

## *The Jewish People and America in the 20th Century*

**Course Description** Learn about the extraordinary relationship between a “wandering people” and a “golden land.” Discover the lessons it teaches us about the evolution of the Jewish people from hopeful immigrants seeking a haven to esteemed citizens who found a home. This program documents remarkable achievement in the face of obstacles, and ingenuity in creating opportunity in a new land. This story about Jewish hopes and the realities of the American Promise provides penetrating insight into how an immigrant people forged liberating New World Jewish identities across the American landscape in commerce, arts and culture, sciences, law, higher education, medicine, entertainment, and more. This course chronicles not only what is familiar in our remarkable Jewish American life and times, but also shines a light into what has been overlooked, and reveals it in an inspiring new contextual history.

### “In the beginning...”

America as a frontier: an entire people can re-imagine themselves. We developed liberating, bold New World profiles of Jewishness.

1654: New Amsterdam: (1) basic human rights, (2) personal freedom, (3) economic freedom. Jews sense: opportunity can be grasped, freedom can be won, powers can be challenged, minds can be changed, and rules can be bent.

Jews discovered that freedom doesn't depend upon the caprice or mood of a ruler; privileges aren't doled out by becoming the favorite of some duke or prince. Jews encounter resentment, antagonism and restrictions but not impregnable barriers. The dynamism of the New World would not allow bigotry to become institutionalized.

American Revolutionary War: Jews were fighters and financiers. Success brought two important boons: Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Jews expand on the vision of America from a haven to homeland

1800: the Jewish population was estimated to be about 2,500 persons; spurred by migration, Jews grew to 50,000 by 1860. As America grew, so did opportunities for Jews.

1820--1860: Jewish immigrants settle into growing communities in the vast stretch of America between the Alleghenies and the Pacific. Civil War: Jews on both sides. Rabbi Morris J. Raphall of congregation B'nai Jeshurun; Judah P. Benjamin, the “brains of the confederacy.”

1870's: the U.S. enters a period of explosive expansion; 275,000 Jews. A new kind of American-born Jew, not tied to old world memory. 1880's on: a fresh exodus of Jewish immigrants. Population: 1800--2,500; 1860--50,000; 1875--250,000; 1914--3,000,000.

## From the Shtetl to...Sheboygan?

How did we come to live in Sheboygan or Scranton? Our journey across this vast country is a storied saga. For most immigrants, just getting to America was enough of an ordeal.

The Industrial Removal Office attempted to encourage new immigrants to leave the large population centers on the East Coast and to settle in the interior of the country. It received financial support mainly from the Baron de Hirsch fund and from several other sources, notably the Jewish Colonization Association.

The IRO attempted to abolish filth and disease and to solve the soaring delinquency and crime rate of the Lower East Side and other immigrant enclaves. Its unstated goal was to curb the development of radical movements such as socialism and anarchism that urban concentration tended to breed among Eastern European Jews—and to avert feared outbreaks of anti-Semitism.

Altogether, 75,000 immigrants were resettled in cities and towns across America. Only 5% of Jewish immigrants pouring into this country were convinced to relocate to the heartland.

Being Jewish in the state of Washington: to this day, the city's best-known Jews remain, as in the pioneer period, businessmen: Howard Schultz of Starbucks and Jeff Brotman of Costco.

Jewish in Wisconsin: among the illustrious are Golda Meir; Herbert Kohl and Russ Feingold; Newton Minow, Walter Annenberg, "Bud" Selig, Gene Wilder. The inventor of the laminated padlock, Harry Soref, founded the world's largest padlock company.

Over one million Jews live in the South, from tiny towns in Arkansas to booming metropolises like Atlanta. Today, there are over 13,000 Jews in New Orleans, and Jewish communities are thriving in small towns across the state.

Hundreds of itinerant Jewish peddlers worked around the South. The "Jew store," as it came to be known in many communities, was often the one dry goods store in town, and the Jewish family that owned it, was sometimes the only Jewish family in the community.

Jews found creative ways to blend the traditions of their neighbors with those of their ancestors. To this day, Elaine Schlessinger of New Orleans makes an old family recipe for *charoset* using nuts, apples, honey and cinnamon. But she substitutes Jack Daniels for the sweet Manishevitz wine! The Preservation Hall Jazz Band in New Orleans.

Montana? Rabbi Bruk of Chabad says: "We're the Jewish Peace Corps, the 'No Jew Left Behind' program." Check out their website, [www.frummt.org](http://www.frummt.org).

Texas Jews. Rough and tumble Tombstone, AZ. The Jews in California.

## Music! Music! Music!

Among the most cherished of freedoms the Jewish people found in America is the freedom to create. The result has been an extraordinary gift to America and the world of literature, art, philosophy, film and especially, music.

