

**WMNS 185A : Harmonies and Tensions: Contemporary Issues Between Blacks and Jews in the U.S.**

**Spring 1999**

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Prerequisite: Women's Studies 5A and/or Professor's Signature

**Seminar Description:**

The United States is a multi-ethnic society where the interactions between diverse ethnic groups is often more antagonistic than harmonious. The goal of this course is to look closely at the particular relationship between African Americans and Jewish Americans. Students will analyze the relationships between Blacks and Jews with the hope of developing new theories about how inter-ethnic connections and disconnections are maintained and/or disrupted.

This is not a history course or even a traditional sociological study. Rather *Harmonies and Tensions* is an interdisciplinary seminar in which the course material is drawn from many disciplines including but not limited to the arts and humanities, and popular culture. Specific historical events where Blacks and Jews worked together, clashed, or were pitted against each other will be discussed. By looking at sites of connection and disconnection, the class will consider the current state of Blacks and Jews with an added emphasis on the role of women as leaders or players. Major consideration will be given to the social construction theories of race and ethnic identity and the impact this particular theory has on Black/Jewish relations.

Beginning with an analysis of Michael Omi and Howard Winat's Racial Formation in the

United States, Katya Gibel Azoulay's "It's Not the Color of Your Skin, but the Race of Your Kin and Other Myths of Identity," and James Baldwin's theories on "How the Jews became White," the class will look at the effect of upward, class mobility and how certain alliances between Blacks and Jews were affected by middle class aspirations of success and assimilation. Specific discussions will include theories on U.S. Racism and European Anti-Semitism. Special attention will be paid to people and events which continue to create tension between Blacks and Jews, such as: Louis Farrakhan, Alan Baake, Charles Murray, Jesse Jackson; Affirmative Action, Quotas, Crown Heights and media suggested "Hollywood Cabals."

A close look at the alliance some Jews have made with the Christian Right and its impact on Black/Jewish relations; and the failure of the civil rights alliance between Martin Luther King Jr. and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel to be sustained and expanded will also be considered, as well as the work of Michael Lerner and Cornel West. Discussions by leading feminists on the exclusion of Black and Jewish women from the public debate will be a major part of the course. Dialogues between poets Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich; including the discussions between Barbara Smith and Elly Bulkin, will be compared to the Lerner and West dialogues.

The critical race work of Paul Berman, Jane Lazarre, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Gerda Lerner, and bell hooks will be part of the required reading list. Issues of representation in art and literature including questions around cultural borrowing or the development of hybrid forms will be covered. The Bill T. Jones and Arnie Zane Dance Company, a Black and Jewish collaboration will be studied, as well as certain novels and short stories by Jo Sinclair, James McBride, and Julius Lester.

A 1997 film on Blacks and Jews will be shown, and Anna Deavere Smith's one woman show (in video) *Fires In The Mirror*. Hollywood images of Blacks and Jews (by Blacks and Jews) will be viewed and discussed. There will be guest lectures (not yet confirmed) by leading Black and

Jewish scholars such as Julius Lester, Barbara Smith, Dr. Russell Adams, Dr. Linda Randall, and Dr. Cheryl Greenburg. Several community participants in historic Black-Jewish dialogues will be asked to speak to the class. In addition, Professor Ibrahim Sundiata (now of Howard University) has agreed to give a lecture and participate in a question/answer session with Professor Felman.

*Harmonies and Tensions* is taught in the Women's Studies Program at Brandeis University because of its particular focus on multiple lenses, which is a large component of feminist theory. Within the discourse of feminist theory, "multiple lenses" analyzes and deconstructs institutional structures, events, and people based on race, gender, sexuality, and class. In addition, "multiple lenses" offers new paradigms for understanding the impact of power and privilege on race and gender relations.

