

Jews and Popular Culture
REL 3938/LIT 4930/JST 3930
M9/W9-10

Professor Rachel Gordan

Office: Anderson 131

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Office hours: Mon and Wed, 3-4 pm and by appointment

Class times: Mon: 4-5 pm and Wed, 4-6 pm

Note on emailing: "Dear Professor Gordan" is the correct way to begin an email to the professor.

This semester we will focus on two prominent themes of the past seventy-five years of Jews and American popular culture: 1) The Jewish woman in America and 2) Antisemitism in America. We will examine the historical and cultural context around these themes ("obsessions" may be a better word!) and learn about the communal, cultural, and religious conversations in which these popular culture texts from the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, and beyond participated. Our goal is to understand the historical events, ideas, and cultural trends that these books, films, and plays responded to, and the visions of American society that they presented. What, for example, inspired Laura Z. Hobson to write a bestselling novel about antisemitism during WWII? And what changes in society did she and other writers of Jewish popular culture envision for Jews and American society? Sometimes, the inspirations may be part literary. For example, do we hear echoes of earlier literary works in Melissa Broder's popular 2021 novel, *Milkyfed*? By examining mainstream examples of Jewish popular culture, we will be learning about those films and books that caught the public's attention and have a lasting legacy.

Course Objectives

Students will:

- Be familiar with two major themes in recent American Jewish popular culture: 1) the Jewish woman and 2) antisemitism and some of the historical and cultural context surrounding these themes.
- Be familiar with reception history
- Know the history of well-known American Jewish popular culture texts and authors, including *Gentleman's Agreement*; *Marjorie Morningstar*; *Goodbye, Columbus*; *Driving Miss Daisy*; Herman Wouk; and Philip Roth.
- Evaluate one or more examples of popular culture from the past 7 years.

Content warning: eating disorders

One of our American Jewish novels, *Milkyfed*, contains descriptions of eating and body-image-related thoughts that may be triggering for some readers.

Books to purchase/rent for our class:

Marjorie Morningstar, Herman Wouk

Milkyfed, Melissa Broder

Fighting to be American, Riv-Ellen Prell

This class does not espouse, promote, advance, inculcate, or compel students to believe concepts concerning race, gender, national origin as listed in Florida House Bill 7 (or something like that).

Grading and Assignments

Explanations of assignments can be found on the Assignments page of our CANVAS site.

Late assignments will be penalized and may not receive credit.

- **15% Participation.** Participation counts for a lot in this class. 15/15 is reserved for students who contribute to discussion in every class (and often, multiple times per class), and *whose contributions show that they have been listening and are responding to the professor and other students*. If your eyes are on your phone/laptop, your professor and fellow students will likely not feel that you are tuned in to the class conversation. Participation assumes attendance: it is not possible to earn a high participation grade if you are not present. ***Students with perfect attendance will be given an extra point on the final grade.* Please see the university policy regarding absences: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>
- **25% Weekly short assignment.** Every week that we have class, by Friday at 12 (noon), students will submit through CANVAS a brief, 3-part assignment that includes: a) favorite quotation from the week's reading/class lecture and discussion *and why* b) an important take-away from the week's readings and lectures c) a question from the week's reading and discussion. The professor will let you know if there is a week when there is no weekly assignment due.
- **2% Professor Josh Lambert writeup.** On Wednesday, October 26, we will attend a lecture by Professor Josh Lambert (Wellesley College) on a topic related to our course: Jews and publishing. Follow the format of our weekly assignment and submit a 3-part assignment with 1) favorite quotation from the event; 2) important take-away 3) and question. To find out more about Prof. Lambert's recent book on this topic, [click here](#).
- **3% Melissa Broder Questions.** We are reading one contemporary, popular (and very short!) Jewish novel, this semester: Melissa Broder's *Milkfed*. You can read about it [here](#). On Monday Oct. 24th, we will have a zoom conversation with Melissa Broder, whom you can read about [here](#). In preparation for that discussion, please submit 3 questions for Ms. Broder, through CANVAS by the due date provided. Your questions should make clear that you have read her book ☺, rather than being a generic question, such as "Why did you write this book?"
- **5% Reading quizzes:** 5-8 (usually unannounced) quizzes during the semester. These quizzes are intended to motivate students to stay on top of reading assignments. If you've done the reading for the week *and have been listening to class discussion*, these quizzes are straightforward and easy. These quizzes cannot be made up for unexcused absences.
- **20% Essay on Jews in popular culture** (1,200-word). A choice of essay prompts will be made available by late October. In order to help students plan their writing and begin early, parts of this paper (such as the thesis statement and opening paragraph), will be due before the final paper. You will have the opportunity to workshop parts of the essay with your classmates and professor, in small groups.

