

# A PPENDIX

## Series for Film Group Discussions

The most rewarding discussions of movies usually have a focus and a framework, and the easiest way to achieve this is to select a series of films linked by common themes or elements. The JHVC provides the opportunity to explore many different subjects through film.

The series listed in the following pages are designed to help groups get started. Each should provide a solid framework for discussion; together they illustrate a range of different ways of putting series together. The Collection is large enough, and the movies are interrelated in so many ways, that numerous combinations are possible. Groups are encouraged to add to or subtract from these series, to combine series, and to invent new ones.

The Jewish Heritage Video Collection *Catalog*, available at your JHVC site, includes descriptions of all videos in the Collection. It will provide further background on the films in these series, as well as ideas for other films to view.

Films listed in the series that follow which are also included in JHVC courses are marked with an asterisk (\*). Course curricula include detailed descriptions as well as historical and cultural background relating to the films, which may be of interest for film group discussions.

The list of JHVC courses, at the end of this Appendix, may provide some additional ideas for viewing and discussion. Material may be photocopied from these courses, available at your JHVC site, for use in film groups.

Finally, *Genesis: A Living Conversation* with Bill Moyers, part of the JHVC, lends itself to discussion groups. The series, and a resource guide with background on setting up and running a *Genesis* group--including source readings and discussion questions--are available from your JHVC site.

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*We welcome feedback and suggestions on additional series using the  
Jewish Heritage Video Collection. Our address is:  
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## C lash of Lifestyles: In the Family, in New Lands

### **FAMILIES: STEREOTYPES AND ARCHETYPES**

Ethnic families have been portrayed and stereotyped since the early days of cinema. Perhaps the most detailed iconography has been developed for the Jewish family. Jewish mothers and daughters, fathers and sons have all been stamped with now-familiar characteristics, many borrowed from the immigrant generation that arrived and succeeded in America just as the film industry was coming into its own.

This series provides opportunities to discuss the depiction of the Jewish family in American film in all its ramifications: the stereotyping of particular Jewish family members as well as the Jewish family dynamic itself; how the Jewish film family compared to the mainstream nuclear family; and how the Jewish family itself ultimately entered the mainstream and became a part of popular American culture.

#### **□ Images of Jewish Mothers**

*The Jazz Singer* (1927)\*--In this first feature film with sound sequences, Al Jolson plays the son of Jewish immigrants whose pursuit of a career as a jazz singer, strongly opposed by his cantor father, is supported by his nurturing, devoted, all-accepting mother.

*Mirele Efros* (1939)\*--An exploration of family conflict, often called "The Jewish Queen Lear" and the masterwork of the Yiddish writer Jacob Gordin, this film tells the story of a pious widow, her son, and her selfish daughter-in-law.

*Marjorie Morningstar* (1958)\*--A bright and beautiful young woman, the daughter of upwardly mobile Jewish parents in the 1930s, questions the lifestyle and values represented by her well-intentioned but conventional mother.

*Next Stop, Greenwich Village* (1976)\*--Shelley Winters plays the overbearing Jewish mother in Paul Mazursky's bittersweet comedy about Jewish life in the 1950s, which portrays a young man's coming of age and asks whether it is possible to leave home behind.

\* These films are featured in JHVC curricula; see list on pp.45-47

*Brighton Beach Memoirs* (1986)\*--The first part of Neil Simon's trilogy of autobiographical plays, this nostalgic comedy set in 1937 depicts a mother determined to keep her family on track through struggles over money, living space, and desire.

*Radio Days* (1987)--Woody Allen's autobiographical memories of the radio era create a rich portrait of a lower-middle-class Jewish family in Rockaway Beach, N.Y., in the early 1940s.

#### □ **Images of Jewish Fathers**

*His People* (1925)\*--This superb silent film presents a learned, religious immigrant father whose tradition and values are all but shattered by his encounter with the New World and by his failure to understand the very different paths taken by his sons.

*Goodbye, Columbus* (1969)\*--The movie version of Philip Roth's biting and controversial look at upwardly mobile Jewish life in the 1960s suburbs features a father (Jack Klugman) devoted to his family as well as to material success.

*Fiddler on the Roof* (1971)\*--The film adaptation of the musical based on Sholem Aleichem's stories tells of Tevye, a poor milkman in a Russian shtetl and a strong and sentimental father of five daughters, who struggles to preserve Jewish tradition in the face of the persecutions and seductions of the outside world.

*The Chosen* (1982)\*--The story of two teenage boys in Brooklyn in 1944 who come to question the world views of their fathers--one, a charismatic Hasidic rabbi and the other, a professor and ardent Zionist--and to appreciate each other's way of life.

*The Imported Bridegroom* (1989)\*--Based on a story by Abraham Cahan, the film tells of conflicting needs, dreams, guilt, and regret in the household of a successful turn-of-the-century immigrant, his ambitious daughter, and the Old Country *yeshiva bocher* he arranges for her to marry.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

### **Families: Stereotypes and Archetypes**

- What are the key characteristics of each family member? In what way do they seem to represent the “Jewish mother,” “Jewish father,” etc.?
- Do you think the characters accurately depict Jewish figures of the time in which the film was made? Are they exaggerated, for humorous or dramatic effect? Do you see positive and negative traits?
- In what ways do you find the characters particularly Jewish, and in what ways more generally American, or universal?
- How would you characterize relations among the family members? Do you find anything specifically Jewish in the family dynamics? Do you think the director meant to convey something Jewish, or general?
- Do you find these stereotypes related to the immigrant generation that arrived in the U.S. during the growth of the film industry? How were certain characteristics and family dynamics unique to this time period and this country? What were some of the historical realities that created certain stereotypes?
- How do you find the images compare with those in fiction? On television (for films made in the television era)? In your own experience?
- What might we learn about Jewish American life from the film? About the director’s view of Jewish American life? Which stereotypes of Jewish family members have been most consistent and vivid?
- How have stereotypes changed over the years? Have older ones been superseded by new ones, or have portrayals become more diverse and less stereotypical?
- Has the Jewish family become part of American popular culture, or is there still a sense of separate ethnicity? How have the two intermingled, and where are the distinctions preserved?

