American Jews and Media
01:050:336:01 (American Studies); 195:395:01 (Comparative Literature)
563:306:01 (Jewish Studies)

PROVISIONAL SYLLABUS

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Course description:

This course examines the wide range of interactions that American Jews have had with sound recordings, film, radio, television, video, and the internet over the course of the past century. While some attention is placed on feature films, popular television series, and other significant works of American media by or about Jews, the focus of the course is on the social practices in which all these media have figured in 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 the internet in transforming traditional Jewish community life). Special attention is placed on the use of new media for self-portraiture, spirituality, and collective memory.

Course learning goals:

• Students will acquire an overview of the range and dynamics of American Jews’ encounters with new media from the turn of the twentieth century to the present.
• Students will understand how engagements with new technologies and media practices inform the lives of American Jews in relation to their encounters with modernity; relations with their neighbors; innovations in religious, political, and cultural life; the dynamics of their self-representation 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. Regular attendance of class and active participation in class discussion is required. Students are expected to come to class on time, having prepared the reading or other assignment due that day, with comments, questions, etc.,
regarding the assigned material; to respect the protocols of classroom conduct (e.g., arriving promptly, turning off cell phones and laptops, not eating during class, avoiding distracting chatter); to check their email regularly for class announcements (e.g., changes in schedule or assignments); and to turn in written work on the dates due. Students with two unexcused absences will have their course grade reduced by one full grade (e.g., from A to B). Students with four or more unexcused absences will receive an F for the course. Students should be prepared to provide the professor with documentation of excusable absences, such as family emergencies, illness, or religious observance; these must be submitted by the due date for the final exam. Students who find that they are unable to attend class regularly for some pressing reason should notify their dean as well as the professor as soon as possible.

A note on media reserves: Unless otherwise instructed, all prescreening/prelistening materials are placed on reserve in the Media Library, located in the lower level of the Douglass campus library. Materials must be used on site.

2. Guided response papers: write six out of twelve response papers, each 2 double-spaced pages (i.e., 1,000-1,200 words), on the reading and/or media work to be prepared for each class. Students choose which six papers they wish to write. Papers must be turned in on the date due in class (see schedule). Guidelines for papers will be distributed at least one week before they are due.

3. Film/television program analysis: write a short paper (4 double-spaced pages) on an American film or television program dealing with Jewish experience. Detailed instructions to be distributed.

4. Final examination: Essay questions related to course readings, media works watched/listened to both outside of class and in class, and class discussions. Details to be announced.

All written work that a student submits must be his/her own independent effort. Students must cite properly all outside sources (readings, media works, websites, etc.) consulted in preparing written assignments. Students should review the university policy on Academic Integrity. Failure to comply with this policy can result in failure of the course or more severe penalties.

Course grade will be based on class attendance and participation (15%), response papers (35%), film/television program analysis (20%), and final exam (30%).

NOTE: Course schedule is subject to change. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to check with the professor regarding any changes in assignments, etc.
# American Jews and the Media Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Reading and Prescreening/Prelistening*</th>
<th>In-class screening/listening (excerpts)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Obsessed with Jews</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>EA** 15-33</td>
<td>Romance of a Jewess, The Yiddisher Boy, His People</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>JGV*** Chapter 1</td>
<td>Selected cantorial recordings and films</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>EA 76-92, Raphaelson</td>
<td>The Al Jolson Story, ‘Jazz Singer’ remakes, Overture to Glory</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>EA 113-123, 244-256</td>
<td>TBA</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>EA 101-112</td>
<td>His Wife's Lover, Uncle Moses, Green Fields; selections from Yiddish radio</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>EA 45-75</td>
<td>Crossfire, The Great Dictator</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>JGV Chapter 2</td>
<td>The Eternal Light, A Time for Valor</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>EA 205-219, Tryster</td>
<td>Land of Promise, Exodus, The Illegals</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Shandler 1999</td>
<td>This Is Your Life, While America Watched</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>JGV Chapter 4</td>
<td>selected amateur films, Nobody’s Business,</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Ginsburg, Katz, Ruby</td>
<td>guest filmmaker TBA</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>JGV Chapter 6</td>
<td>selected Chabad videos</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Boyarin, Ruedenberg, Portnoy, Voloj</td>
<td>selected websites</td>
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* Unless otherwise instructed, prescreening/prelistening materials (listed in italics) are on reserve in the Music Library located in the lower level of the Douglass Library. These materials must be used on site.

**EA = Hoberman and Shandler, *Entertaining America*  
***JGV = Shandler, *Jews, God, and Videotape*
American Jews and the Media / Course Readings

= book to be purchased at Rutgers University Bookstore. This book is also on reserve in Alexander Library (College Ave. Campus). Other readings, except where noted, are available online at sakai: (https://sakai.rutgers.edu/portal).