

The Jewish Gangster in America
Spring Semester 2019

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course is a survey of the life and crimes of major Jewish gangsters in the United States from the end of the 19th century to the mid-20th century. The course consists of lectures, readings and selected FBI and government documents that relate to the lives of these men, their motivations for engaging in a life of crime, their criminal activities, and their relationship with their families and the Jewish community.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Students are expected to attend the lectures and do the assigned readings.

Research Paper:

Each student will be required to write a research paper on a subject, theme, topic or period covered in the course. The paper should be double spaced, no more than 5-7 pages in length, and contain source notes. During the first three weeks of class, students must inform me in person or by e-mail about the subject of their paper and the sources they intend to use. **The paper must be turned in on or before the last day of class.** Further details about the paper will be given in class.

The final grade is based on a mid-semester exam, the research paper, and class attendance and participation. **Note: All Students are allowed three (3) unexcused absences. Students who have more than three unexcused absences will have points deducted from their final grade.**

Grade Breakdown

Attendance: 10%

Mid-semester exam: 40%

Research paper: 50%

The following suggested books may be purchased, but students are not required to do so.

Albert Fried, *The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Gangster in America* (1980)

Jenna Weissman Joselit, *Our Gang: Jewish Crime and the New York Jewish Community, 1900-1940* (1983)

Robert A. Rockaway, *But He Was Good to His Mother: The Lives and Crimes of Jewish Gangsters* (2000)

Gerald Sorin, *Tradition Transformed: The Jewish Experience in America* (1997)

WEEK and TOPICS

1. Introduction and Overview of Jewish Criminality in the U.S.

Required Readings:

Joel Slonim, "The Jewish Gangster," *The Reflex* 3 (July 1928), 36-41
 David Singer, "Crime as 'Unser Shtick,'" *Judaism* 23 (Winter 1974), 70-77.
 Albert Fried, *The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Gangster in America* (1980), 89-114.

Documentary film: "The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Mobster"

2. American Jewry, 1870-1914

Required Reading:

Gerald Sorin, *Tradition Transformed: The Jewish Experience in America* (1997), 34-60, 61-90.

American Jewish Criminality and Gangsterism, 1870-1914

Documents:

Thomas Byrnes, 1886: *Professional Criminals of America*: David Goldstein, #30; Abe Greenthal, #152; Herman Greenthal, #153; Julius Klein, #191; Michael Kurtz, #80; George Levy, #185; Frank Lowenthal, #182; Emmanuel Marks, #187; Albert Wise, #203

3. American Jews and Crime: New York City, 1880-1914.

Required Readings:

Jenna Weisman Joselit, *Our Gang: Jewish Crime and the New York Jewish Community, 1900-1940* (1983), 1-13, 23-53.

Documents: Abraham Shoenfeld, New York Crime Reports, 1912-1914

American Jewry, 1920s

Required Reading:

Sorin, 179-193

4. Prohibition in America, 1919-1933

Document: 18th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

Prohibition in New York City, 1920-1933

Required Readings:

Josilet, "The Business of Crime: Arnold Rothstein and Murder, Inc." *Our Gang*, 140-156.
 Ron Arons, *The Jews of Sing Sing* (2008), 181-233; Louis "Lepke" Buchalter; Irving "Waxey Gordon" Wexler.

Document: FBI file on Waxey Gordon

5. **Film:** "Dutch Schultz: Menace to Society"

Prohibition: The East Coast, 1919-1933(Newark, Philadelphia, Boston)

Readings:

Mark H. Haller, "Philadelphia Bootlegging and the Report of the Special August [1928] Grand Jury," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol.109, No.2 (April 1, 1985), 215-233.

Documents:

FBI files, for Abner "Longy" Zwillman, , Charley "The King" Solomon" Max "Boo Boo" Hoff

6. Prohibition: The U.S. Midwest (Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Minneapolis-St. Paul)

Required Readings:

Robert Rockaway, "The Notorious Purple Gang: Detroit's All-Jewish Prohibition Era Mob," *Shofar*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Fall 2001), 113-130.

Documents:

FBI file, Detroit's Purple Gang

Film: "Louis Lepke"

7. Perils and Pitfalls of the Gangster Life

Required Reading:)

Robert Rockaway, *But He Was Good to His Mother: The Lives and Crimes of Jewish Gangsters* (2000), 113-143.

Film:"Don't Call Me Bugsy"

PASSOVER VACATION (April 15-April 27)

10. The Family Came First

Required Reading:

Rockaway, *Ibid.*, 182-219.

Documents:

Jake Guzik, "prison letters to his family"

Film: "Meyer Lansky: Mob Tycoon"

11. MID-SEMESTER EXAM

12. Defenders of Their People

Required Reading:

Rockaway, "Gangsters Against the Nazis," *Tablet Magazine* (July 18, 2018).

"Gangsters for Zion," *Tablet Magazine* (April 19, 2018)

Documents:

Funeral of Samuel "Nails" Morton

Film: "Lepke" (1970)

13. Research Papers Due

Wrap Up and Exam Review