

Professor Karla Goldman
4704 School of Social Work Building
kargold@umich.edu, 734-763-6583
Office Hours by Appointment

A History of American Jewish Women

Judaic Studies 417 - 001 / Social Work 513 – 001/ History 468 – 001/ AmCult 405 - 009
Tuesday, 2-5 p.m. / 1804 SSWB / Winter 2019

Course Description:

This class on American Jewish history foregrounds the experience and perspectives of Jewish women. It explores the creation of American Judaism and Jewish community; the experience of immigration; the pursuit of political activism and social justice; and changing notions of identity, sexuality, family, and leadership through the lens of women's lives and voices. Drawing upon primary and literary texts, this course challenges us to consider how the telling of American Jewish history changes when women are placed at the center.

Course Objectives:

Completion of this course will result in the ability of students to:

1. Think critically and expansively about the sources of history. Whose stories get told? Whose are ignored? What kind of historical sources shape the stories we receive?
2. Grasp the central themes shaping the historical experience of American Jewish women.
3. Recognize the difference between accounts of American Jewish history that incorporate women and those that do not.
4. Make connections across historical periods – be able to see the relevance of past historical periods to today.
5. Recognize how evolving gender roles and expectations have inflected American Jewish identity at the intersection of socio-economic, racial, religious, and ethnic American identities.
6. Understand general frameworks shaping American Jewish experience through different historical periods.
7. Become familiar with major events and central figures in the history of American Jewish women while also holding onto the stories and significance of “ordinary” women.
8. Examine the intersection of public and private identities and contribute to the preservation of communal memory and narrative through the practice of oral history and historical research.
9. Draw upon the complexities of historical context in order to understand current societal and communal debates over identity, gender, religion, race, and politics.

Accessibility: Please consult with me about any special circumstances related to allowing you to participate fully in class, so that we can make appropriate adaptations.

Required Texts, available for purchase:

Susan Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl: Life and Labor in the Immigrant Generation* (Cornell University Press, 1990).

Pamela Nadell, *American Jewish Women's History: A Reader* (New York University Press, 2003)

Philip Roth, *Goodbye Columbus* (1959), varied editions.

Class Sessions:

1. January 15: Considering Women's History and Who Tells One's Story

2. January 22: People with a Past // Colonial Jewish Women

Judith Baskin, "Jewish Women in the Middle Ages," and Renee Levine Melammed, "Sephardi Women in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods," in Judith Baskin ed., *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective* (1991), pp. 94-134.

Holly Snyder, "Queens of the Household: The Jewish Women of British America, 1700-1800," in Sarna and Nadell, *Women and American Judaism*, pp. 15-43

Aviva Ben Ur, "The Exceptional and the Mundane: A Biographical Portrait of Rebecca Machado Phillips (1746-1831), in Sarna and Nadell, pp. 46-80

Ellen Smith, "Portraits of a Community: The Image and Experience of Early American Jews," in Pamela Nadell reader, *American Jewish Women's History*, pp. 13-25.

3. January 29: 19th Century Jewish Women: Acculturation and Respectability

Karla Goldman, *Beyond the Synagogue Gallery: Finding a Place for Women in American Judaism*, pp. 78-150.

Dianne Ashton, "The Lessons of the Hebrew Sunday School," in Nadell reader, pp. 26-42

Jonathan Sarna, "A Great Awakening: The Transformation that Shaped Twentieth-Century American Judaism," in Nadell, pp. 43-63.

4. February 5. World of our Parents: Eastern European Jewish Immigrants

Susan Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl: Life and Labor in the Immigrant Generation*, pp. 8-131

Felicia Herman, "From Priestess to Hostess: Sisterhoods of Personal Service in New York City, 1887-1936," in Sarna and Nadell, pp. 148-181.

5. February 12: Immigrant Women in Labor and Protest

Paula Hyman, "Immigrant Women and Consumer Protest: The New York City Kosher Meat Boycott of 1902," in Nadell, pp. 116-128.

