

THE RUSSIAN JEWISH EXPERIENCE

Spring 2014
Tu/Th 2-3:15 PM
Econ 13

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Office hours: Tues, 10:45 am-12 pm and by appt.



“Memorials” (Grisha Bruskin, 1983)

This course offers an examination of the experience of Russian Jews from the end of the 19th century to the present, focusing on the late Imperial, the Soviet, and the post-Soviet periods. We will study the cultural artifacts dealing with the challenges of co-existence of Jews and their neighbors in the Russian Empire; we will also consider experiences of and reflections on the Bolshevik Revolution, Stalinism, the Holocaust, the post-Stalin period; the place of Jews as individuals and members of a minority group within Russian and Soviet society, ideology, and culture; migration and emigration; everyday life in Russia, the Soviet Union, and among immigrant communities in America and elsewhere at the beginning of the 21st century. We will study fiction, films, diaries, memoirs, political propaganda, transcripts of trials, essays, and contemporary scholarship. All readings in English.

Books to purchase: (these titles are available at the campus bookstore but you are welcome to look for better priced copies online; I linked the titles to amazon.com but you are by no means required or encouraged to buy from amazon; always try to patronize your local bookstore first):

Sholem Aleichem, [*Tevye the Dairyman and Railroad Stories*](#)
[*Isaac Babel's Selected Writings*](#), edited by Gregory Freidin
Moyshe Kulbak, [*The Zelmanyaners: A Family Saga*](#)
Zvi Gitelman, [*A Century of Ambivalence*](#)

All other readings that are not in book form will be available on the course website in D2L.

COURSE POLICIES

1. Attendance and participation: 15%

The class is discussion-based so it absolutely depends on your presence and active participation
Attendance is mandatory and will be tracked through a sign-in sheet. Participation should occur through asking questions or answering questions in class, and through participation in class discussions.

Preparation: critical comprehension of assigned readings and knowledgeable engagement in class discussions are essential. Because class discussions will revolve around the readings, you will be expected to come to class having completed all the readings. Once again, you must prepare for each class in order to participate effectively.

Bring your assigned text/article every day, as we often do close text study of key arguments. This textual analysis involves focusing, questioning, and synthesizing so you need to have all the texts ready and available in class.

Students who have good attendance but do not participate will get an 80 on this portion of the grade. Students who do participate will get between 81 and 100, depending on the quality of participation.

Points will be deducted for absences. You will not be penalized for up to 2 unexcused absences (they are freebies—apportion them however you want, go skiing, whatever). From the 3rd through the 5th absence, you will lose 5 points off for each absence off of this portion of the grade (plus, this will hamper your ability to earn enough participation points, so do the math about what this means). **Students with 6 or more unexcused absences will fail the course.**

For absences to be excused, they must be documented. If you are in a complicated or ongoing personal situation (family death or illness, personal injury or illness, situation of abuse, trauma), please contact the Office of Victims Assistance <http://cuvictimassistance.com/> which, in addition to providing you confidential support, will also contact your professors to inform them of (and excuse) your absences without revealing any of the confidential information about your case.

Two latenesses (after the attendance sheet has been passed around) will be counted as an absence for grading purposes.

Many of you, I understand, work alongside your studies, are involved in sports or other extracurriculars and/or have family responsibilities that demand your attention. You are expected to arrange your schedule such that you can attend every class and complete all assignments.

Please communicate with me clearly if you are having any particular problems with the course. Email is the best way of doing so. I am more than willing to work with you if you show the responsibility to be in touch when appropriate. I am much less flexible when I hear about problems or absences at the last minute or after the fact. I will hold regular office hours but I am also more than willing to meet with any of you at other times. Just let me know and we can set something up.