Finally, students will be asked to reflect on those places of agreement and disagreement in the contemporary

debate on the slave trade, the use and abuse of Holocaust language, the role of the Holocaust Museum in furthering the

antagonisms between Blacks and Jews, Jewish invisibility in the multicultural analysis, and the role of the media in

fostering group antagonisms. Much of the course work will be done in small groups and panel discussions led by the

students themselves on selected topics. Structurally, this course will be a new paradigm for analyzing other inter-ethnic struggles.

**Required Texts:**

1. Paul Berman, *Blacks and Jews*.
2. Anna Deavere Smith, *Fires in the Mirror*.
3. Michael Lerner and Cornel West, *Jews & Blacks*.
4. Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks & What That Says About Race in America*.

5. Elly Bulkin, Minnie Bruce Pratt, and Barbara Smith, *Yours In Struggle: Three Feminists' Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism*
6. Jack Salzman and Cornel West, *Struggles In The Promised Land: Toward A History Of Black-Jewish Relations In The United States.*
7. **Optional/ Highly Recommended:** Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States.*
8. Pick One: Jo Sinclair, *The Changelings*  
  
Jane Lazarre, *Beyond the Whiteness of Whiteness.*  
  
Julius Lester, *Love Song.*  
  
Harvey Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color.*  
  
Susan Grubar, *Race Changes White Skin, Black Face in American Culture.*  
  
Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood.*  
  
Laurence Thomas, *Vessels of Evil.*  
  
David R. Doediger, *Black on White: Black Writers On What It Means to Be White.*

**Or You May Pick A Book Of Your Own Choosing From The Course Bibliography**

**Reference: Vidoes on Reserve**

1. *Africans' America: America's Journey Through Slavery* (set of 4 videos).
2. *Hollywoodism: Jews, Movies, and the American Dream.*
3. *America and the Holocaust: Deceit and Indifference.*
4. *The Longest Hatred* (set of 2 videos).

**Harmonies and Tensions: Contemporary Issues Between Blacks and Jews in the U.S.**

**Jyl Lynn Felman**

**Spring, 1999**

**Wednesdays, 2 - 5**

**Course Requirements:**

1. Students are expected to come to class having carefully read the material assigned for that day and to engage in serious discussion. Students will sometimes be required to develop three or four questions for discussion.

In addition, students will be asked to present a topic of their choice (based on the readings) and to lead a class discussion on the relevant issues.

**Class participation 35% of the final grade.**

2. A series of short pieces written outside of class will be required as well as weekly in class writing. This work will not be graded, but counts for 15% of class participation.

3. Midterm will be a take-home exam to be completed in partners.

**Midterm will count for 30% of the final grade.**

4. The final consists of a small group presentation on a topic related to the issues studied in class --presented from both a Black and a Jewish point of view.

Or, students may decide to write a ten page paper on a topic related to the material discussed in class --presented from both a Black and a Jewish point of view.

**Final counts for 35% of the final grade.**

**Absolutely No Late Papers Will Be Accepted.**

**This syllabus, (reading, writing, and video assignments) and all guest speakers may change during the semester.**

**Harmonies and Tensions: Contemporary Issues Between Blacks and Jews in the U.S.**

**First Day of Class:** We will discuss the course and the following quote.

**James Baldwin from "On Being *White* and Other Lies"**

"...No one was white before he/she came to America. It took generations, and a vast amount of coercion, before this became a white country. It is probable that it is the Jewish community --or more accurately, perhaps, its remnants-- that in America has paid the highest and most extraordinary price for becoming white. For the Jews came here from countries where they were not white, and they came here, in part, because they were not white; and incontestably-- in the eyes of the Black America (and not only in those eyes) American Jews have opted to become white..."

**First In-Class Assignment:** Please write a response to the above quote by James Baldwin. Discuss your reactions to his ideas. What questions does this quote bring up for you?

