

CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN JEWISH ISSUES – CS 426
Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion
Instructor: Dr. Sarah Bunin Benor
Summer 2006

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DESCRIPTION:

A social science course examining contemporary issues in Jewish religion, culture, and demographics. Topics include Jewish identities, layers of community, changing patterns of Jewish observance and affiliation, family dynamics, intermarriage, economics, Jewish distinctiveness, and the relationship between universalism and particularism. This class will look at a number of Jewish subpopulations, including secular Jews, poor Jews, gay and lesbian Jews, disabled Jews, Deaf Jews, recent immigrants, and multi-racial Jews.

This class has a dual focus – academic research about contemporary American Jews and the implications of this research for Jewish communal leaders. Some of the questions we will deal with are:

- How do religion and ethnicity intertwine in the identification of American Jews?
- Is the American Jewish population in danger of extinction?
- What are “Jewish values” and how do they influence Jewish communal institutions?
- Which Jews are marginalized and disenfranchised, and what can Jewish communities do to reach out to them?

The format is interactive lectures and discussion, as well as student presentations. Classroom activities will include structured debates, brainstorming sessions, case studies, and guest lectures. The success of the class depends on active student participation. Therefore, students are expected to complete all reading assignments before each class.

REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:

50%: Attendance and prepared participation in class

25%: Assignment #1

25%: Assignment #2

REQUIRED TEXTS:

1. Cohen, Steven M. and Arnold M. Eisen. 2000. *The Jew Within: Self, Family, and Community in America*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
2. Kaplan, Dana Evan. 2005. *Cambridge Companion to American Judaism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
3. Course reader – on reserve in the library (all other assigned readings are in there)

SCHEDULE:

1. Monday, 6/19: Introduction, historical background, demographics
2. Tuesday, 6/20: The quality of Jewish life in America 20 years ago: Traditionalists vs. Transformationists

Cohen, Steven M. and Charles S. Liebman. 1987. *The Quality of Jewish Life in America: Two Views*. 3-55.

Submit top 2 topic choices for Assignment #1 in class.

Note the gap in the schedule (I will be in Israel). Time to work on your assignments.

By Sunday, 7/2: Assignment #1 outline and bibliographic summaries due via e-mail to sbenor@huc.edu.

3. Monday, 7/3: Jewish identity

Cohen, Steven M. and Arnold M. Eisen. 2000. *The Jew Within: Self, Family, and Community in America*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. Chapter 1. 1-12.

Kaufman, Debra Renee. 2005. "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.

4. Thursday, 7/6: Jewish community; marketing Judaism

Geffen, Rela Mintz. 1996. "The Jewish Family: An Institution in Transition." *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* 73/3. 116-121.

Cohen, Steven M. and Arnold M. Eisen. 2000. *The Jew Within: Self, Family, and Community in America*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. Chapter 5: Echoes of Tribalism.

Sh'ma: Marketing Judaism. 2004. Short articles by Chava Weissler, Andrew Silow-Carroll, David Nelson, and Jay Michaelson. January 2004.

Luo, Michael. 2006. "With Yoga, Comedy and Parties, Synagogues Entice Newcomers." *New York Times*, April 4.

5. Tuesday, 7/11: Religious denominations

Grossman, Lawrence. "Jewish Religious Denominations." In *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism*. Ed., Dana Evan Kaplan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 81-99.

Wertheimer, Jack. 2005. *All Quiet on the Religious Front? Jewish Unity, Denominationalism, and Postdenominationalism in the United States*. New York: American Jewish Committee. 1-26.

6. Friday, 7/14: Jewish culture and 20- and 30-something Jews

Cohen, Steven M. and Ari Y. Kelman. 2006. *Cultural Events and Jewish Identities: Young Adult Jews in New York*. Executive Summary. (14 pp.)

Birkner, Gabrielle. 2005. "Pop Goes the Hipster Judaism Bubble." *The Jewish Week* (New York). 12/30/05.