## **IMMIGRATION: SENTIMENTAL AND UNSENTIMENTAL JOURNEYS**

Throughout their history, oppression and persecution have led Jews to migrate from one land to another in an attempt to find religious freedom and better living conditions. Two significant migrations have had historic implications for our own time. At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, about two and half million Jews left Russia and Eastern Europe to settle in America--part of a movement that brought twenty million Europeans to the United States over four decades. The world they carried with them, the world they found, and the often painful conflicts and changes occasioned by adjustments to American life have been addressed in a number of fine films, both feature and documentary.

The other great migration is the one that followed the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, which brought Jews there from all over the world. That experience is documented in several documentaries and a delightful feature film.

### **□ In America**

*These four films focus on Jewish immigration to the United States in the early part of the century--a period of conflict, transition, assimilation, and a new need for self-definition.*

*Hester Street* (1974)\*--The story of a turn-of-the-century immigrant on the Lower East Side who sends for his wife, this film portrays the life of a community in transition, where immigrants must reexamine their identities as Jews in light of American opportunities and values.

*The Forward: From Immigrants to Americans* (1989)--This film chronicles the great Yiddish newspaper, *The Forward*, founded in 1897 by the Yiddish writer Abraham Cahan, and its important role in guiding Yiddish-speakers into the American mainstream.

*His People* (1925)\*--This silent film tells the tale of an immigrant family whose tradition and values are all but shattered by the encounter with the New World.

*Avalon* (1990)\*--Writer/director Barry Levinson drew upon his immigrant heritage to create this chronicle of Jewish family life in Baltimore, with its themes of assimilation, ambition, and generational conflict.

## ❑ **To The Land of Israel**

*Two documentaries and one comedy explore the enormous changes that affected ancient and diverse communities brought together by the birth of the modern nation of Israel.*

*Routes of Exile* (1982)--This documentary traces the history of Moroccan Jewry from its origins 2,000 years ago to the outmigration that began with the creation of the State of Israel.

*Operation Moses* (1985)--The story of Ethiopia's Jews--their isolation and religious perseverance, and the stirring massive airlift to Israel organized by the international Jewish community in the 1980s.

*Sallah* (1964)\*--A hilarious satire of the experiences of one new immigrant, played by Topol, when he arrives in a young, struggling state confronted with the challenges of resettling diverse groups of people.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

### **Immigration: Sentimental and Unsentimental Journeys**

- Does the film give a sense of what the characters left behind in the “old country” and the reasons for their migration?
- How is the “old” represented in the film?
- How do the characters react to life in the new country? Are there differences between family members? Generations?
- What seems most difficult about settling in a new place? Most appealing? Most confusing?
- If you had to migrate, how would you decide whether and where to go? What problems do you think you would have? Your parents? Children?
- What happens to Jewish tradition in the new land? Does greater freedom have any costs?
- What are the biggest conflicts represented in the film?

## **JEWISH WOMEN: ENCOUNTERING CHANGE**

This series deals with the transitions from the Eastern European shtetl, with its traditional Jewish values and strict roles for women, to the opportunities and dangers presented by modernity and American society. Many writers, playwrights, and, later, filmmakers have mined this rich material, portraying the colliding worlds, changing mores (particularly with regard to women), and, often, ensuing loss of identity and a spiritual center.

New opportunities and freedoms brought immigrants to America, but at the same time a clear danger faced the morally cohesive way of life, governed by Jewish community and family values, they had brought with them. The first films in the series look at those early clashes: Two focus on the impact of the American experience, and one, *Yentl*, written by Isaac Bashevis Singer before he immigrated, predicts future collisions to come.

The last four films feature Jewish women, young and old, in America at different time periods, from the 1930s to the 1980s. They are no longer immigrants, clearly American, yet not completely absorbed by the mainstream society. While still affected by a clash of values, they evaluate and redefine themselves as Jews, Americans, and women. But the issues they deal with now are more than Jewish dilemmas. These films depict Jewish women at the center of what becomes an American struggle for identity--one that must balance ethnicity and assimilation, activism and self-containment, conventionality and individuality, worldly success and true happiness.

*Yentl* (1983)--Based on the story by Isaac Bashevis Singer and directed by and starring Barbra Streisand, this is the story of a Jewish girl who masquerades as a boy in order gain admittance to a yeshiva where she can study Torah. By so doing, she upsets conventional assumptions about men's and women's roles and their needs for spiritual and intellectual sustenance.

*East and West* (1923)\*--A silent comedy made in Vienna in 1923, this film takes a satirical look at the clash between the traditional Old World of Eastern Europe and the carefree modern ways of the West, particularly as each regarded appropriate female behavior. It is the earliest extant film with the great Yiddish actress Molly Picon.

*The Imported Bridegroom* (1989)\*--Based on a story by Abraham Cahan, this poignant and funny film of an immigrant who made good, his ambitious daughter and a yeshiva student provides a memorable view of the immigrant experience at the turn of the century.

*Marjorie Morningstar* (1958)\*--A powerful romance leads a bright and beautiful young Jewish woman, the daughter of upwardly mobile parents in 1930s Manhattan, to question her lifestyle and values.

*The Way We Were* (1973)\*--The relationship of a Jewish political activist and a handsome, talented gentile (played by Barbra Streisand and Robert Redford) who first meet and compete in college. Set against the background of World War II and the McCarthy era, this a love story where fundamental values get in the way.

*Driving Miss Daisy* (1989)--Winner of an Academy Award for Best Picture, this film provides an unusual view of race relations in the Deep South through the touching story of a wealthy Jewish widow and her black chauffeur. It covers a period of 25 years, culminating in the Civil Rights movement.

