American Studies 01:050:300:03: Race, Culture, and Politics: Blacks and Jews in America; Jewish Studies 01:563:359:01/Africana Studies 01:014:359:01: Blacks and Jews in American History

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Race, Politics, and Culture: Blacks and Jews in America is the fruit of an international partnership awarded by the American Studies Association to promote cooperation between the Rutgers American Studies Department and that of the Hebrew University. Emily Budick, chair of American Studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and author of *Blacks and Jews in Literary Conversation*, and I designed the initial seminar. The current revised course will explore the complexities of how black and Jewish political and cultural identities have evolved in relationship to one another via an examination of social and political history, literature, and film.

LEARNING GOALS:

Department Learning Goals Met by this Course:

Students will be able to synthesize an interdisciplinary dialogue among the different disciplinary methodologies that compose American Studies investigation of American culture across time and space in the history, politics, literature, and arts of the peoples of the United States, as well as the Americas. Students will be able to write well; speak articulately; and think critically, analytically, and creatively.

Additional Learning Goals Met by this Course:

Students will learn to think critically about black-Jewish relations from colonial times onward by situating those relations in their historical, political, social, cultural, and educational contexts.

BOOKS REQUIRED FOR PURCHASE:


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PROFESSOR FISCHBEIN’S OFFICE HOURS:
OFFICE:  Ruth Adams Hall 024C   OFFICE HOURS:   Monday:  12:15–1:45
TELEPHONE:  732-932-8650   Thursday: 12:15-1:45
E-MAIL:  fishbei@rci.rutgers.edu

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: Students with documented disabilities should present their documentation to the instructor at the beginning of the semester in order to be afforded appropriate accommodations. Students with disabilities requesting accommodations must follow the procedures outlined at http://disabilityservices.rutgers.edu/request.html

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

Except for collaborative assignments officially approved by the instructor in advance, all work a student submits must be his/her own independent effort. Students must cite properly all outside sources consulted in preparing written assignments. Students should review the university policy on Academic Integrity (see the website for the Center for the Advancement of Teaching: http://teachx.rutgers.edu/integrity/policy.html). You can obtain help in maintaining
standards of academic integrity by taking any of the following academic integrity tutorials: Take a 20 minute interactive-tutorial on Plagiarism and Academic Integrity, http://sccweb.scc-net.rutgers.edu/douglass/sal/plagiarism/Intro.html. For another view, use the Camden Plagiarism Tutorial: http://library.camden.rutgers.edu/EducationalModule/Plagiarism/. Consult Don't Plagiarize: Document Your Research! for tips about how to take notes so that you don't plagiarize by accident. http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/lib_instruct/instruct_document.shtml. Failure to comply with the University’s academic integrity policy can result in failure of the course.

Plagiarism is the representation of the words or ideas of another as one's own in any academic exercise. To avoid plagiarism, every direct quotation must be identified by quotation marks or by appropriate indentation and must be promptly cited in the text or in a footnote. Acknowledgement is required when material from another source is stored in print, electronic, or other medium and is paraphrased or summarized in whole or in part in one's words. To acknowledge a paraphrase properly, one might state: "to paraphrase Plato's comment ..." and conclude with a footnote identifying the exact reference. A footnote acknowledging only a directly quoted statement does not suffice to notify the reader of any preceding or succeeding paraphrased material. Information which is common knowledge, such as names of leaders of prominent nations, basic scientific laws, etc., need not be footnoted; however, all facts or information obtained in reading or research that are not common knowledge among students in the course must be acknowledged. In addition to materials specifically cited in the text, only materials that contribute to one's general understanding of the subject may be acknowledged in the bibliography. Plagiarism can, in some cases, be a subtle issue. Any questions about what constitutes plagiarism should be discussed with the faculty member. For information on proper documentation, consult Acknowledging Sources: http://amerstudies.rutgers.edu/documents/AcknowledgingSources.pdf, the guide prepared by the Rutgers American Studies Department, which is available on the American Studies Department web site and on the course Sakai web site.

