

American Jewish Family Matters
NEJS 161b
Prof. Jonathan Krasner
Fall 2018
Monday: 2-4:50 pm
Office Hours: Friday, 12-2 pm and by appointment
Office: ASAC 123

I. Course Description

This course will examine the evolution of the American Jewish family from historical, sociological and cultural perspectives. We will explore how the definition of family; the rituals and performance of family life; and the challenges that families negotiate have changed in response to cultural forces. We will also utilize the lenses of ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality to analyze the representations of the Jewish family and family members (e.g., the Jewish mother, the Jewish American Princess, etc.) in American popular culture, including literature, film, theater and television.

II. Learning Goals

By the end of this course students will be able to

- Demonstrate understanding of the family as a dynamic social institution.
- Consider the implications of various social and political problems on the contemporary American Jewish family
- Appreciate changing cultural attitudes within the American Jewish community about gender roles, marriage, sexuality, parenting, work, and aging.
- Analyze and provide examples of how culture, historical forces, and structural forces (e.g., institutions and social systems) influence the structure, functions, and meanings of American Jewish families over time.

III. Requirements

- **Class Participation**
 - Class participation is a crucial part of the course. All students are required to attend class regularly and to complete reading and viewing assignments before the class in which it will be discussed. Please be prepared to comment on the day's material with your own views and analyses.
- **Response Papers (1000-1500 words – 4-6 double spaced pages, 12 pt. font)**
 - Students will submit **three** response papers over the course of the semester, which

analyze and reflect upon the readings, films and class discussions in light of the major course themes. **Due Dates: October 18, November 8, November 29, December 19.**

- **Family Migration Memoir Paper**

- Read one of the following immigration memoirs

Joseph Berger, *Displaced Persons: Growing Up American After the Holocaust*
Anita Epstein and Noel Epstein, *Miracle Child: The Journey of a Young Holocaust Survivor*

Farideh Goldin, *Wedding Song: Memoirs of an Iranian Jewish Woman*

Eva Hoffman, *Lost in Translation*

Lucette Lagnado, *The Man in the White Sharkskin Suit*

Jack Marshall, *From Baghdad to Brooklyn*

Deborah Stobin and Ilie Wacs, *An Uncommon Journey: From Vienna to Shanghai to America – A Brother and Sister Escape to Freedom During World War II*

Discuss the impact of migration on family dynamics and the culture and texture of family life. Compare and contrast the experience of the family you read about with that of Rose Cohen and her family in *Out of the Shadow* and Jake and Gitl in *Hester Street*. Where applicable, consider evolving attitudes and definitions around gender roles, religion, social class, childhood, and education.

Due: September 28 (1250-1500 words -- 6 pages, double-spaced, 12 pt. font)

- **Please Note: Success in this four-credit course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, preparation for exams, etc.)**

IV. Grading

Homework and Class Participation	30%
Response Papers	45% (15% each)
Migration Memoir Paper	25%

V. Required Books

Philip Roth, *Patrimony* (1991) Available [here](#).

Tova Mirvis, *The Ladies Auxiliary* (2000) Available [here](#).

This book is available for purchase online and will also be placed on reserve in the library. All other readings will be posted on Latte.

VI. Disabilities

If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me as soon as possible.

VII. Academic Integrity

You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. Please consult Brandeis University *Rights and Responsibilities* for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. Students may be required to submit work to *TurnItIn.com* software to verify originality. Allegations of alleged academic dishonesty may be dealt with on an individual basis between the instructor and the student or, in serious cases, forwarded to the Director of academic Integrity. Sanctions for academic dishonesty can include failing grades and/or suspension from the university. Citation and research assistance can be found [here](#).