*Crossing Delancey* (1988)\*--Izzy Grossman is a young single woman caught between the allure of a man from the literary uptown world she lives and works in and the simpler charms of a pickle merchant who hails from the Lower East Side world of her beloved grandmother.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

### **Jewish Women: Encountering Change**

- ❑ What is the external conflict depicted in each film, and what is the inner conflict within the woman at the film's center? In what way can it be seen as a Jewish conflict? In what way, American?
- ❑ What is the role of Judaism in the lives of the characters and how does it affect their decisions and struggles?
- ❑ Each film looks at American-Jewish life at a different time period. How does each portray Jewish life? What can be understood about the position of Jews in American society at the time? What are the strains? What transitions are occurring?
- ❑ How does each film look at the clash between the traditional Old World and modern Western ways?
- ❑ How does each film view the immigrant experience? Is it tragic, comic, both? How does each tally the gains and losses of this period for those who lived it?
- ❑ Why is the love story such a successful vehicle for examining the clash of values? How does this work in the films?
- ❑ How was the experience of women different from men? Did it change from Europe to America?
- ❑ Why do you think women are so central to these stories of change? How are they portrayed in these films? Are stereotypes reinforced or overturned?

## THE CATSKILLS

New York's Catskill Mountains were once known as the Jewish Alps. Dotted the mountains were family-run resorts catering to a mostly Jewish clientele--offering Jewish food, Jewish humor, and other Jewish guests with whom to socialize. For Jews--increasingly successful though not entirely at ease or welcome in gentile establishments--it was the obvious vacation spot: a place to relax from the stresses of city life while appreciating their substantial accomplishments with others like themselves. For young people, the Catskills were often the setting of romance and sometimes for rebellion.

These films, all made long after the periods they chronicle, look at four decades of the Catskills and Jewish life in America. They take a sometimes nostalgic, sometimes socially penetrating look at a unique and memorable slice of Jewish-American life.

*Marjorie Morningstar* (1958)\*--Marjorie, the daughter of upwardly mobile Jewish parents in the 1930s, gets a job at a summer camp in the Catskills. She meets the handsome director of a nearby resort's summer theater, and a romance develops that makes her question her values, lifestyle, and ideas about love and success.

*Dirty Dancing* (1987)\*--This film takes place during the summer of 1963 at a resort, during the heyday of the Jewish Catskills. Conflicts of class and ethnicity are played out through the romantic relationship between a naive Jewish teenager and a streetwise gentile dance instructor.

*Sweet Lorraine* (1987)\* --The Hotel Lorraine is facing its last summer when the owner's granddaughter, Molly Garber, surprisingly shows up for work. This touching film captures the end of an era in Jewish-American life and explores whether we can go home again.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

### **The Catskills**

- ❑ What do each of these films reveal about the Jews who vacationed in the Catskills? Why do these characters choose to summer in there?
- ❑ The films cover four decades: How are the characters similar or different? What appears to have changed from the 1930s to the 1960s?
- ❑ How do the characters identify as Jews? In what ways are they clearly Jewish beyond that self-identification? How do the films show the cultural, economic, and class differences between different sets of Jews? How important are these issues in the film?
- ❑ How do the films use romantic or other personal stories to make sociological points? Why does the setting of the Catskills make such a potent backdrop for stories of generational tension and romantic diversity?
- ❑ How are the films nostalgic or unsentimental--or both at the same time? Think about the period depicted as well as the period in which the film was made. How do the attitudes and points of view of the filmmakers affect the story we see?
- ❑ Why did the Jewish Catskills come to an end? What do the films have to say about that?

## The Consequences of Prejudice and Hate

### ANTISEMITISM

The hatred of Jews has a long history, going back at least as far as the story of Esther and Haman. But after the second exile in the year 70 AD, when the Judean kingdom was crushed by Rome and the modern diaspora effectively began, so did a particularly virulent form of antisemitism. In Europe, Jews lived as vulnerable minorities--separate, closely knit, oppressed, a potent reminder of the roots of Christianity and a constant rebuke to Christian believers. In the modern era, even as the antisemitism fomented by the Church weakened, it became transformed into nationalism and racial demonization. From Spain to Russia to France to Nazi Germany, manifestations of antisemitism show both common threads and characteristics specific to time, place, and circumstance.

The first series deals with historical antisemitism, primarily in Europe. The second depicts antisemitism in America, where it has usually been less obvious, because it was not sanctioned by government and church, but where it has taken the form of veiled, subtle social prejudice against Jews.

#### □ A Historical View

*The Longest Hatred* (1991)--This documentary follows the 2,000-year history of antisemitism in all its virulent forms. Its three segments cover the history of Christian antisemitism, its presence and prevalence in Europe today, and changing Muslim attitudes toward Jews.

*The Disputation* (1986)--This film recreates one of the most famous theological debates in medieval Europe--between the converted monk Pablo Christiani and Rabbi Moses ben Nachman before King James of Aragon in Barcelona in 1263--in a forum frequently arranged to convince Jews to convert.

*Prisoner of Honor* (1991)--Conscience and prejudice are explored in this dramatization of the reopening of the Dreyfus case by Col. Georges Picquat (played by Richard Dreyfuss).

*The Last Marranos* (1990)--Five centuries after Jews began secretly practicing Jewish rites in the remote Portuguese village of Belmonte--as a result of expulsions and forced conversions--a fascinating documentary takes a look at what remains of that heritage: its distorted traditions, enduring symbols, and the tenacity of its memory.

*Chariots of Fire* (1981)--This feature film explores the subtle and genteel forms of antisemitism that existed in post-World War I England through the stories of two athletes, one a nonreligious Jew, the other a devout Christian, who compete in the 1924 Olympics.

*Get Thee Out!* (1991)--Based on the stories of the Russian shtetl by Sholem Aleichem and the Ukrainian tales of Isaac Babel, the film covers a period when antisemitism is endemic, but so is familiarity between Jewish and Christian neighbors.

*Genocide* (1975)\*--This program, from *The World at War* series, traces the systemized demonization of the Jews in Nazi Germany, from the formation of racial theories in the 1920s to their translation into concrete policies during World War II.

*Facing Hate* (1991)--An interview by Bill Moyers with Elie Wiesel, a survivor of Auschwitz, that explores the origins and manifestations of hate on both the victim and perpetrator.

#### ❑ **Antisemitism in America**

*Gentleman's Agreement* (1947)\*--The winner of three Academy Awards, including Best Picture, this film stars Gregory Peck as a gentile writer who poses as a Jew to research a magazine story about an unspoken discrimination.

*Crossfire* (1947)--Appearing shortly after World War II, this movie--starring Robert Young and Robert Mitchum--was the first major American film to deal with antisemitism. The murder of a Jewish man prompts an investigation that exposes bigotry and menace.

