

“Shalom Y’All”
Jewish History in the American South:
Engaging History Through Objects



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Class meets:

Office: 139 Gambrell Hall
Office Hours:
Meeting Place:

Course Description

This course introduces students to the major developments in American-Jewish history from colonial times until the present, with a particular focus on the American South. We will explore early Jewish immigration to American port cities, patterns of acculturation, and the formation of various American-Jewish religious and cultural identities. We will also examine the role of Jews in slave societies, the Civil War and the era of Reconstruction and, in the twentieth century, in the Civil Rights Movement. These topics will raise complicated questions about race (especially Black-Jewish relations), religion, socio-economic mobility, politics, and regionalism.

At times we will zoom in on a particular object produced by, or reflecting, the period under discussion. Our course thus has a material culture component. The term “material culture” is expansive and broad. Perhaps the simplest way to define it is that material culture represents the “things” or “stuff” that we create and use every day, the tangible products of a culture. This stuff can range from the furniture we use, the clothes we wear, the buildings we live and work in, even the contents we toss into a USC trash can. While some of these artifacts may be sophisticated and fashionable, more often they are quite mundane. Some may be mass-produced while others are vintage and unique. Some objects embody status and wealth, while others cross class boundaries and are collectively used, enjoyed, consumed, and stored in attics.

All the “stuff” of material culture – in our case Jewish material culture – has a *communicative* function; it tells us a great deal about a particular place and time, about the people who created or used the artifacts, about historical change. Significantly, while material culture is produced, it equally shapes people’s behavior, ideas, ambitions, and relationships to others. We will try to identify what specific objects – a Reform synagogue, a cookbook, a bagel, a Happy New Year postcard, a memorial to the Holocaust – can tell us about Jewish history in the American South.

Required Reading

Marcie Cohen Ferris and Mark I. Greenberg, eds. *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil* (Brandeis University Press, 2006)

Jonathan Sarna and Adam Mendelsohn, eds., *Jews and the Civil War* (New York University Press, 2010)

Additional readings will be uploaded in PDF and available on BlackBoard

Learning Outcomes

- ❖ Demonstrate principles of historical thinking to understand human societies, specifically through the history of Jews in the American South
- ❖ Evaluate significant themes, issues, or eras in American-Jewish history
- ❖ Demonstrate basic skills in the comprehension and analysis of selected sources and their relevance in the context of historical knowledge
- ❖ Demonstrate the ability to develop interpretive historical arguments drawing on primary and/or secondary sources (see paper assignment)
- ❖ Demonstrate the ability to recognize the differences between original historical source material (primary sources) and later scholarly interpretations of those sources (secondary sources)

Course Assignments

Midterm 1	20%	Final Exam (cumulative)	20%
Paper 1 (5 pp)	20%	Attendance and participation	20%
Paper 2 (5 pp)	20%		

Letter grades are on a 10-point scale (A=90-100, B+=88-89, B=80-87, C+=78-79, C=70-77, D+=68-69, D=60-67)

Assignments and Exams

This course has **one midterm exam, two take-home papers** and a **final**. The exams will include essays, identifications, and multiple-choice questions, and will test your knowledge of the main themes and events of Jewish history in the American South.

You will also write two **papers** (5 double-spaced pages in Times New Roman 12-point font with standard one-inch margins), one of which analyzes a material culture object of your choice, placing it in the proper historical context.

Attendance and Participation count for 15% of your final grade. Students who miss three or more sections will be penalized. Although we will not check attendance on Mondays and Wednesdays, you should bear in mind that the weekly readings do not necessarily repeat lecture material and that good lecture notes are vital to a good grade. You will be graded on your willingness and ability to contribute to classroom discussion. This includes being prepared for section, asking questions, and being engaged with the readings. Participation does not consist of simply showing up!

Make-up Assignments will be given only to students who missed exams for reasons beyond their control and who have been excused. Students must present valid excuses in the week following the scheduled exam. Late excuses will not be accepted. There will be no make-ups for missed quizzes.

Classroom Conduct: Let's be rigorous with ideas but gentle with each other. I expect courtesy toward me and your fellow students. That does not mean we cannot disagree – I hope we do since it will lead to interesting discussions – but I expect from you, as you should from me, a sense of responsibility and respect toward others.

Please turn off your cell phones, i-phones, i-pods, i-everything during class. It's disruptive and annoying, not merely for the professor but also for your fellow class mates.

Religious Observances: If a class session or due date conflicts with your observance of a religious holiday, please notify me ahead of time so we can make alternative arrangements.

Disability: Any student with a documented disability should contact the Office of Student Disability Services at 777-6142 to arrange for appropriate accommodations.