VIII. Critical Dates:

- **Response Papers: October 18, November 8, November 29, December 19**
- **Family Migration Memoir Paper: September 28**

IX. Course Outline

Week 1:

Thursday, September 6 (Brandeis Monday)

The Jewish Family in Historical Perspective

Read: Paula Hyman, "The Modern Jewish Family: Image and Reality," in *The Jewish Family: Metaphor and Memory*, edited by D. Kraemer (Oxford University Press, 1989), 179-193. **LATTE**

Week 2:

Monday, September 17

Jewish Families and Immigration

Read, Rose Cohen, *Out of the Shadow*, Parts 1-4 **LATTE**

Watch: *Hester Street*, Joan Micklin Silver (dir.) (1975) **LATTE**

September 28 -- Family Migration Memoir Paper Due

Week 3:

Monday, October 8

Americanization and Generational Conflict

Read: Sampson Raphaelson, "The Day of Atonement" **LATTE**

Watch: *The Jazz Singer*, Alan Crosland (dir.) (1927) **LATTE**

Week 4:

Monday, October 15

The Jewish Mother

Read: Antler, *You Never Call, You Never Write*, Chapters 1-3

Watch or Read: Clifford Odets, *Awake and Sing!* Robert Hopkins, Norman Lloyd (dirs.) (1972 television production of the 1935 original play)

Watch: *Yoo-Hoo Mrs. Goldberg*, Aviva Kempner (dir.) (2009)

October 18 – First Response Paper Due

Week 5:

Monday, October 22

Fathers and Sons

Watch: *The Chosen*, Jeremy Kagan (dir.) (1981) **LATTE**

Watch: *A Serious Man*, Ethan Coen and Joel Coen (dirs.) (2009) **LATTE**

Week 6:

Monday, October 29

Daughters on the Suburban Frontier

Read: Riv-Ellen Prell, *Fighting to Become Americans* (1999), Chapter 6 **LATTE**

Watch: *Goodbye Columbus*, Larry Peerce (dir.) (1969) **LATTE**

Week 7:

Monday, November 5

Family, Community, and Boundaries

Read: Tova Mirvis, *The Ladies Auxiliary* (2000) **Available through Amazon**

Watch: *Liberty Heights*, Barry Levinson (dir.) (2000) **LATTE**

November 8 – Second Response Paper Due

Week 8:

Monday, November 12

Jewish Youth and the Counterculture

Read: Riv-Ellen Prell, "Summer Camp, Postwar Youth and the Redemption of Judaism" **LATTE**

Read: Marshall Sklare, "The Greening of Judaism" **LATTE**

Week 9:

Monday, November 19

Rites of Passage

Read: Rachel Kranson: "More Bar Than Mitzvah" **LATTE**

Read: Rela Mintz Gefen, "Life-cycle Rituals" **LATTE**

Watch: Praying with Lior, Ilana Trachtman (dir.) (2008) **LATTE**

Listen: Shalom Auslander, "The Blessing Bee," *This American Life* (2005) **LATTE**

Week 10:

Monday, November 26

Death and Dying

Read: Philip Roth, *Patrimony*

Read: Barbara Myerhoff, *Number Our Days*, 195-231 **LATTE**

Watch: *Number Our Days*, Lynne Littman (dir.) (1976) **LATTE**

November 29 – Third Response Paper Due

Week 11:

Monday, December 3

Jewish Adoption

Read: Jen Sartori and Jayne Guberman, "Boundaries of Identity: Jewish Families in an Era of Transnational, Transracial and Open Adoption," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Fall 2014 **LATTE**

Read: Robert Wright, *Twins: And What They Tell Us About Who We Are*, 35-43 (1998) **LATTE**

Watch: *Three Identical Strangers*, Tim Wardle (dir.) (2018) **LATTE**

Watch: *Going Home*, Jason Hoffmann (dir.) (2009) **LATTE**

Week 12:

Monday, December 10

The New Jewish Family

Read: Allegra Goodman, "Four Questions" **LATTE**

Read: Samira Mehta, *Beyond Christmukkah* (2018), Chapters 5-6 **LATTE**

Watch: *Falsettos*, James Lapine, Matthew Diamond (dirs.) (2016 Broadway Revival of the 1992 play) **LATTE**

December 17 – Fourth Response Paper Due