

Jews and Popular Culture

JWSS/HIST/HUM 111

Final take-home exam

To be mailed to instructor no later than 12 pm on Monday 12/13/10 to both email addresses (to be on the safe side): donnyi@sfjcf.org; dinbar@sbcglobal.net

Please write **2** essays (4-6 pages-long each) on two of the topics from section **A** *or* **1** essay (4-6 pages) from section **A** and **2** essays (2-3 pages-long each) on topics from section **B**

The essays should be written in a word document, font size 12, double spaced.

Topics are phrased either as a question or a headline, but should be treated in the same fashion

Section A

1. How has Jewish humor served as a weapon (aimed at more than a single target) over the generations of popular Jewish culture?
2. From cantors to jazz singers: the path(s), the struggle, myths and reality.
3. Jewish dominant presence in American show business was concurrent with self-closeted Jewishness on Broadway and in Hollywood. Expand and explain this apparent contradiction.
4. Abraham Goldfaden and the revolution of the new-born Jewish theater.
5. Did Jewish show business succeed in taking the place of the synagogue as the center of Jewish life, and if so, what was the process?

Section B

- a. Uriel Acosta: between the secularist heretical historical figure and the protagonist of a stage melodrama (which one was more influential).
- b. “Jewish Art” is almost impossible to define. Try to elaborate on three variations, using three (or more) examples.
- c. The Dybbuk: describe the journey from secularist Jewish art to the “religiosity” of An-sky’s play.
- d. Judaism has evidently reinvented itself a number of times since the 18th century (in German, the Russo-Polish Pale of Settlement, and then America and Palestine/the Land of Israel). Those reforms were either of religious practices, social or cultural or in terms of languages. Write about two such cases.
- e. The Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment) and its derivatives “put” the Jewish people back on the “path of history.” expand, using 2-3 significant examples of reconciliation with “heroic” Jewish past through the revival of the Hebrew language and the succeeding Zionist culture.
- f. *Wandering Stars*, Sholem Aleichem’s novel serves as an engaging historical source, beyond its literary value. Please explain.
- g. The Jewish Hasidism movement was born almost simultaneously with the Haskalah. How and why was Haskalah the movement that introduced Jewish show business to the world, and not Hasidism; whereas the Hasidim became this popular culture’s main target/victims? How could a reverse trend eventually happen?