America has long celebrated the accomplishments of American Jewish composers such as George Gershwin, Aaron Copland, Kurt Weill, Phillip Glass and Leonard Bernstein.

Jewish composers have created some of the most memorable movie scores: Elmer Bernstein: *The Magnificent Seven*, *The Ten Commandments*, Phillip Glass: *The Truman Show*, *The Hours*, *The Fog of War* Jerry Bock: *Fiddler On The Roof* or *Fiorello*, or *Mr. Wonderful* Rudolf Friml: *Rose-Marie* (1924). *Indian Love Call*. Stephen Sondheim: *Gypsy*, *Follies*, *A Little Night Music*, *Sweeney Todd* Andre Previn: *Paint Your Wagon*, *Silk Stockings*, *Kiss Me Kate*.

Aaron Copland: "The Dean of American Composers." *Billy The Kid*, *A Lincoln Portrait*, *Rodeo*, *Appalachian Spring*, *Fanfare for The Common Man*.

We know that Jewish and "Jingle Bells" don't mix. But...Jewish composers have written some of the very best Christmas tunes that have remained popular for decades.

Lou Reed, one of rock and roll's icons since 1965: *Good Evening, Mr. Waldheim*. It targets the betrayal of the Jews.

There are many great American Jewish folk musicians: Ronnie Gilbert, Steve Goodman, David Bromberg, Theodore Bikel and Peter Yarrow. Arlo Guthrie: *Alice's Restaurant* brought instant fame

Robert Allen Zimmerman aka Bob Dylan, singer, songwriter, poet, author and musician who has been a major figure in popular music for five decades. He has been called "the twentieth century's most influential folk singer."

There is an immense Jewish contribution to rock and roll. Jerry Leiber, Mike Stoller, Jerry Wexler, Jerry Ragovoy and Phil Spector. *Hound Dog*, *Jailhouse Rock*, *Save The Last Dance For Me*, *You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'*,

Herb Alpert of the Tijuana Brass. Jim Croce of *Bad, Bad Leroy Brown*.. Leonard Cohen known for his poetry, novels and beautiful, evocative folk songs. Neil Diamond, Cass Elliott.

## A Legacy of Jewish Military Service

Arthur Goldberg, a colonel in the Air Force, was appointed Secretary of Labor and later was appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court. He became ambassador to the United Nations and Ambassador at Large.

Judith A. Resnick, Challenger mission specialist and astronaut.

Capt. Joshua Goldberg and Rear Adm. Bertram W. Korn, the highest-ranking Jewish chaplain ever to serve in the Armed Forces of the United States.

Ambassadors Robert Guggenheim and Samuel D. Berger.

Rae Landy, a lieutenant colonel, who served in both World Wars II. Landy went to Jerusalem to help start the Hadassah Hospital.

In 1948 at the age of only 25, Norman Mailer wrote *The Naked and the Dead*, considered one of the finest novels about WWII.

David Daniel Mickey Marcus. Ben Gurion named Marcus Lieutenant General, the first general in the army of Israel in nearly 2000 years.

“The Father of the Nuclear Navy” is Admiral Hyman Rickover. He holds the record for serving his country longer than any other military individual--over 63 years of service to his country and to 13 Presidents.

Mark Clark was the youngest American military man ever to be promoted to general at the age of 49.

## Jewish Pioneers in Cartoon Art and the Comics

The comic strip has been called the “folk play of the American masses;” “instead of a message . . . it contains the mirrored image of its readers.”

The comic strip is a creative form of expression that involves the pursuit of trying to understand ourselves in our times through the study of visual materials.

Harry Hershfield's Abie The Agent was the first Jewish lead character in a comic strip. He hit all the Jewish stereotypes, but he's a sympathetic stereotype.

The "Rube Goldberg devices" are purely fictional inventions and a familiar part of our language for generations and part of our pop American culture. Boob McNutt earned Goldberg his place in the funny pages.

Al Capp's contributions to American culture transcend the newspaper page. In the Great Depression, the hardscrabble residents of lowly Dogpatch allowed suffering Americans to laugh at yokels even worse off than they were.

Ham Fisher's Joe Palooka appeared in 1930  
Elzie Segar's Popeye and Olive Oyl and Bluto appeared in 1929  
George Herriman ("Krazy Kat"), E.C. Segar ("Popeye")  
Milton Caniff ("Terry and the Pirates," "Steve Canyon"),  
Will Eisner ("The Spirit"), Jack Kirby ("Captain America").

What explains how Jews made such a tremendous contribution to American cartooning?

