

The Jewish Gangster in America Professor Robert Rockaway Spring Semester 2021

Prof. Robert Rockaway
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Office hours by appointment (email for appointment)
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Course Credits: 3 TAU Semester Credits

For course times/days and location, please visit the TAU International web site (Study Abroad Course Offerings and Schedules). Please note that all information below is subject to change and/or adjustment as necessary.

Course Description

This course is a survey of the life and crimes of major Jewish gangsters and Jewish gangs in the United States from the end of the 19th century to the mid-20th century. The course consists of lectures, readings, and documentary films that relate to the lives of these men, their motivations for engaging in a life of crime, their criminal activities, their relationship with their families and the Jewish community and how they were viewed by them, and their ambivalent and often contentious relationship with their Italian gangster associates. The cities where Jewish gangsters and gangs operated will also be examined and compared. In addition, the gangsters' unusual alliance and cooperative efforts with the United States government during the 1930s and World War II will be analyzed and discussed.

Course Requirements and Expectations

Students are expected to attend the lectures and do the assigned readings. Please do not bring your cell phones to class. If you must, please make certain they are shut off during the class period. If it's an emergency and you must speak to someone, please leave the classroom to do so. I also expect you to not look at Facebook or other social media on your computer or cell phone during class. Doing so will have a negative effect on your grade.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, you will have gained an additional perspective and broader knowledge of the history and experience of Jews and the Jewish community in the United States from the mid -19th century to the period after World War II. And that you will also acquire an awareness of the underside and darker side of the Jewish experience in America.

Evaluation Criteria

Your final grade is based on class attendance and participation, a mid-semester exam, and the research paper. Grade Breakdown:

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Attendance and participation: 10%

Mid-semester exam: 40%

Research paper: 50%

The midterm exam will be a multiple choice exam covering the readings and lectures up to the midterm examination.

The research paper will be evaluated on the kinds of sources used and the quality of the writing. That is, that the writing should show care and be written in a clear language. I expect you to proofread your essay, to catch misspelled words and awkward or incomplete sentences.

Research Paper:

Each student will be required to write a proper research paper further examining a subject, theme, topic or period covered in the lectures, reading materials, and documentary films. The paper should be double spaced, 8-10 pages in length, and contain proper citations (footnotes or end notes) of sources, and a bibliography of your sources. During the first three weeks of class, students must inform me in person or by email about the subject of their paper and the sources they intend to use. This is to ensure that there is no misunderstanding of what is expected and that your topic is acceptable. The paper must be turned in before the last week of class. Papers turned in later than this will have the grade lowered. Further details about the paper will be given in class.

Absence Policy

Please note the TAU International Absence Policy as outlined on the next page. All Students are allowed three (3) unexcused absences. Students who have more than three unexcused absences will have points deducted from their final grade.

Course Schedule

1. Introduction and description of course

How to evaluate books and articles about Jewish crime, criminals and gangsterism

Overview of Jewish Criminality in Europe and America

Readings:

Robert A. Rockaway, "Exploring Jewish Crime," *An Inventory of Promises*, ed. Jeffrey S. Gurock and Marc Lee Raphael (1995), 223-234.

2. History of the Jews in the United States before 1914

Readings:

Gerald Sorin, *Tradition Transformed: The Jewish Experience in America* (1997), 61-90
Jewish Criminality in America before-1914

Documents:

Thomas Byrnes, *1886: Professional Criminals of America*: David Goldstein, #30; Abe Greeenthal, #152; Herman Greeenthal, #153; Julius Klein, #191; Michael Kurtz, #80;

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3. Jews and Crime in New York City before 1914

Readings:

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

Prohibition in American History

Document:

“18th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution”

4. Prohibition in America, 1919-1933

Documentary Film: Ken Burns, *Prohibition*, part 2

American Jewry in the 1920s

Reading:

Sorin, 179-193

5. Prohibition in New York City, 1920-1933

Reading:

Joselit, *Our Gang*, 140-156

A Rogue’s Gallery of New York’s Prohibition Era Jewish and Italian Mobsters:

Arnold Rothstein, Jacob “Little Augie” Orgen, Nathan “Kid Dropper”, Kaplan, Louis “Lepke” Buchalter, Jacob “Gurrah” Shapiro, Arthur “Dutch Schultz” Flegenheimer, Meyer |Lansky, Albert “Pretty” Amberg,, Joseph “Doc” Stacher, Joe Adonis, Charles “Lucky” Luciano, Vito Genovese, Joseph Bonanno, Frank Costello

Reading:

Marc Mappen, *Prohibition Gangsters: The Rise and Fall of a Bad Generation* (2013), 31-60.

6. MID-SEMESTER IN-CLASS EXAM (NO MAKE UP EXAMS GIVEN; MUST BE PRESENT IN CLASS!!)

7. Prohibition in America II

Documentary film: Ken Burns, *Prohibition*, part 3



Prohibition on the East Coast (Newark, Philadelphia, and Boston)

Abner “Longy” Zwillman, Max “Boo Boo,” Hoff, Charley “King” Solomon

Reading:

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.

8. Prohibition in the American Midwest (Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit,, Minneapolis--St. Paul, and St. Louis)

Reading:

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

Jewish Gangsters in the American Midwest

Jake "Greasy Thumb" Guzik, (Chicago); Moe Dalitz (Cleveland), Alex "Shondor" Birns (Cleveland), Isidore "Kid Cann" Blumenfeld (Minneapolis), Davey Berman (Minneapolis), Leon Gleckman (St. Paul, Minnesota)

9. Perils and Pitfalls of the Gangster Life

Reading:

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

The Gangster, His Family, and the Jewish Community

Rockaway, *Ibid.*, 182-219.

