

Fall 2015
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Hours: M 4-5 PM; W 12:30-1:30 PM and by appt.

ANTH 429/529: JEWISH FOLKLORE AND ETHNOLOGY

What does it mean to be Jewish in cultural terms? This course focuses on the diversity of Jewish cultures, with an emphasis on Ashkenazic (East European) Jewish experiences and the contemporary Jewish diaspora in North America. A historical approach to identity explores the Holocaust and its representational controversies. Expressive culture, including narrative, proverbs, jokes, folk beliefs, rituals, holidays (calendrical and life cycle), food, customs, and music are analyzed with attention to tradition, innovation, and gender. Readings cover a variety of genres including scholarly articles, graphic novels, memoirs, folktales, and jokes. Guests and films supplement lecture and discussion.

I welcome questions and feedback via email, telephone, in writing, and in person during office hours. I have a comment bag available at every class. If you have a documented disability and need accommodation, please contact Disability Services.

Please turn off all mobile devices during class. Please, no texting. Computer use is permitted for class related activities, such as note taking.

Plagiarism is not tolerated at the UO.

Respect for the instructor and fellow students is imperative. Some of the class materials may be controversial. It is important that we listen to and respond civilly to one another. I encourage everyone to participate and express their opinions freely.

The class utilizes a **Canvas** site. See Modules by date and topic for readings, handouts, outlines, and powerpoints. News articles are online with urls provided. Two glossaries of Yiddish words are provided under in Canvas Sept 30.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. Attendance (10%) and participation (10%). Please sign the attendance sheet. Participation includes classroom, office hours, and posting in Canvas Discussions. A food sign up sheet will be available for preparing and presenting about Jewish foodways.
2. Fieldwork assignment (15%) due Nov. 16. A one paragraph proposal for this project is due Oct. 12. See last page of syllabus.
3. Take-home essay midterm due Nov. 2 in class, and take-home essay final due Tuesday, December 8, 3 PM (32%+ 33%). Exams are distributed at least five days prior to the due date.
4. **Graduate students:** exam percentages are 22%+23%. Graduate students will write a research paper (10 pp., 20%), due Nov 30. A one-page proposal (with bibliography) is due Oct 12. The fieldwork project may be combined with the research paper with my approval. Graduate students will present their projects in class at a relevant time during the term (20 minutes).

Midterm and final exams will cover lectures, readings, and films. The final exam will emphasize material from the second half of the course. Exams and assignments must be submitted on time—under no circumstances will make-up exams or extensions be given without a documented excuse. Points will be deducted for late exams. If you will not be able to turn in an assignment on time, please notify me in advance.

Graduate student papers should be well documented and should contribute to their larger graduate goals; you will be expected to apply concepts encountered in discussions/readings. Students may incorporate fieldwork into their projects. Please see me for bibliographic assistance and to discuss project ideas.

Some possible topics include:

- a. Ethnography and analysis of any one of the following: ritual events such as Shabbat (Saturday ritual), Sukkot, Purim (carnival), Passover seder, wedding, childbirth, bar or bat mitzvah (coming-of age ritual at 13 yrs.), bris (circumcision), funeral; a setting such as kheyder (Jewish school), beys-medresh (house of prayer), synagogue, sukkah, mikvah (communal ritual bath), or work or domestic setting, a practitioner, such as cantor (leader of prayer), mohel (circumciser), rabbi, midwife, Hasidic rebbe, shochet (kosher slaughterer), an expressive domain eg., food, dress, storytelling, music, folk art, games, folk medicine, folk belief
- b. Culture change.
- c. Gender and Jewish culture; male/female domains; interpretation of scripture and folk practices, feminism and the Jewish experience.
- d. Analysis of contemporary Jewish humor based on fieldwork or popular entertainers.
- e. Autobiographical account of the folkways of a family.
- f. Life history of an East European (or other non-American-born) Jew.
- g. Innovation in Jewish ritual, such as new forms of wedding, birth and naming ceremonies.
- h. Interaction of Jews and non-Jews, mutual images, stereotypes in folk culture.
- i. Annotated bibliography on a specific subject related to Jewish folklore.
- j. Holocaust representations.
- k. Folkloric elements in Jewish literature or theater.
- l. Expressive elements in the Yiddish language.
- m. Hasidic folklore in America or Israel.
- n. Family clubs and kinship networks among American Jews.

Grading Rubric:

A – Outstanding performance relative to that required to meet course requirements; demonstrates a mastery of course content at the highest level.

B – Performance that is significantly above that required to meet course requirements; demonstrates a mastery of course content at a high level.