Academic Honesty: I tolerate a lot in my classroom, but I do *not* tolerate plagiarism. Any time you rely on information from someone else in your paper, whether a direct quote, paraphrase, or fact, you should cite your source (including those from a website!). It is not

only intellectually honest, but it increases the authority of your work. Students in violation of USC's Honor Code will, without exception, receive an F for the assignment, if not for the class. For information on academic integrity, see web link below and/or talk to us!

<http://www.sph.sc.edu/currentstudents/PDFS/AcademicIntegrity.pdf>

Weekly Calendar and Reading Assignments

Week 1: Introduction and Setting the Scene

January 14 (M): Introduction to Jewish History and Material Culture

January 16 (W): Example of Material Culture Study: Synagogue as “text” and “story teller”

Readings: Marci Cohen Ferris and Mark I. Greenberg, “Introduction,” *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil (JRSS)*, 1-20

Cary Carson, “Doing History with Material Culture,” in Ian Quimby, ed, *Material Culture and the Study of American Life* (Norton, 1978), 41-64 (PDF)

Week 2: Jews in the Atlantic World

January 21 (M): Port Jews in the Colonial Period

Readings: Mark Greenberg, “One Religion, Different Worlds: Sephardic and Ashkenazic Immigrants in Eighteenth-Century Savannah,” *JRSS*, 27-40

January 23 (W): Ports and Plantations

Readings: Dale Rosengarten, “Port Jews and Plantation Jews: Carolina/Caribbean Connections,” in *The Jews in the Caribbean*, 289-307



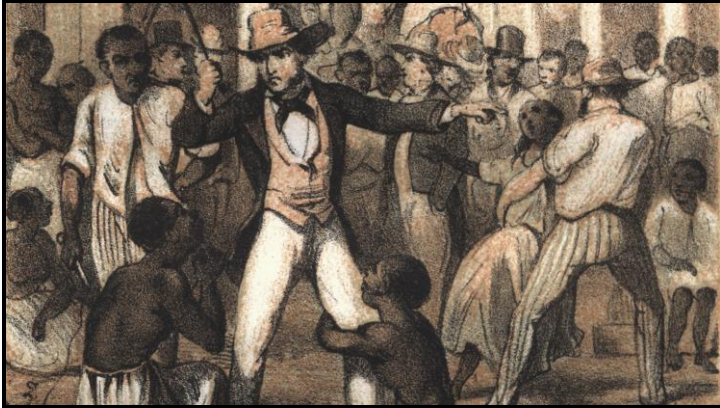
Week 3: Jews & Slavery

January 28 (M): Jews and the Slave Trade

Readings: Seymour Drescher, "Jews and New Christians in the Atlantic Slave Trade," *Jews and Civil War*, 51-86 [include the "Jews and Slavery intro on pp. 47-50]

January 30 (W): **Cotton**

Readings: Bertram Korn, "Jews and Negro Slavery in the Old South, 1789-1865," *Jews and the Civil War*, 87-122



Week 4: Religious Reform

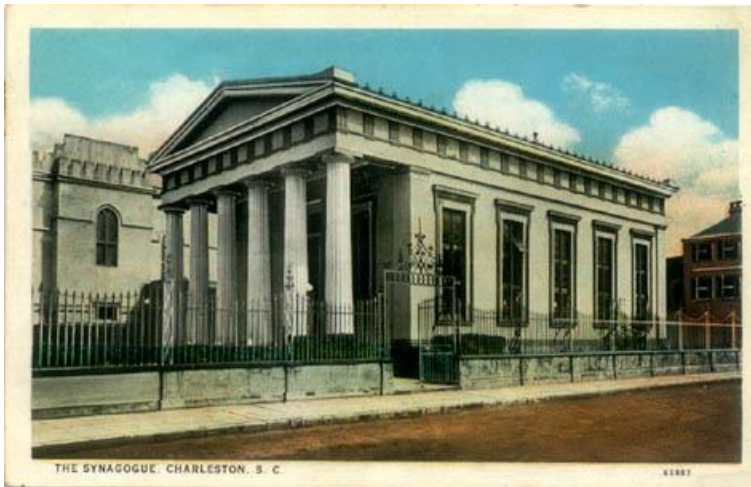
February 4 (M): The Reform Movement

Readings: James Hagy, "The Birth of Reform Judaism," in *This Happy Land: The Jews of Colonial and Antebellum Charleston*, pp. 128-160

February 6 (W): **The Reform Synagogue: Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim** in Charleston

Readings: "The Life of the Synagogue," College of Charleston Jewish Heritage Collection:

