GER1400H S From Real to Virtual Shtetl: Jewish Culture in Russia, 1917-2010

GER362S Soviet and Kosher: Jewish Culture in the Soviet Union GER 362S

Wednesdays, 2-4pm, JHB 235
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The course will examine the major trends in Russian Jewish History, culture and identity as developed during the Soviet and post-Soviet Period. Selected topics are Soviet policies towards the Jews, building of Yiddish, Hebrew and Russian culture in the 1920s, Holocaust in the Soviet Union, Jewish participation in the Soviet war effort, anti-Semitism of the 1950s, Jewish culture during the late Soviet period, collapse of the Soviet Union, post-Soviet Jewish Diaspora and its implications.

We will examine a variety of primary sources, ranging from archival documents, to personal testimonies, to literary works, and folklore. A variety of disciplines will be used to examine Soviet Jewish experience. We will look into the works by political scientists, historians, literary scholars, and anthropologists. In the discussion, we will think about how a primary source can provide different data for different disciplines, and will discuss the implications for the development of Russian Jewish Studies.

Some Books in the Syllabus:

Zvi Gitelman, A Century of Ambivalence


Ken Moss, Jewish Renaissance in the Russian Revolution

Jonathan Dekel Chen, Farming the Red Land: Jewish Agricultural Colonization and Local Soviet Power, 1924–1941

Leon Dennen, Where the Ghetto Ends

Pauline Wengeroff, Rememberings: the world of a Russian-Jewish woman in the nineteenth century

Maxim Shrayer, An Anthology of Jewish-Russian Literature: 1801-1953

Benjamin Harshav, The Moscow Yiddish Theater: art on stage in the time of revolution

David Shneer, Yiddish and the creation of Soviet Jewish culture, 1918-1930

Joshua Rubenstein and Vladimir P. Naumov. Stalin's secret pogrom: the postwar inquisition of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee

Larissa Remennick, Russian Jews on three continents: identity, integration, and conflict

Slezkine, Yuri. The Jewish Century. Ewing: California Princeton Fulfillment Services

Larissa Remennick, Russian Jews on Three Continents
• Most secondary readings, and some primary readings will be posted on the course Blackboard site. Blackboard will also be the central location for posting response papers, seminar presentations, and other course discussions. The cheapest way to acquire the books is through the internet bookstores, such as amazon.ca and bookfinder.com

• Undergraduate students are expected to read the materials posted on the course’s website, through the blackboard.

• Some readings, identified with an (*) are optional for undergraduates but mandatory for graduate students.

• Graduate students should read books in their entirety, when possible. Also, please see a fuller bibliography section at the end of the syllabus.

Course Requirements

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1) Class Discussion: In this seminar, each student in the class bears an equal responsibility for carrying the discussion. You will be evaluated based on both the quality and quantity of your oral participation as well as on your participation in the on-line written discussions. Each week, I will suggest a few topics or questions to consider in the coming week’s readings. These questions will be posted on Blackboard. It is highly recommended that you prepare at least 500 words notes for each seminar in response to those questions. [20%]

2) Publishable Book Review [20%]

3) Presentation: During the term, each student will give one 20-minute oral presentation on the assigned readings for the week, and then will offer directions for further discussion. Students are required to meet with me at least one week before the presentation, and to post an outline of the presentation on Blackboard (on that class’s discussion board) by 10pm on the night before class. Presentation dates will be assigned during the first class meeting. [20%]

4) Final Essay: 20 – 25 page seminar paper. Due by April 10, 2013. [40%]

GER 362S

1) Class Discussion: You are expected to be familiar with the assigned readings, and to be able to contribute to the discussion in each class. [20%]
2) **Book(s) Report**, analytical overview of one or more primary sources on the topic of the course (a book of memoirs, an archival or a literary document, a collection of songs, etc. due February 13th, noon [25%]

3) **Research Paper**: An analytical paper, based on one or more of primary sources on a topic of Soviet Jewish history, discussed in class. It is due on March 26th, noon. [30%]

4) **Final test (take home)** - 25 %

Wednesday, January 9, 2013

**Russian Jewry on the Eve of the Russian Revolution**

(*) Pauline Wengeroff, pp. 173 – 233, bb

Wednesday, January 16, 2013

**From the Pale of Settlement to the Collective Farms: Projects of Establishing Jewish Agricultural Nation**

*Required:*  
Zvi Gitelman *A Century of Ambivalence*, pp. 59 - 87  
Etya G. story, sovietjewishculture.org  
Film: *Seekers of Happiness*, 1936 – reserved for in-library viewing at Robarts, also [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ImAtApVLiuE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ImAtApVLiuE) (no subtitles)

Wednesday, January 23, 2013

**Organization of the Jewish Education System, 1918 – 1939 and Soviet Anti-Judaism Campaigns**

*Required:*  
Elias Shulman, Yiddish schools, pp. 123-145, bb  
Grigorii story, sovietjewishculture.org  
Anna Shternshis, *Soviet and Kosher*, pp. 1 – 43, bb  
Moshe Altshuler, “The Komsomol Hagaddah,” bb
Wednesday, January 30, 2013

Jewish Intellectual Dilemmas in the Soviet Context

 Required:
Sholem Aleichem, Agents, bb
(*) Gilboa, *A Language Silenced*, pp. 47 - 124
(*) Dennen, pp. 32 – 49, 108 – 110, 130 – 141

