

Featured Faculty

Have you done anything scholarly *out* of school, lately? **JDST** faculty were busy with a number of scholarly pursuits in 2013, following their interests from the United Kingdom to **The United Nations**.

Peter Haas, Abba Hillel Professor of Jewish Studies, Chair of the **Department of Religious Studies** and the **Judaic Studies Program**, gave three presentations in 2013. The first, "The Unusual Torah of Knox County, Ohio," was a public talk at **Kenyon College** in February, dealing with a Torah scroll the College had purchased several years earlier. The scroll was reputedly rescued from the Holocaust by a scribe and self-described "Jewish Indiana Jones." It was displayed with pride in the College library until it was learned that the man had been jailed for selling Torah scrolls he falsely described as rescued from the Holocaust. Prof. Haas' talk dealt with the various religious and moral consequences of those developments.

Prof. Haas' second talk, "Do not be a Talebearer among Your People (Lev. 9-16)," was part of a panel organized for a conference at **John Carroll University** in April. The question, in light of the diverse conflicts in the Middle East, was how one could both protect freedom of speech while upholding the need for public respect for other religions. A repeat of the conference was held by invitation at **The United Nations**, in November.

In June, Prof. Haas delivered a paper in Rochester titled "From Chosen to Choosing: For Whom was the Revelation at Sinai?" sponsored by **Nazareth College**. The conference focused on how the revealed Scriptures in Judaism, Christianity and Islam can help unify rather than divide people. Publication of the collected papers is being investigated, along with a follow-up conference next year in Turkey.

Jay Geller, Samuel Rosenthal Professor of Judaic Studies, gave the keynote lecture at the **University of London Institute for**



Professors Peter Haas, Judith Neulander and Jay Geller

Jewish Studies annual summer conference, which focused on the life and work of the Israeli thinker Gershom Scholem. Prof. Geller's talk, "The Scholem Family in German and German-Jewish Historical Context," surveyed the origins and development of the Scholem family until the Second World War. Using housing records, maps, school records, business records and documents from the Jewish community of Berlin, he compared the Scholem family's experience to that of their Jewish and non-Jewish German neighbors from the time they arrived in Berlin in the 1810s until the family dispersed into exile in the 1930s. A version of this talk will be published in a collection of essays by Brill Publishers.

In July, **Judith Neulander**, Co-Director of the **Judaic Studies Program**, spoke on "Inventing Jewish History, Memory and Genetic Identity in Hispanic New Mexico" at the **British Association for Jewish Studies (BAJS)** conference, at the **University of Kent, Canterbury**. Prof. Neulander's research, funded by the **National Institutes of Health (NIH)** and the **Center for Genetic Research Ethics and Law (CGREAL)**, refuted academic claims of a crypto-Jewish survival in New Mexico. In October she spoke on modern New Mexican "Jewish-by-disease" claims as a revival of nineteenth century race-science, at **Indiana University, Bloomington**. Three essays on this research are forthcoming from Cambridge University Press, Purdue University Press, and The Jewish Publication Society.

And *you* thought all they did was teach, didn't you!

INSIDE

Featured Faculty	1
Student Essay/ Outstanding Achievement	2 - 3
▪ Jonathan Meckler	
On and Off Campus	4
Courses of Interest	5
Sampling of Paper Titles	6
▪ Samantha Coen	
▪ Joey Rooney	
▪ Madison Dore	
▪ Jonathan Meckler	
▪ Arley Rodriguez	
▪ Amber Rohrer	
▪ Brandon Flick	
JDST Information	7

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The Three Stooges Take on Hitler: Comedic Film as Effective Social Criticism

Recognition for Outstanding Achievement

Jonathan Meckler



Jonathan Meckler

In the early 1930s, films featuring The Three Stooges were known for laughter and levity across the country, but by 1940 they had become such a threat to the Third Reich that Adolf Hitler put them on his personal death list (Seely 2007:170). At a time when the majority of Americans were isolationists, and most movie studios remained silent about the Nazi threat, The Three Stooges risked their livelihoods and even their lives to take on Hitler.