2. Quizzes: 20%

There will be quizzes beginning with the second week of the course. These will consist of a set of multiple choice and true/false questions. Some weeks these will be quizzes on specific readings that will be due before class; other weeks these will be quizzes when I ask you to synthesize material from class. In both cases, the quizzes will be administered through D2L and they will be timed (i.e. the system will shut off if you don't complete the quiz in the allotted time). Occasionally, I might also give in-class pop quizzes. The schedule of these quizzes will be intentionally erratic but – basically – do all the readings on time and you will be fine.

3. Take-home exams: 2 x 20% and final at 25%

There will be three of these during the course of the semester; the first two will be worth 20% of the final grade and the last will be worth 25%. The last of the three exams will be due on the date of the final exam as set by the Registrar. More details about these exams as the semester proceeds but they will consist of a set of short essays and close readings; the final exam may include some independent work in the library.

4. Extra credit opportunities

There will be extra credit opportunities throughout the semester, which will involve attending public lectures and events hosted by the Program in Jewish Studies and/or the Russian Studies program. I will announce these in class and you are also welcome to monitor the calendar of events on the Program in Jewish Studies [web page](#); follow the Program in Jewish Studies account on Twitter (@JewishStudiesCU); you may also follow the professor on Twitter who will try to stay on top and tweet the schedule of events (@returnstosender). Extra credit will generally be worth a dropped grade on one of your quizzes per each event you attend though check with me about the details first.

5. Cell / smart phone policy

Please silence and put away your phones and any other mobile devices during class. Please do not text, check your email, or browse any social media sites during class. If you choose to do so (even surreptitiously under your desk), I'll politely ask you to leave class for the day, and you will not earn attendance points for that class. See attendance policy above – same rules apply here.

Note: if you absolutely must be available by cell phone because of, for example, family circumstances (such as caring for a child and being needing to be in touch with a childcare provider at all times, or caring for a sick relative or friend) please let me know who you are. I will ask you that you keep your phone on “vibrate” and sit closer to the exit from the classroom so that you may answer a call without disturbing the class.

6. Laptop / tablet / other technology policy

I discourage the use of laptops in class. Face-to-face encounters are rare and rarer these days so part of the rationale of this discussion-based course is to improve the quality of our interactions, which technology often impedes. This is not a lecture course so you won't need to constantly take notes; when you do need to take notes, I encourage you to do so in a (paper) notebook. A range of studies are now available about distractions that are caused to self and other by technology use (such as web surfing) in classroom settings – feel free to Google these studies.

You need to bring all the readings to class. Some of our readings will be distributed in PDF format so I encourage you to print those out and save them until the end of the semester.

If for some reason you are unable to take notes in a paper notebook or are not able to print out reading assignments (I understand that cost of printing and environmental concerns may be an issue) you *may* use a laptop or a tablet device in class. However, if you choose to use the laptop/tablet device in class even once during the course of the semester, you must abide by the following policies (you will be required to sign this document by the beginning of the second class of the semester – I will distribute it in class then):

- The laptop will be used for note-taking and reading assigned PDFs *only*.
- Wireless connectivity (WiFi) will be turned off during the full 75 minutes of class. This means absolutely no Internet usage, including email, YouTube, Facebook, and even Wikipedia searches. If you plan to read PDFs on your computer, be sure to download them from the D2L portal prior to class.
- The laptop-user agrees not work on other assignments during this class session.
- The laptop-user will get a number for their laptop and display his/her laptop number where neighbors can easily see it.
- The laptop-user understands that, in the event that he/she uses email, Facebook, et cetera, *anyone* in class who sees this may report this issue to the professor via personal email.
- The professor will inform the laptop-user that a report has been lodged; however the complete anonymity of the person who has filed the report is guaranteed by the professor.
- 5 points of the laptop-user's attendance grade will be *transferred from the user to the reporter* (to atone for causing a distraction).
- No proof is required. (!) There is no recourse or plea for the laptop-user. The laptop-user, by signing, is agreeing to trust in the fundamental decency of his/her fellow students to not lodge false accusations. However, the undersigned laptop-user understands that, in this class as in life, there are no guarantees of fairness, and they might well suffer false reporting by unscrupulous classmates.
- The laptop user cannot lose more than 5 points per day. (Multiple reporters of the behavior may benefit.)
- The maximum allowable "loss" is 50% of the attendance grade – it's a huge portion of the total grade (do the math). The "gain" by any one reporter of this behavior is similarly limited to 2x5 points per semester.