10. The Jewish Gangster as Defenders of His People

Required Reading:

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

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

Benjamin “Bugsy” Siegel, Las Vegas, and the Mob



11. Documentary film: Las Vegas and the Mob

Course Readings and/or Required Materials

All readings listed above provided on your Moodle course site for you. The following books are available in paperback and may be purchased, but you 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)

In addition, I placed these books on reserve in the Melman Library of Jewish history. This library is in the Carter Building (Carter 108) next to the TAU International Student Office. These books and others in the library can only be read or photocopied in the library.

Instructor Biography

Robert Rockaway was born and raised in Detroit, Michigan. He received his Ph.D. in history from the University of Michigan in 1970. He taught at the University of Texas before moving to Israel in 1971. Since then, he has been a member of the Department of Jewish History at Tel-Aviv University, where he is a professor emeritus. Rockaway has authored *The Jews of Detroit, From the Beginning, 1760-1914* (1986); *Words of the Uprooted: Jewish Immigrants in Early 20th Century America* (1998); *But He Was Good to His Mother: The Lives and Crimes of Jewish Gangsters* (2000); a monograph, *The Jews Cannot Defeat Me: The Anti-Jewish Campaign of Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam* (1995), as well as numerous articles on American history, American Jewish history, and modern Jewish history. Rockaway has been a visiting professor at Brandeis University, Boston University, San Diego State University, and George Washington University; as well as a visiting scholar and guest lecturer in Boston, Detroit, Cleveland, New York, Los Angeles, Seattle, San Diego, Miami, Washington, D.C., Toronto, Montreal, and Melbourne, Australia. He has appeared on radio and television in Israel and the United States. He appeared on the Arts and Entertainment series, *American Justice* ("The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Mobster"), and on *American Biography* ("Louis Lepke,"; and "Mickey Cohen"). A number of his writings are being made into feature films.

TAU International Academic Guidelines

Students may only attend classes which they are officially registered for. No auditing of courses is permitted. Students are responsible for reading and adhering to all policies and procedures in the TAU International Academic Handbook [posted here](#) at all times. Below is a summary of some of these relevant policies and procedures.

Learning Accommodations

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In accordance to University guidelines, TAU International may be able to accommodate students with learning disabilities or accommodation requests if these requests are also honored at the student's home university or home school. To be considered, students must submit official documentation from their home school or university (if not in English, a notarized official copy translated into English is required) to TAU International in advance of arrival describing in detail any specific needs and how these are accommodated at the home school or university. Students must also bring a copy of this documentation with them on-site and give it to their faculty on the first day of class while introducing themselves so that the faculty know who they are and what sorts of needs or accommodations they may have. **Without official documentation from the home school submitted on or before the first day of courses, TAU will not be able to honor accommodation support.**

With supporting documentation and by following the correct procedure as outlined above, TAU International and its faculty will do the best it can to make any suitable accommodations possible. However, we cannot guarantee that all accommodations received at the home school can be similarly met at TAU. For example, TAU is usually not able to offer note-taking services in English, private testing rooms, or advance viewing of classroom presentations, exams, or assignments.

It may be an option to provide a student with additional tutoring or support outside the classroom as needed. Students should be aware that this additional support cannot be guaranteed and is based on teacher availability in the subject as well as the specific student level. If available, the cost of additional tutoring or support will be the sole responsibility of the student.

In-Class Exams

TAU does not permit, under any circumstances, taking any in-class (including mid or final) exams early or later than the scheduled exam day. When selecting courses, it is thus very important to note if there is an in-class midterm or final exam as this date/exam cannot be changed. It is also the student's responsibility to clarify exam dates with the professors at the beginning of a course, with the understanding that not all exam dates can be decided up front as it can sometimes depend on the pace of the course and class learning. It is the student responsibility to plan to be present for all courses including the final day of class for this reason. Early departures from the program are not approved, nor are early or exception in-class exams.

TAU International Absence Policy

Attendance is mandatory in all of the courses including Hebrew Ulpan. Faculty can and will take attendance regularly. Missing classes will be reflected in the final grade of the course. Up to three justified and properly documented absences from classes may be accepted (for example: emergency matter or illness, both of which will require a doctor's note). Such cases of absence should be reported to the faculty immediately and again, a doctor's note is required. Teachers are entitled to treat any lateness or absence without documentation as unexcused. Some of our courses such as Service Learning or the Internship Seminar require more practical in-class work;

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thus, attendance policies may be stricter in some courses and students then must adhere to the stricter attendance policy as outlined by the faculty/syllabus.

Students are required to arrive on time for classes. Teachers are entitled to treat any single case of lateness and/or repeated lateness as an unjustified absence.

Please note that according to official TAU Academic Policy, if a student's behavior or attendance during is disagreeable his/her course participation may be cancelled at the discretion of TAU with no due refund.

Grade Appeals

Students are responsible for checking grades once posted or distributed by faculty. The limited grade appeals window and the detailed procedure for appealing a grade – whether a graded assignment, exam or final grade – is outlined clearly in the policies and procedures in the TAU International Academic Handbook [posted here](#).

