

The Jewish Gangster in America
Professor Robert Rockaway
Spring Semester 2020
Office: 204 Carter Building



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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 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 all of 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 reading materials from week 6 through week 12. The paper should be double spaced, no more than 5-6 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 week of class.** Further details about the paper will be given in class.

The final grade is based on class attendance and participation, the mid-semester exam, and the research paper. **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 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)

I placed these books as well as others dealing with Jews and organized crime on reserve for this class in the Melman Library of Jewish history in the Carter Building next to the International Student office. These books can only be read or photo copied in the library.

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.

American Jewry, 1870-1914

Required Reading:

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

2. Jewish Criminality and Gangsterism in America, 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

Jews and Crime in 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.

Documents: Abraham Shoenfeld, NY Crime Reports, 1912-1914

3. American Jewry in the 1920s

Required Reading:

Sorin, 179-193

Prohibition in America, 1919-1933: Overview

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

4. Prohibition in America

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

Prohibition in New York City, 1920-1933

Required Reading:

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.

5. New York's Jewish mobsters: Arthur "Dutch Schultz" Flegenheimer ; Louis "Lepke"
 Buchalter; Meyer Lansky, Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel; Irving "Waxey Gordon" Wexler;
 Sam "Red" Levine; Louis "Pretty" Amberg

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

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

Required 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.

Document:

FBI File on Abner "Longy" Zwillman,

Documentary film: *Lansky*

7. MID-SEMESTER EXAM

Prohibition: The American Midwest (Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, and Minneapolis-St.
 Paul)

Required Reading:

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

PASSOVER VACATION

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

Detroit's Purple Gang, 1920s -1940

Document: FBI list of Purple Gang Members

11. 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.

The Family Came First

Required Reading:

Rockaway, *Ibid.*, 182-219.

Document: Jake Guzik, letter from prison

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)

The Mob and Las Vegas

Documentary film: *Don't Call Me Bugsy*

RESEARCH PAPERS DUE

Open Discussion

TAU International Course Guidelines

Rules and Respectful Behavior

- No cell phones or laptops permitted in class unless approved by instructor for use
- Tardiness to class is not permitted
- As our courses bring together students from many different styles of learning and from a wide variety of home institutions, we ask that students remain respectful to and patient with fellow classmates at all time as some students may be more familiar with certain course material or procedures than others.

Learning Accommodations

In accordance to University guidelines, students with learning disabilities or accommodation requests must submit official documentation from their home country / university (translated into English by notary if not already in English) to TAU International (tauiacademic@tauex.tau.ac.il) in advance of arrival describing in detail any specific needs they have. 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 they may have. TAU International and its faculty cannot guarantee that all accommodations received at the home school can be similarly met at TAU but certainly does the best it can to make any suitable accommodations possible that are needed.

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 below if there is an in-class midterm or final exam as this date/exam cannot be changed. 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. Missing classes will be reflected in the final grade of the course. Up to three justified absences from classes will be accepted (for example: emergency matter or illness, both of which will require an official doctor's note sent to the faculty **on the day of the absence**). Such cases of absence should be reported to your lecturer immediately and again, a doctor's note is required. 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 TAU Academic Policy, if a student's behavior or attendance during the semester is disagreeable his/her course participation may be cancelled at the discretion of TAU.

Students are responsible for reading and adhering to the policies and procedures in the TAU International Academic Handbook [posted here](#) at all times.