I understand that this is a very strict policy. I do not assume students to be bad-natured people. This policy, borrowed from a CU colleague, simply aims to help us all as a group to focus on the class without distracting ourselves and others when we are all so distracted by technology all the time. This is the 75 minutes twice a week to cherish as an opportunity for productive human interaction.

7. Late Work

I do not accept late work except in the case of extenuating circumstances. I will *never* accept late work in the case of personal computer failure or travel delays (an exception being if the campus network goes down). This means you should have your work automatically backed up (check out programs like Dropbox, Copy,

iCloud, Carbonite) and know where campus or public library computers are located in the event that you cannot use your own. It also means that if you are travelling just before a deadline, you should submit your work *before* you leave (travel delays are very common). Pay attention to deadlines and *do not* assume that a late submission (even if it is only a little late) will be accepted.

8. Email etiquette

I communicate by email outside of class, so please feel free to contact me at the address listed above if you'd like to set up an appointment or for any other reason. Please remember to use appropriate and professional language in your email: phrases like "hey there" or "yo professor, whassup with my grade?" are not appropriate or professional. Your best bet is to open your email with "Dear Prof X..." (and this applies to addressing all faculty at the university, not just yours truly). This is by no means my own pet peeve: addressing letters properly is very much part of your professional development.

Do not expect that I reply to your email right away—be prepared for wait for 24 hours for me to reply, so be sure to ask your questions in a timely manner if you anticipate needing a reply by a certain date.

9. The syllabus

Though the syllabus will not change in major ways, some reading assignments will be adjusted from time to time. All books that are required will be used in this course; no additional books will need to be purchased. However, various readings in non-book form (PDFs and web links) might be changed by the professor. It's probably best not to print out this syllabus but rather to keep checking it on D2L – I will be posting revised versions as we go along, if the need arises.

Schedule of Classes

Note: you need to finish all readings and film screenings by the date listed on the schedule below.

Tues 1/14	INTRO: RUSSIAN JEWS BETWEEN IMAGINATION AND REALITY
Thurs 1/16	JOURNEYS INTO MODERNITY <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sholem Aleichem, "On Account of a Hat"• Zvi Gitelman, "Creativity versus Repression: The Jews in Russia, 1881-1917," in <i>A Century of Ambivalence</i> (pp. 1-41)
Tues 1/21	TEVYE THE DAIRYMAN (I): CHALLENGING TRADITION <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sholem Aleichem, "Tevye Strikes it Rich," "Today's Children"• Zvi Gitelman, "Creativity versus Repression: The Jews in Russia, 1881-1917," in <i>A Century of Ambivalence</i> (pp. 42-58)
Thurs 1/23	TEVYE THE DAIRYMAN (II): JEWS, POLITICS, AND MAJORITY CULTURE <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sholem Aleichem, "Hodl," "Chava"
Tues 1/28	TEVYE THE DAIRYMAN (III): JEWISH MOBILITY <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sholem Aleichem, "Lekh Lekho"• Yuri Slezkine, "Mercury's Sandals: Jews and other Nomads" in <i>The Jewish Century</i>