- 20% **“Why this Jewish Popular Culture Matters” final essay** (roughly 1,000-words) due by Sunday, Nov 27th, midnight. We will be reading and discussing why popular culture matters: for this research essay, please choose your own example of American Jewish popular culture from the past 75 years, and using the reasons that we have drawn on this semester (historical, reception, thematic), explain to a general reader why it matters. You will be asked to include quotations from at least two newspaper/magazine reviews of your popular culture.
- 10% **Jews and Popular Culture theme Oral presentation** at the end of the semester. We have focused on two themes this semester: “The Jewish Woman in America” and “Antisemitism in America.” For this end-of-semester oral presentation, students are asked to present another possible theme that would fit into a “Jews and American Popular Culture” for this class. The presentation should include two possible books/films/TV shows that would fall under that theme. Presentations should be 6-8 minutes and include at least 3 images. Students may work together in groups of 2-3. Presentations will occur during the last weeks of class.

** There may be extra-credit assignment this semester. If so, Professor Gordan will alert the class to these opportunities.

** You are responsible for keeping track of your assignments. If you missed a due date, it is your responsibility to follow-up to inquire as to whether you can submit late.

- 1) Wed., Aug. 24, 2022. First class introduction: our themes and assignments

Part I The Jewish Woman

Ilana Horwitz: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/yentls-revenge-young-american-jewish-women-outperform-all-others-academically/>

For Monday, read Part I (chap 1-3) of *MM*

- 2) Mon., Aug. 29: *Marjorie*, Herman Wouk, Women, and the postwar change. For Wed Aug 31, read through the end of chapter five

- 3) Wed., Aug. 31: Cont. *Marjorie*, Herman Wouk, and the Postwar change *Marjorie Morningstar*. For Wed. Sep. 7, read through the end of Part II of *MM*

****Mon., Sep. 5: Labor Day*

- 5) Wed., Sep. 7: *Marjorie Morningstar: Wouk and Postwar Jewish Writers*

For Mon. Sept 12, read through the end of chapter 15

- 6) Mon., Sep. 12: *Marjorie Morningstar*, the film. For Wed, finish *MM* film

- 7) Wed., Sep. 14: Marjorie and Brenda: *Goodbye, Columbus*

For Monday, read *GBC* opening. And

<https://books.google.com/books?id=kRSTXb3fuRgC&lpg=PA3&dq=%22The%20Persistence%20of%20the%20Jewish%20American%20Princess%22&pg=PA25#v=onepage&q&f=false>

8) Mon., Sep. 19: *Goodbye, Columbus* for Wed, read 178-188 (chapter 6) in Riv-
Ellen Prell reading

9) Wed., Sep. 21: Brenda and *The Heartbreak Kid* (1972): Jewish women in
popular American fiction and film. Finish chapter 6 of Riv-Ellen Prell. For Wed,
read: <https://www.vox.com/the-goods/2018/12/5/18119890/jewish-american-princess-jap-stereotype>

***Mon., Sep. 26 Rosh Hashanah

10) Wed., Sep. 28: *Goodbye, Columbus* and *Milkfed*

11) Mon., Oct. 3: Harvard Divinity School visit

***Wed., Oct. 5: Yom Kippur

12) Mon., Oct. 10: *Milkfed* <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2021/02/10284239/melissa-broder-milk-fed-interview>

13) Wed., Oct. 12: *Milkfed*

14) Mon., Oct. 17: *Milkfed* Workshop paper thesis

For Wednesday: read the opening 10 pages of *Gentleman's Agreement* and p. 33-
41 of "The 1940s as the Decade of the Anti-Antisemitism Novel"

Part II: Antisemitism in America: We've Seen this Movie Before

15) Wed., Oct. 19: The Anti-antisemitism novel/film of the 1940s and
Gentleman's Agreement For Monday, finish the first 5 chapters of *GA* and finish
the 1940s article.

