

JST 4936

LIT 4930

Jewish-American Cinema, FALL 2023

Instructor: Professor Dragan Kujundzic

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Tuesday, 7 (1:55 PM – 2:45 PM)

Thursday, 7-8 (1:55 PM – 3:50 PM)

TURLINGTON 2334



The course will introduce students to the rich history of Jewish cinema and the latest critical and theoretical literature about it. It will be organized thematically, and chronologically, starting with the topics of Jewish Diaspora, emigration to the US and integration, the first sound film, and then films about the Holocaust, comedy, Israeli Cinema. During the course, we will screen and discuss films involved with the representation of the Jews (not necessarily made by Jewish American cineastes like Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* and *Inglorious Basterds* by Quentin Tarantino) and those of course made by prominent Jewish American filmmakers. The course will cover the screening and discussion of classics such as *Fiddler on the Roof*, or Barbara Streisand's *Yentl* (together with reading the novel by Sholem Aleichem and the story by Isaac Bashevis Singer on which each film was respectively based); the extensive analysis of the first sound movie, *The Jazz Singer* with Al Jolson, including critical and theoretical responses by Irvin Howe and Susan Gubar; *Schindler's List* by Steven Spielberg and *The Pianist* by Roman Polanski. Jewish humor in cinema will be discussed (Billy Wilder, *Some Like It Hot*; and Mel Brooks—*The Producers*, *Blazing Saddles*). Special attention will be dedicated to women filmmakers, such as Barbara Streisand, Susan Seidelman, and Amie Heckerling. The course will conclude with the Coen Brothers' film *Serious Men*. This list is not exhaustive, and may change during the course to include, for example, documentaries about Israeli cinema or filmmakers' biographies. The course will also make use of the Jewish Film Festival organized by the Center for Jewish Studies during the Fall (the program will be distributed) and screen and discuss the current International Jewish Film Production. **Learning goals: the students will learn to think critically about the seminal films of Jewish, Israeli and Jewish-American Cinema, and essays about them.**

Students will be expected to write short summaries of each film screened, which will count towards their class attendance and homework (10%) and group presentation participation (30% of the grade). There will be a mid-term (30%) and a final paper (30%). Collective class presentations will be assigned, to include reports from Jewish Film Festival. Attendance is obligatory. The Honors Code and the Flu/Covid Policy of the University of Florida will be observed. The syllabus is not final, and may be changed during the course of the semester according to the needs of the class and the benefit of the students. Any changes will be sent duly ahead of time in writing via the class listserv and or canvas.

Please consult your UF email regularly as well as Canvas for announcements about the class and class assignments. Course material will be distributed via listserv and or canvas.

The class will also on occasion meet via ZOOM, to be announced on Canvas and via listserv. Please plan to attend all meetings. Two absences during the semester are allowed without excuse. Other absences will require written excuse such as a doctor's note.

Syllabus, Jewish-American Cinema

Tuesday marked as 1 period
Period 7 (1:55 PM - 2:45 PM)

Thursday marked as 2 periods
Period 7 - 8 (1:55 PM - 3:50 PM)

Week one, August 24

2 **Thursday** Introduction, *Tevye the Milkman (Library of Yiddish Classics Edition)* by Sholem Aleichem, text provided by instructor. *Fiddler on the Roof*, Screen, Amazon.

Week two, August 29-September 1

1 Continue Introduction, *Tevye the Milkman (Library of Yiddish Classics Edition)* by Sholem Aleichem, texts, provided by instructor. *Fiddler on the Roof*, Screen, Amazon.

2 **First group presentation, Group 1.** *Tevye the Milkman. Fiddler on the Roof.*

Week three, September 5-September 7

1 *Laughing in Darkness*, Library UF, also YouTube.

2 **Second group presentation, Group 2.** *Laughing in Darkness*

Week four, September 12-September 14

1 *The Jazz Singer*; essays provided by instructor; screen, YouTube.

2 **Third group presentation, Group 3.** *The Jazz Singer* and essays.