Sieradski, Daniel. 2006. Letter to the Editor. *The Jewish Week* (New York). 1/8/06.

Browse the Heebsters unit on Modiya: Jews/Media/Religion (incl. Other Topics):

<http://dlibdev.nyu.edu/modiya/handle/1964/52>

Monday, 7/17: Assignment #1 due via e-mail.

7. Tuesday, 7/18: 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.

Sales, Amy L. and Leonard Saxe. 2004. "*How Goodly Are Thy Tents*": *Summer Campus as Jewish Socializing Experiences*. Hanover: Brandeis University Press and the AVI CHAI Foundation. 1-41.

Student presentations begin.

8. Friday, 7/21: Intermarriage

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

Liebman, Charles S. and Sylvia Barack Fishman. 2000. "Jewish Communal Policy toward Outmarried Families: The Question of Outreach." *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* 77/1. 17-27.

Greenwood, Dru. 1991. "Congregational Policy and Intermarriage." In *The Imperatives of Jewish Outreach: Responding to Intermarriage in the 1990s and Beyond*. Egon Mayer, ed. New York: Jewish Outreach Institute. 132-135.

9. Monday, 7/24: Jewish liberalism, Jewish values, social justice

Liebman, Charles and Steven Cohen. 1999. "Jewish Liberalism Revisited." *Jews in America* 197-200.

Ochs, Vanessa. 2003. "Ten Jewish Sensibilities." *Sh'ma* December 2003.

10. Tuesday, 7/25: Israel and Zionism

Aviv, Caryn and David Shneer. 2005. *New Jews: The End of the Jewish Diaspora*. New York: NYU Press. Introduction (1-25).

Jill Jacobs vs. Daniel Gordis debate on Israel, 2003. (15 pp.)

11. Friday, 7/28: The costs of Jewish living, Jewish families

Guest speaker: Gerald Bubis, Founder, HUC-JIR School of Jewish Communal Service

Bubis, Gerald B. 2002. *The Costs of Jewish Living: Revisiting Jewish Involvements and Barriers*. American Jewish Committee. (1-28).

Bubis, Gerald B. 2006. "The Jewish Family, Today and Tomorrow." Presentation to Jewish Family and Children's Agencies of North America annual meeting, Sunday, April 30, San Jose. (1-10).

12. Tuesday, 8/1: Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender Jews

Guest speaker: Joel Kushner, Director, Institute for Judaism and Sexual Orientation

Film to watch before class (DVD is on reserve in the library): *Trembling Before G-d*. Sandi Simcha Dubowski, filmmaker. 2001.

Litman, Jane Rachel. 2002. "Kol Sason v'Kol Simcha, Kol Kalah v'Kol Kalah: Same Gender Weddings and Spiritual Renewal." In *Queer Jews*. Caryn Aviv and David Shneer, eds. New York: Routledge. 111-118.

Linzer, Norman. 1996. "The Ethics of Gay and Lesbian Adoptions." *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* 73/2-3. 207-215.

Choose one of the following (or both):

Dubowsky, Hadar. 2002. "Jewish Dyke Baby-Making." In *Queer Jews*. Caryn Aviv and David Shneer, eds. New York: Routledge. 44-54.

Brettschneider, Marla. 2002. "All Points Bulletin: Jewish Dykes Adopting Children." In *Queer Jews*. Caryn Aviv and David Shneer, eds. New York: Routledge. 238-257.

13. Friday, 8/4: Recent Jewish immigrants; multi-racial Jews

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.

Tobin, Diane, Gary A. Tobin and Scott Rubin. 2005. *In Every Tongue: The Racial and Ethnic Diversity of the Jewish People*. San Francisco: Institute for Jewish and Community Research. 17-34.

14. Monday, 8/7: Deaf Jews; wrap-up

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

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

Assignment #2 due in class.

15. Tuesday, 8/8: Researching Jewish identity, regional variation

Guest speaker: Bethamie Horowitz, Research Director, Mandel Foundation.

