

The Jewish Civilization: The Jewish People in America



From the top left, clockwise: book cover of "The Truth about Henry Ford" (Yiddish) (1924); an FBI poster for three missing civil right workers (1964); and a poster of "Jews for the Preservation of Firearms Ownership" (2011).

Once considered the "black sheep" and on the periphery of the Jewish world, American Jewry has become the largest (until recently) and arguably the most prosperous and influential Jewish community in the world after 1945. The course traces the history of Jews in America from their humble beginnings to what is often described as a blissful present. We will explore major themes in American Jewish history like religious innovation, immigration, assimilation, antisemitism, patterns of political behavior, social mobility, inter-ethnic relations, and internal divisions.

We will look at different ideologies that have regenerated and revised Jewish life, such as Reform and Conservative Judaism, Zionism, and Jewish socialism. Those are related to questions of Jewish self-definition in America's ethnic and racial matrix: do Jews constitute a religious group, an ethnicity, a race, or a combination of the above? Finally, we will also examine the contemporary debate regarding the future of Jews in America, in which some observers see decline and danger, while others see change and renaissance.

Note: This course has asynchronous meeting times; there are no set class meetings.



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