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.


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.


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?