1. The profession was relatively open to Jews.
2. It was a new artistic frontier where immigrant talent could thrive.
3. A literary tradition and comic perspective fit with this new art form.
4. The Jewish worldview could easily be expressed in cartooning.
5. The Jewish tradition of the scribe lent itself to cartooning which can be appreciated as a form of chronicling the life and times of a people.
6. The Golem: Jews created American heroes from our biblical champion. The Jewish story is in step with truth, justice and the American Way.

### Jewish Foundational Thought in American Psychology

America is sometimes called a "psychological society" or a "therapeutic society" owing to our national quest for pursuing peace of mind.

(1) The Declaration of Independence: "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." (2) Literacy for enlightenment and guidance. (3) Self education, reason and self improvement to further democratic institutions.

American psychological thought bears the imprint of Jewish intellect and values, with Jewish perceptions about human nature, the psyche, personality, the inner life and the meaning of human existence.

Freud: the subconscious; primitive instincts; we have mental processes that defend and protect us—sublimation, rationalization, repression, intellectualization, displacement; people can develop complexes and neuroses.

Alfred Adler: "inferiority complex" and "superiority complex;" "lifestyle," "perfectionist," and "compensate."

Rudolf Dreikurs: "acting out."

Viktor Frankl: authored 32 books published in 32 languages.

Abraham Maslow: peak performances; self actualization.

Martin Buber: I-Thou relationships; we can transcend the ordinary.

Erik Erikson: we fashion our identity throughout life.

Wilhelm Reich: we need to free ourselves of our "character armor."

Erich Fromm: *The Art of Loving*. Romantic love.

Stanley Kellerman: "bioenergetics;" Ida Rolf--"Rolfing."

Richard Lazarus: "a troubled childhood."

Fritz Perls gave us “lose your mind and come to your senses.”

*Peace of Mind* (1946), was written by a rabbi, Joshua Loth Liebman, who became the first rabbi with a national interfaith audience.

Rabbi Harold Kushner’s *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, exalted him as an authority on the question of theodicy.

Abraham Twerski, a Hasidic psychiatrist created a unique blend of Mussar and the Twelve Step program of recovery from addiction.

Joseph Jastrow was one of the first to really write for a mass audience.

Mildred Newman and Bernard Berkowitz: *How to Be Your Own Best Friend*.

Daniel Levinson: *The Seasons of a Man’s Life* about Male mid-life crisis.

David Viscott: *How to Live with Another Person*.

Herb Goldberg: *What Men Really Want, The New Male*.

Joseph Telushkin: *The Book of Jewish Values*:

Richard Leider: *The Power of Purpose*

Esther Pauline (Ann Landers) and Pauline Esther (Dear Abby) Friedman

Michael Gurian: *A Fine Young Man, Raising A Son*

Maxwell Maltz; psycho cybernetics

Wendy Mogel: *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee*

### The Jewish Sensibility in American Photography

Jews have played a distinguished role in the history of American photography in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Is there a Jewish photographic sensibility?

George Gilbert published *The Illustrated Worldwide Who’s Who of Jews in Photography*. Everywhere, in the medium’s history, we find Jews making significant contributions. (1) Invention: John Herschel-- coined the term *photography* and invented the terms *negative* and *positive*. Kodachrome film is invented by Leopold Mannes and Leopold Godowsky. Edwin Land: the Polaroid camera. (2) History: Helmut Gernsheim—wrote extensively about the origins and development of photography. (3) Scholarship: Susan Sontag: *On Photography*. (4) The retail trade—Albert Howell, in 1907 launched Bell and Howell. (5) Distinguished picture-takers.

Ease of entry for young immigrants without higher learning and seeking a living. Taking up photography was surely one way of proving that one was *modern* and fully arrived in America. It entailed mastering a technical process that required some scientific savvy, knowledge of optics, light, chemistry, the physics of the camera itself.

As a way of “seeing” the-world, Yiddishkeit probably does come into play in the work of many photographers connected with Yiddishkeit’s secular humanism, its liberal and socialist proclivities.

How do we get to see ourselves? Photography does that for us. Jewish photographers have captured the American experience in memorable imagery.

Alfred Stieglitz  
Alfred Eisenstaedt  
Robert Capa  
Herb Snitzer  
Roman Vishniac  
Ruth Gruber  
Ben Shahn  
Helen Levitt  
Diane Arbus  
Julius Shulman  
Man Ray

Margaret Bourke-White  
Arnold Rothstein  
Richard Avedon  
Annie Liebowitz  
Esther Bubley  
Linda Eastman McCartney  
Garry Winogrand  
Joe Rosenthal  
Arthur Fellig  
Cornell Capa

### The Jewish Comic Tradition in American Humor

Jewish-inspired humor transcends place, ethnicity, social class and religious persuasion, even race and culture. How did Jewish comedy become so foundational to American comedy?