*Music Box* (1988)--The question of proving guilt or innocence among purported Nazi war criminals who have established new lives in new countries is the subject of this courtroom thriller, with Jessica Lange as a Chicago attorney who defends her father against charges of war crimes.

*School Ties* (1992)--This feature film explores the open hostility frequently directed toward Jews in the 1950s by members of privileged social sets--in this case, the boys of an exclusive prep school.

*Homicide* (1991)\*--A police officer confronts his long-buried Jewish identity as he grapples with the murder of an elderly Jewish shopkeeper. His encounters, particularly his response to overt antisemitism, underscore the tensions between his police work and his Jewish identity.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

### **Antisemitism**

- What are some of the different forms antisemitism takes in the films you viewed? Which aspects of antisemitism strike you as universal and which as manifestations of a particular society? In what ways do specific cultures and nationalistic identities characterize the hatred of Jews? What role do you think religion plays?
- How does each film approach its subject? Does it take an obvious moral position or dispassionately portray historical fact and let the viewer draw his or her conclusions?
- Does the film suggest motivations and offer explanations for antisemitic behavior?
- How does the film distinguish between societal pressure and individual choice when it deals with antisemitism that may be culturally learned?
- In what ways has antisemitism changed during different periods in history? Which aspects have remained constant?
- How is antisemitism depicted in the societies where Jews are assimilated? How does it (if it does at all) differ from places that are less integrated?
- How do both Jews and non-Jews in the film grapple with the antisemitism that they encounter?
- In what ways does antisemitism serve as a destructive force for individuals and societies as depicted in the films?
- How do the films you viewed use fiction, combinations of history and fiction, and dramatized fiction to present their “truths”? Do you think one approach works better than others in certain cases?

## **THE HOLOCAUST: DRAMATIC AND DOCUMENTARY REALITIES**

The ability of any art form to convey the reality of the Holocaust has troubled both artists and scholars. In film the problems are especially complex: film is a very effective means to inform, to make people aware, to try to bring the events of the past closer, and to give humanity to faceless numbers. Film has the power to depict what appears to be reality. But what seems to be “real” has in fact been crafted.

A large collection of both features and documentaries have addressed the Holocaust, and new films continue to be made every year. Each may provide a window to “truth.” Looking at both features and documentaries about aspects of the Holocaust can provide different, sometimes contradictory but often complementary perspectives on a topic. It can offer food for discussion of the relative strengths, weaknesses, and contributions of the two forms.

You may wish to screen one pair of films, or several, under the headings below. Note: For historical background, viewers may want to refer to *Perspectives on the Holocaust: A Course for Adolescents* by Mary Johnson and Patricia Brett Erens, a Jewish Heritage Video Collection course, and *The World Must Know: A History of the Holocaust as Told in the US Holocaust Memorial Museum* by Michael Berenbaum (Boston: Little, Brown, 1993).

### **□ Terezin, the Fortress Camp**

*These evocations of the infamous prison camp are both based on memory: one is a fictional reimagining by a former inmate, the other a documentary about survivors.*

*Transport from Paradise* (1963)--An original feature film set in Terezin (Theresienstadt), the concentration camp presented by the Nazis as a “model city.” The film, based on a novel by Arnost Lustig, who had been imprisoned there, captures the surreal atmosphere of the camp during a 24-hour period.

*Terezin Diary* (1990)--A documentary about survivors who, as children, had been inmates at the camp from which Jewish prisoners were deported to Auschwitz.

### ❑ **Uprising in Warsaw**

*The most famous act of Jewish resistance in World War II is portrayed in a feature film made in postwar Poland and by a documentary incorporating interviews and archival footage.*

*Border Street* (1948)--One of the first postwar films to depict the Holocaust, it looks at the terror and fervor of the Warsaw Ghetto through the eyes of four youths--two Jewish, two gentile.

*Warsaw Ghetto Uprising* (1993)--A documentary that recounts the events that led to the formation of the ghetto, the impassioned resistance of the young Jews within, and the final conflagration.

### ❑ **Protectors or Betrayers**

*For many gentiles witnessing the arrest and deportation of their Jewish neighbors, the question was: Will I collaborate, turn a blind eye, or put myself and my family at risk? Nine features and documentaries explore the tangled moral issues the Nazi war against the Jews presented to individuals and communities.*

*Au Revoir, Les Enfants\** (1987)--Louis Malle's film memoir of friendship, betrayal, and guilt in Vichy France, where three Jewish boys are sheltered in a Catholic boarding school.

*Weapons of the Spirit\** (1989)--A documentary that examines the conscience and faith that encouraged the French village of Le Chambon-Sur-Lignon to quietly shelter at least 5,000 Jews during World War II, even as French collaborators were delivering thousands more to the death camps.

*The Boat Is Full* (1980)--A drama about five Jews who in 1942 escape Germany and attempt to elude deportation by posing as a family qualified to stay in Switzerland, after that country has shut its borders to most refugees.

*Who Shall Live and Who Shall Die?* (1982)--A documentary that takes a hard look at the U.S. failure to open its doors to Jewish refugees in the 1940s, and at the possible Jewish role in that failure.

*The Shop on Main Street* (1965)--A feature film starring the great Yiddish actress Ida Kaminska about the tangled personal and political motives that made ordinary people in occupied Europe accomplices of the Nazi agenda.

*Good Evening, Mr. Wallenberg* (1990)--This feature chronicles the last days of the war in Budapest, as the Soviets move into the city and the Swedish attache, Raoul Wallenberg works to save thousands of Hungarian Jews from deportation.

*So Many Miracles\** (1987)--Forty years after the war, survivors Israel and Frania Rubinek return to Poland to meet with Sofia, the gentile woman who hid them for two years in her one-room farmhouse.

*Schindler's List* (1993)--Steven Spielberg's Oscar-winning film tells the story of Oskar Schindler, the German playboy and profiteer who evolved into a rescuer of more than a thousand Polish Jews.

*Schindler* (1983)--A documentary about Oskar Schindler featuring interviews with those who knew him, including his wife and many of "Schindler's Jews"--the people he saved.