Read and explore <https://lifeofthesynagogue.library.cofc.edu/>



Week 5: Merchants and Jewish Economic History

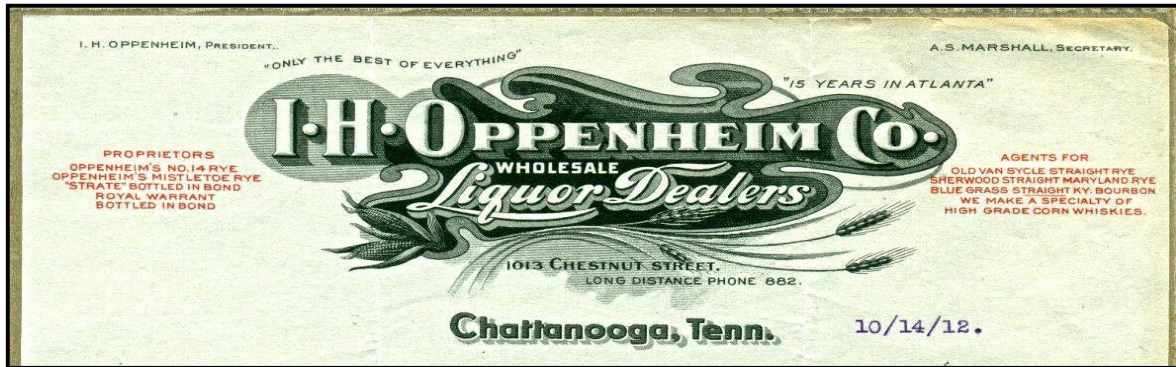
February 11 (M): From Peddlers to Shop Owners

Readings: Hasia Diner, "Entering the Mainstream of Modern Jewish History: Peddlers and the American Jewish South," *JRSS*, pp. 86-106

February 13 (W): **Liquor!**

Readings: Jonathan Sarna, "How Matzah Became Square: Manischewitz and the Development of Machine-Made Matzah in the United States," in *Chosen Capital: The Jewish Encounter with American Capitalism*, 272-85

Marni Davis, "Despised Merchandise: American Jewish Liquor Entrepreneurs and Their Critics," in *Chosen Capital: The Jewish Encounter with American Capitalism*, 113-134



Week 6: The Civil War and Reconstruction

February 18 (M): Jewish Soldiers During the Civil War

Readings: Eli Evans, "The War Between Brothers in American," *Jews and the Civil War*, 27-46
Stanley Falk, "Divided Loyalties in 1861," *Jews and the Civil War*, 197-226

February 20 (W): The Home Front

Readings: David Morgan, "Eugenia Levy Phillips: The Civil War Experiences of a Southern Jewish Woman," *Jews and the Civil War*, pp. 265-278
Robert N. Rosen, "Jewish Confederates," *JRSS*, 109-126

Week 7: Diamonds, Advertisements, and Postcards!

February 25 (M): Upward Socio-Economic Mobility

Readings: Saskia Coenen Snyder, "Luxuries Have Now Become Necessities: Diamonds in America," in *Diasporic Gems: Diamonds, Jews, and Nineteenth-Century Transatlantic Trade*, pp. ...

February 27 (W): Happy New Year!

Readings: Ellen Smith, "Greetings from Faith: Early-Twentieth-Century American Jewish New Year Postcards," in David Morgan and Sally Promey, *The Visual Culture of American Religions*, 229-248 [PDF]



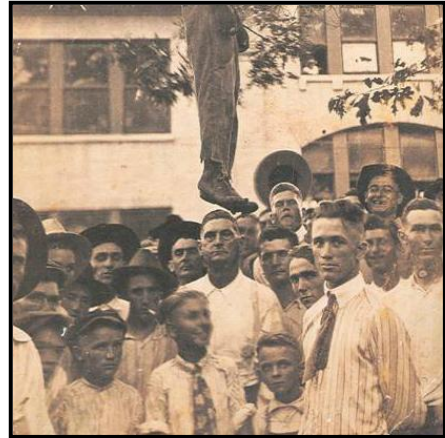
Week 8: Anti-Semitism in the Land of Promise: Leo Frank

March 4 (M): This wasn't supposed to happen here..

