

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, of 8-10 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, class attendance and participation. The percentage of the grade is based on the following breakdown.

Attendance = 10%
Mid-semester 40%
Research paper = 50%

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.

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.

Required reading:

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.

Suggested reading:

Robert Rockaway, "American Jews and Crime: An Annotated Bibliography," *American Studies International*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (February 2000), 26-41.

Alan A. Block, "History and the Study of Organized Crime," *Urban Life* Vol. 6, No. 4 (January 1978), 455-474.

James O'Kane, *The Crooked Ladder: Gangsters, Ethnicity, and the American Dream* (1993), 51-78.

2. American Jewry, 1870-1914

Reading:

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

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

Required reading:

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

Herbert Ausbury, "Monk Eastman: The Prince of Gangsters," *The Gangs of New York* (1927; 1970), 272-298.

Suggested reading:

Patrick Downey, *The History of the New York Underworld, 1900-1935* (2004), 49-81.

Documents: Abe Schoenfeld, "Investigative Reports of the Lower East Side, 1912-1917"

4. American Jewry, 1915-1939

Reading:

Sorin, 179-193

5. Prohibition: New York City, 1919-1933

Required Reading:

Joselit, "The Business of Crime: Arnold Rothstein and Murder Inc.," *Our Gang*, 140-156
 Larry D. Gragg, *Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel: The Gangster, The Flamingo, and the Making of Modern Las Vegas* (2015), 1-18.

Ron Arons, *The Jews of Sing, Sing* (2008), 181-233: "Louis "Lepke" Buchalter; Irving "Waxey Gordon" Wexler.

Suggested reading:

Paul R. Kaveieff, "The Birth of Murder, Inc.," in *The Life and Times of Lepke Buchalter: America's Most Ruthless Labor Racketeer* (2006), 69-78.

Patrick Downey, "Gangster City, 99-110, 199-208 (Waxey Gordon, Dutch Schultz)

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

Readings:

Mark Stuart, *Gangster #2: Longy Zwillman, the Man Who Invented Organized Crime* (1965), 19-24.

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, Max "Boo Boo" Hoff, Charley "The King" Solomon

Interview: Interview with Lester J. Schaffer, attorney for William "Willie" Weisberg on August 14, 1991.

7. MID-SEMESTER EXAM

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

Required readings:

Michael Newton, *Mr. Mob: The Life and Crimes of Moe Dalitz* (2007), 3-28.

Mark H. Haller "Organized Crime in Urban Society: Chicago in the Twentieth Century," *Journal of Social History* 5 (1971-1972), 210-234.

Suggested reading:

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

Paul Maccabee, *John Dillinger Slept Here: A Crook's Tour of Crime and Corruption in St. Paul, 1920-1936* (1995), "Leon Gleckman," 34-44.

Documents:

National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement Report on Crime and the Foreign Born (Washington, 1931), "Organized Crime and the Foreign Born," 189-196.
FBI file, Isidore "Kid Cann" Blumenfeld

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), 113-181.

10. The Family Came First

Reading:

Rockaway, *Ibid.*, 182-219.

Documents:

Mickey Cohen, *In My Own Words: The Underworld Autobiography of Michael Mickey Cohen* (1975), 182-183.

FBI file, Louis "Lepke" Buchalter

Jake Guzik, "prison letters to his family"

11. Defenders of Their People

Reading:

Rockaway, *Ibid.*, 219-254

Documents:

Funeral of Samuel "Nails" Morton

Interview: Reuven Dafne, June 7, 1989. Gangsters who provided him with money and help for Israel, 1946-1947

12. **RESEARCH PAPER DUE**