C – Performance that meets the course requirements in every respect; demonstrates an adequate understanding of course content.

D – Performance that is at the minimal level necessary to pass the course but does not fully meet the course requirements; demonstrates a marginal understanding of course content.

F – Performance in the course is unacceptable and does not meet the course requirements; demonstrates an inadequate understanding of the course content.

Course Objectives:

- Identify the diverse conceptions of what it means to be Jewish in cultural terms.
- Trace the study of Jewish folklore historically and today.
- Interrogate the representations of Jews in popular culture and folklore.
- Analyze representations of the Holocaust.
- Analyze gender in Jewish culture in relation to questions of politics, power, ritual, and creativity.
- Analyze Jewish narrative, proverbs, legends, jokes, folk beliefs, rituals, holidays (calendrical and life cycle), foodways, customs, and music.
- Trace the dynamism between tradition and innovation in Jewish folklore.

REQUIRED READING:

The required readings consist of 3 books (in the book store and on reserve) plus readings in Canvas and the internet. Two glossaries of Yiddish words and several maps of Eastern Europe are provided in Canvas under Sept 30.

The required books are:

Spiegelman, Art. MAUS, A SURVIVOR'S TALE, Part I: My Father Bleeds History, and Part II: And Here My Troubles Began (Pantheon 1986, 1991).
Myerhoff, Barbara, NUMBER OUR DAYS (Touchstone, 1980).

Recommended (graphic novel):

Chast, Ros. *Can't We Talk about Something More Pleasant? A Memoir* (Bloomsbury, 2014).

Useful websites:

Encyclopedia of Jewish Life: www.yivoencyclopedia.org/

Jewish Virtual Library <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org>

Roman Vishniac photography archive: <http://museum.icp.org/vishniac/gallery/index.html>

YIVO Institute for Jewish research: <http://www.yivo.org/>

Exhibit: Jews of Tsarist Russia: <http://www.yivoexhibitions.com> (listen to the sound recording)

Pre-WWI Photographs: <http://yivo1000towns.cjh.org/default.asp>

East European Archives: <http://www.rtrfoundation.org/Archdta1.shtml>

Jewish Ancestry and Genealogy: <http://www.jewishgen.org>

Maps of Jewish Eastern Europe: <http://easteurotopo.org/>

About Judaism: <http://judaism.about.com>

Judaism 101 (Orthodox): <http://www.jewfaq.org/>

Aish HaTorah (Fire of Torah, Orthodox): www.aish.com/jl/l/m/48969841.html

The following local organizations sponsor events related to Jewish life:

The Jewish Federation of Lane County <http://www.jewishfedlc.org/HTML/JewishLiving.html>

Temple Beth Israel (TBI), Reconstructionist, tbieugene.org.
1175 East 29th & University, 541- 485-7218

Oregon Hillel, 1059 Hilyard Street, 541-343-8920, www.oregon.hillel.org;
andy@oregonhillel.org; [facebook.com/oregonhillel/foundation](https://www.facebook.com/oregonhillel/foundation)
Shabbat services every Friday at 6:15 PM with dinner afterwards; free, no dress code.

Jewish Student Union, EMU suite 28, 6-4366

CONGREGATION AHAVAS TORAH - Orthodox
<http://www.minyan.us> 541 844 1340, ahavastoraheugene@aol.com

Or haGan, Light of the Garden Jewish Community <http://www.orhagan.org/>
Rabbi Jonathan Seidel

AD-OLAM SYNAGOGUE WITHOUT WALLS Rabbi: Hanan Sills <http://adolam.org>

OREGON JEWISH MUSEUM (PDX) www.ojm.org (503) 226-3600

JEWISH FEDERATION OF GREATER PORTLAND www.jewishportland.org

<http://www.chabadoregon.com/> (Lubavitcher Hasidim)

Upcoming Events at TBI:

Sept. 29, 7:00 – 8:30 PM Rabbi Naomi Steinberg: Storytelling in the Sukkah

Sept. 30, 5:30-7:30 PM in the Sukkah: High Holiday art gallery show "Pomegranates (Rimonim)" and photography exhibit on loan from the Oregon Jewish Museum's Sukkah building competition. Wine and hors d'oeuvres, harp music by David Helfand, and a lecture about the show by UO Prof. Kenny Helfand at 7 PM

Oct. 2, 6:30 – 8:00 PM Community-wide, Kid-friendly Shabbat Service/Oneg in the Sukkah

Oct. 4, 11 AM: Sukkah tour

Oct. 5, 6:30 PM Simkhat Torah Celebration

Oct. 15, 7 – 9 PM Genealogy Group & Sisterhood Event

Oct. 17, 4- 5:30 PM Moving in Mincha with UO Prof. Evlyn Gould

Nov. 15, Global Day of Jewish Learning

COURSE OUTLINE:

1. Sept. 28. Introduction. Variety of Jewish cultures: geography and language. Approaches to studying Jewish culture: ethnographic and folkloristic. Institutional vs. vernacular/folk religion.

