

American Jews and the Media

Rutgers University

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NOTE: This is an intermediate-level undergraduate course with no prerequisites. It is cross-listed with American Studies and Comparative Literature and was last taught in 2005. The course meets once a week for a double session (3 hours), and students are expected to screen or listen to assigned media works (sound recordings, films and telecasts on video), available in a media library on campus, between sessions. I have reshaped both the content of the course and the assignments over the years and continue to do so to accommodate both new media works and secondary materials.

Course description:

This course examines the wide range of interactions that American Jews have had with sound recordings, film, radio, television, and computers over the course of the twentieth century. Attention is placed not only on feature films, popular television series, and other significant works of American media by or about Jews, but also on the roles that all these media have played in shaping American Jewish life from the period of East European Jews' mass emigration to America at the beginning of the century (e.g., early sound recordings, early silent film) to the present (especially the use of videos and computers in transforming traditional Jewish community life). Special attention is placed on the use of new media for self-portraiture, propaganda, and collective memory.

Course requirements:

1. Attendance, preparation for, and active participation in all sessions. Students are required to prepare for in-class discussion all assigned readings and screenings/listening selections in advance of each session.
2. Write eight out of thirteen response papers, each 2 double-spaced pages (i.e., 500-600 words), on the reading and/or media work to be prepared for each class. Students choose the papers they wish to write. Papers are due the day that the works in question are discussed; late submissions are not accepted. Guidelines for papers are distributed at least one week before they are due.
3. Final examination: Take-home essay exam, distributed on the last day of class.

Course grade will be based on class attendance and participation (20%), response papers (50%), and final exam (30%).

American Jews and the Media: Schedule

Topic	Reading and <i>Prescreening/Prelistening*</i>	In-class screening/ listening (excerpts)
<u>1</u> Introduction RESPONSE PAPER #1 DUE	--	Obsessed with Jews
<u>2</u> Klezmer and its revival RESPONSE PAPER #1 DUE	London, Sapoznik, Slobin <i>Klezmer Music: A Marriage of Heaven and Earth; Klezmer Pioneers</i>	selected klezmer recordings, In the Fiddler's House
<u>3</u> Immigrant entertainments RESPONSE PAPER #2 DUE	EA* 15-33 <i>Cohen's Fire Sale</i>	Romance of a Jewess, The Yiddisher Boy, His People
<u>4</u> The Jazz Singer RESPONSE PAPER #3 DUE	EA 76-92, Raphaelson <i>Jazz Singer (1927)</i>	The Al Jolson Story, 'Jazz Singer' remakes, Overture to Glory
<u>5</u> Yiddish film and radio RESPONSE PAPER #4 DUE	EA 101-112 <i>Americaner Schadchen</i>	His Wife's Lover, Uncle Moses, Green Fields; selections from Yiddish broadcasts
<u>6</u> Hollywood and anti-Semitism RESPONSE PAPER #5 DUE	EA 45-75 <i>Gentleman's Agreement</i>	Crossfire, The Great Dictator
<u>7</u> Ecumenical broadcasting RESPONSE PAPER #6 DUE	Shandler & Katz	The Eternal Light, A Time for Valor
<u>8</u> Israel and film RESPONSE PAPER #7 DUE	EA 205-219, Tryster <i>Edison "Holy Land" films</i>	Land of Promise Exodus, The Illegals
<u>9</u> Holocaust TV RESPONSE PAPER #8 DUE	Shandler (Chs. 2,5,6,7,8) <i>Star Trek: Patterns of Force</i>	This Is Your Life, Holocaust: A Postscript, While America Watched
<u>10</u> Popular self-portraiture RESPONSE PAPER #9 DUE	EA 113-127; 244-256 <i>The Goldbergs</i>	Rhoda, Nanny, Seinfeld
<u>11</u> Home Movies RESPONSE PAPER #10 DUE	Citron, Zimmermann <i>Family Album</i>	selected amateur films, Nobody's Business, Huppah in the Sukkah
<u>12</u> Documentaries: Personal/Political RESPONSE PAPER #11 DUE	Ginsburg, Katz, Ruby <i>TBA**</i>	guest filmmaker TBA
<u>13</u> Media and piety RESPONSE PAPER #12 DUE	EA 264-267, Kligman, Sacks <i>Matisyahu: Shake Off the Dust</i>	selected Chabad videos and sound recordings
<u>14</u> Internet in Jewish life RESPONSE PAPER #13 DUE	Boyarin, Ruedenberg	selected websites

*EA = Hoberman and Shandler, *Entertaining America*.

** Pre-screening of a documentary film by the guest filmmaker.

American Jews and the Media / Course Readings

= book to be purchased; other readings are in course packet.

Boyarin, Jonathan. 1994. "Jewish Geography Goes On-Line." *Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Review* 16:1, pp. 3-5.

Citron, Michelle. 1999. *Home Movies and Other Necessary Fictions*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 2-25.

Ginsburg, Faye. 1988. "The Parallax Effect: Jewish Ethnographic Film." *Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Review* 10:1, pp. 16-17.

Hoberman, J., and Jeffrey Shandler. 2003. *Entertaining America: Jews, Movies and Broadcasting*. Princeton University Press. ("**EA**" on schedule)

Katz, John Stuart. 1978. "Autobiographical Film." In *Autobiography: Film/Video/ Photography*, ed. John Stuart Katz. Art Gallery of Ontario, pp. 10-15.

Kligman, Mark. 1994. "The Medium and the Message: The Recorded Music of Brooklyn's Orthodox Jews," *Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Review* 16:1, pp. 9-11.

London, Frank. 1998. "An Insider's View: How We Traveled from Obscurity to the Klezmer Establishment in Twenty Years." *Judaism* 185 (47:1), pp. 40-43.

Raphaelson, Samson. 1924. "The Day of Atonement." In *The Jazz Singer*, ed. Robert L. Carringer. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979, pp. 147-167.

Ruby, Jay. 1978. "The Celluloid Self," In *Autobiography: Film/Video/Photography*, ed. John Stuart Katz. Art Gallery of Ontario, pp. 7-9.

Rudenberg, Lucia. 1994. "Jewish Resources in Computer Networking." *Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Review* 16:1, pp. 12-18.

Sacks, Maury. 1989. "Computing Community at Purim," *Journal of American Folklore* 102: 405 (July-September), pp. 275-291.

Sapoznik, Henry. 1987. *The Compleat Klezmer*. Cedarhurst, N.Y.: Tara Publications, pp. 5-18.

Shandler, Jeffrey. 1999. *While America Watches: Televising the Holocaust*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Shandler, Jeffrey, and Elihu Katz. 1997. "Broadcasting American Judaism: The Radio and Television Department of the Jewish Theological Seminary." In *Tradition Renewed: A History of the Jewish Theological Seminary*, ed. Jack Wertheimer. New York: JTS, pp. 363-401.

Slobin, Mark. 1984. "The Neo-Klezmer Movement and Euro-American Musical Revivalism." *Journal of American Folklore* 97:383, pp. 98-104.

Tryster, Hillel. 1995. *Israel before Israel: Silent Cinema in the Holy Land* Jerusalem: Steven Spielberg Jewish Film Archive, pp. 96-124.

Zimmerman, Patricia R. 1995. *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 56-89.