16) Mon., Oct. 24: ***a conversation with novelist Melissa Broder
For Monday Oct 31, read to the end of chapter 13 of *GA*

17) Wed., Oct. 26 ***special event with Professor Josh Lambert (Wellesley
College) on the "Jewish Literary Mafia on Jews" of the postwar era

18) Mon., Oct. 31: *Gentleman's Agreement* finish *GA* for Wednesday

19) Wed., Nov. 2: *Gentleman's Agreement*

For Monday, read *Driving Miss Daisy* on CANVAS

20) Mon., Nov. 7: Imagining Postwar Southern Antisemitism in the 1980s: *Driving
Miss Daisy*

21) Wed., Nov. 9: *Driving Miss Daisy*

22) Mon., Nov. 14: *Driving Miss Daisy and School Ties*

23) Wed., Nov. 16: *School Ties*

***Mon., Nov. 21: American Academy of Religion

***Wed., Nov. 23: Thanksgiving break

24) Mon., Nov. 28: *School Ties*

25) Wed., Nov. 30: Presentations/Jewish women & comics event

26) Mon., Dec. 5: Presentations

27) Wed., Dec. 7: Presentations

The course follows the standard UF grading scheme. There is no A+ grade.

- A94to100
- A-<94to90
- B+<90to87
- B<87to84
- B-<84to80
- C+<80to77
- C<77to74
- C-<74to70
- D+<70to67
- D<67to64
- D-<64to61
- E<61to0

Class Attendance and Make-Up Policy

Class attendance is expected. Unexcused absences will result in a reduction in your participation grade. Excused absences are consistent with university policies in the undergraduate catalog (<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>) and require appropriate documentation.

Students are responsible for satisfying all academic objectives as defined by the instructor. Absences count from the first-class meeting

Acceptable reasons for absence from or failure to engage in class include illness; Title IX-related situations; serious accidents or emergencies affecting the student, their roommates, or their family; special curricular requirements (e.g., judging trips, field trips, professional conferences); military obligation; severe weather conditions that prevent class participation; religious holidays; participation in official university activities (e.g., music performances, athletic competition, debate); and court-imposed legal obligations (e.g., jury duty or subpoena). Other reasons (e.g., a job interview or club activity) may be deemed acceptable if approved by the instructor.

For all planned absences, a student in a situation that allows an excused absence from a class, or any required class activity must inform the instructor as early as possible prior to the class. For all unplanned absences because of accidents or emergency situations, students should contact their instructor as soon as conditions permit.

Students shall be permitted a reasonable amount of time to make up the material or activities covered during absence from class or inability to engage in class activities because of the reasons outlined above.

If a student does not participate in at least one of the first two class meetings of a course or laboratory in which they are registered, and they have not contacted the department to indicate their intent, the student can be dropped from the course. Students must not assume that they will be dropped, however. The department will notify students if they have been dropped from a course or laboratory.

The university recognizes the right of the instructor to make attendance mandatory and require documentation for absences (except for religious holidays), missed work, or inability to fully engage in class. After due warning, an instructor can prohibit further attendance and subsequently assign a failing grade for excessive absences.

Students Requiring Accommodations

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center by visiting <https://disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started/>. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

Course Evaluation

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via ufl.bluera.com/ufl/. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/.

Class Demeanor

Students are expected to arrive to class on time and behave in a manner that is respectful to the instructor and to fellow students. Please avoid the use of cell phones and restrict eating to outside of the classroom. Opinions held by other students should be respected in discussion, and conversations that do not contribute to the discussion should be held at minimum, if at all.

Counseling and Wellness Center

Contact information for the Counseling and Wellness Center: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx>, 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.