2. Sept. 30. Fall Holidays and Folk Beliefs: Sukkos/Sukkot and Simkhas Torah. See above schedule of local events.

Klagsbrun, Francine and M. Podwal. Sukkot- The Feast of Booths. In *Jewish Days*. Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, pp. 38-51, 1998.

3. Oct. 5. Film: Image Before my Eyes. History of Ashkenazic Jews: Jewish Life in Poland between the wars. The film is based on the book: Dobroszycki, L. and B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. *Image Before My Eyes: A Photographic History of Jewish Life in Poland 1864-1939* (Schocken, 1977).

Scheindlin, Raymond. *A Short History of the Jewish People*. Chapter 8: The Jews of Eastern Europe and the United States, 1770-1940 (Oxford, 1988), pp. 173-197.
Recommended for Graduate students: read Chapter 7, The Jews of Western Europe, 1500-1900.

4. Oct. 7. The Values and Culture of the Shtetl (small town); major forces in Shtetl life.

Hap Pondel is a local scholar of East European Jewish historical maps:
<http://easteurotopo.org/>. Please read the home page and browse. See http://easteurotopo.org/img/europe_map_large.jpg

Richmond, Theo. KONIN: A QUEST (Pantheon, 1995), Introduction, 14-85; 108-121, 154-170; 174-177; 198-199, 206-225, 229-240; 262-294; 377-397; 447-450.

5. Oct. 12. Major forces in Shtetl life. Be prepared to compare Konin, Life is with People, and Image Before My Eyes. What is the goal and the style of each book/film? What was new to you? What was familiar? What questions did each work raise? What are the strengths and shortcomings of each work? **Fieldwork proposal due.**

Zborowski, M. and E. Herzog, LIFE IS WITH PEOPLE: THE CULTURE OF THE SHTETL. (New York: Schocken, 1971) First read the chapter Charity Saves from Death, pp. 191-213. The read the Introduction by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1995), pp. ix-xlvi.

Recommended for Graduate Students:

Read one chapter of your choice in Eliach, Yaffa. THERE ONCE WAS A WORLD: A 900-YEAR CHRONICLE OF THE SHTETL EISHYSHOK. (LITTLE BROWN, 1998). Chapter 15, The Shtetl Household, can be found here: <http://www.rtrfoundation.org/shtetl-front.shtml>

6. Oct. 14. Guest lecture Temple Beth Israel Rabbi Ruhi Rubenstein: Reconstructionism, Gender, Diversity, and Innovation in Ritual.

Contact 2010, vol 12 (2), special issue on New Jewish Ritual. Read: Editor's Introduction By Eli Valley. p. 1

The Courage to Reinvent Jewish Ritual by Vanessa Ochs, pp. 5-6
 Ritual and the Forces of the Free Market by Rabbi Hayim Herring p. 7
 How Women and Girls Revitalized Jewish Ritual by R. Handler and L. Lefkowitz pp. 8-9
 Creating Life Cycle Rituals by Rabbi Miriam Berkowitz, p. 14

7. Oct. 19. Jewish Gender Roles: Stereotypes and Reality.

Prell, Riv-Ellen. "Rage and Representation: Jewish Gender Stereotypes in American Culture." In *Uncertain Terms: Negotiating Gender in American Culture*, eds. Faye Ginsburg and Anna Tsing. (Beacon, 1990), pp. 248-266.

Oppenheimer, Mark. "In a Scandal, New Attention to Mikvahs."
http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/25/us/in-a-scandal-new-attention-to-mikvahs.html?_r=1#

Kershner, Isabel. "With Guile and Tiny Torah, Women Hold a Bat Mitzvah at the Western Wall"
<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/25/world/middleeast/women-hold-western-wall-bat-mitzvah-in-jerusalem.html>

8. Oct. 21 The Holocaust: Documentary, Literary, and Folkloric Approaches.

Spiegelman, Art. *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, Part I: My Father Bleeds History, and Part II: And Here My Troubles Began (Pantheon 1986, 1991).