**Week 1**  
**Jan. 20**

**Section I: Cultural Metaphors and Ethnic Misunderstandings**

**1. Racial Formation in the U.S.: Notions of Sites of Identity**

- A. The Social Construction of Whiteness
  - 1. (De)Constructing Jewish Identity in the U.S.
  - 2. (De)Constructing Black Identity in the U.S.
  - 3. Time Line of *Harmonies and Tensions*

**Questions For Discussion:** What is "Jewishness?" What is "Blackness?"  
What makes these categories sites of identities?

**Assignment:**

**Read:** How Jews Became White Folks & What That Says About Race In America, pgs. 1- 76 (this includes the introduction.)

**OPTIONAL:** Racial Formation in the U.S., Part I: Paradigms of Race, Ethnicity, Class, and Nation, pgs. 9-52.

**Write:** Three to Four page response paper to the readings. On a separate page, include two questions from each reading for class discussion.

**Week 2**  
**Jan. 27**

**Section II: Competition of Tears and Hierarchies of Suffering**

**1. Uses and Abuses of Language: Who Owns the Terms?**

- A. Slave, Slavery, Exile, Diaspora, The Chosen People, Holocaust, Zion, Concentration Camps
- B. Film: *Blacks and Jews*

**Assignment:**

**Read:** Handout from the "New York Times" on who owns the Holocaust.

Blacks and Jews: Alliances and Arguments, Jewish Racism, Black Anti-Semitism, pgs. 154-163 and The Lives People Live, pgs. 164-177.

Jews and Blacks, Past Oppression, pgs. 45-61.

**Write:** Two to Three page response paper to the "New York Times" article.

**Week 3**  
**Feb. 3**

**2. Contesting and Creating Meanings: Sites of Interaction**

**Guest Speaker: Professor Jonathan Sarna, Brandeis University**

- A. Locating Slavery in the context of Black/Jewish Relations
- B. Locating the Holocaust in the context of Black/Jewish Relations
- C. View Video Analyzing Slavery and the Holocaust Cross Culturally

**Assignment:**

**Read:** Blacks and Jews: Alliances and Arguments, The Other and the Almost the Same, pgs. 1-30; and Group Autonomy and Narrative Identity: Blacks and Jews, pgs. 286-303.

Struggles In the Promised Land, Chapter 3, Jews In the Slave Trade, pgs. 65-

72; Chapter 4, Antebellum Jews, Slavery, and the Old South, pgs. 73-86.

**OPTIONAL:** Racial Formation in the U.S., Part II. Racial Formation and The Racial State, pgs.53-94.

**Write:** Bring two questions per reading to class, typed.  
**Week 4**  
**Feb. 10**

**3. Victims and Victimizers or Negotiating Moral Territories**

- A. Looking at questions of "Jewish Racism."
- B. Looking at questions of "Black Anti-Semitism."

**Assignment:**

**Read:** Jews and Blacks, Jewish Racism and Black Anti-Semitism, pgs. 135-156.  
Yours In Struggle, Relationships Between Black and Jewish Women, pgs. 65-89.  
Anti-Semitism In America, Chapters 9 and 10, pgs.175-227.

**Write:** **To Be Announced.**

**Week 5**  
**Feb. 17**

**4. Cultural Preservations: National Memorials and The Lack of National Memorials**

- A. The Politics of Perspective: Interpreting the meaning of the creation of the Holocaust Museum.
  - a. From a Jewish Perspective. (What makes a perspective *Jewish and male* or *Jewish and female*?)
  - b. From a Black Perspective. (What makes a perspective *Black and male* or *Black and female*?)
- B. Interpreting the meaning of the lack of a museum dedicated to the History of Slavery in the U.S.