#### ❑ **Ultimate Justice**

*Four films--one fictional, the others containing historical footage--cover two attempts to punish the perpetrators of the Holocaust in the aftermath of World War II: the Nuremberg Trials and the Eichmann Trial in Israel.*

*Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961)--Hollywood's first attempt to confront issues of guilt and innocence in the Holocaust, the Oscar-winning film presents a group of German judges charged with "crimes committed in the name of the law," and addresses the complex issue of assigning culpability.

*Trial at Nuremberg* (1958)--Broadcast in 1958 on the CBS documentary series *The Twentieth Century* hosted by Walter Cronkite, the film reviews key moments from the trial of 21 former Nazi officials and includes captured German Army film footage.

*Witnesses to the Holocaust: The Trial of Adolf Eichmann* (1987)--This documentary of the 1961 trial in Israel of Adolf Eichmann for his role in administering the "Final Solution" is compiled from court proceedings and eyewitness testimony on videotape.

*The Devil Is a Gentleman* (1983)\*--A 12-minute segment from the newsmagazine *60 Minutes* that reviews Eichmann's career in the Nazi party, his trial in Israel, and the nature of his character.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

### **The Holocaust: Dramatic and Documentary Realities**

- What does each film convey about the history of the Holocaust? What assumptions does it make about the viewer's knowledge of the period? Were there gaps that made it difficult to follow?
- What do you learn from each film? From watching two films about the same topic?
- Did you come away from the film with answers, or with more questions?
- What does the film add to what you could have learned about the subject from a history book?
- What choices does each filmmaker make in creating a film about this era?
- How does the Holocaust world depicted in feature and documentary films differ? What is the contribution of each form?
- What do features achieve that documentaries do not, and vice versa? Which seems more "real"?
- What are the limits of all films in depicting the Holocaust?
- What might other films contribute? What can no film tell?

### Terezin

- How does the reality of Terezin compare with the picture created by the Nazis for their propaganda? Why do you think they had success in their efforts to convince the Red Cross that they were treating the Jews well?
- In what ways was the situation of inmates in Terezin different from, and similar to, those of prisoners in other camps?

### Uprising in Warsaw

- What circumstances led to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising?

- ❑ How did ghetto dwellers view the young people who organized resistance? What do you learn about the attitudes of Poles toward the ghetto and its Jewish inhabitants?
- ❑ Why did the organizers continue, despite the odds against them?

### Protectors or Betrayers

- ❑ What was the situation for the Jews in each country depicted in the films, and how did circumstances differ in different countries?
- ❑ Non-Jews risked the same punishment as Jews if they were caught in rescue activities. What were the motivations of these individuals who risked their lives to protect Jews?
- ❑ What effect does contact with the Jews have on the attitudes and personalities of the protectors? What tensions are created for the protectors by helping Jews? How do you explain the friendships that evolve?

### Ultimate Justice

- ❑ How do you assess Adolf Eichmann's role in the Holocaust? What about the other numerous figures who had a hand in the extermination of the Jews, from the trainmen who transported the Jews to the guards at the camps? What do you consider to be grounds for their responsibility or their lack of responsibility?
- ❑ How do you compare Eichmann's trial, which occurred 16 years after the end of the war, to the Nuremberg Trials?

## **HUMOR IN THE FACE OF EVIL**

Philosophers continue to debate whether the Holocaust can or should be evoked in art, because of the limitations and falsifications that are inevitable in any rendering of that tragedy. When the period is depicted on the screen, it is most often through the nonfiction documentary or the sober drama that seeks to evoke pity and terror.

How then should we view comedies whose subject is Hitler and Nazism? The three films in this series depict the early days of that demonic movement, when its paranoia, hysteria, and exaggerations still could be mocked at a distance, and when the full scale of the horror was yet to come. Still, one must ask what exactly these filmmakers were trying to achieve with their humor. Were they innocent, misguided, clever, subversive--or insensitive? This series explores the films' moral, political, and artistic validity both in their own time and today.

*To Be or Not To Be* (1942)--Director Ernst Lubitsch, a refugee from Nazi Germany, was criticized for insensitivity about the plight of Jews in this biting, hilarious comedy set in wartime Warsaw, starring Jack Benny and Carole Lombard. "What I have satirized in this picture," Lubitsch responded, "are the Nazis and their ridiculous ideology."

*The Great Dictator* (1940)--Charlie Chaplin plays both a humble Jewish barber and an egomaniacal dictator in a brilliant parody released at a time when many Americans still believed Hitler could be appeased.

*The Producers* (1969)\*--A musical comedy entitled "Springtime for Hitler" is the audacious centerpiece of this Mel Brooks film with Zero Mostel and Gene Wilder, which takes outrageous risks and, amid side-splitting humor, offers food for serious thought.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

### **Humor in the Face of Evil**

- ❑ How is comedy used in films to explore the same subjects as serious dramas? In what way may a comedy or parody be more successful in getting its message across?
- ❑ How similar is the style of comedy in the films? To what purpose is the comedy being used? In what sense are these films parody? Does parody make their content more palatable? If so, why?
- ❑ Which elements of Nazism are being mocked? How close do the films get to sensitive areas? Do you think they cross the line at any point? Do you think any or all could have or would have been made in today's climate of political correctness?
- ❑ How significant is the audience to which the film is directed? How significant is the fact that the filmmaker is Jewish or not?
- ❑ Two of the films were made before the full horror of the Nazi regime was known. One was made in 1969. How do these facts affect their tone? Are they political films? Does the later film reflect its greater knowledge? Should more sensitivity be expected of it? How would these films have been looked at in their time and how looked at now? How does knowledge change things?

# The Heritage of Judaism: A Living Tradition

## THE POWER OF TRADITION

This series focuses on some of the elements that have kept Jewish tradition alive for centuries: ritual, the primacy of Talmudic learning and law, philosophical and emotional bonds. The selections deal with combinations of these components and their influence on Jews, both contemporary and historical. The films also touch on some of the powerful forces that erode Jewish identity--cultural illiteracy, assimilation, social and philosophic conflicts--through the stories of individuals who struggle with these issues.