Horowitz, Bethamine. 2002. "Reframing the Study of Contemporary American Jewish Identity." *Contemporary Jewry* 23.

Horowitz, Bethamie. 1999. "Jewishness in New York: Exception or the Rule?" In *National Variations in Jewish Identity: Implications for Jewish Education*. Ed, Steven M. Cohen and Gabriel Horenczyk. 223-240.

ASSIGNMENTS

ASSIGNMENT #1: "ANOTHER ISSUE": PAPER (4-6 PAGES) / PRESENTATION (10-15 MINUTES)

One semester is clearly not enough time to discuss all of the issues facing contemporary American Jewry. Therefore, each student will research another topic, leading to a 4-6-page paper and a 10-15-minute presentation. Your assignment is to summarize the issue and make suggestions for how to address it. Your final paper should refer to at least 6 articles or books, some of which may be from the class readings (websites are allowed, but they do not count toward the 6). It is tricky to shrink a 4-6-page paper into such a short presentation, but this is necessary because of the time constraints of the class. Please plan your presentations carefully.

Format for paper:

1. Abstract (1 paragraph)
2. Issue: What issue(s) does this paper address? Why is this issue important for American Jewry?
3. Details about the issue
4. Suggestions: How do you propose to address the issue(s)? Who is your target population, and how do you expect your ideas to reach them?
5. Conclusion
6. Bibliography (at least 6 items)

You will be evaluated on your ability to conduct your own research of social science and/or communal service literature, to adequately summarize the issue, and to be creative with your suggestions.

Some possible topics:

- patrilineal descent
- conversion to Judaism
- feminism and the evolving role of women in Jewish life and leadership
- contemporary anti-Semitism
- Jewish / Christian relations
- Jewish / Muslim relations
- Jewish / Black relations
- Jewish philanthropy: giving to Jewish vs. non-Jewish causes

- relationship between American Jews and other Diaspora communities
- Jewish environmentalism, eco-kashrut
- domestic abuse (partner, child, and elder)
- alcoholism, drug abuse
- crisis in Jewish leadership (professional and lay leaders in communal service, education)
- changing structure of Jewish communal institutions
- some other issue

Timeline:

6/20: Submit your top two choices of topics.

6/21: I will confirm your topics, making sure there are no overlaps, and I will distribute a presentation schedule via e-mail.

7/2: Submit a 1-2-page outline of your presentation and a paragraph about each article or book you plan to reference.

7/17: Assignment #1 due via e-mail

7/18-8/7: Student presentations. Part of each class session will be set aside for student presentations and discussion.

ASSIGNMENT #2: “FINAL EXAM”: QUALITY OF JEWISH LIFE IN 2006 (4-6-page paper)

Re-examine *The Quality of Jewish Life in America: Two Views* (1987), and choose a side in the debate. Argue your case based on what you have learned in the class and any other source of contemporary data. You will be graded on your ability to incorporate what you have learned in the class and write clearly and persuasively. Your bibliography should include at least five published references, some of which can be from the class readings (websites are allowed, but they do not count toward the 5).

SUGGESTED REGULAR READING

As Jewish communal leaders, you will be better able to serve your constituencies by keeping up with academic and popular writings about them. In addition to your local Jewish newspaper, I recommend the following:

Forward

Contemporary Jewry

Journal of Jewish Communal Service

American Jewish Year Book

Sh'ma

Moment

Hadassah Magazine

Past issues of these journals may also be helpful for you as you research your assignments and as you prepare projects throughout your career.

OTHER RESOURCES

These lists of innovative projects may be helpful.

The Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies Slingshot Fund's list of 50 "of the next generation's responses to Jewish identity and community"

<http://www.2164.net/slingshot.html>

Bikkurim – An Incubator for New Jewish Ideas

<http://www.bikkurim.org/>

Reboot – A Network for Jewish Innovation

<http://www.rebooters.net/>

ON RESERVE IN THE LIBRARY (MAY BE REFERENCED IN CLASS, USEFUL FOR ASSIGNMENTS):

Aviv, Caryn and David Shneer, eds. 2002. *Queer Jews*. New York: Routledge.