- Thurs 1/30 **OLD ODESSA: FROM WEAKNESS TO VIOLENCE**
- Isaac Babel, “The Story of My Dovecote” (pp. 347-355); “How Things Were Done in Odessa” (pp. 266-272)
- Tues 2/4 **THE REVOLUTION AND THE JEWISH BODY**
- Isaac Babel, “The Road” (pp. 44-50); “Karl-Yankel”
 - Zvi Gitelman, “Revolution and the Ambiguities of Liberation” in *A Century of Ambivalence* (pp. 59-87)
- Thurs 2/6 **A JEW ON HORSEBACK**
- Isaac Babel, *Red Cavalry* (pp. 94-116)
 - *1920 Diary* (excerpts, pages TBA)
- Tues 2/11 **SAINTS AND MURDERERS**
- Isaac Babel, *Red Cavalry* (pp. 116-142)
 - Babel’s reporting for *The Red Cavalryman* (pp. 252-255)
- Thurs 2/13 **THE REVOLUTION AS MESSIAH**
- Isaac Babel, *Red Cavalry* (pp. 142-174, plus alternative ending, “Argamak”)
 - Efraim Sicher, “Midrash and History” (pp. 469-483)
- Tues 2/18 **THE COMMISSAR AND THE JEWS**
- Watch: *Commissar* (dir. Askoldov, 1967)
- Thurs 2/20 **THE OLD AND THE NEW: A FAMILY SAGA**
- Moyshe Kulbak, *The Zelmanyaners*, pp. 3-62
 - Elissa Bemporad, “Red Star on the Jewish Street” in *Becoming Soviet Jews: The Bolshevik Experiment in Minsk* (pp. 31-50)
- Tues Feb 25 **JEWISH COURTYARD, SOVIET CITY**
- Moyshe Kulbak, *The Zelmanyaners*, pp. 63-124
 - Anna Shternshis, “Antireligious Propaganda and the Transformation of Jewish Institutions and Traditions,” in *Soviet and Kosher* (pp. 1-43)
- Th Feb 27 **SALVAGE ETHNOGRAPHY**
- Moyshe Kulbak, *The Zelmanyaners*, pp. 127-200
 - Andrey Sinyavsky, “Stalin: The State-Church” in *Soviet Civilization* (pp 81-113)
- Tues 3/4 **BUILDING SOCIALISM**
- Moyshe Kulbak, *The Zelmanyaners*, pp. 201-267
 - Zvi Gitelman, “Reaching for Utopia: Building Socialism and a New Jewish Culture,” in *A Century of Ambivalence* (pp. 88-114)
- Thurs 3/6 **STALIN’S RED PROMISED LAND**
- Watch: *Seekers of Happiness*
 - Finish the discussion of readings on Stalinism from previous week

- Tues 3/11 **THE HOLOCAUST (I): JEWS AND THEIR NEIGHBORS**
- Watch: *Ladies' Tailor*
 - Zvi Gitelman, "The Holocaust," in *A Century of Ambivalence* (pp. 115-143)
- Thurs 3/13 **THE HOLOCAUST (II): WRITING THE LOSS**
- Vasily Grossman, letters to his mother; "The Old Teacher"
- Tues 3/18 **THE JEW AS A ROOTLESS COSMOPOLITAN**
- Ludmila Ulitskaya, "March Second of *That Year*" (15 pp)
 - Transcripts of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee Trial (10-15 pp)
 - Zvi Gitelman, "The Black Years and the Gray, 1948-1967" (pp. 144-173)
- Thurs 3/20 **Class canceled: instructor away**
- 3/25 and 3/27 **Spring break, no class**
- Tues 4/1 **THE JEW AS A SOCIAL DEVIANT**
- Joseph Brodsky, "In a Room and a Half" (40 pp)
 - Excerpts from Joseph Brodsky's 1964 trial (3-4 pp)
 - Zvi Gitelman, "Soviet Jews, 1967-1987: To Reform, Conform, or Leave?" in *A Century of Ambivalence* (pp. 174-195)
- Thurs 4/3 **THROUGH SOVIET JEWISH EYES**
Guest lecture by Professor David Shneer
- David Shneer, "Picturing Grief, Documenting Crimes: Soviet Holocaust Photography," in *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes* (pp. 140-183)
- Tues 4/8 **BETWEEN JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY**
- Judith Deutsch Kornblatt, *Doubly Chosen: Jewish Identity, the Soviet Intelligentsia, and the Russian Orthodox Church* (excerpts)
 - Joseph Brodsky, *Nativity Poems*
- Thurs 4/10 **SOVIET JEWS AND "THE FRIENDSHIP OF NATIONS"**
- Dina Rubina, "Apples from Schlitzbuter's Garden"
 - Zvi Gitelman, "The 'Other' Jews in the Former USSR: Georgian, Central Asian, and Mountain Jews," in *A Century of Ambivalence* (pp. 196-211)
- Tues 4/15 **Passover: no class**
- Thurs 4/17 **THE SOVIET SHTETL**
- Ludmila Ulitskaya, "Genele the Purse Lady"
 - Jeffrey Veidlinger, *In the Shadow of the Shtetl* (excerpts)
 - Explore testimonies at www.aheyem.org
- Tues 4 22 **RUSSIAN JEWS IN ISRAEL**
- Watch: *Yana's Friends*
 - Zvi Gitelman, "The Paradoxes of Post-Soviet Jewry" (pp. 244-274)