Jewish survival is an issue with which every generation has had to contend. In America today, the Jewish community across the spectrum is confronting these important and complicated ideas, and these films can initiate stimulating discussion. The series may also be combined with the following one, "The Meanings of Judaism," which delves more deeply into interpreters of Jewish tradition, and with "Jewish Women: Living in Judaism," which focuses on efforts by women to both preserve and adapt traditions.

*Ritual: Three Portraits of Jewish Life* (1989)--This film examines the nature of rituals in Judaism, exploring their importance for continuity and identity as well as their meaning for people at different stages of life. Its three segments depict individuals and families as they follow the rituals of prayer, building a *sukkah*, and the celebration of a *brit-milah* (circumcision).

*The Journey* (1989)--In the 1940s, a Jewish American engineer--who has paid little attention to his religious background--meets a young Jewish boy on a Russian train who knows even less than he. It is a day before the boy's thirteenth birthday, his bar mitzvah, and the American is challenged to transmit what he can of their spiritual identity and heritage.

*The Eighth Day* (1985)--Against the backdrop of the Maccabean rebellion against the Greeks, who had outlawed Jewish ritual observance in an effort to Hellenize the Jews, a mother summons a Maccabee doctor to circumcise her son; the father, a Hellenized Jew, forbids the ceremony. The two men debate religious tradition till dawn, when the father must make the crucial decision.

*Return Trips* (1995)--After a long period of determined assimilation, recent decades have seen a resurgence of interest in Judaism on the part of many American Jews. Through visits with families, communities, and leaders all along the spectrum, this film explores the journeys of rediscovery and renewed connection to Judaism that have been occurring in both modern and traditional forms.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

### **The Power of Tradition**

- ❑ How does each film portray the place of ritual in the survival of Judaism?
- ❑ What is the value of ritual to those who practice it?
- ❑ What does tradition mean to the people in the films? Is it immutable, or can it be adapted? What does it mean to you?
- ❑ What are the necessary components, do you think, to maintain both connection and continuity?
- ❑ How necessary is ritual? What place do communal memory and emotional bonds play? What place philosophy and intellectual knowledge? How much does a Jew need to know? How do each of the films answer these questions? Do you agree or disagree?
- ❑ What is the relevance of these films, particularly the historical ones, to the issues facing Jews today? Think about how some of the forces that threaten to erode contemporary Jewish identity--cultural illiteracy, assimilation, conflicts with secularism--were dealt with in the past and the implications for Jewish identity and continuity.

## **THE MEANINGS OF JUDAISM**

In times of political and social stress as well as during periods of ease, Jews have found it necessary to reevaluate their religious priorities in relation to the cultures around them. Whether through the instigation of a Catholic Church intent on exposing the fallacies of Judaism or out of an urgency to understand the requirements of Judaism within the context of the Civil Rights movement, Jews have struggled to interpret and reinterpret the traditions that give meaning to their lives as Jews. The films in this series offer four readings of Jewish heritage. None excludes the others, but each is an outgrowth of the background and personality of its interpreter.

*The Disputation* (1986)--Disputations were medieval debates set up between Christian and Jewish theologians to convince the Jews to convert. This film recreates one of the most extraordinary of these disputations--the debate between the converted monk Pablo Christiani and Rabbi Moses ben Nachman (the Ramban), which took place in 1263 in Barcelona before King James of Aragon.

*Abraham Joshua Heschel Remembered* (1973)--A refugee from Germany who became professor of Jewish ethics and mysticism at the Jewish Theological Seminary, Abraham Joshua Heschel beautifully articulated a Judaism imbued with humanism and ethical regard. In this interview shortly before his death in 1972, Heschel discusses his involvement in social and political causes, his philosophy of God, the value of study, and humanity's "craving for the meaning of existence."

*The Talmud and the Scholar* (1989)--This film explores the place of the Talmud in Jewish life through the figure of Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, one of the greatest contemporary Jewish scholars, who has brought to a new generation the methodology of Talmudic learning and its unique approach to moral and ethical issues.

*Great Figures of the Bible* (1993)--With the presence of a master storyteller and the insights of a scholar, in this six-part series Elie Wiesel--scion of a Hasidic family and a Nobel Peace Prize winner--explores the human condition through the tales of some of the central figures of the Bible. In doing so, Wiesel continues a classic Jewish tradition of commenting on contemporary dilemmas by explicating biblical stories.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

### **The Meanings of Judaism**

- ❑ How does the Jewish thinker in each film look at Judaism? Where do they agree or overlap? How do they differ? How do the different perspectives in themselves provide insights into Jewish intellectual life?
- ❑ How does each religious thinker understand the issues of practice, belief, and meaning in the Jewish religion? How does the Jewish approach of each provide a framework for looking at the world in general?
- ❑ How does each filmmaker present the world and views of the scholar? What is each film trying to communicate? Does the man or the idea take precedence? Which approach is most moving? Most thought-provoking?
- ❑ What thoughts do the films stimulate about the very idea of redefining and reinterpreting religious sources, values, traditions?
- ❑ What qualities have made each of these thinkers so prominent in their own time? What has made their individual voices so compelling to contemporaries?

## **JEWISH WOMEN: LIVING IN JUDAISM**

In their long history of dispersion, Jews have maintained a creative dynamic with the social and cultural currents of their various diasporas while staying true to the fundamental ideals of their heritage. The challenge to involved Jews always has been to find a balance between ancient and contemporary principles--not that everyone ever agrees on what that balance should be.

These films all look at the effects of time, culture, social climate, and secular values on the rituals of Judaism; all feature women at their centers. Each film is concerned with the idea of a living faith--how to make ritual responsive to those who practice it while preserving its integrity. All the films will stimulate viewers to explore the tension and creativity of a Judaism anchored in the past and moving into the future.

*In Her Own Time* (1985)--Anthropologist Barbara Meyerhoff, learning that she is dying of lung cancer, engages in a journey for spiritual solace within Judaism while studying an Orthodox community in Los Angeles. She is drawn to the life she observes, which is more intensely Jewish--with rituals and traditions she finds meaningful--but also more restrictive than the independent life to which she is accustomed.

*Saying Kaddish* (1991)--A mother's death raises conflict between her two daughters over the way each chooses to express her loss. In particular, reciting the Kaddish, the traditional memorial prayer, becomes a point of contention.