**Assignment:**

**Read:** Yours In Struggle, Hard Ground: Jewish Identity, Racism, and Anti-Semitism, pgs. 89-193.

**Handout:** "Art In America" on *Art & Memory at the Holocaust Museum*

**Write:** **Take-Home Midterm to be completed in small groups.**

**Week 6** **Spring Break, Feb. 22-26**  
**No Class** **Assignment is to complete the Midterm.**  
**Feb. 23**

**Week 7**  
**Mar. 3** **Midterm Due**

### **5. Assimilation and Class: Benefits and Blues**

- A. What is Assimilation? Assimilation into what?
  - a. What does the notion of assimilation suggest about the character of American Identity?
  - b. Who made Barbie? Why is this questions important to a class on Blacks and Jews?
- B. Questions of Gender, Class and Privilege
  - a. Where are the Black Women Leaders?
  - b. Where are the Jewish Women Leaders?
- C. Video: On the Creation of Barbie.

#### **Assignment:**

**Read:** The Issue Is Power, Class, Feminism and the "Black-Jewish Question," pgs. 116 - 130; Jews, Class, Color and the Cost of Whiteness, pgs. 139-150.

Jews and Blacks, Economic Conflicts, pgs. 157-179.

How Jews Became White Folks... Race, Gender and Virture in Civic Discourse, and Not Quite White: Gender and Jewish Identity, pgs.77-137.

**Write:** Write a two-page response paper summarizing the issues (as you see them) around class.

**Week 8**

**Mar. 10**

**Section III: Miscues and Mixed Metaphors in Black Jewish Relations**

1. **(Deconstructing) Past Events and Current Tensions:**
  - A. The Ocean Hill-Brownsville Controversy, 1968
  - B. The Raid on Entebbe, 1976
  - C. Crown Heights, 1991
  - D. The Valentines Day Cover of *The New Yorker* by Art Spiegelman, 1993
2. **Video: *Fires In The Mirror***

**Assignment:**

**Read:** Fires In The Mirror

Blacks and Jews, On Spiegelman's Valentine and Having a Headache.

**Handouts:** “Crown Heights” and “White” Values, “Black” Values: The Ocean Hill Brownsville Controversy and New York City Culture, 1965-1975.

**Week 9**

**Mar. 17**

2. **(Deconstructing) Past Events and Current Tensions:**

**Guest Speakers: Professors Maurianne Adams and John Bracey, Univ. Mass., Amherst**

- D. The Million Man March
- E. Affirmative Action
- F. Minister Louis Farrakhan

**Assignment:**

**Read:** Struggles in the Promised Land, Separate Paths, pgs. 275-294; Affirmative Action: Jewish Ideals, Jewish Interests, pgs. 295-322; Affirmative Action: African -American and Jewish Perspectives, pgs. 323-340.

Jews and Blacks, Current Tension Points, pgs. 180-224.

The Farrakhan Factor, Farrakhan, the Hip-Hop Generation and the Failure of Black American Leadership, pgs. 184-193; Farrakhan Fever, pgs. 211-227.

**Write:** In-Class writing assignment and bring three questions to class, typed.

**Week 10**

**Mar. 24**

**1. Auto-emancipation , Ethnocentric Movements, and Pan-nationtionalism**

**Guest Speaker: Professor Wellington Nyangoni, Brandeis University.**

- A. Zionism
- B. Afrocentrism
- I. Pan Africanism

**Assignment:**

**Read:** Jews and Blacks, Black Nationalism, pgs. 91-114; Jewish Nationalism pgs. 115-134.

Struggles in the Promised Land, Black-Jewish Universalisms in the era of Identity Politics, pgs. 177-198; "Nation Time!" pgs. 341-356; African-Americans and Israel pgs. 357-370.

**Week 11**

**Mar. 31**

**Section IV: (Mis)Representations In Popular Culture and History**

**Guest Speaker: Professor Ibrahim Sundiata, Howard University**

**1. The Good Old Days: Civil Rights Alliances in the 40's and the 60's**

- A. The Liberation of Auschwitz
- B. Revisiting Chaney, Schwerner, and Goodman
- C. The Role of the Media in creating racial antagonisms: *Showing Schindler's List on Martin Luther King Day to African American high school students in California* and other "media made moments"

**Assignment:**

**Read:** Jews and Blacks, The Civil Rights Movement, pgs. 80-90.

Struggles in the Promised Land, Long Distance Runners of the Civil Rights Movement, pgs. 123-152; Negotiating Coalition, pgs. 153-176; Blacks, Jews and Gender pgs. 385-400.

