

**JS 381: THE JEW IN AMERICAN SOCIETY**  
University of Southern California  
Instructor: Dr. Sarah Bunin Benor  
Fall 2010

Course ID: 38262R  
Time: Mondays and Wednesdays, 2-3:20pm  
Location: Taper Hall B10  
Office hours: By appointment (don't be shy!)  
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<http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#!/pages/Jewish-Studies-at-USC/153674587980302?ref=sgm>  
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**DESCRIPTION:**

A social science course examining contemporary American Jews and Judaism. Topics include Jewish identities, layers of community, and changing patterns of Jewish observance and affiliation. Students will learn about the American Jewish denominations, institutions, forms of education, approaches to Zionism, attitudes toward intermarriage, and cultural preferences, including food, music, and language. This class also looks at a number of Jewish subpopulations, including gay and lesbian, deaf, immigrant, and multi-racial Jews.

**FORMAT:**

The format is interactive lectures and discussion, as well as student presentations. Classroom activities will include structured debates, case studies, and guest lectures. Students will interact with the course material through quotes, graphs, tables, music, art, websites, and advertisements. The success of the class depends on active student participation. Therefore, attendance is mandatory, and students are expected to complete all reading assignments before each class. If you need to be absent, you are responsible for asking a classmate to take detailed notes and get any handouts for you. Any absences over 2 will affect your grade.

**REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:**

15%: Attendance and prepared participation in class  
10%: Assignment #1  
10%: Assignment #2  
10%: Assignment #3 presentation  
25%: Assignment #3 paper  
30%: Final exam

**REQUIRED TEXTS:**

Diner, Hasia. 2004. *The Jews of the United States: 1654-2000*. Berkeley: U.C. Press.

Kaplan, Dana Evan, ed. 2005. *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism*. Ed., Dana Evan Kaplan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fader, Ayala. 2009. *Mitzvah Girls: Bringing Up the Next Generation of Hasidic Jews in Brooklyn*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Kelner, Shaul. 2010. *Tours That Bind: Diaspora, Pilgrimage, and Israel Birthright Tourism*. New York: NYU Press.

A course reader, available from [www.UniversityReaders.com](http://www.UniversityReaders.com). [indicated by (CR)]

All other readings are available on Blackboard (Bb) or other websites.

## **SCHEDULE:**

### **Introduction**

1. Mon, Aug 23: Introduction, Demographics

2. Wed, Aug 25: Personal Meaning of Jewishness

Pogrebin, Abigail. 2005. *Stars of David: Prominent Jews Talk About Being Jewish*. New York: Broadway Books. Brief interviews with Natalie Portman, Ronald O. Perelman, Sarah Jessica Parker, Leon Wieseltier, and Al Franken. (CR)

3. Mon, Aug 30: Historical Background: Community Formation

Diner, Hasia. 2004. *The Jews of the United States: 1654-2000*. Berkeley: U.C. Press. 1-9, 112-154.

4. Wed, Sept 1: Historical Background: At Home in America

Diner, Hasia. 2004. *The Jews of the United States: 1654-2000*. Berkeley: U.C. Press. 205-215, 239-258, 283-304.

### **Visit Skirball Museum by Sept 5.**

Mon, Sept 6: no class (Labor Day)

5. Wed, Sept 8: Traditionalists and Transformationists: Approaches to Jewish Issues

Kaplan, Dana Evan. 2005. Introduction. In *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism*. Ed., Dana Evan Kaplan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1-19.

Bershtel, Sara and Allen Graubard. 1992. *Saving Remnants: Feeling Jewish in America*. 1-8. (CR)

6. Mon, Sept 13: Religion vs. Ethnicity

Kaufman, Devra Renee. "The Place of Judaism in American Jewish Identity." In *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism*. Ed., Dana Evan Kaplan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 169-185.

- Dreisinger, Baz. 2005. "Spot the Jew." In *The Modern Jewish Girl's Guide to Guilt*. Ruth Andrew Ellenson, ed. New York: Dutton. 173-181. (CR)
- Goodman, Allegra. 1996. "The Four Questions." *Commentary* 101:4. 42-50. (CR)

## Religious Life

### 7. Wed, Sept 15: Denominations of American Judaism

- Grossman, Lawrence. 2005. "Jewish Religious Denominations." In *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism*. Ed., Dana Evan Kaplan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 81-99.
- Liebman, Charles. 2005. "The Essence of American Judaism." In *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism*. Ed., Dana Evan Kaplan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 133-144.

### 8. Mon, Sept 20: Trends in Religious Engagement

- Kaplan, Dana Evan. 2005. "Trends in American Judaism from 1945 to the Present." In *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism*. Ed., Dana Evan Kaplan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 61-78.
- Waxman, Chaim. 2005. "Patterns in American Jewish Religious Behavior." In *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism*. Ed., Dana Evan Kaplan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 101-115.