Alice Kessler Harris, "Organizing the Unorganizable: Three Jewish Women and their Union," in Nadell, pp. 100-115.

Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl*, 132-242.

6. February 19. Immigrant Literature

Mary Antin, [*The Promised Land*](#), (1912), "Introduction," "My Country," "Miracles."

Anzia Yezierska, [*Hungry Hearts*](#) (1920) "Hungry Hearts," "The Free Vacation House," "How I Found America."

Abraham Cahan, [*Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto*](#) (1896).

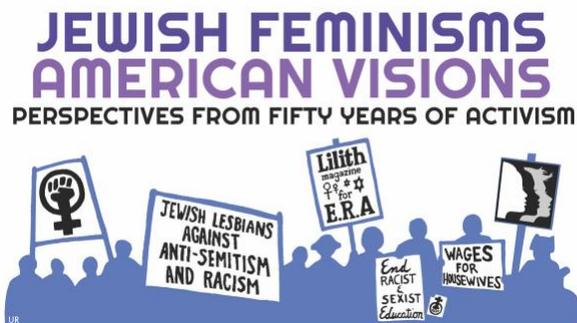
7. February 26. Consumption, Activism, Material Culture

Riv-Ellen Prell, *Fighting to Become Americans: Assimilation and the Trouble between Jewish Women and Jewish Men* (1999), pp. 88-123.

Andrew Heinze, *Adapting to Abundance: Jewish Immigrants, Mass Consumption, and the Search for American Identity* (1990), pp. 68-85; 105 – 115

Melissa Klapper, "They Have Been the Pioneers": American Jewish Women and the Mainstreaming of Birth Control," in Klapper, *Ballots, Babies, and Banners of Peace: American Jewish Women's Activism, 1890-1940* (2013), pp. 135-173.

8. March 12: no class, *Jewish Feminisms/American Visions* symposium



Wednesday evening, March 13 – Friday afternoon, March 15



Rabbi Lizzi Heydemann ♦ Sarah Hurwitz ♦ April Baskin

Sunday afternoon, March 17, noon -3 pm.

9. March 19. At Home in America:

Wenger, "Budgets, Boycotts and Babies: Jewish Women in the Great Depression" in Nadell, pp. 153-174.

Joyce Antler, "Zion in Our Hearts: Henrietta Szold and the American Jewish Women's Movement," in Nadell, 129-150.

Jenna Weissman Joselit, "The Jewish Priestess and Ritual: the Sacred Life of American Orthodox Women," in Nadell, pp. 153-174.

Klapper, "Where the Yellow Star Is': American Jewish Women, the Peace Movement, and Jewish Identity during the 1930s and World War II," in *Ballots, Babies, and Banners of Peace*, pp. 174-204.

10. March 26. Post-war Complaints and Prosperity:

Philip Roth, *Goodbye Columbus* (1959)

Rachel Kranson, "Hadassah Makes you Important" from *Ambivalent Embrace: Jewish Upward Mobility in Postwar America* (2017) pp. 114-137.

Lila Corwin Berman, "Gendered Journeys: Jewish Migrations and the City in Postwar America," in Marion A. Kaplan and Deborah Dash Moore, eds., *Gender and Jewish History* (2011), pp. 336-349.

Brettschneider, "Race, Gender, Class, Sexuality and the Jewish Goldbergs in the Suburbs" in *Jewish Feminism and Intersectionality* (2016), pp. 61-74.

Riv-Ellen Prell, "Rage and Representation: Jewish Gender Stereotypes in American Culture," in Nadell, pp. 238-255.

11. April 2: The Challenge of Change: Civil Rights and Feminism

Debra Schultz, "Going South, Women in the Civil Rights Movement," In Nadell, pp. pp. 281-196.