- Thurs 4/24 **DIASPORA OR HOMELAND?**
- Watch: *Five Hours from Paris*
- Tues 4/29 **ONLY IN AMERICA**
- David Bezmozgis, “Roman Berman, Massage Therapist”
 - Gary Shteyngart, *Little Failure* (excerpts)
 - Contemporary journalism on Russian-Jewish literature in English
- Thurs 5/1 **CONCLUSIONS: RUSSIAN JEWS IN THE 21ST CENTURY**
- Wrap-up discussion

Schedule of take-home exams:

- Essay #1 – date TBA, about a month into the semester
 Essay #2 – date TBA, about two months into the semester
 Essay #3 – due on the date of the final exam as set by the Registrar (TBA)

DISABILITY POLICY

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to your professor a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner (for exam accommodations provide your letter at least one week prior to the exam) so that your needs can be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities. Contact Disability Services at 303-492-8671 or by e-mail at dsinfo@colorado.edu.

If you have a temporary medical condition or injury, see Temporary Injuries under Quick Links at Disability Services website (<http://disabilityservices.colorado.edu/>) and discuss your needs with your professor.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND THE HONOR CODE

All students of the University of Colorado at Boulder are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council (honor@colorado.edu; 303-735-2273). Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). Other information on the Honor Code can be found at

<http://www.colorado.edu/policies/honor.html> and at <http://honorcode.colorado.edu>

APPROPRIATE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, color, culture, religion, creed, politics, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity and gender expression, age, disability, and nationalities.

Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.

See policies at: www.colorado.edu/policies/classbehavior.html and also www.colorado.edu/studentaffairs/judicialaffairs/code.html#student_code

DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT

The University of Colorado Boulder (CU-Boulder) is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working, and living environment. The University of Colorado does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status in admission and access to, and treatment and employment in, its educational programs and activities. (Regent Law, Article 10, amended 11/8/2001). CU-Boulder will not tolerate acts of discrimination or harassment based upon Protected Classes or related retaliation against or by any employee or student. For purposes of this CU-Boulder policy, "Protected Classes" refers to race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or veteran status. Individuals who believe they have been discriminated against should contact the Office of Discrimination and Harassment (ODH) at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Student Conduct (OSC) at 303-492-5550. Information about the ODH, the above referenced policies, and the campus resources available to assist individuals regarding discrimination or harassment can be obtained at

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE

Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to reasonably and fairly deal with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. If you have a potential class conflict because of religious observance, you must inform me of that conflict within three weeks of the start of classes. See policy details at http://www.colorado.edu/policies/fac_relig.html.
<http://hr.colorado.edu/dh/>