

Ethnography of Contemporary Jewish Life

Jewish Studies: 563:346
American Studies: 050:301:01

Tuesday/Thursday 6th period (4:30-5:50 PM)
Room: Frelinghuysen A1

Prof. Jeffrey Shandler

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Course description

This course focuses on the study of contemporary Jewish life, especially in America—in communities, institutions, rituals, personal histories, etc.—through the approach of field work and ethnographic writing. In addition to analyzing readings and films on Jewish ethnography and discussing research methodology, students are required to undertake two short fieldwork projects.

Requirements

1. Regular attendance and preparation for active participation in class sessions (20% of grade). Regular attendance of class and active participation in class discussion is required, including individual preparation to lead discussion of readings or other assignments. Students are expected to come to class on time, having prepared the reading or reserve screening due that day, with comments, questions, etc., regarding the assigned material; to respect the protocols of classroom conduct (e.g., turning off cell phones, not eating during class, avoiding distracting chatter); to check their email regularly for class announcements (e.g., changes in assignments); and to turn in written work on the dates due. Students with three unexcused absences will have their course grade reduced by one full grade (e.g., from A to B). Students with six or more unexcused absences will receive an F for the course. Students should be prepared to provide the instructor with documentation of excusable absences, such as family emergencies, illness, religious observance; these must be submitted by the due date for the final exam. *Students who are unable to attend class regularly for some pressing reason must notify their dean as well as the instructor.*

2. Purim ethnography (20% of grade): a 1,000-1,200-word (ca. 4-5 double spaced pages) ethnographic report on some aspect of the celebration of the holiday of Purim. Ethnography guidelines will be distributed at least one week before Purim (14 March); paper will be due the week following the celebration.

3. Tourism ethnography (20% of grade): a 1,000-1,200-word (ca. 4-5 double spaced pages) ethnographic report on a walking tour of the Jewish Lower East Side (9 or 16 April; see below). Ethnography guidelines will be distributed at least one week before walking tour and will be due on the last day of class.

4. Midterm (15% of grade) **and final examination** (25% of grade): essay exams (ca. 3-4 pages of writing each) based on course readings and class discussions.

All written work that a student submits must be his/her own independent effort. Students must cite properly all outside sources consulted in preparing written assignments. Failure to comply with this policy can result in failure of the course.

Class schedule

NOTE: Class schedule is subject to change. Announcements of any changes will be made in class as well as by email; students should check their Rutgers email accounts regularly for these announcements. If students miss a class, they should be sure to check with the instructor about possible changes in assignments.

Key to readings

[\$] = book to be purchased

[#] = reading available online at Sakai.rutgers.edu

1/17) Session 1. Introduction to Jewish ethnography

1/19-1/26) Sessions 2-4. The work of Barbara Myerhoff

Barbara Myerhoff, *Number Our Days* (New York: Touchstone, 1978) [\$]

Screening of films *Number Our Days* and *In Her Own Time*.

Jack Kugelmass, ed., *Between Two Worlds: Ethnographic Essays on American Jewry* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988) [\$]; Chapter 11

1/31-2/9) Sessions 5-8. Synagogues

Harvey Goldberg, ed., *The Life of Judaism* (U Cal. Pr., 2001) [\$]; Chapters 4,5,6

Screening of film *TBA*

2/9-2/23) Sessions 9-12. Rituals

Goldberg, *The Life of Judaism*; Chapters 2,8,9

Kugelmass, *Between Two Worlds*; Chapters 4,7

Screening of film *TBA*

2/28-3/2) Sessions 13-14. Foodways

Eve Jochowitz, "'Send a Salami to Your Boy in the Army': Sites of Jewish Memory and Identity at Lower East Side Restaurants," in Hasia Diner, Jeffrey Shandler, and Beth S. Wenger, eds., *Remembering the Lower East Side: American Jewish Reflections* (Bloomington, Ind., 2000), pp. 212-225. [#]

Sharon R. Sherman, "The Passover Seder: Ritual Dynamics, Foodways, and Family Folklore," in *We Gather Together: Food and Festival In American Life*, Theodore C. Humphrey and Lin T. Humphrey eds. (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1991), pp. 27-42. [#]

Screening of film *TBA*

3/7) Session 15. Oral Histories

Jonathan Boyarin, *A Storyteller's Worlds: The Education of Shlomo Noble in Europe and America* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1994), excerpt [#]

3/9) Session 16. Midterm examination (in class)

SPRING BREAK

NOTE: Purim is celebrated during Spring Break on Tuesday 14 March (Fast of Esther is Monday 13 March, and Shushan Purim is Wednesday 15 March)

3/21) Session 17. Purim

Kugelmass, *Between Two Worlds*; Chapter 1

Discussion of Purim ethnographies.

3/23-3/30) Sessions 18-20. Hasidim

Jerome R. Mintz, *Hasidic People: A Place in the New World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992) [\$\$\$]; chapters TBA.

Kugelmass, *Between Two Worlds*; Chapter 3

Screening of film *TBA*

Big Onion Walking Tour of Jewish Lower East Side

Sunday 9 April or Sunday 16 April, 1:00-3:00 PM

Student price: \$10 Details TBA

(Students are required to attend one of these tours as the basis for the walking tour ethnography assignment due 4/27.)

4/4-4/11) Sessions 21-23. Sites

Goldberg, *The Life of Judaism*; Chapters 12, 13

Joelle Bahloul, "Remembering the Domestic Space: A Symbolic Return of Sephardic Jews," *YIVO Annual* 21 (1993), pp. 133-150. [#]

David Mayer Gradwohl and Hanna Rosenberg Gradwohl, "That Is the Pillar of Rachel's Grave Unto This Day: an Ethnoarcheological Comparison of Two Jewish Cemeteries in Lincoln, Nebraska," in *Persistence and Flexibility: Anthropological Perspectives on the American Jewish Experience*, ed. Walter P. Zenner (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), pp. 223-259. [#]

Screening of film *TBA*

NOTE: NO CLASS ON 4/13, 4/18, AND 4/20 (PASSOVER)

4/25-4/27) Sessions 24-25: Tourism

Jack Kugelmass, "Turving the Slum: New York City's Tenement Museum and the Politics of Heritage," in Hasia Diner, Jeffrey Shandler, and Beth S. Wenger, eds., *Remembering the Lower East Side: American Jewish Reflections* (Bloomington, Ind., 2000), pp. 179-211. [#]

Seth Kamil, "Tripping Down Memory Lane: Walking Tours on the Jewish Lower East Side," in Diner, et al., *Remembering the Lower East Side*, pp. 226-240. [#]

Discussion of ethnographies of Lower East Side walking tour.