Kirsten Fermaglich, "The 'Comfortable Concentration Camp': The Significance of Nazi Imagery in Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique*" in *American Dreams and Nazi Nightmares: Early Holocaust Consciousness and Liberal America, 1957-1965* (2006), pp. 58-82.

Joyce Antler, *Radical Jewish Women: Voices from the Women's Liberation Movement* (2018), pp. 31-70.

Evelyn Torton Beck, *Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology* (1982, 1989), pp.3-10, 105-113, 193-201.

Adrienne Rich, "Split at the Root: An Essay on Jewish Identity" (1982)

[Jewish Women and the Feminist Revolution](#), Jewish Women's Archive

12. April 9: Gendered Religious Tensions

Discussion at 1922 Central Conference of American Rabbis meeting (optional)

Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* (1990), pp. 28-31, 52-56, 134-136.

Blu Greenberg, *On Women and Judaism* (1981), pp. 3-37

Antler, *Jewish Radical Feminism*, pp. 205-242.

Riv-Ellen Prell, ed., *Women Remaking American Judaism* (2007), pp. 109-134, 153-180.

13. April 16: Struggles over Ritual, Identity, Continuity, and Inclusion

"Statement on the American Jewish Future," American Jewish Committee, 1996/97
(Read statement and at least four responses, including Steven M. Cohen and Deborah Dash Moore).

"Strategic Directions for Jewish Life: A Call to Action," (2015)

Michael Staub, "'Are You Against the Jewish Family?': Debating the Sexual Revolution," in *Torn at the Roots: The Crisis of Jewish Liberalism in Postwar America* (2002), pp.240-279.

Rokhl Kafrissen, "Allowing Michael Steinhardt's Bad Behavior is not Our Biggest Mistake: Obsessing over Jewish Continuity and Megadonors Is," JTA.org, April 3, 2019.

14. April 23. New Horizons and Red-Lines: #MeToo and Marching Forward

Barbara Smith, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place," *Yours in Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism* (1984), pp. 67-85.

Ellen Willis, "Is There Still a Jewish Question? Why I'm an Anti-Anti-Zionist" and Grace Paley, "Afraid," in *Wrestling with Zion* (2003).

Muriel Rukeyser, three poems (1944, 1948, 1973)

Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, "Black/Jewish Imaginary and Real," in *The Colors of Jews: Racial Politics and Radical Diasporism* (2007), pp.33-65.

Beatrice Kahn, NCJW letter on Women's March, January 13, 2019

Class Requirements:

Class participation: 150 points

This course is conducted as a seminar and *requires active student participation*. Students should come to class having done the assigned readings and any pre-work; prepared to ask questions, share insight, listen to the instructor and fellow students with full attention; and provide leadership in the classroom, within large and small groups. *Specific reading assignments may shift* to accommodate the needs and interests of the class. *Electronic devices are inevitably a distraction* and should only be present in service of specific group or individual learning needs. Graduate students will be required to submit a longer final paper or one designed to address their particular academic or professional interests in consultation with the instructor.

"Mini Oral History" (50 points, recording, transcript, 1-2 page summary)

due: January 27, 10:00 pm

Students will conduct an audio mini- oral history, and submit the final products of such an interview, audio or video recording, transcript, and release form, as well as a one-two page narrative summary of the oral history. Refer to oral history/Story Aperture materials provided by the Jewish Women's Archive. Choose someone who identifies as a woman of your acquaintance (family, friend, colleague, professor, clergy member, mentor, etc.) who was an teenager or adult in the 1960s with whom you will conduct a ten-minute oral history interview. Your interview should focus on a particular theme or question in the narrator's life and experience. Ask about their own expectations for themselves when they were young and how those expectations may have changed. How did they see the women's movement intersecting with their own experience? *Full credit will be given as long as all materials are submitted.*

Entry for [This Week in History](#) @ Jewish Women's Archive (150 points)

Due: February 28, 5:00 pm

The Jewish Women's Archive has a weekly feature that highlights events from each day of the year. Entries focus on a particular historic event and often uses dates like births, deaths,

publications to highlight particular individuals. In the first part of the course, we will look at some of these entries to see how they are constructed and used to add to the breadth of information about individuals and communities that JWA can provide.