Aviv, Caryn and David Shneer. 2005. *New Jews: The End of the Jewish Diaspora*. New York: NYU Press.

Cohen, Steven M. 1998. *Religious stability and ethnic decline: emerging patterns of Jewish identity in the United States: A national survey of American Jews*. New York: Florence G. Heller-Jewish Community Centers Association Research Center.

Cohen, Steven M. and Arnold M. Eisen. 2000. *The Jew Within: Self, Family, and Community in America*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Cohen, Steven M., Shifra Bronznick, Didi Goldenhar, Sherry Israel, and Shaul Kelner. 2004. *Creating gender equity and organizational effectiveness in the Jewish federation system: A research-and-action project*. New York: United Jewish Communities.

Cohen, Steven M. and Ari Y. Kelman. 2006. *Cultural Events and Jewish Identities: Young Adult Jews in New York*. New York: National Foundation for Jewish Culture.

Diner, Hasia R. 2004. *The Jews in the United States, 1654 to 2000*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Farber, Roberta Rosenberg and Chaim I. Waxman, eds. 1999. *Jews in America: A Contemporary Reader*. Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press.

Fishman, Sylvia Barack. 2004. *Double or Nothing: Jewish Families and Mixed Marriage*. Lebanon, NH: Brandeis University Press.

Fishman, Sylvia Barack. 2000. *Jewish Life and American Culture*. Albany: SUNY Press.

Goldscheider, Calvin. 1986. *Jewish Continuity and Change: Emerging Patterns in America*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Goldscheider, Calvin. 2004. *Studying the Jewish Future* (Samuel and Althea Stroum Lectures in Jewish Studies). Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Greenberg, Anna. 2005. "OMG!: How Generation Y is redefining Faith in the iPod Era." Reboot. <http://www.rebooters.net/pollexec.html>.

Horowitz, Bethamie. 2000. *Connections and Journeys: Assessing Critical Opportunities for Enhancing Jewish Identity*. New York: UJA Federation.

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

- Putnam, Robert D. 2001. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Putnam, Robert D. and Lewis M. Feldstein. 2003. *Better Together: Restoring the American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Sarna, Jonathan. 2004. *American Judaism: A History*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Sales, Amy L. and Leonard Saxe. 2004. "How Goodly Are Thy Tents": Summer Camps as Jewish Socializing Experiences. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.
- Smith, Tom. 2005. *Jewish Distinctiveness in America: A Statistical Portrait*. New York: The American Jewish Committee.
- Trembling Before G-d*. Sandi Simcha Dubowski, filmmaker. 2001.
- Wertheimer, Jack. 1993. *A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America*. New York: Basic Books.

SOME ADDITIONAL SOURCES THAT MAY BE REFERENCED IN CLASS:

- Greenberg, Anna. 2004. "OMG!: How Generation Y is redefining Faith in the iPod Era." New York: Reboot. <http://www.rebooters.net/poll/rebootpoll.pdf>.
- Liebman, Charles. 1999. "Ritual, Ceremony and the Reconstruction of Judaism in the United States." In *Jews in America: A Contemporary Reader*. Roberta Rosenberg Farber and Chaim I. Waxman, eds. Hanover: Brandeis University Press. 307-319.
- Mayer, Egon, Barry Kosmin, and Ariela Keysar. 2001. "American Jewish Identity Survey." Reissued in 2003 by the Center for Cultural Judaism.
- National Jewish Population Survey, reports available on the UJC website: http://www.ujc.org/content_display.html?ArticleID=60346
- North American Jewish Databank, <http://www.jewishdatabank.org/>
- Phillips, Bruce. 2005. "American Judaism in the Twenty-First Century." In *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism*. Ed., Dana Evan Kaplan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 397-415.
- 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.
- Woocher, Jonathan. 2006. "Jewish Education in the Age of Google." Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. No. 8. <http://www.jcpa.org/cjc/cjc-woocher-06.htm>