I joined the faculty at Case Western Reserve University in the fall of 2017. My seminars have included “The Landscape of Memory” and “On the Road in America,” and I’ve collaborated with faculty members teaching SAGES seminars on topics ranging from classical music to mechanical engineering.

My own background is in English Literature. In 2015, I completed my Ph.D. at Johns Hopkins University. At Hopkins, I studied Jewish American literature and culture, and I became increasingly interested in the place of the Holocaust in American life. My interest in the role played by the Holocaust in America led me to design a SAGES course called “The Landscape of Memory.” In it, we consider how the memorialization of the Holocaust has influenced the ways in which other collective traumas, including 9/11, have been remembered and memorialized.

My study of Jewish literature actually began before graduate school; I had already spent several years studying the major texts of Jewish civilization (the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud) at yeshivas in New York and Israel. This training helped me to recognize how Jewish interpretive techniques, Jewish modes of speech, and important texts have captivated contemporary Jewish writers and artists. To help students understand these continuities, I like to pair traditional texts with contemporary works. So, for example, we might read the Book of Job alongside the Coen Brother’s wonderful film, A Serious Man (2009), or read dialogue from Seinfeld and Curb Your Enthusiasm alongside passages from the Babylonian Talmud.

My current research focuses on what some have called the “end” of Holocaust memory. I am working with a group of Jewish American novels from the last twenty-five years that all deal with the gradual disappearance of the Holocaust from living memory. I argue that they are engaging with problems of Holocaust memory through a turn to the genre of the late-life novel and to stories about aging Jewish characters and, sometimes, Holocaust survivors. These novels, I believe, raise ever more important questions about the future of American Judaism.

Beyond my research and my work in the classroom, I have given public lectures at the Menorah Park Center for the Aging, and for CRWU’s Siegal Lifelong Learning Program. The last year-and-a-half at CWRU has been a wonderful time for me. I’m very much looking forward to learning more with my students and also with members of the community in the upcoming months.
Before 1968, Hollywood mandated adherence to a narrow standard of beauty for female stars. From its inception, well into the 1960s, Hollywood defined female beauty almost exclusively in white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant terms. Films favored starlets with fair complexions and small, chiseled, facial features. Under these restrictive limits, women of color, and any woman with a large, or prominent facial feature—especially what was called a “Jewish nose”—could not play a romantic lead in Hollywood. But Barbra Streisand’s portrayal of comedienne Fanny Brice in the film *Funny Girl* (1968), ended exclusion of women with prominent features from romantic leads, and altered the mainstream perception of female beauty.

By the 1930’s, after a brief period of Jewish representation in silent films, Hollywood all but erased Jewish narratives from the movies (Goldblatt 2003). As Hitler rose to power, Jewish film-makers feared being labeled Bolsheviks and being accused of war-mongering if they made multidimensional, timely films about Jewish issues. In addition, Jewish moguls had already diminished their own Jewish visibility through assimilation, and their refusal to feature Jewish ethnicity on screen can be seen as part of that process. Rather than using film to alter narrow mainstream views, studio heads conformed to them. Samuel Goldwyn even asserted it would “look wrong” for a Jew to portray another Jew on screen (Bingham 2010). Not surprisingly, while major studios gave almost all actors new, romanticized names, Jewish romantic leads were given names that deliberately erased their ethnicity, for fear of narrowing the Hollywood fan base.

Goldblatt, writes that before 1968, much of Hollywood’s animus toward Jewish characters on screen stemmed from the perceived ugliness of the Jewish nose (2003). But both the Broadway play, and the film *Funny Girl* mocked this rigid standard, asking rhetorically, “Is a nose with deviation such a crime against the nation?” By way of an answer, Louis B. Mayer had once asserted that anyone who failed to view the purpose of Hollywood as making movies about “beautiful people” should exit the film-making industry (Goldblatt 2003); by “beautiful people” he clearly meant women with non-descript noses. Not surprisingly, females with prominent, ethnic, or purportedly Jewish features, lacked onscreen representation. Even the character of Fanny Brice in *Funny Girl* was almost portrayed by a gentile; Columbia Pictures originally approached Shirley MacLaine, of English and Scottish heritage, to play the romantic lead (Bingham 2010).