Each week, two students will be asked to look at dates for next week in advance and select one entry to present briefly (no more than 5 minutes) to the rest of class as a way to share (sometimes) small events and details and think about their relationship to our larger stories.

Once familiar with the structure and character of these short (generally less than 500 words) entries, each student will identify a date or subject of interest to them (in consultation with instructor) and will research and write an entry. Every student submission that receive an "A" will be added to JWA's on-line collection and appear in *This Week in History*.

Weekly Response Papers (200 points)

Students will keep a running "journal" of responses to the assigned readings. For the 12 weeks in which readings are assigned, you must submit 8 journal entries. Entries of 2 to 3 pages should be submitted on the course Canvas site by 10 a.m. on the day of class.

These entries are not meant to be polished works of prose. They are meant to encourage you to give some structured thought to the week's reading assignment before class meets and to connect the week's readings to each other and to previous readings or discussion. I will provide a few specific questions each week that you might want to address, but you should use these papers to consider questions that particularly interest or challenge you; to connect individual readings to the larger themes of the course; connect a given week's articles to each other; and/or say whatever you like about what you have read. The response paper should address more than one of the readings assigned in a given week. Do not just summarize. Take advantage of the response questions, relate material to class discussions, compare different readings to each other, or share your own questions to develop thoughtful responses to the assigned texts.

An updated reading list and discussion questions will be provided for each week's assignment on Canvas. General questions you might consider for these short submissions (*you do not have to answer these particular questions or the ones that will be shared each week – they are provided only to be helpful!*):

1. In what way do these readings challenge or add to or alter your prior understandings of the experience, identity, and understandings of American Jewish women?
2. What questions do these readings raise for our understandings of American Jewish history?

3. What questions do these readings bring up for you that you would like to see further addressed?
4. Are there particular social concerns or ideological positions that inform the analysis presented in the readings? Are the readings reflective of a particular historical moment?
5. How do the issues that arise in one week's readings relate to themes that have emerged in assignments and discussion from previous weeks?
6. What do the readings suggest about how the broad categories of gender, racial, religious, and ethnic identity operate and evolve within the American context?

Final Project (400 points)

One-page description and proposal, due March 19, 10 am (all students should consult with instructor on choice of subject, sources, and approach to research and writing)

Drafts received by April 15 will receive careful feedback within one week

Final Submission, April 30, 5 pm

(Undergrads: 10 pages). (Grads 15-20 pages):

- I. Research Project on Subject in Jewish Women's history
 - A. Archival project
 - B. Examination of a range of books on related subject e.g. women rabbis, lesbian cultural and religious expression, religious practice, immigration, design, activism, etc. to illuminate central questions, key concepts, and bring additional insight (some bibliographies on core topics will be provided).
- II. Oral History Project: one-hour interview, transcription, and analysis
- III. Literary analysis: looking at literature related to American Jewish women's experience in relation to themes of the course.
- IV. Examination of contemporary issues through the lens of American Jewish women's history sample topics could include tensions in the Women's March, approaches to intermarriage and Jewish demography, contemporary representations of Jewish women (think RBG, e.g.), and political activism (on left or right).
- V. Approach and subject of your choosing (in consultation with instructor).

Extra Credit: responses to *Jewish Feminisms/American Visions* and/or *The Jewish Future is Feminist* symposia via: tweeting/other social media platforms/ or other engagement with Conference(s) and speakers.

Summary of Grading:

Mini Oral History: 50

This Week in History: 150

Class preparation and participation: 200

Reading Responses: 200

Final Project: 400

Total: 1000

Jewish Feminisms/American Visions engagement: anywhere between 5-100 extra credit points