Wednesday, February 6, 2013

Modernism, Socialist Realism, Yiddish Literature before 1941

 Required:
Der Nister, *The Fence*, bb
Itsik Fefer, *I’ve Never Been Lost, Rabbi’s Name and So What If I’ve Been Circumcised*
(*) Moyshe Kulbak, “Zelmenyaner”
David Shneer, *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture*, pp. 134- 178
(*) Dennen, *Where the Ghetto Ends* pp. 141 – 160

Wednesday, February 13, 2013

Soviet Jews During World War II

Joshua Rubenstein and Ilya Altman, *the Unknown Black Book*, Introduction, Ukraine, bb


**Wednesday, February 20, 2013**
Film: Commissar, Moscow, 1967

Reading Week, no classes

**Wednesday, February 27, 2013**

**Holocaust in Soviet Literature**

Itsik Fefer, *I am a Jew*
Vassily Grossman, *Letter from the Mother*, from *Life and Fate*, bb
(*) E. Clowes, “Constructing the Memory of the Holocaust: The Ambiguous Treatment of Babii Yar in Soviet Literature,” bb

Film: Goodbye Boys (Moscow, 1964)

**Wednesday, March 6, 2013**

**1946 – 1953 – The Black Years of Soviet Jewry**

Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence*, pp. 115 – 143
Gennady Kostyrchenko, *Out of the red shadows: anti-semitism in Stalin's Russia*, bb

**Wednesday, March 13, 2013**

**Jews of Silence?**

David Harris, *The Jokes of Oppression*, bb
Gennady Estrayikh, *Yiddish During the Cold War*, exerts

**Wednesday, March 20, 2013**

**The Great Exodus of the 1990s and the Birth of New Russian Jewish Diaspora**
Larissa Remennick, *Russian Jews on Three Continents*
Fran Markowitch, “Criss-crossing identities: The Russian Jewish diaspora and the Jewish diaspora in Russia”, bb

**Wednesday, March 27, 2013**

**Polemics about Post-Soviet Jewish Culture, Literature and Identity**

Yurii Slezkine, *The Jewish Century*


**Wednesday, April 3, 2013**

**Discussion of Final Projects, selected student presentations**

*Suggested Topics for Discussion*

1. Analyze the focus of Assimilationist and modernization trends in the pre-revolutionary Jewish life.
2. What agendas of Jewish political parties did the Bolsheviks adopt in their treatment of “the Jewish question”?
3. Discuss tradition and innovation in the organization of Yiddish schools.
4. What were the state policies towards the Hebrew language? What are the major paradoxes in its treatment?
5. Think about how Soviet model of anti-religious propaganda can be applied to any Jewish or Christian holiday.
6. What do personal narratives not tell us about pre-war Jewish life?
7. Imagine that you are a Jewish parent (from an observant family) that has to send a child to school in Kiev, in 1929. Discuss your choices and dilemmas in selecting a school for your child, and explain your decision.
8. How did Jewish intellectuals and Soviet state see the role of Yiddish theatre?
9. How do Soviet Jews perceive World War II?
10. Discuss the role of the image of the Holocaust in Soviet Jewish culture and literature.
11. How did Yiddish authors reconcile their Jewish identity and the culture of the Soviet society?
12. What is the symbolism of Der Nister story? Think of at least two interpretations of the images in the story.
13. What shocked the Soviet Jews most about the World War II?
14. What could Fefer of 1942 tell Fefer of 1923? What about Fefer of 1948?
15. Answer question number 12 about Bergelson.
16. What did the Refusenik movement do for Soviet Jews?
17. What are the manifestation of Jewishness in the times when one is not allowed to speak about Religion or Holocaust?
18. Discuss the impact of Soviet policies towards the Jews on Soviet satellite countries of Eastern Europe.
20. How do Russian Jews (mis)fit in the Western societies after the immigration?
21. What elements of Soviet Jewish culture seem to be most adapt to post-Soviet world?

Selected Bibliography on Soviet Jewish History and Culture

General overviews


**Anthologies of Yiddish Literature (in Yiddish)**


**Primary Texts**


**Bibliographies**


Anti-Semitism


Russian Revolution, Civil War and Pogroms


Jewish Art, Theatre, Cinema and Music


Harshav, the book on Yiddish theater


1917 – 1941


**Russian Jewish Literature in Translation**

**Anthologies and Primary Texts**


Literary Criticism


Yiddish Culture


Krutikov, Mikhail. From Kabbalah to Class Struggle: Expressionism, Marxism, and Yiddish Literature in the Life and

Religion


Hebrew Culture


World War II

Holocaust


**Jews in the Soviet Army during WWII**


**Memoirs about Jews in the Soviet Army**


1948 – 1991


1948 – 1953 – Dark Years


BOOK WITH THE PROTOCOLS OF THE JEWISH ANTI_FASCIST COMMITTEE

Refusenik movement

1991- today –post-Soviet Russia


**Post-Soviet Jewish Immigration**


Non-Ashkenazi Jews


Jewish Identity


Journals: East European Jewish Affairs, Jews and Jewish Topics
Soviet produced propaganda sources
Websites – stories, iremember, sovietjewishculture, samovar

**Polemics**