Readings: Paul Berger, "Untold Story of the First Jewish Lynching in America," *Forward* (December 8, 2014): <https://forward.com/news/210334/untold-story-of-the-first-jewish-lynching-in-ameri/>

March 6 (W): **Movie – The People vs. Leo Frank**

Readings: Eric Goldstein, "Now Is the Time to Show Your True Colors: Southern Jews, Whiteness, And the Rise of Jim Crow," *JRSS*, pp. 134-150



Week 9: Spring Break

Week 10: Jewish Music and Theater

March 18 (M): Jazz

Readings: Charles Hersch, Introduction + "Black-Jewish Integration in the Jazz World from the Swing Era to the 1950s," in *Jews and Jazz: Improvising Ethnicity*, 1-15; 45-69 [PDF]

Listen: <https://forward.com/schmooze/211294/9-jews-who-changed-the-sound-of-jazz/>



March 20 (W): **LP Music Record Covers**

Readings: Eliza R. L. McGraw, "An 'Intense Heritage': Southern Jewishness in Literature and Film," *JRSS*, pp. 210-223

Roger Bennett and Josh Kun, "Introduction," *And You Shall Know Us By the Trail of Our Vinyl* [PDF]

Listen: <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=97311653>

Check out: <https://forward.com/culture/367352/ behold-the-worst-jewish-album-covers-of-all-time/>

Week 11: World War II and the Holocaust

March 25 (M): What happened in Europe?

Readings: Hasia Diner, "Introduction," *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945-1962*, pp. 1-18 [PDF]

March 27 (W): **Holocaust Memorial in Charleston**

Readings:

TBA



***** Movie Night: *From Swastika to Jim Crow***



Week 12: Postwar Suburban Prosperity

April 1 (M): Move to Suburbia

Readings: Arthur Goren, "A 'Golden Decade' for American Jews: 1945-1955," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, pp. 1-18 [PDF]

April 3 (W): **Synagogue as Community Center**

Readings: Deborah Dash Moore, "Jewish Migration in Postwar America: The Case of Miami and Los Angeles," *A New Jewry? America Since the Second World War: Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, 102-117



Week 13: Jews and the Civil Rights Movement

April 8 (M): Freedom for All?

Readings: Clive Webb, “Black-Jewish Relations in the 20th-Century South,” *JRSS*, 192-206

Listen: Clive Webb, “Counterblast: How the Atlanta Temple Bombing Strengthened the Civil Rights Cause,” <https://southernspaces.org/2009/counterblast-how-atlanta-temple-bombing-strengthened-civil-rights-cause>

April 10 (W): **The Lunch Counter**

Readings: Raymond A. Mohl, “South of the South?” Jews, Blacks, and the Civil Rights Movement in Miami, 1945-1960,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 18: 2 (Winter, 1999), pp. 3-36

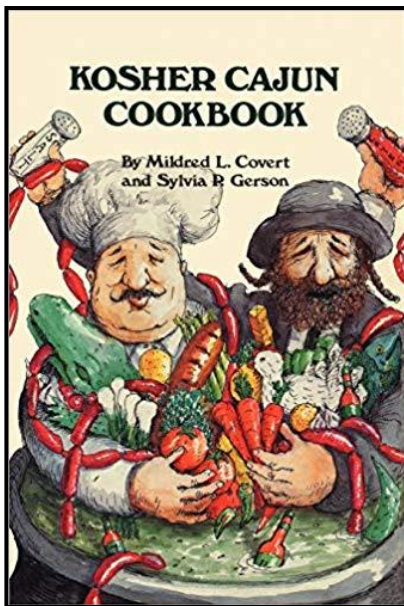


Week 14: Table Talk: Southern Jewish Foodways

April 15 (M): Matzoh Ball Gumbo: Southern Jewish History Through Food

Readings: Marcie Cohen Ferris, “Dining in the Dixie Diaspora: A Meeting of Region and Religion,” *JRISS*, 226-249

Listen: “Pie by Another Name: The Burekas of Or Ve Shalom,” *Gravy Podcast*, Southern Foodways Alliance, August 24, 2017, <https://www.southernfoodways.org/gravy/pie-by-another-name-the-burekas-of-or-ve-shalom/>



April 17 (W): “Judaism Is Like Tofu – Soaking up the Flavors from Its Surroundings” **Cook Books!**

Readings: Jenna Weissman Joselit, “The Call of the Matzoh,” in *The Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture, 1880-1950*, pp. 219-63 [PDF]

Listen: “The Last Jews of Natchez,” by Robin Amer, *GRAVY PODCAST*, Southern Foodways Alliance (episode 14) May 21, 2015: <https://www.southernfoodways.org/gravy/the-last-jews-of-natchez-gravy-ep-14/>

Week 15: The New South?

April 22 (M): American Jews in the 21st Century

Readings: Stuart Rockoff, "The Fall and Rise of the Jewish South," *JRSS*, pp. 284-301

Listen: Nicole Hemmer, "The Alt-Right Rises," Episode 4, *A12 Podcast* (August 6, 2019)
<https://soundcloud.com/past-punditry/episode-4-the-alt-right-rises>.

April 24 (W): What's next?

Readings: Stephen J. Whitfield, "Jewish Fates, Altered States," *JRSS*, pp. 304-326

**** Date Final Exam TBA**