Week five, September 19-September 21

1 Charlie Chaplin, *The Great Dictator*, Stream YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EN-uDhd2HRo&t=4367s>
Also, Amazon Prime. Documentary by Costa Gavras, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sq2SdsfZ7cY>.

2 **Fourth group presentation, Group 4.** *The Great Dictator*, Gavras, and articles.

Week six, September 26-September 28

1 Billy Wilder, *Some Like It Hot*, Amazon; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_Mills; Instructor's lecture and general discussion; *Billy Wilder Speaks*, Amazon. Instructor's lecture.

2 **Fifth group presentation, Group 1.** Billy Wilder, *Some Like It Hot*, Amazon; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_Mills; Instructor's lecture and general discussion; *Billy Wilder Speaks*, Amazon.

Week seven, October 3-October 5

1 Mel Brooks, Mel Brooks and Susan Stroman (two versions), *Producers*, and *Blazing Saddles* (selection). Instructor's lecture and general discussion

2 Mel Brooks and Susan Stroman (two versions), *Producers*, and *Blazing Saddles* (selection). **Sixth group presentation, Group 2.**

Week eight, October 10-October 11

1 **Seventh group presentation, Group 3.** Steven Spielberg, *Schindler's List*; *Raiders of the Lost Arc*

2 **Eighth group presentation, Group 4.** Quentin Tarantino, *Inglorious Basterds*.

Week nine, October 17-October 19

1 MIDTERM individual and group presentations

2 MIDTERM individual and group presentations; PAPER DUE

Week ten, October 24-October 26

1 Barbara Streisand, *Yentl*; Read Isaac Basevis Singer, *Yentl*;
Watch *Isaac in America*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YPDowgxqqjA>

2 *Ninth group presentation, Group 1, Yentl* (story and film), and *Isaac in America*.

Week eleven, October 31-November 2

1 Amie Heckerling, *Clueless*; Susan Seidelman, *Desperately Seeking Susan*; *Sex and the City*

2 *Tenth group presentation, Group 2*, Heckerling and Seidelman

Week twelve, November 7-November 9

1 Roman Polanski, *The Pianist*; *An Officer and a Spy*. Screen at home. Zola, *J'Accuse*.
Instructor's introduction.

2 *Eleventh group presentation, Group 3*, Polanski, Zola.

Week thirteen, November 14 to November 16

1 The Coen Brothers, *A Serious Man*

2 *Twelfth group presentation, Group 4, A Serious Man*, instructor's lecture and all class discussion

Week fourteen, November 21 to November 23

1 *The Tribe*, (on Barbie), in class screening and discussion. Screen, free access,
<https://vimeo.com/554428109>

2 November 24, Thanksgiving, No Class

Week fifteen, November 28-November 30

1 Woody Allen, *The New York Stories*, home screen. Instructor's introduction and discussion. ***Student individual final project presentation/group presentations***

2 Student individual final project presentation/group presentations

Week sixteen, December 5

1 Presentation wrap up. Instructor's Course Summary. **Final Paper Due December 10 via email/canvas**

Selected Literature (selected chapters and review articles to be distributed in class)

Bartov, Omer. *The "Jew" in Cinema: From The Golem to Don't Touch My Holocaust*. (2004)

Bial, Henry. *Acting Jewish. Negotiating Ethnicity on the American Stage and Screen*. (2005)

Buhle, Pauul. *From the Lower East Side to Hollywood: Jews in American Popular Culture*. (2004)

Desser, David. *American Jewish Filmmakers*. Second Edition (2003)

Doneson, Judith, E. *The Holocaust in American Film. (Judaic Traditions in Literature, Music and Art)*. (2002)

Gabler, Neil. *An Empire on Their Own. How the Jews Invented Hollywood*. (1989)

Mintz, Allan, L.. *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory in America (Samuel and Althea Stroum Lectures in Jewish Studies)* (2001)

Samberg, Joel. *Reel Jewish*, (2000)