

UKRAINE AND JEWS

JST 4936; LIT4930

Spring 2026

Instructor: Professor Dragan Kujundzic

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Classroom: Turlington 2322

Tuesday, 8-9 (3:00 PM – 4:55 PM)

Thursday, 9 (4:05 PM – 4:55 PM)

Office Hours TBA

Office Walker Hall 200



Fascinating literature, art and films have been produced by the Jews living in Ukraine and the territories of Ukraine 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.

POLICIES:

This course complies with all UF academic policies. For information on those policies and for resources for students, please see

<https://syllabus.ufl.edu/syllabus-policy/uf-syllabus-policy-links/>

Some of these policies are summarized below for easy access.

Accommodations: Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the Disability Resource Center [<https://disability.ufl.edu/>]. Please share your accommodation letter with the instructor and discuss your access needs as early as possible in the semester.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

- *Campus Health and Wellness Resources:* For resources that are designed to help you thrive, visit<https://one.uf.edu/whole-gator/discover>
- U Matter, We Care: umatter@ufl.edu – <https://umatter.ufl.edu/> ; 392-1575
- Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS): Student Health Care Center; 392-1161
- University Police Department: <http://www.police.ufl.edu/> ; 392-1111 (911 for emergencies)
- *UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center:* For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608: <https://ufhealth.org/locations/uf-health-shands-emergency-room-trauma-center/>

ACADEMIC RESOURCES

- E-learning technical support: 352-392-4357; helpdesk@ufl.edu
- Career Connections Center: Reitz Union 1300; <http://www.crc.ufl.edu/> ; 352-392-1601
- Library Support: 866-281-6309 or ask@ufl.libanswers.com
- Teaching Center: 1317 Turlington Hall, 352-392-2010

Students must respect THE UNIVERSITY HONOR CODE:

HONOR PLEDGE: We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by Students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment."

See also <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-conduct-code/>

Course Evaluations

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online.

See the UF Academic policies link above for more information about the process.

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. Occasional class may be taught via Zoom, if instructor at a conference, TBA. *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 01/13-01/15

2 **Introduction by Instructor;** *Fiddler on the Roof*, excerpts.

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 01/20-01/22

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 01/27-01/29

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

Read: Davidzon, handout

Screen: YouTube Lecture, *Ukraine and Jews 1*, 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, 1*, 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 02/3-02/5

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

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

Week five 02/10-02/12

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

1 *Yentl*, film and story, discussion

Week six 02/17-02/19

2 Yentl, Third Group Presentation, Group 3.

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)

1 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), 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

Week seven 02/24-02/26

2 Third Group Presentation, Group 3, Odessa, Babel, Nahum, Montefiore, Davidzon.

Introduction: Europe, Ukraine and Jews, the Holocaust. Kuznecov and Loznica, *Babi Yar*.

1 *Baby Yar, Ukraine, Holocaust, Ground Zero*, a film by Michael Hewitt screen in class.

Week eight 03/3-03/5

2 Kavelina, *Lemberg*, screen in class, if the film available. Or, *Shttl*.

1 Discussion, *Lemberg* or *Shttl*.

Week nine 03/10-03/12

2 Screen in class: Kujundzic, *Frozen Times, Liquid Memories*, excerpts. Instructor will also recount his recent visit to Ukraine in wartime conditions.

1 Fourth Group Presentation, Group 4, Holocaust in Ukraine, films and literature

Week ten

SPRING BREAK, March 14-21

Week eleven 03/24-03/26

2 Midterm Presentations individual and group 1 and 2: What have you learned about Ukraine and Jews? Discussion.

1 Midterm presentations, individual and group 3 and 4: What have you learned about Ukraine and Jews? Discussion.

MIDTERM Paper DUE ONLINE, 03/30

Week Twelve 03/31-04/2

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

1 All groups present and discuss: *Pre lecture assignments*, TBA

Week thirteen 04/07-04/9

2 Guest Lecture, TBA

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

Week fourteen 04/14-04/16

2 Screen in class: Significant Jewish-Ukrainian journalists and the war against Ukraine: Mark Feygin and Vitaly Portnikov, **instructor's introduction and selected segments, handouts. Instructor:** *The current war against Ukraine, various sources*.

Presentation as discussion contribution: *Group (1-2) and individual presentations on the topic of Ukraine and Jews, current war in Ukraine*

1 Instructor, *The current war against Ukraine, various sources*.

Presentation as discussion contribution: Group (3-4) and individual presentations on the topic of Ukraine and Jews, current war in Ukraine.

Week 15 04/21

2 Concluding remarks. Instructor; Final Paper Due Online April 25 11:59PM

Scholarship, excerpts will be made available by instructor

1. Avrutin, Eugene. *Jews and the Imperial State: Identification Politics in Tsarist Russia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010. [L1] [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. [L1] [SEP]
3. Frankel, Jonathan; Zipperstein, Steven, eds. *Assimilation and Community. The Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992. [L1] [SEP]
4. Freeze, ChaeRan. *Jewish Marriage and Divorce in Imperial Russia*. Hanover: University Press of New England for Brandeis University Press, 2002. [L1] [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. [L1] [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. [L1] [SEP]
8. Litvak, Olga. *Conscription and the Search for Modern Russian Jewry*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006. [L1] [SEP]
9. Nathans, Benjamin. *Beyond the Pale: the Jewish Encounter With Late Imperial Russia*. Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002. [L1] [SEP]
10. Petrovsky-Shtern, Yohanan. *Jews in the Russian Army, 1827-1917: Drafted Into Modernity*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. [L1] [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. [L1] [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.