*Half the Kingdom* (1990)--This documentary explores the obstacles and challenges facing a group of Jewish women in North America and Israel who are reconceiving rituals and ceremonies in an attempt to reshape Judaism to include them.

*Intermarriage: When Love Meets Tradition* (1987)--This film focuses on five interfaith American couples; their connection or desire for connection to Judaism; and the issues they grapple with, such as raising children, celebrating holidays, and finding community.

*The Last Marranos* (1990)--A fascinating look at the village of Belmonte, Portugal, where the remnants of a Jewish community that began to observe its Judaism secretly in the fifteenth century in order to escape the Inquisition still resides. Their rites and prayers today are an amalgam of Christianity and bits of Judaism distorted by clandestine practice and fear; reacquainted with mainstream Judaism, they now face a new challenge.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

### **Jewish Women: Living in Judaism**

- How do the women in the films deal with that which is fixed and that which is changing in Judaism? Must anything be fixed? Why do rituals atrophy? What answers to these questions do the films suggest?
- How does each film view the purpose and place of ritual in community life, family life, and the life of the individual? How are the conflicts between these arenas portrayed?
- How does each film examine the women's efforts to make ritual personal and relevant to them?
- What rituals seem to have particular power in the lives of women? To which are they especially drawn, and which do they most intensely want to reshape and revitalize?
- Do you think ritual is necessary?

## A PASSION FOR JUSTICE

Jews as a group have been associated with most of the movements for social justice in the last hundred years, both in Europe and the United States. The massive Jewish representation and leadership in these movements has complex cultural, political, and religious roots. From the beginning, Jews living in oppressive conditions had an obvious motive to help expand human rights. But there were other factors: the ethical emphasis of Judaism exemplified by the concept of *tikkun olam*--the healing, or perfecting, of the world; a political affinity with the concerns of the left; and an enduring identification with the disenfranchised.

For many Jews in the twentieth century, the commandment to heal the world has been a central aspect of their Jewish identity. The fight for social justice has been a defining characteristic of their Judaism, strongly connected (in their own minds) to the Jewish tradition, which in other ways they may have left behind. The films in this series cover aspects of the involvement of Jews in the fight for social justice, from the early part of this century, in both Europe and America. Many of the figures shown in these films discarded Jewish ritual and scholarship (though often retaining a deep connection to Yiddishist culture) and transformed religious passion into a secular vision.

*Image Before My Eyes* (1980)\*--Poland between the wars was the scene of active participation by Jews in a wide range of political movements, from communism to Zionism.

*Free Voice of Labor* (1980)\*--A documentary about the Jewish--and mainly Yiddish-speaking--aspect of anarchism, which was the largest radical movement among Jewish immigrants in the late nineteenth century and continued as a central part of the lives of many of its members well into the twentieth century.

*The Forward* (1989)--This documentary on the Yiddish-language newspaper is also the story of Yiddish-speaking immigrants and their passions about politics and culture.

*Street Scene* (1931)\*--In this feature based on an Elmer Rice play, the characters in a multiethnic row house include Abraham Kaplan, whose revolutionary, socialist views grate on some of his neighbors.

*The Way We Were* (1973)\*--Barbra Streisand plays a Jewish woman committed to left-wing causes in the Thirties, whose marriage to a gentile produces conflict on both political and religious issues.

*Abraham Joshua Heschel Remembered* (1973)--Heschel's commitment to justice is the focus of this program, which discusses his support of Martin Luther King, Jr.,

and opposition to the Vietnam War, his views of the message of the prophets, and his thoughts about other aspects of Judaism.

Also of interest (although not in the Collection):

*Norma Rae*--a Jewish labor organizer galvanizes worker protests in a southern textile plant.

*Running on Empty*--a radical (Judd Hirsh) is on the run with his family from the authorities for acts he committed years before.

*Mississippi Burning*--an investigation into the deaths of three civil rights workers in Mississippi in 1964.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### A Passion for Justice

- How does the passion for social justice relate to the Jewish tradition? Is this explicit or implicit in the film? Is the character obviously Jewish--as he/she sees him/herself, and as the viewer sees him or her?
- Do the Jewish characters devote their energies mostly to improving the situation for Jews, or for society generally? How do they--and you--see the distinction, or the connection, between the two objectives? Can you/should you pursue one without the other?
- Are there contemporary examples of Jews' involvement in the fight for social justice? Has this commitment changed since the period when the films were made?
- Do you find the representation of the characters and their political commitment to be realistic, or idealized?
- Do you think the link between the Jewish tradition and social justice is valid, or is the commitment just as great in other traditions?
- Do you think that the relative economic prosperity of Jews in America today has lessened the commitment to social justice? Why? Why not?
- Does your own sense of Jewish identity relate mainly to the search for *tikkun olam* (healing the world)? What about other aspects of Jewish tradition (e.g., religious observance, family issues, culture)?

 <b>ILMS INCLUDED IN COURSES</b>
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- Au Revoir, Les Enfants**  
Perspectives on the Holocaust
  
- Avalon**  
“Real Americans”
  
- Brighton Beach Memoirs**  
“Real Americans”
  
- The Chosen**  
Growing-Up Stories  
The Jewish Image in American Film
  
- Crossing Delancey**  
More than Chemistry
  
- The Devil is a Gentleman**  
Perspectives on the Holocaust
  
- East and West**  
Yiddish Culture
  
- Fiddler on the Roof**  
“Real Americans”
  
- Free Voice of Labor: The Jewish Anarchists**  
Yiddish Culture
  
- Gentleman’s Agreement**  
The Jewish Image in American Film
  
- Goodbye Columbus**  
The Jewish Image in American Film  
More than Chemistry

- ❑ **Hester Street**  
The Jewish Image in American Film  
Yiddish Culture
- ❑ **His People**  
The Jewish Image in American Film
- ❑ **Homicide**  
The Jewish Image in American Film
- ❑ **Image Before My Eyes**  
Yiddish Culture
- ❑ **The Imported Bridegroom**  
More than Chemistry
- ❑ **The Jazz Singer**  
The Jewish Image in American Film  
“Real Americans”
- ❑ **Marjorie Morningstar**  
Growing-Up Stories  
The Jewish Image in American Film  
More than Chemistry
- ❑ **Mirele Efros**  
“Real Americans”
- ❑ **Next Stop, Greenwich Village**  
American Jewish Directors
- ❑ **The Producers**  
American Jewish Comedy  
The Jewish Image in American Film
- ❑ **Sallah**  
Visions of Israel
- ❑ **So Many Miracles**  
Perspectives on the Holocaust

