

UKRAINE AND JEWS

JST 4936; LIT4930

Spring 2026

Instructor: Professor Dragan Kujundzic

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Tuesday, 8-9 (3:00 PM – 4:55 PM)

Thursday, 9 (4:05 PM – 4:55 PM)

Fascinating literature, art and films have been produced by the Jews living in Ukraine and the territories of Russia and East and Central Europe. The course will discuss these works, sometimes written in Yiddish but deeply steeped in Ukrainian and Russian history, (*Tevye the Dairman* by Sholem Alechem) and watch the films based on them (*Fiddler on the Roof*). Paintings by Marc Chagall will be discussed, as well as writings by Isaak Babel. Films by Serguei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov (Kaufman) will be screened and discussed as well as the politics of Lev Trotsky or Boris Nemtsov. Other figures from East and Central Europe may include the works of Franz Kafka, Paul Celan, or Danilo Kish. Particular accent will be placed on issues of Ukraine Jews, in film and media (Loznitsa, Volodimir Zelenski), in the context of the current Russian aggression on Ukraine. Class will be held in the form of a seminar with active student participation, presentations and class discussions. The class will be held in the form of a seminar with active student participation, presentations and class discussions. The class discussions and presentations will form 40% of the grade, attendance, film screening offline and reports, and class participation and attendance 10%, and one midterm and one final paper 50% (25% each). No final exam. All readings in English, and films with English subtitles. The exact readings will be provided for each class by the instructor over the list serve and/or canvas. No books or textbooks to purchase. There will be however some minor costs involved in streaming films not available in the library, (via Amazon, Hulu). No final exam. The exact readings will be provided for each class by the instructor over a listserve. **The goals: the students will be introduced to the cultural, political and historical conditions of Ukraine and Jews, their life and tradition, and learn to assess and think critically about the major works of literature, film, works of art, politics and philosophy written by the Jews of Russia, the Soviet Union and the post-Soviet period and emigration to Israel and the United States.**

Midterm and Final paper (25% of grade each) due on the days indicated in the syllabus and on Canvas, group presentations (40%). Attendance and participation 10% of the grade.

Course Evaluation Process:

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.ua.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from

GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES, READINGS, ASSIGNMENTS AND SCREENINGS

The exact topics, assignment, and format of presentation will be given in class and via email as well as canvas in a timely manner. The syllabus may be adjusted to accommodate student participation, the rhythm of reading or an ad hoc visiting lecture. *Assignments specified and in detail for each class, in class, online and via canvas, each week.*

Tuesday, 8-9 (3:00 PM – 4:55 PM), marked as 2
Thursday, 9 (4:05 PM – 4:55 PM), marked as 1

Week one

2 Introduction

1 Read: Davidzon, “Ukraine and Jews,” handout.

Read: Sholem Aleichem, *The Tevye Stories*, selection and introduction provided by instructor (excerpts); Students discuss the readings individually.

Week two

2 Fiddler on the Roof, Tevye Stories. Screen selection in class, all at home: Fiddler on the Roof, Amazon and elsewhere, also UF Library. Discussion.

1 Screen: *Laughing in the Darkness* (available online at UF Library). Conclusion, Sholem Aleichem.

Week three

2 Instructor’s lecture, continue: *Tevye Stories, Fiddler on the Roof, Laughing in Darkness*, Aleichem.

Read: Davidzon, handout

Screen: YouTube Lecture, *Ukraine and Jews I*, Henry Abramson.

Screen in class.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=747FyJNfJ9w&t=10s>

Read: “Jews of Ukraine, Until 1914” Yevo,

<https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/ukraine>

Screen: Parfenov, *Russian Jews, I*, YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FfN3yQJxe8E>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y2dgWV63GMc>

1 First Group Presentation, Group 1 *Tevye Stories, Fiddler on the Roof, Laughing in Darkness*, Aleichem.

Screen: *Ukraine and Jews*, 2. Abramson, YouTube, **screen in class**.

Week four

2 Screen in class: Parfenov 2 and 3, selection, discussion, in class, finish at home; Abramson

1 Second Group Presentation, Group 2, Yivo, Abramson, Parfenov, Davidzon

Week five

2 Instructor's lecture: Isaac Bashevis Singer, *Yentl*, and Barbra Streisand, *Yentl*; excerpts shown in class. Read *Yentl*

1 Instructor introduces: Simon Sebag Montefiore, and Vladislav Davidzon, Nahum, on Odessa. **Read at home:** Simon Sebag Montefiore, and Vladislav Davidzon, Nahum, on Odessa.

Read: Isaak Babel, *Odessa Stories* (excerpts) Instructor's introduction, and Yivo, *Isaak Babel* (handout)

Week six

2 Isaak Babel, *Odessa Stories* (excerpts) continue, and *Benia Krik*, stream in class, excerpts, You Tube, available, silent film.