### 9. Wed, Sept 22: Jewish Education

- Aron, Isa, Michael Zeldin, and Sara Lee. 2005. "Jewish Education." In *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism*. Ed., Dana Evan Kaplan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 145-168.

### 10. Mon, Sept 27: Ritual

- Geffen, Rela Mintz. 2005. "Life Cycle Rituals: Rites of Passage in American Judaism." In *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism*. Ed., Dana Evan Kaplan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ochs, Vanessa. 2007. *Inventing Jewish Ritual*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society. Excerpts. (Bb)

## Jewish Culture

### 11. Wed, Sept 29: Language

- Benor, Sarah Bunin. To appear. "Echoes of Yiddish in the Speech of 21<sup>st</sup>-Century American Jews." In *Choosing Yiddish: Studies on Yiddish Literature, Culture, and History*, ed. Lara Rabinovitch, Hannah Pressman, and Shiri Goren. Detroit: Wayne State Press. (Bb)

12. Mon, Oct 4: Music

Kligman, Mark. 2005. "Recent Trends in New American Jewish Music." In *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism*. Ed., Dana Evan Kaplan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 363-380.

Bring to class one song that you consider to be American Jewish music.

13. Wed, Oct 6: Television and Film

Brook, Vincent. 2003. "Something Ain't Kosher Here: The Rise of the 'Jewish' Sitcom." New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press. 118-128. (CR)

Film to be shown in class (TBA)

14. Mon, Oct 11: Food

No reading. Bring "Jewish" recipes or food to class.

***Skirball Museum write-up due.***

## **Jewish Peoplehood, Community, and Engagement**

15. Wed, Oct 13: Universalism vs. Particularism

Cohen, Steven M. and Jack Wertheimer. 2006. "Whatever Happened to the Jewish People." *Commentary*, June 2006. 33-37.

<http://www.huc.edu/faculty/faculty/pubs/StevenCohen/CohenWertheimer.pdf>

Woocher, Jonathan. 2005. "'Sacred Survival' Revisited: American Jewish Civil Religion in the New Millennium." In *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism*. Ed., Dana Evan Kaplan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 283-297.

16. Mon, Oct 18: 20- and 30-Something Jews

Greenberg, Anna. 2006. "Grande Soy Vanilla Latte with Cinnamon, No Foam..." *Jewish Identity and Community in a Time of Unlimited Choices*. Reboot. 3-33.

<http://www.acbp.net/About/PDF/Latte%20Report%202006.pdf>

Cohen, Steven M. and Ari Y. Kelman. 2006. "Cultural Events and Jewish Identities: Young Adult Jews in New York." Executive Summary. 5-16.

<http://www.huc.edu/faculty/faculty/pubs/StevenCohen/CulturalEvents06.pdf>

17. Wed, Oct 20: Israel and Zionism

Rosenthal, Steven. 2005. "Long-Distance Nationalism: American Jews, Zionism, and Israel." In *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism*. Ed., Dana Evan Kaplan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 209-224.

***Sunday, Oct 24: Shabbat Services Ethnography due***

18. Mon, Oct 25: Israel Trips

Kelner, Shaul. 2010. *Tours That Bind: Diaspora, Pilgrimage, and Israel Birthright Tourism*. New York: NYU Press. Pages TBA.

19. Wed, Oct 27: Israel Trips (cont'd)

Kelner, Shaul. 2010. *Tours That Bind: Diaspora, Pilgrimage, and Israel Birthright Tourism*. New York: NYU Press. Pages TBA.

20. Mon, Nov 1: Intermarriage

Cohen, Steven M. 2006. "A Tale of Two Jewries: The 'Inconvenient Truth' for American Jews." 3-23. [http://www.jewishlife.org/pdf/steven\\_cohen\\_paper.pdf](http://www.jewishlife.org/pdf/steven_cohen_paper.pdf)

Fishman, Sylvia Barack. 2004. *Double or Nothing: Jewish Families and Mixed Marriage*. Lebanon, NH: Brandeis University Press. 57-76. (CR)

21. Wed, Nov 3: Jewish Political Engagement: Right and Left

Liebman, Charles and Steven Cohen. 1999. "Jewish Liberalism Revisited." In *Jews in America: A Contemporary Reader*. Roberta Rosenberg Farber and Chaim I. Waxman, eds. Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press. 197-200. (CR)

Greenberg, Anna and Kenneth Wald. 2001. "Still Liberal After All These Years? The Contemporary Political Behavior of American Jewry." In *Jews in American Politics*. L. Sandy Maisel and Ira N. Forman, eds. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. 162-193. (Bb)

## **Diversity Among American Jews**

22. Mon, Nov 8: Orthodox Jews

Fader, Ayala. 2009. *Mitzvah Girls: Bringing Up the Next Generation of Hasidic Jews in Brooklyn*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Pages TBA.