Blacks and Jews, The Schisms of '67, pgs. 263-285, Keeping a Legacy of Shared Struggle, pgs. 229-238.

**Write:**

A two page response paper to the readings as a whole and two questions.

**Week 12**      **Passover and Easter Break April 1 - April 8.**  
**No Class**      **Assignment to be Completd During the Break.**  
**Apr. 7**

**2.      The Politics of Representation: Images of Blacks and Jews by Blacks and Jews. Looking at the production of cultural images, exoticism, and the perpetuation of stereotypes.**

- A. The Harlem Renaissance as Precedent
- B. Spike Lee's *Do The Right Thing* and *Mo Better Blues*
- C. Steven Spielberg's *Amistad* and *The Color Purple*
- D. Reconsidering *Gentleman's Agreement*

**Assignment:**

**Read:**              Struggles in the Promised Land, African Americans and Jews in Hollywood: Antagonistic Allies, pgs. 257-274.

**Handouts:** “The New York Times,” *Michael Jackson*

**View:**              Watch with a partner(s) videos on reserve: *Hollywoodism* and Spike Lee’s *Mo Better Blues*

**Write:**              Write a two to three page response paper on each film.

**Week 13**      **Section V: Literature and Dance: What's Being Acted Out?**  
**Apr. 14**

- 1.      Dance**
  - A. The Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company: Sites of Connection
- 2.      Literature**
  - A. Jews and Blacks in Literary Conversation: Representations and the Power of Language to Inform, Misinform, and/or Distort
  - B. View film on Bill T. Jones

**Assignment: Class Presentations**

**Read:**              **Pick an optional book from the list or the Selected Course Bibliography.**

**Handouts:** Jews and Blacks in Literary Conversation

**Write:**              A two page response paper to the book you read. Pick a partner to read the book with, and meet to discuss before writing your paper.

**Week 14**  
**April 30**

**Last Class**

**Section VI: Where Are We Today: Un Melting The Pot**

- 1. Summary of the Issues: There are no Heroes or Villains or Horace Kallen's Dream Come True.**
- 2. Living with Contradictory Realities**
  - A. Navigating multiplicities.
  - B. What's at stake in efforts to forge Black/Jewish connection?
  - C. What are the political, cultural, ethical contexts under which such a cross cultural connection can be sustained?

**Assignment: Class Presentations.**

**Read:** Struggles in the Promised Land, On Imagining Foes, Imagining Friendship, pgs. 371-384; Blacks and Jews: A Personal Reflection, pgs. 401-410.

Jews and Blacks, Strategies for Reconciliation and Healing, pgs. 249-273; Grounds for Hope, pgs. 274-295.