Screen clips in class and at home: Once Upon a Time in Odessa, YouTube, 1-5
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wc6_gsWCQfw

Screen in class and at home: *Benia Krik* (free, YouTube)

1 Third Group Presentation, Group 3, Odessa, Babel, Nahum, Montefiore, Davidzon, **Via Zoom**

Week seven

2 Introduction: Europe, Ukraine and Jews, the Holocaust, **Via Zoom**; **Screen in class:** Kujundzic, *Frozen Times*, *Liquid Memories*, excerpts

1 Screen at Home, *Everything is Illuminated*, film, and novel by Jonathan Safran Foyer, *Everything is Illuminated*, **study day or Zoom, TBD**

Week eight

2 Discuss, *Everything is Illuminated*; Kuznetsov, *Babi Yar*; *Liquid Memories*, **Screen:** Hewitt, **UKRAINE: HOLOCAUST GROUND ZERO** (57')

Link: <https://vimeo.com/863137054?share=copy>

Password: ukrainedbf

1 Introduce Loznitsa, *Baby Yar*, **screen:** excerpts in class, Ukraine, Jews and Europe, instructor's concluding remarks.

Week nine

2 Fourth Group Presentation, Group 4, Holocaust in Ukraine, Films, essays and literature

1 Instructor's lecture. Conclusion to the first part of the semester. **Class on Zoom**

Week ten

SPRING BREAK

Week eleven, 03/25-03/27

2 Midterm Presentations individual and group.

1 Midterm presentations, individual and group.

MIDTERM DUE ONLINE, 03/30

Week Twelve

2 Instructor: Zelensky, current politics of Ukraine and Jews; Zelensky, Abramson; *Servant of the People*, the film, in class, clips.

1 All groups present and discuss: Pre lecture assignments, Marina Nahum

Week thirteen, 04/08-04/10

2 Guest Lecture, TBA

1 Screen in class: Zelenski, *Interview with David Letterman* (YouTube, free access)
Read: handouts, TBD

Week fourteen

2 Screen in class: Significant Jewish-Ukrainian journalists and the war against Ukraine: Mark Feygin and Vitaly Portnikov, **instructor's introduction and selected segments**

Presentation: Group (1-2) and individual presentations on the topic of Ukraine and Jews

1 Presentation: Group (3-4) and individual presentations on the topic of Ukraine and Jews

Week 15

2 Concluding remarks, instructor; Final Paper Due Online

Scholarship, excerpts may be made available by instructor, a selection

1. Avrutin, Eugene. *Jews and the Imperial State: Identification Politics in Tsarist Russia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010. [L] [SEP]
2. Dubnow, Simon. *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland: From the Earliest Times Until the Present Day*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1916- 1920. [L] [SEP]
3. Frankel, Jonathan; Zipperstein, Steven, eds. *Assimilation and Community. The Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992. [L] [SEP]
4. Freeze, ChaeRan. *Jewish Marriage and Divorce in Imperial Russia*. Hanover: University Press of New England for Brandeis University Press, 2002. [L] [SEP]
5. Gitelman, Zvi. *Century of Ambivalence*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2001.
6. Haberer, Erich. *Jews and Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Russia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. [L] [SEP]
7. Lederhendler, Eli. *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics: Political Tradition and Political Reconstruction in the Jewish Community of Tsarist Russia*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989. [L] [SEP]
8. Litvak, Olga. *Conscription and the Search for Modern Russian Jewry*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006. [L] [SEP]
9. Nathans, Benjamin. *Beyond the Pale: the Jewish Encounter With Late Imperial Russia*. Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002. [L] [SEP]
10. Petrovsky-Shtern, Yohanan. *Jews in the Russian Army, 1827-1917: Drafted Into Modernity*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. [L] [SEP]
11. Stanislawski, Michael. *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews: the Transformation of Jewish Society in Russia, 1825-1855*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983.
11. Stein, Sarah. *Making Jews Modern: the Yiddish and Ladino Press in the Russian and Ottoman Empires*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press,

2004.^[L]_[SEP]12. Zipperstein, Steven. *The Jews of Odessa: a Cultural History, 1794-1881*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1985.

Films (selection) : “Fiddler on the Roof,” and "Jewish Luck" (1925) for pre-revolutionary Russia, "Return of Nathan Becker" (1932) - for Soviet transformation, "Commissar" (1966) - for Russian Civil War, and "Everything is Illuminated" (2005) - for the Holocaust and contemporary post-Soviet issues, *Voices from the Booth*-Russian Jews in Israel, *Friends From France*--Russian Jews After Communism.