But Streisand and by extension her character, Fanny Brice, both owned their talent, their ethnic features, and their Jewish identities. Streisand led with her talent, her ethnic name and her ethnic beauty, not only winning the lead in *Funny Girl*, but going on to play romantic leads opposite a string of Hollywood’s most handsome leading men, something film historian Lester D. Friedman states was previously unthinkable (1987). Streisand’s unapologetic ethnicity had turned the liability of her nose into an asset, from the pages of *Playboy*.

Professor of American-Jewish Studies, Roy Goldblatt, writes that before 1968, much of Hollywood’s animus toward Jewish characters on screen stemmed from the perceived ugliness of the Jewish nose (2003). But both the Broadway play, and the film *Funny Girl* mocked this rigid standard, asking rhetorically, “Is a nose with deviation such a crime against the nation?” By way of an answer, Louis B. Mayer had once asserted that anyone who failed to view the purpose of Hollywood as making movies about “beautiful people” should exit the film-making industry (Goldblatt 2003); by “beautiful people” he clearly meant women with non-descript noses. Not surprisingly, females with prominent, ethnic, or purportedly Jewish features, lacked onscreen representation. Even the character of Fanny Brice in *Funny Girl* was almost portrayed by a gentile; Columbia Pictures originally approached Shirley MacLaine, of English and Scottish heritage, to play the romantic lead (Bingham 2010).

But Streisand and by extension her character, Fanny Brice, both owned their talent, their ethnic features, and their Jewish identities. Streisand led with her talent, her ethnic name and her ethnic beauty, not only winning the lead in *Funny Girl*, but going on to play romantic leads opposite a string of Hollywood’s most handsome leading men, something film historian Lester D. Friedman states was previously unthinkable (1987). Streisand’s unapologetic ethnicity had turned the liability of her nose into an asset, from the pages of *Playboy*.

**Streisand in Hollywood: Altering the Norm Instead of the Nose**

**Recognition for Outstanding Achievement**

Grace Schaller
Magazine (then the symbol of American sex appeal), to the pages of Vogue Magazine (then the symbol of American chic). In fact, Vogue credited her for “catalyzing a fresh taste in beauty” (Senior 2016).

Inside Hollywood, Streisand’s impact opened opportunities for women of prominent features to play romantic leads. Outside of Hollywood, this relieved whole populations of American women from undergoing plastic surgery to avoid rejections they would otherwise have faced. By embracing her ethnicity, Streisand altered the norm, instead of her nose. In turn, without changing her name or her nose, she altered perceptions of beauty in the American mainstream. She struck the first blow with two words in the opening moments of Funny Girl. Passing a mirror, she faced her reflection, and uttered the phrase: “Hello, gorgeous.”

References Cited


Goldblatt, Roy. “As Plain as the Nose on Your Face: The Nose as the Organ of Othering” in Amerikastudien/ American Studies 48, no. 4 (2003) 563-76.


Happy Winter Break

From the JDST eJournal!
On/Off Campus

Prof. Jay Geller is the author of a new book, *The Scholems: A Story of the German-Jewish Bourgeoisie from Emancipation to Destruction*. The book is a biography of the family of the renowned Jewish scholar Gershom Scholem, and a social history of the Jewish middle class in Germany, from the era of emancipation through the Holocaust. The book will be in bookstores, and at KSL, in March, 2019.

IT’S A NEPHEW!

Congratulations to Lauren Gallitto on becoming an Aunt for the second time! Big brother Severino holds his new baby brother Sebastian, September, 2018.

Post It!