- ❑ **Street Scene**  
The Jewish Image in American Film
  
- ❑ **Sweet Lorraine**  
Growing-Up Stories
  
- ❑ **The Way We Were**  
More than Chemistry
  
- ❑ **Weapons of the Spirit**  
Perspectives on the Holocaust

## COURSES

### □ AMERICAN JEWISH COMEDY: AN INTRODUCTION

Curatorial and research services provided by The Jewish Museum

Viewers will take a cinematic journey through some of the best Jewish humor of the past 60 years. Through satirical, poignant, and hilarious programs, this course offers the opportunity to watch, laugh, think, and talk together.

*Animal Crackers • Annie Hall • The Producers • Sid Caesar in Your Show of Shows • Saturday Night Live*

### □ AMERICAN JEWISH DIRECTORS: THREE VISIONS OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH EXPERIENCE

By Lester D. Friedman, Syracuse University, and David Desser, University of Illinois

This course turns the camera's lens back on three of film's most acclaimed auteurs. Woody Allen, Paul Mazursky, and Sidney Lumet have unique, identifiable,

and distinct visions of American Jewish life. The course examines ways that their films speak of American Jews grappling with questions of their own identity.

*Annie Hall • Crimes and Misdemeanors • Daniel • Enemies, A Love Story • Next Stop, Greenwich Village • The Pawnbroker*

### □ ELIE WIESEL'S GREAT FIGURES OF THE BIBLE

By Beverly Schneider; Academic Consultant, Tsvi Blanchard

In this course, based on a PBS series, Elie Wiesel provides fascinating insights into the lives of Biblical figures and illuminates the moral and ethical dilemmas they faced. Along with Wiesel's commentary, the programs feature original film footage shot in Israel and artwork from museums all over the world that depict the subjects of the programs.

*Adam and Eve • Cain and Abel • Abraham and Isaac • Moses • David • Job*

### □ GROWING-UP STORIES: COMING OF AGE IN THE MEDIA AND IN LITERATURE

Curatorial and research services provided by The Jewish Museum

Participants visit that difficult, exciting, profoundly important period of transition between adolescence and adulthood. Each film examines the search for self-definition, the place of Jews in contemporary society, and the ways in which Jewish values are reinterpreted by succeeding generations.

*The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz • Biloxi Blues • The Chosen • Marjorie Morningstar • Sweet Lorraine*

**□ THE JEWISH IMAGE IN AMERICAN FILM:  
A CENTURY OF JEWISH CHARACTERS AND THEMES**

By Lester D. Friedman, Syracuse University

This course offers a sampling of the hundreds of films of Jewish interest made during this century. For each time period, it examines the political context as well as events in Hollywood that influenced the portrayal of Jews and Jewish-related issues on the screen.

*The Chosen • Crimes and Misdemeanors • Enemies, A Love Story • Exodus • The Frisco Kid • Gentleman's Agreement • Goodbye, Columbus • Hester Street • His People • Homicide • The Jazz Singer • Marjorie Morningstar • The Producers • The Purple Heart • Street Scene*

**□ MORE THAN CHEMISTRY: THE ROMANTIC CHOICES  
OF AMERICAN JEWS**

By Sylvia Barack Fishman, Brandeis University

This course looks at love and romance in a Jewish context. Through a critical survey of films, it helps viewers think in new ways about one of the central decisions of personal, and Jewish life.

*Annie Hall • Crossing Delancey • Goodbye, Columbus • The Imported Bridegroom • Intermarriage: When Love Meets Tradition • Marjorie Morningstar • The Way We Were*

**□ PERSPECTIVES ON THE HOLOCAUST:  
A COURSE FOR ADOLESCENTS**

By Patricia Erens, Rosary College, and Mary Johnson, Facing History and Ourselves

This course offers an approach especially designed to reach young viewers. Using both features and documentaries that emphasize the experiences of young people, it allows students to discuss what they see on the screen in the context of the history provided in the written materials.

*Au Revoir, Les Enfants • The Camera of My Family • The Devil Is a Gentleman • Kitty, A Return to Auschwitz • So Many Miracles • Weapons of the Spirit*

**□ “REAL AMERICANS”: THE EVOLVING IDENTITIES  
OF AMERICAN JEWS**

By Sylvia Barack Fishman, Brandeis University

This course explores the process of Americanization experienced by Jews over the twentieth century and the impact of that process on American Jewish life. It illuminates the dramatic and ongoing encounter of traditional Jewish values and mainstream American society.

*The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz • Avalon • Brighton Beach Memoirs • Crimes and Misdemeanors • Fiddler on the Roof • The Jazz Singer • Mirele Efros*

**□ VISIONS OF ISRAEL: ISRAELI FILMMAKERS  
AND IMAGES OF THE JEWISH STATE**

By Ilan Avisar, Tel Aviv University

This course explores the powerful vision that culminated in the founding of the State in 1948 and the complex facets of Israeli culture as it has evolved. In six films by Israeli filmmakers, it offers fascinating portrayals of Israeli life on screen that are by turns informative, thought-provoking, tragic, touching, and humorous.

*Fictitious Marriage • Hill 24 Doesn't Answer • Operation Thunderbolt • Over the Ocean • Sallah • The Wooden Gun*

**□ YIDDISH CULTURE: BETWEEN THE OLD WORLD AND THE NEW**

Curatorial and research services provided by The Jewish Museum

The films in this course capture the many facets of the Yiddish language and the deep, vibrant culture it represents. Using both documentaries and feature films, the course explores contemporary Jews' relationship with this moving, contradictory, and significant heritage.

*East and West • Free Voice of Labor: The Jewish Anarchists • Hester Street • Image Before My Eyes • Isaac in America • Tevye*