ABSENCES:
Regular class attendance is required by Rutgers and is essential to this class. You will be allowed one unexcused absence without grade penalty. The consequences of unexcused absences are as follows:

1 unexcused absence = No penalty 
2 unexcused absences = 20% grade penalty = final grade no higher than a B 
3 unexcused absences = 30% grade penalty = final grade no higher than a C 
4 unexcused absences = failure in the course
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Excused absences are those that result from documentable family emergencies, illness, religious observance, court dates, jury service, etc., that is, situations over which you have no individual control. Please inform me as soon as possible if you are unable to attend class on a regular basis.

ASSIGNMENTS:
ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING:

- Response papers  15% for 4 out of 13 response papers
- moderation  10%
- Class participation  15%
- Critical paper  15% (1000 words of text)
- Term Paper  45% (2500 words of text)

In-class participation will consist of the following:

Each student must contribute to in-class discussion every week. Therefore, attendance is required at every class. Only one unexcused absence is allowed without grade penalty.

Each student will serve as part of a team of moderators for two classes. These students should collaborate with each other in advance and will present a short oral introduction to their topic of the week and prepare questions to stimulate class discussion.

In order to facilitate discussion all students will submit to the professor four out of thirteen one-page e-mail response papers that relate to the reading/film of the week. These responses – one for each section -- will be due by 7:00 P.M. the night prior to the class meeting and must include a question suitable for in-class discussion.

You should log onto the Discussion and Private Messages section of https://sakai.rutgers.edu/portal/ initially with your eden e-mail account to post such messages. You can change your log-in once you have established yourself with sakai to reflect the e-mail account that you ordinarily use. You can reaccess the site subsequently to see what other students have posted in preparation for class discussion.

NOTE: The response paper is not a summary of the contents of the reading. Instead, the response paper should comment on significant issues raised by the material and should use concrete textual evidence to support a clear argument.
In her Introduction to *In the Almost Promised Land: American Jews and Blacks, 1915-1935* (1977) Hasia R. Diner has argued that Jews benefited from their involvement in the civil rights struggles of the Sixties:

For Jewish leaders in the early twentieth century, the issues of black America provided an attractive and appropriate forum to adapt and blend their cultural heritage with contemporary realities. In the first place, many of the issues raised by black civil rights groups spoke directly to problems faced by American Jews. Job discrimination, restrictive housing markets, exclusion from universities and professional schools were concerns of Jews also. Jewish leaders clearly perceived that the removal of civil disabilities from one group would have a beneficial effect on their own security and well-being. [xv]….  

In proclaiming through the medium of black concerns that Jews were “more American” than the Americans, Jewish leaders were filling yet another need. They were as concerned with preserving that which was distinctly Jewish as they were with adapting the group to American life. They believed that the essence of the Jewish tradition involved a commitment to human rights and philanthropy. Jews must expose the world to high moral standards, for this was their role as God’s Chosen People. In America, the desperate plight of blacks provided the forum in which Jews could illustrate their moral and ethical superiority, their “Chosenness.” Thus, through the race issue, the leaders of American Jewry hoped that their culture and heritage could be passed on to future generations of American Jews.” [xvi]

Do you agree with Diner’s argument that Jewish involvement in civil rights involved a substantial measure of self-interest, whether conscious or not, and that it was meant both to stake a claim to successful acculturation and to preserve their own distinctive cultural heritage? Is there a need to distinguish between the motives of Jewish leadership and Jewish grass roots participants in the civil rights movement? Does a consideration of gender affect the accuracy of Diner’s arguments? Did Jewish women who participated in the civil rights movement share such motivations? Was the rise of black anti-Semitism that accompanied black power a reaction against Jewish exploitation of civil rights to advance Jews as a group, or did it have a different motivation or complex of motivations? Please be sure to document accurately in footnotes or endnotes all references used in this critical paper.

**Thursday, March 4th:** Preliminary bibliography due. E-mail to me at fishbei@rci.rutgers.edu.

**Thursday, April 8th:** thesis statement due. E-mail to me at fishbei@rci.rutgers.edu.
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Thursday, April 29th: term paper due on topic to be decided in consultation with instructor by Monday, February 11th: (2500 words of text) **Paper actually must use and document in footnotes or endnotes THREE of the sources provided by the instructor at meeting at which term paper topic is approved.** Please e-mail your paper to me at fishbei@rci.rutgers.edu and supply stamped self-addressed large (e.g. 9” x 13”) manila envelope for return of paper, **which must be submitted in hard copy at the April 29th class.**