*Early this semester we congratulated Riley Tedrow on recognition he received for his research in entomology. Here’s Riley’s response:*

Great to hear from you!
I’m conducting research on the malaria transmitting mosquitoes of Madagascar for my Doctoral Dissertation. After completing my degree in May 2019, I’ll be commissioning as an officer with the US Navy as a Medical Entomologist in the Medical Service Corp.

The course I took on *The Mythical Trickster* served as my introduction to the diversity of belief systems in different cultures. This has sparked both an intrigue and greater respect for these cultures in subsequent years, inspiring me to delve into more anthropological literature outside the confines of my field. This interest definitely helped me adapt and integrate into the remote villages where we conduct our work in Madagascar.

So thank you!

Best,
Riley

LET’S HEAR FROM YOU! postit@case.edu
Courses of Interest for Spring 2019

JDST 254
The Holocaust
Jay Geller

This class seeks to answer fundamental questions about the Holocaust: the German-led organized mass murder of nearly six million Jews and millions of other ethnic and religious minorities. It will investigate the origins and development of racism in modern European society, the manifestations of that racism, and responses to persecution. An additional focus of the course will be comparisons between different groups, different countries, and different phases during the Nazi era.

JDST 314
Mythologies of the Afterlife
Judith Neulander

This course provides a multidisciplinary approach to the idea of an afterlife, and its manifestation in diverse cultures. We will examine the way varying views of the afterlife influence religion, popular culture and palliative care, and how human creativity has shaped the heavens, hells, hauntings and holidays of diverse populations over time and across space. Students will come to see the afterlife as an integral part of human history and experience, not only because it helps us die with better hope, but because it helps us to live more richly.

RLGN 201
Interpreting Religion: Approaches and Current Issues
Jonathan Tan

Introduction to academic study of religion, exploring the history and development of the field, important theories and methodologies, and current issues, debates, and horizons of research. The course is foundational for majors and minors in religious studies but also open to other interested students who may find it valuable for their work in other fields of study.

For courses in Hebrew and Arabic visit the Modern Languages and Literatures website: http://www.case.edu/artscl/dmill/
Sampling of Final Paper Titles

A sampling of titles for final research papers in JDST 228: The Jewish Image in Popular Film and JDST/ARTH 220: Jewish Traditional Art and Architecture reflects the diversity of interests in a typical JDST classroom.

The Jewish Image in Popular Film - JDST 228

Grace Schaller
Nobody Puts Baby in a Corner: The Liberation of American-Jewish Women in Film

Shane Cooley
Hollywood Horrors: The Fall of McCarthyism and the 21st Century Accusatory Rationale

Max Speil
Jewish Liminality and the Use of Blackface

Nathan Shapiro
The Three Stooges Take on Hitler: A Fearless Comedic Trio

Chloe Booth
Barbra Streisand: Her Impact on Hollywood and the American Mainstream

Roston Shore
The Jewish Image in American Film: The Good, The Bad and The Ugly

Jewish Traditional Art and Architecture - JDST/ARTH 220

Francesca Conti
Overcoming Oppression: How Judy Chicago’s Dinner Party Employed Jewish Symbolism

David Kerrigan
The Art and Architecture of Zionism

Changyi Wang
“Degenerate Art”: Theoretical Foundation, Political Reality and Cultural Impact

Elizabeth Hanna
Feminine Influence on the Material Culture of Passover

Avery Oberfeld
Terezin: The Creation of Haunting Art
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.

Editor:
Dr. Judith Neulander
Co-Director, Judaic Studies Program
judy.neulander@case.edu

Contributing Editor:
Dr. Jay Geller
Director, Judaic Studies Program
jay.geller@case.edu

Technical Support:
Lauren Gallitto
Dept. RLGN/JDST
lauren.gallitto@case.edu

Support the Program in Judaic Studies

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:

giving.case.edu

Students flank a replica of Michelangelo’s “horned” Moses at The Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage, October 2018