In addition to Maus, all students should pick another short book, or a chapter in a longer book, or an article or documentary film dealing with the holocaust and read/see enough to discuss its style and content. Suggestions include *Night* by Elie Wiesel and numerous survivor accounts; films include *Shoah* and many others. There will be a comparative question on this on the midterm.

9. Oct 26. The Holocaust, continued. Controversies over documentation and representation.

Holc, Janine. Working through Jan Gross's Neighbors. *Slavic Review* 61(3): 453-459 (2002).

Lyman, Rick. "To Celebrate Its Jewish History, Poland Presents 'a Museum of Life'"
<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/22/world/europe/warsaw-museum-of-the-history-of-polish-jews.html>.

10. Oct 28. The Holocaust, continued. Controversies over commemoration.

11. Nov. 2 Hasidic Folklore. Film: A Life Apart (96 minutes). Midterm due.

Mintz, Jerome. *Legends of the Hasidim* (Univ. of Chicago, 1968), pp. 1-14 and 25-36.

12. Nov 4. Hasidic Folktales.

Good Morning Herr Mueller:

http://www.hasidicstories.com/Stories/Of_Our_Times/good_morning.html

Also read the collection of Hasidic tales from Eliach, Yaffa. *Tales of the Holocaust* (Oxford 1982) and from Mintz on Canvas.

13. Nov 9. Verbal Arts: Narrative: Parables

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. "A Parable in context: a social interactional analyses of storytelling performance" in *Folklore: Performance and Communication*, eds. Ben-Amos and Goldstein (Mouton, 1975), pp. 105-130.

Read The Lamedvovnik tale and the Rich Man Tale on Canvas.

14. Nov 11. Narrative, Creativity and the Immigrant Experience. Jokes, curses, blessings. Gender issues.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. "Culture Shock and Narrative Creativity," in *Folklore in the Modern World*, ed. Richard Dorson (Mouton, 1978), pp. 109-122.

Ben-Amos, Dan, "The Myth of Jewish Humor" *Western Folklore* 32 (April 1973): 112-131.

Explore: <http://oldjewstellingjokes.com/>

15. Nov. 16. Jewish Foodways. Film: Deli Man (91 minutes)

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: Food and Drink, YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe (2010): www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Food_and_Drink

16. Nov. 18. Introduction to Barbara Myerhoff's work on elderly East European Jews in Los Angeles. Videos: Number Our Days (30 minutes) and In her Own Time (58 minutes).

Myerhoff, Barbara. *Number Our Days*. (Touchstone, 1980).

Recommended (graphic novel):

Chast, Ros. *Can't We Talk about Something More Pleasant?* A Memoir (Bloomsbury, 2014).

17. Nov. 23. Discussion, Number Our Days.

Myerhoff, Barbara. "Life History Among the Elderly: Performance Visibility and Re-membering" in *A Crack in the Mirror*, ed. Jay Ruby, pp. 99-117 (Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1982).

18. Nov. 25. Con't Discussion, Number Our Days.

19. Nov 30. Graduate project reports

20. Dec 2. One hour class: Con't graduate project reports.

Final due Tuesday Dec. 8, 3PM.

**FIELDWORK ASSIGNMENT - 3 pp. (Grad Students 4 pp.) double-spaced typed
Due Nov 16 in class.**

Option I

Contact a member of your own family, a friend, or another person who was born in or grew up in an Eastern European Jewish environment, and discuss the following questions with them:

1. Where are you (or your relatives) from? What was the name of the town (exactly) where they grew up or lived (find it on a map)? Note the Yiddish name and the non-Jewish name(s).
2. What was the name of the country in Eastern Europe from which your informants or their relatives emigrated? Did the name of the country ever change? When?
3. What language(s) did they speak at home? To other Jews? To non-Jews?
4. What was it like growing up in your town?
5. FOR ALL OF THE ABOVE INFORMATION, designate the time period.
6. What are you (how do you identify yourself)? In what ways are you Jewish?

Option II

Contact a Jewish person of any age who is willing to talk to you about Jewish traditions:

1. Document the person's ancestry. Are there any foreign-born parents or grandparents? From where, when immigrated, etc.? Find this location on a map.
2. What holidays and life-cycle ceremonies do (did) you celebrate? How and why do you celebrate them?
3. In what ways do you consider yourself Jewish? What choices have you made about being Jewish?

Option III

Attend a Jewish celebration/event, e.g., Simkhas Torah, Sukkot, a wedding, Shabbat, bar/bas mitzvah, etc, and document the event. Interview at least one participant.

1. What are the roles enacted in this event? Who does what and why?
2. What are the major symbols associated with the ritual?
3. What meanings does the event have for each of the participants?