**Harmonies and Tensions: Contemporary Issues Between Blacks and Jews in the U. S.**

**Selected Course Bibliography**

**Compiled by: Jyl Lynn Felman**

1. Russell Adams and Jonathan Rieder, "Common Quest," *The Magazine Of Black Jewish Relations*.
2. Amy Alexander, *The Farrakhan Factor: African American Writers on Leadership, Nationhood, and Minister Louis Farrakhan*.
3. Hannah Arendt, *The Jew As Pariah*.
4. Carol Ascher, *The Flood*.
5. Katya Gibel Azoulay, *Black, Jewish, and Interracial*.
6. James Baldwin, *Collected Essays*.
7. Saul Bellow, "Looking for Mr. Green."
8. Paul Berman, *Blacks and Jews*.
9. David Biale, Michal Galchinsky, and Susannah Heschel, *Insider/Outsider: American Jews and Multiculturalism*
10. Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin, *Jews and Other Differences: The New Jewish Cultural Studies*
11. Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks & What That Says About Race in America*.
12. Emily Miller Budnick, *Blacks and Jews in Literary Conversation*.
13. Elly Bulkin, Minnie Bruce Pratt, and Barbara Smith, *Three Feminists Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism*.
14. Hasia Diner, *In The Almost Promised Land*.
15. Leonard Dinnerstein, *Anti-Semitism In America*.
16. Richard Dyer, *White*.
17. Eli Faber, *Jews, Slaves, and the Slave Trade: Setting the Record Straight*.
18. Ruth Frankenberg, *Displacing Whiteness*.

19. Ruth Frankenberg, *The Social Construction of Whiteness*.
20. V.P. Franklin, Nancy L. Grant, Harold M. Kletnick, and Genna Rae McNeil, *African Americans and Jews in the Twentieth Century*
21. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. , *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Man*.
22. Nathan Glazer, “*Negroes and Jews: The New Challenge to Pluralism.*”
23. Stephen Gregory and Roger Sanjek, *Race*.
24. Susan Gubar, *Race Changes: White Skin, Black Face in American Culture*.
25. Alan Helmich and Paul Marcus, *Blacks and Jews on the Couch: Psychoanalytic Reflections on Black-Jewish Conflict*
26. bell hooks, *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*.
27. Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*.
28. Jonathan Kaufman, *Broken Alliance: The Turbulent Times Between Blacks And Jews In America*.
29. Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, *The Issue Is Power*.
30. Nat Hentoff, *Black Anti-Semitism and Jewish Racism*.
31. Milton Himmelfarb, “*How We Are.*”
32. Charles R. Lawrence III and Mari Matsuda, *We Won't Go Back: Making the Case for Affirmative Action*.
33. Jane Lazarre, *Beyond the Whiteness of Whiteness*.
34. Michael Lerner and Cornel West, *Jews & Blacks*.
35. Julius Lester, *Love Song*, and “*The Outsiders: Blacks and Jews and the Soul of America.*”
36. Hillel Levine and Lawrence Harmon, *The Death of an American Jewish Community*.
37. Bernard Malamud, “*The Loan, Angel Levine, and Black Is My Favorite Color.*”
38. James McBride, *The Color of Water*.
39. Jeffrey Melnick, *A Right To Sing The Blues: African Americans, Jews and American*

*Popular Song*

40. Riv-Ellen Prell, *Fighting to Become Americans: Jews, Gender, and the Anxiety of Assimilation*
41. Jerald E. Podair, "'White' Values, 'Black' Values: The Ocean Hill-Brownsville Controversy and New York City Culture, 1965 – 1975."
42. Norman Podhertz, "My Negro Problem—And Ours."
43. Adrienne Rich, *Blood, Bread, And Poetry* .
44. David R. Roediger, *Black on White: Black Writers on What It Means to Be White*.
45. Michael Rogin, *Black Face, White Noise*.
46. Bayard Rustin, "From Protest to Politics."
47. Jack Salzman and Cornel West, *Struggles In The Promised Land: Toward A History Of Black-Jewish Relations In The United States*.
48. Jo Sinclair, *The Changelings*.
49. Anna Deavere Smith, *Fires in the Mirror*
50. Stephen Steinberg, *The Ethnic Myth*.
51. Stephen Steinberg, *Turning Back: The Retreat From Racial Justice In American Thought And Policy*.
52. Laurence Thomas, *Vessels of Evil*.
53. R. G. Weisbord and A. Stein, *Bittersweet Encounter: The Afro-American and the American Jew*.
54. R. G. Weisbord and Richard Kazarian, Jr., *Israel in the Black American Perspective*.
55. Howard Winant and Michael Omi, *Racial Formation in the United States*.



