Contemporary Jewish Culture (TENTATIVE SYLLABUS)  
Fall 2013

Instructor: Hilit Surowitz-Israel  
Office Hours: Wednesday 1-2:30 or by appointment, Miller Hall 107  
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Description: American Jewish communities are remarkably diverse, some define themselves racially, other ethnically, and some according to religious practice, or even body art. This course surveys Jewish communities in the Americas. We will explore the historical and cultural experiences that have helped define a number of Jewish communities, such as Cuban Jews, Jews of the American south, and Jews in New York. We will examine questions of race, ethnicity, community, and religion and the way in which these constructs shape identity. For examples, how do Cuban Jews in Miami understand and organize themselves vis-à-vis other Cuban and Jewish groups? Similarly, how do Ultra-Orthodox Jews in America define their community and relationship with other Jewish groups, and maintain distinction within a diverse social landscape? Among the topics discussed: diversity of Jewish life, religious dynamism, the maintenance and flexibility of social boundaries.

Required Texts:


Other readings for the course will be available on SAKAI.

Learning Goals:

a. Students will develop their ability to engage in logical thinking and complex critical analysis.

b. Students will develop their skills in expressing complex ideas through written and oral communication.

c. Students will be able to read and analyze primary and secondary sources.
k. Students will be able to explain the development of some aspect of a society or culture over time, including the history of ideas or history of science.

Assessment: Via embedded exam questions and embedded written assignments.

Attendance & Participation
Students are expected to attend each class on time. Attendance will be taken at each class meeting. You are permitted three unexcused absences. Following the third unexcused absence 1/3 of a letter grade will be deducted for each unexcused absence. Students who encounter any extended problem with absences, for example, for medical or family emergencies, or religious reasons, must inform me in writing about the reason and duration of the absence. Decisions on excused absences will be made on a case-by-case basis.

Short quizzes may be given on a regular basis. There will be no make-ups for in-class quizzes or exams.

Student participation is an integral component for the success of this class. Course participants will be expected to arrive to class on time, and prepared to discuss the assigned readings. Please bring assigned readings to class as we will frequently consult the text. Participation not only means asking questions and involving oneself in the classroom discussion, it also means actively listening to others.

Course Requirements:
1) attendance and participation (10%)
2) Literature Review on topic of research (10%)
3) Observation notes and analysis (10%)
4) Interview Notes and Analysis (10%)
5) Final paper (35%)
6) Exam (25%)

Course participants must submit all course requirements in order to complete the course.

Written work will be graded on the basis of content, clarity of argument, quality of writing, and how well it analyzes the material and answers the questions. Written work, except for that which is a classroom assignment, must be typed (double-spaced, 12 pt. font), and spell-checked. One letter grade per day will be deducted for late papers unless you have a written medical excuse.

Classroom Policies:
- Plagiarism and cheating will be penalized according to the full extent of University policy. Please consult Rutgers University’s Policy on Academic Integrity for Undergraduate and Graduate Students: http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/integrity.shtml#plagiarism
- Students with disabilities who require accommodations should provide me with their “accommodation letter” from the Office of Disability Services as soon as possible so that appropriate arrangements can be made. Please consult the website of the Office of Disability
Services for further information:
http://sas.rutgers.edu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=135&Itemid=117

❖ Note that I do not accept assignments submitted by email. All assignments must be submitted in hard copy on the day that they are due.

❖ Evaluations will cover all course material.

❖ You must complete all course requirements in order to receive a passing grade

❖ Schedule ❖

**Week 1**
Wed., 9/7
❖ Introduction to course;

Thurs., 9/8
Anthropology of Jews

**Week 2**
Mon. 9/12
Methods & Fieldwork

Wed. 9/14
Defining Jews and Judaism
❖ “Jew” and “Jewish Identity” from *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 10

**Week 3**
Mon. 9/19
Defining our terms: religion, race, ethnicity, culture

Wed. 9/21
Discuss fieldwork project-guidelines, ethics…

**Week 4**
Mon. 9/26
Jews and diaspora
- Andre Levy Introduction in Homelands and Diasporas: Holy Lands and Other Places 2005 1-26

Wed. 9/28  (literature review on topic due by 5pm-submit electronically)

**Week 5**
Mon. 10/3

Wed. 10/5
Jews & Race

**Week 6**
Mon. 10/10
Jews and Race

Wed. 10/12
Film: Brownsville Black and White

**Week 7**
Mon. 10/17
film: Fires in the Mirror
- comparative analysis

Wed. 10/19
“Passing” and “Blending”
Week 8 (observation notes & analysis due in class)
Mon. 10/24

Wed. 10/26

Week 9
Mon. 10/31

Wed. 11/2 (interview notes due in class)

Week 10
Mon. 11/7
Identity and the Researcher
* Virginia Dominguez Different and Difference, *Anthropology and Humanism Quarterly* 14(1) 1989 pgs. 10-16.

Wed. 11/9
Methods II

Week 11
Gender
Mon. 11/14
* “Sacred Categories and Social Relations: The Visibility and Invisibility of Gender in an American Jewish Community” by Riv-Ellen Prell from *Judaism Viewed from Within and Without* by Harvey Goldberg, SUNY Press, 1987.

Wed. 11/16

**Week 12**
Mon. 11/21

Wed. 11/23 (**Papers Due by 5pm-submit electronically; details forthcoming**)

**Week 13**
Mon. 11/28
* Number Our Days documentary film

Wed. 11/30
* **In-class Exam**

**Week 14**
Mon. 12/5

Wed. 12/7
* Myerhoff, Barbara. *Number our Days*. Touchstone, 1980. (conclusion)
* Surviving Stories: Reflections on Number Our Days from Between Two Worlds (Kugelmass)