Hidden from public view, Jewish studio heads were secretly funding information-gathering on Nazi activity in Los Angeles (Rosenzweig 2013:n/p). In 1939 they released *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, but the film lacked popular appeal. In 1940, The Three Stooges were the first A-list Hollywood stars to openly satirize Hitler, beginning with Columbia's two-reel comedy, *You Nazty Spy!*

The eighteen minute short came out nine months before Charlie Chaplin's lampoon on Hitler, titled *The Great Dictator*.

The sequel to *You Nazty Spy!*, called *I'll Never Heil Again*, was released in July 1941, five months before the attack on Pearl Harbor that finally ended America's isolationism. Unlike other Americans in the entertainment field, unwilling to oppose Hitler both for financial reasons and out of fear he might win the war, the three Jewish comedians took him on with gusto, long before it was nationally acceptable. Defying a public that wanted to

keep their distance from European affairs, and going against a Hollywood culture that largely closed its eyes to the looming Nazi threat, The Three Stooges used comedic film as social criticism to help publicize the Nazi menace that was being ignored by most Americans.

During the 1930's, the prevailing isolationist mood in the country restrained Hollywood's efforts to embrace political themes. With the memory of the tragic losses of WW I fresh in their minds, along with the continual economic devastation wrought by the Great Depression, few Americans wanted to become embroiled in European and Asian conflicts. In fact, at the outbreak of WW II in 1939, a Gallup poll showed that 96 percent of Americans opposed entering the war (Seely 2007:157).



Hoping to keep America out of war, the United States Congress passed the Neutrality Acts of the late 1930s. Several senators, fearing that Hollywood films could serve as propaganda to rally the American public for war, strongly objected to any pictures that

were anti-Nazi in nature. Alarmed that the isolationist Congress might step in to censor movies, or even break up the industry and cause economic hardship, Hollywood undertook its own censorship by implementing the Hays code. Article X of the code required that the history and prominent people of all nations be portrayed non-critically, and it prohibited many types of political and satirical messages (Seely 2007:156). Producers were thus pressured not to make movies that could be construed as war propaganda.

Going against the tide of isolationism that

demanded non-involvement in world affairs, and refusing to hide from public view, or bow to the commands of Hollywood censors, Larry, Curly and Moe brought the horrors of the Nazi regime to the forefront of national attention, determined to alert the public to the dangers of the Third Reich. Nearly two years before Pearl Harbor, The Three Stooges boldly confronted Nazi Germany in a spoof that mocked Hitler and his agents.

In the 1940 film, *You Nazty Spy!*, Larry plays Minister of Propaganda Pebbles, a spoof of Joseph Goebbels (Nazi Minister of Propaganda); Curly is field marshal Gallstone, a caricature of Herman Goring (Nazi Party Leader), and Moe is Dictator Hailstone, a parody of Hitler. The story takes place in the fictional country of Moronica, an obvious play on the word "moron"; banners decorating the wall show two snakes forming a swastika, implicating Nazism as snakelike (Seely 2007:163).

In the 1941 sequel, *I'll Never Heil Again*, the barbs continued to fly, as when field marshal Gallstone reported to dictator Hailstone: "We bombed fifty-six hospitals, eighty-five schools, forty-two kindergartens, four cemeteries and other vital military objects" (Epstein 2001:100). After the United States entered the war, the Stooges continued to use parody, slapstick and sight gags as a vehicle for social criticism. In all they made eight shorts dealing with WW II that lampooned Hitler and the Axis powers.

While most of Hollywood feared the social and financial repercussions of exposing the tyranny of the Nazis, The Three Stooges considered nothing off limits. Concentration camps, book burnings, and Nazi Storm Troopers were just a few of the Nazi atrocities they tackled. *You Nazty Spy!* and *I'll Never Heil Again* were seen by tens of millions of people, creating a stir throughout the country and emboldening the nation to take a stand against Nazism (Seely 2007:170). Daring to go against the prevailing sentiment of the time, and using their sense of humor—the only weapon they had—these remarkable Jewish filmmakers launched an unrivaled assault against Hitler and his Nazi regime.



The Stooges used parody, slapstick and sight gags to mock the Third Reich.