**FILM SCHEDULE:**

**FILMS SHOWN IN CLASS:**
- Thursday, January 21st: *Black Israel* (2003, 88 minutes)
- Thursday, January 28th: *Murder in Harlem* (1935, 102 minutes: excerpts)
- Thursday, February 11th: *Goodbye, Columbus* (1969, 105 minutes: excerpts)
- Thursday, February 18th: *Blacks and Jews* (1997, 85 minutes)

**FILMS PLACED ON RESERVE AT THE MUSIC LIBRARY, MABEL SMITH DOUGLASS LIBRARY:**
- Thursday, January 21st- Thursday, February 4th: *The Jazz Singer* (1927, 89 minutes)
- Thursday, February 25th- Thursday, March 11th: *The Pawnbroker* (1964, 120 minutes)
- Thursday, March 11th- Thursday, April 1st: *Fires in the Mirror* (1993, 80 minutes)
- Thursday, April 15th- Thursday, April 29th: *The Human Stain* (2003, 105 minutes)
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ASSIGNMENTS: All readings on reserve at Mabel Smith Douglass Reserve Desk and articles available on electronic reserve.

No. Week of: Readings and Films: (*on reserve)
I. January 21st Introduction

*Black Israel (2003, 88 minutes) shown in class

Thursday, January 21st-Thursday, February 4th: The Jazz Singer (1927, 89 minutes) on reserve at the Music Library, Mabel Smith Douglass Library.

II. January 28th


– continued on page 8
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No. Week of: Readings and Films: (*on reserve)

II. January 28th (continued)


Excerpts from Oscar Micheaux’s Murder in Harlem (1935, 102 minutes) shown in class

INTRODUCTORY POSTING (required, non-graded):
On the Discussions and Private Messages area of http://sakai.rutgers.edu:

1. Introduce yourself and explain why you took this course, that is, what knowledge, insight, and/or curiosity you bring to the course and what you hope to learn from it.

2. In one sentence state what you think makes race a problem in your society or culture.
   – continued on page 8

QUESTION: How has the legacy of slavery affected black-Jewish relations in the twentieth-century either in the Leo Frank case or in the debates over historian Stanley Elkins’ book Slavery (1959) that compared slavery as an institution to the concentration camp?

III. February 4th


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<td>III.</td>
<td>February 4th (continued)</td>
<td>View <em>The Jazz Singer</em> (1927, 88 minutes) on reserve at the Music Library, Mabel Smith Douglass Library. Film to be discussed in class.</td>
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**QUESTION:** Is the use of blackface and of allusions to African-American music in *The Jazz Singer* meant to reflect the double consciousness of the Jew as an outsider in American culture akin to at W. E. B. Du Bois describes with respect to blacks in *Souls of Black Folk* (1905), or is it emblematic of the Jewish desire to acculturate by demonstrating that the "blackness" of the Jew is artificial and can be successfully removed and transcended?
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<td><em>Goodbye, Columbus</em> (1969, 105 minutes: excerpts) shown in class</td>
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<td>QUESTION: To what degree does Neil Klugman identify with the black child in the Newark Public Library? Is that identification based upon class similarity, a sense of a common outlaw status, and/or a desire to embrace black primitivism? How much weight does this identification carry in Roth's story?</td>
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QUESTION: Did the civil rights movement have substantially different meaning for the Jews and the blacks who participated in it? Did region, religion, or politics play anywhere near as significant a role in shaping that meaning as identification as black or Jew did? |


QUESTION: Why does Alice Walker focus so much on tropes of the body, sexuality, and disease in portraying black-Jewish relations in *Meridian*? |

Thursday, February 25th–Thursday, March 11th: *The Pawnbroker* (1964, 120 minutes) on reserve at the Music Library, Mabel Smith Douglass Library. |


Preliminary bibliography due  

QUESTION: What is the effect of introducing so much Christological imagery into a novel that treats the effects of the Holocaust on a Jewish survivor? Is *The Pawnbroker* a novel that deals specifically with the Jewish experience, or is it more universal in its meaning? How does race figure in a novel that deals with blacks, Jews, and Puerto Ricans in Harlem? Is race a stable category? |
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No.  Week of:  Readings and Films: (*on reserve)


*The Pawnbroker (1964, 120 minutes) on reserve at the Music Library, Mabel Smith Douglass Library to be discussed in class.

