Hollywood**

Films: *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, *The Mortal Storm*, *The Great Dictator*

**Reading:**

"Jewish Supremacy in Motion Picture World," from *The Dearborn Independent*, 1921

Felicia Herman, "Hollywood, Nazism, and the Jews, 1933-41," *American Jewish History*

**6. At Home in America? American Antisemitism and the Cold War**

Films: *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947, 118 min), *Crossfire* (1947, 86 min)

**Reading:**

Goldman, *American Jewish Story*, pages 50-96

Elliot Cohen, "Letter to the Movie Makers," *Commentary*, 1947

Dore Schary, "Letter from a Movie Maker," *Commentary*, 1947

Darryl Fox, "Crossfire" and "HUAC", from *Film History*

Jennifer Langdon, "Discovering *Crossfire*," Introduction to her book on *Crossfire*

**7. At Home in America: Presenting the Jewish Middle Class**

Television: *The Goldbergs*

**Reading:**

Goldman, *American Jewish Story*, pages 97-124

Donald Weber, "Memory and Repression: Goldberg Variations," from *Haunted in the New World*

Lila Corwin Berman, "American Jews and Ambivalence of Middle-Classness," *American Jewish History*

## **8. The Wages of Success in America**

Film: *Fiddler on the Roof* (1971, 181 min)

*Reading:*

Stephen Whitfield, "Fiddling with Sholom Aleichem: A History of *Fiddler on the Roof*," in *Key Texts in American Jewish Culture*

Seth Wolitz, "The Americanization of Tevye or Boarding the Jewish "Mayflower," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Dec., 1988), pp. 514-536

## **9. Jews and the Ethnic Revival in America**

Films and Television: *Bridget Loves Bernie* (1972-73), *The Frisco Kid* (1979, 114 min)

### **Reading:**

Goldman, *American Jewish Story*, pages 125-151

Joyce Antler, "Not 'Too Jewish' for Prime Time, from *Television's Changing Image of American Jews* [pdf file]

## **10. Mad About Jews**

TV shows: *Mad About You*, *Thirtysomething*, *Northern Exposure*, *Seinfeld*, *The Daily Show*

### **Reading:**

Goldman, *American Jewish Story*, pages 152-201

Daniel Itzkovitz, "They All Are Jews," in *You Should See Yourself*, edited by Vincent Brook