Yiddish strives to express the absurdity and the disharmony Jews felt with the world at large. Yiddish is psycholinguistic empowerment. It is the Jews' worldview. The way that Yiddish has migrated into America: *Anglish/Yinglish*. Yiddish words get Anglicized into English and English words get Yiddishized.

Jewish humor is rooted in at least two traditions: (1) the intellectual methods of the Talmud; and (2) the egalitarian tradition of humor as a leveling device.

The entertainment industry, combined with the Jewish humor tradition, provided a route for Jews to succeed. Jewish humor is a sensibility, a kind of ironic, paradoxical take on life; verbal jabs, self-absorbed observations, deadpan one-liners, shrugging shoulders.

We tease ourselves in a good natured way: (1) self-deprecating comments as a shield against anti-Semitism; (2) joking about religion in life; (3) the roles of men and women.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Dr. Jerry Binder** blends academic scholarship and anecdotal narrative into programs that enrich our knowledge about the depth of the Jewish role in creating the American experience. His unique interdisciplinary education includes a Ph.D. in Psychology, an M.A. in the Psychological Foundations of Education and undergraduate studies in American Cultural Studies. He is on the faculty of the Whizin Center at the American Jewish University, and also presents programs at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at UC Irvine and UCLA, the Emeritus Institute at Saddleback College and at the Adat Ari El MID Program in Valley Village. Since 1999, he has been researching the anticipated impact on American society of the emerging age wave of millions of older adults, and teaches *A Roadmap for the New Adulthood* at UCI Extension on this subject. Jerry is a zamler for the National Yiddish Book Center in Massachusetts, consults to Big Tent Judaism in New York City and the Workmen's Circle in Los Angeles.

Thank you for enrolling in *The Jewish People and America in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*.  
I welcome any constructive comments that would make this course more interesting and enjoyable for you. My e-mail is [jerrybinder@yahoo.com](mailto:jerrybinder@yahoo.com)

## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Trudy Alexi, *The Mezuzah in The Madonna's Foot*, 1993.  
Jonathan N. Barron & Eric Murphy Selinger, *Jewish American Poetry*, 2000.  
Asa Berger, *The Comic Stripped American*, 1973.  
Thomas Cahill, *The Gifts of The Jews*, 1999.  
Hasia Diner, *Jews In America*, 1999.  
Bruce Feiler, *America's Prophet: Moses and The American Story*, 2009.  
Henry L. Feingold, *The Jewish People In America: A Time for Searching*, 1992.  
Murray Friedman, *What Went Wrong*, 1995.  
Martin Gilbert, *The Jews In The Twentieth Century*, 2001.  
Solomon Grayzel, *A History of The Jews*, 1968.  
Arthur Hertzberg, *Jews: The Essence And Character of A People*, 1998.  
Arthur Hertzberg, *The Jews In America: Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter*, 1989.  
Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers*, 1976.  
Janet Jacobs, *Hidden Heritage: The Legacy of the Crypto-Jews*, 2002.  
Bertram Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War*, 2001.  
Oscar Reiss, *The Jews in Colonial America*, 2004.  
Howard M. Sachar, *A History of The Jews In America*, 1993.  
Joel Shatzky & Michael Taub, *Contemporary Jewish American Dramatists and Poets*, 1999  
Larry Tye, *Homelands*, 2001.  
Simcha Weinstein, *Up, Up and Oh Vey*, 2006.  
Michael Wex, *Born To Kvetch*, 2005.  
Michael Wex, *Just Say Nu*, 2007.

## SELECTED WEBOGRAPHY

- <http://jwa.org/aboutjwa/> The mission of the Jewish Women's Archive (JWA) is to uncover, chronicle, and transmit to a broad public the rich history of American Jewish women.
- <http://www.simpletoremember.com/> Learned essays on all facets of Jewish life.
- <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/> A universe of information about all things Jewish.
- <http://www.jewsinamerica.org/> The Center for Jewish History. *Jews In America: Our Story*.
- [www.americanjewisharchives.org](http://www.americanjewisharchives.org) American Jewish Archives.
- [www.brandeis.edu/cmj](http://www.brandeis.edu/cmj) The Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis.
- [www.nmajh.org](http://www.nmajh.org) The National Museum of American Jewish History
- <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/> This website contains the complete contents of the twelve volume *Jewish Encyclopedia*, which was originally published between 1901-1906. The Jewish Encyclopedia, which recently became part of the public domain, contains over 15,000 articles and illustrations. Since the original work was completed almost 100 years ago, it does not cover a significant portion of modern Jewish History (e.g., the creation of Israel, the Shoah, etc.). However, it does contain an incredible amount of information that is remarkably relevant today.