QUESTION: How do race and religion intersect in Baldwin's portrayal of black anti-Semitism? Do blacks expect more religious and moral consistency from Jews than they do from Christians? OR: Does the translation from book to film transform the meaning of Edward Lewis Wallant’s *The Pawnbroker from a particularistic one concerning the fate of a Holocaust survivor to a more universalistic one concerning the nature of fallen mankind?

IX. March 18th  SPRING BREAK
Leslie Fishbein
American Studies Department  13  Spring 2010
F.A.S., Rutgers University  Ruth Adams Building 018
Thursday 9:15 A.M.-12:15 P.M.

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No.  Week of:  Readings and Films: (*on reserve)

Richard Broadman’s documentary film Brownsville Black and White (2000, 83 minutes) shown in class

QUESTION: Is Jerald Podair correct in arguing that the Ocean Hill-Brownsville dispute was the strike that changed New York? Did this strike in actuality or symbolically represent the end of the black-Jewish alliance in the unions and in the civil rights movement? What was at stake in the dispute, and did all generations and political persuasions of blacks and Jews view the strike in terms primarily of their ethnic affiliation?

Thursday, March 11th- Thursday, April 1st: Fires in the Mirror (1993, 80 minutes) on reserve at the Music Library, Mabel Smith Douglass Library.


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No.  Week of:  Readings and Films: (*on reserve)

XI. April 1st
(continued)

View Fires in the Mirror (1993, 80 minutes) on reserve at the Music Library, Mabel Smith Douglass Library. Film to be discussed in class.

QUESTION: Anna Deavere Smith states in her Introduction to Fires in the Mirror: "My sense is that American character lives not in one place or the other, but in the gaps between the places, and in our struggle to be together in our differences. It lives not in what has been fully articulated, but in what is in the process of being articulated, not in the smooth-sounding words, but in the very moment that the smooth-sounding words fail us." Many blacks and Jews have attempted to articulate the meaning of the Crown Heights riots and their aftermath. Was this a struggle between blacks and Jews in general, between blacks and Hasidim in particular, or a more complex dispute? Was this ethnic conflict local and particular or reflective of wider fissures in American character? What, if any, are the moral consequences of saying that words will not suffice to articulate the fundamental problem underlying the Crown Heights riots?

XII. April 8th

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No.  Week of:  Readings and Films:  (*on reserve)


**QUESTION:** How do black nationalism and Zionism complicate black-Jewish relations? How do they affect the desire of blacks and Jews in terms of their identification with the American gospel of success and the traditional way in which that credo has defined mobility and achievement?

XIII.  April 15th


**QUESTION:** How is Jane Lazarre as a white person, as a woman, as a Jew, and as a mother able to negotiate her position and that of her family on the color line? How successfully is she able to confront racism and to protect her sons from it?

Thursday, April 15th-Thursday, April 29th: *The Human Stain* (2003, 105 minutes) on reserve at the Music Library, Mabel Smith Douglass Library.
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**No.** | **Week of:** | **Readings and Films:** (*on reserve*)
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**QUESTION:** What are the consequences of Roth's decision to employ a metaphor of passing rather than one of identification as he had in *Goodbye, Columbus* and to make his protagonist black rather than Jewish? Does something new vex Roth in terms of black-Jewish relations?

XV. | April 29\textsuperscript{th} | View *The Human Stain* (2003, 105 minutes) on reserve at the Music Library, Mabel Smith Douglass Library. **Term paper due**

**Term paper due** | **Film to be discussed in class.**

**QUESTION:** Passing historically has involved issues of class as well as issues of race. How are these issues presented in the filmic version of *The Human Stain*? Does their filmic presentation differ substantially from the way in which Philip Roth presents these issues in his novel?

**TERM PAPER DUE:** (2500 words of text). **Paper actually must use and document in footnotes or endnotes THREE of the sources provided by the instructor at meeting at which term paper topic is approved. Please e-mail your paper to me at fishbei@rci.rutgers.edu and supply stamped self-addressed large (e.g. 9” x 13”) manila envelope for return of paper, which must be submitted in hard copy at the April 29\textsuperscript{th} class.**