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Epstein, Lawrence J., *The Haunted Smile: The Story of Jewish Comedians in America*. New York: Public Affairs (2001).

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Seely, Peter and Gail W. Pieper, *Stoogeology*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co. (2007).



On and Off Campus

Kobi Marom at Case



Kobi Marom, Colonel in the Israeli Defense Forces and former Commander of the Eastern Front, South Lebanon and the Hermon Brigade, spoke at **CWRU** on November 21, 2013. Marom spoke to students and faculty on the international crisis in Syria, and its impact on Israel, the US and Iran. The event was co-sponsored by **JDST** and **The Cleveland Hillel Foundation**.

LET'S HEAR FROM YOU!

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Happy Winter Break!



From the JDST eJournal

Courses of Interest for Spring 2014



JDST/HIST 218
JEWIS IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE
Gillian Weiss

Through a selection of Inquisitorial transcripts, government records, memoirs and historical literature, we will explore such topics as persecution, conversion, messianism, toleration, emancipation and assimilation in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

JDST/ANTH 233
INTRODUCTION TO JEWISH FOLKLORE
Judith Neulander

Tradition and transformation in Jewish myth and magic, festivals and foodways, folktales, art, music and more, will give us access to the spirit and mentality of the many different peoples who have carried these traditions, from remote Middle Eastern antiquity to modern times in Israel, and the U.S.A. Using folkloristic theory and method we will follow Jewish folklore as it shapes, and is shaped by, the vast expanse of western history and civilization.

JDST/RLGN/HIST 371
JEWIS UNDER ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY
Jay Geller

This course examines the social and political status of Jews living under Muslim and Christian control since the Middle Ages. Themes include interfaith relations, Islamic and Christian beliefs regarding the Jews, Muslim and Christian regulation of Jewry, and the Jewish response.

JDST 350/RLGN 450
JEWISH ETHICS (Emphasis on Bioethics)
Peter Haas

This course focuses on conceptualizations of good, evil and the moral life as these themes have taken shape within the Judaic tradition from Antiquity to Modern times. The course will proceed through three stages. The first introduces classic Rabbinic Judaism and the major religious, legal and moral texts it has produced. The second is devoted to examining the content of Jewish ethics, looking specifically at issues of life and death such as birth control, abortion, euthanasia, suicide and capital punishment. The third stage will examine the variety of modern Judaisms and how each has reframed the nature of Jewish ethics in light of modern biomedical discoveries.

For courses in **Hebrew** and **Arabic** visit the Modern Languages and Literatures website:
<http://www.case.edu/artsci/dmll/>

Sampling of Final Paper Titles

A sampling of titles for final research papers in **The Jewish Image in Popular Film JDST 228** reflects the diversity of interests in a typical JDST classroom.

'Hello Gorgeous': Streisand and the Jewish Image in Film
Samantha Coen

Ecce Homo: The De-Judaizing of Jesus in Mel Gibson's 'The Passion of Christ'
Joey Rooney

The Changing Image of Jewish Women in Film: The Silent Era to the Present
Madison Dore

'Schindler's List': The Genesis of a Masterpiece
Jonathan Meckler

The Neurotic American Jew in 'Annie Hall' and 'Zelig'
Arley Rodriguez

The Genius Jester: Jewish Humor and Racial Prejudice in 'Borat'
Brandon Flick

The Jewish American Mother in Film: Factors that Shape the Stereotype
Amber Rohrer

The Program in Judaic Studies

By bringing a variety of fields and disciplines to bear on its subject, the Judaic Studies Program at Case Western Reserve University conveys to students the complex interaction of forces that create Jewish ethnic identity. Students completing the program will have a broad knowledge of the field along with the tools necessary for continued academic study of Jewish civilization in all its manifestations.



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Support the Program in Judaic Studies



In Sept. 2013, author **Ayelet Waldman** met with Prof. Geller's Holocaust class to discuss the challenges and perils of writing Holocaust-related fiction.

Please consider supporting the Program in Judaic Studies as we continue building on our achievements. You can contribute to our success by making a gift to the College of Arts and Sciences. Your gift allows us to continue to offer opportunities for our students to excel academically and to conduct important research. You can give online at:

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