23. Wed, Nov 10: Orthodox Jews (cont'd)

Fader, Ayala. 2009. *Mitzvah Girls: Bringing Up the Next Generation of Hasidic Jews in Brooklyn*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Pages TBA.

24. Mon, Nov 15: Recent Jewish Immigrants

Markowitz, Fran. 2001. "A Bat Mitzvah among Russian Jews in America." In *The Life of Judaism*. Harvey E. Goldberg, ed. Berkeley: U.C. Press. 121-135. (CR)

25. Wed, Nov 17: Racially Diverse Jews

Kaye/Kantrowitz, Melanie. 2007. *The Colors of Jews: Racial Politics and Radical Diasporism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. Excerpts. (Bb)

26. Mon, Nov 22: Queer Jews

Schnoor, Randall. 2006. "Being Gay and Jewish: Negotiating Intersecting Identities." *Sociology of Religion* 67/1. 43-60. (CR)

Film to watch before class: *Trembling Before G-d*. Sandi Simcha Dubowski, filmmaker. 2001.  
<http://www.hulu.com/watch/76545/trembling-before-g-d>.

Wed, Nov 24: no class ("Erev" Thanksgiving)

***Research Paper due***

27. Mon, Nov 29: Deaf Jews

Cooper, Sheryl. 1992. "Jewish and Deaf: One Microculture or Two?" *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* 68/1. 50-58.

<https://www.policyarchive.org/bitstream/handle/10207/10527/JJCS68-1-07.pdf?sequence=1>

28. Wed, Dec 1: Review

No reading.

## ASSIGNMENTS

### **1. Visit to the Skirball Cultural Center (by Sept 5, write-up due Oct 11)**

Please visit the Skirball Cultural Center by September 5 (one of the exhibits closes that day):

<http://www.skirball.org>

2701 North Sepulveda Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90049

Telephone: (310) 440-4500

Plan to spend about 2 hours at the museum, viewing the permanent exhibition, called “Visions and Values: Jewish Life from Antiquity to America” (in the right gallery) and “Jews on Vinyl” (down the left hall and to the right).

Format for write-up (2-3 pages):

The permanent exhibition, Visions and Values, includes objects/artifacts in the following categories:

- a. History
- b. Holidays
- c. Lifecycle events
- d. Diversity of Diaspora

For each of these categories, discuss 2 items: what do they tell us about Jews and Judaism in America? (no more than a short paragraph for each item)

What is the overall message(s)/narrative(s) of the exhibition? How does it relate to class concepts? (about 1 page)

“Jews on Vinyl”: What do the music and album art in the exhibit tell us about Jews in America, Jewish music, and the relations between Jews and non-Jews?

### **2. Shabbat Services Ethnography (write-up due Oct 24):**

Visit a synagogue or other Jewish congregation for Friday night or Saturday morning services. If you have attended synagogue before, make sure the one you choose to visit is of a different denomination or Jewish subgroup. Write a report of your visit. What about the experience seems American? What seems distinctly Jewish? How did the service differ from others you have observed?

### **3. Research Paper (due Nov 24):**

Choose a research topic about American Jews. Some examples:

American Jewish Surnames

Feminist Jewish Ritual

Anti-Semitism on American College Campuses Today

The Debate About Outreach to Intermarried Couples

Black-Jewish Relations

## Persian Jews in Los Angeles Newly Orthodox Jews

Your presentation should be 10-12 minutes (including discussion). Feel free to use notes, but please do not read your presentation verbatim. Please practice to make sure you fit into the time frame.

Presentation format:

1. Introduce your topic.
2. Start with an enticing anecdote or question for the class.
3. Report about what you've found in your research (might include a handout with quotes, statistics, or other information)
4. End with something creative: your own addition. Some suggestions:
  - a. Prediction of how the issue will develop in the future
  - b. Your advice to the Jewish community (or one of the movements) about some aspect of the issue

Your final writeup (8-10 pages) should be an in-depth exploration of your topic and should reference at least 5 books or articles (websites are allowed only if they are used as original documents, e.g., [www.ritualwell.org](http://www.ritualwell.org) for new rituals). Please write in a clear and concise way, and make sure to edit your paper thoroughly (not just spell-check and grammar-check). You will be graded on the following scale:

1. Thorough treatment of your topic
2. Appropriate use of previous research
3. Shows understanding of classroom discussions and readings
4. Strong and engaging writing (see essay writing tips)
5. Keeps the reader's interest (feel free to be creative)

### **ONLINE RESOURCES**

Berman Jewish Policy Archive: Amazing treasure trove of articles on Jewish identity, community, and organizations: <http://www.bjpa.org/>

National Jewish Population Survey, reports available on the Jewish Federations of North America website: <http://www.jewishfederations.org/page.aspx?id=33650>

North American Jewish Databank, <http://www.jewishdatabank.org/>, including local Jewish population studies and the American Jewish Identity Survey (2001).