

Passing in Israel: Connecting Modern Israeli and African American Cultures



Course Description: Aren't we all *passing*? Moving between identities daily, changing our personalities, hiding behind masks and presenting ourselves to be different than who we are? In some cases, passing between identities help us adjust to certain demands of a mainstream culture. But at what cost? Which parts of us are being lost when dealing in such ventures? In this course we will define passing through its historical African American roots, and then seek manifestations of the phenomena in modern Israeli cultures, examining the complex relationships between various global and Israeli identities. We will begin our session talking about the implications and the possible outcomes of comparing unique and different experiences. We will see the extreme stakes of African American passers at the turn of the 20th century and ask what passing means today. With this new knowledge we will move to Modern Israeli society, seeking to define national integrationist narratives through passing, looking to reevaluate our own negotiation of identity/difference in today's world.

Students will achieve these outcomes through class discussions and assignments that emphasize:

- The cultural and historical context through which modern Israeli society evolved.
- Key Israeli texts, histories and literature, that correspond with, and help us understand different forms of Modern Israeli culture, society and identity.
- The complex relationships between different models of Israeli identity—culture/ethnicity/race and gender—and the interpretation of ideas on which they are based.
- Familiarity with *passing*, a key historical and contemporary American phenomenon.
- Exploration of one's own connection and identification with the intersection of the Black/Jewish experience, and (re)assessing the intellectual and cultural framework that constructs our personal and political views.

Students will gain the skills needed to show deeper appreciation of unfamiliar cultural production in both oral and written form, while learning to recognize and respond to key elements of Judaism through a comparative lens.

Class Etiquette. To make this class as enjoyable and collaborative experience as possible, there are a few in-class policies: Cell phones silent and out of sight. No laptops. Class notes can and should be taken the old-fashioned way. You are required to print all texts and bring them to class on the assigned days. I expect you to attend all classes. If you need special accommodations due to a disability or other health-related issue, inform me as soon as possible. You are allowed 2 unexcused absences without incurring penalty. Work should be turned in on time.

Forum: Students will be divided into two groups. Alternating each week, group A students will be the first to post one reading response of 200 +/- words. Each student in group B will post a reply of 50 (or so) words to a fellow student's question before next class begins. Responses may address the assigned readings or raise another issue of interest. Your responses should move from comprehension (who/what/where/when) to analysis and interpretation (how and why). Replies should respond thoughtfully to your classmates' ideas. Constructive criticism and respectful disagreement are essential components of rational discussion and can be extremely helpful in improving your ideas.

You are required to obtain the following books:

- Larsen, Nella. *Passing* (ISBN - 0813511704)
- Schuyler, George S., *Black No More*. (ISBN – 0486147746)
- Kashua, Sayed. *Second Person Singular*. (ISBN – 0802194648)

I will provide you with all other readings through the course site. These texts must be printed and brought to class. Failure to print the material will result in removal of student from session. Films should be viewed before each session.

Bottom Line.

Discussion - 15%

Forum Participation – 20%

Midterm Paper - 25%

Final Project - 40%

See the College's sexual misconduct policy, academic and professional honesty and integrity



Street Art. Jerusalem.

Passing. Defined.

- 1.18 | Introduction. Natalie Melas, *All the difference in the world*.
- 1.20 | Nella Larsen, *Passing* (I - II) + Allyson Hobbs, *A Chosen Exile*. Intro.
- 1.23 | Finish *Passing* (III) + Kenji Yoshino, *Covering* (introduction).
- 1.26 | Screening: Ice Cube's *Black. White*. Discussion.
- 1.28 | Langston Hughes, "Passing."

The Passing of a Nation

- 1.30 | George S. Schuyler, *Black No More*.
- 2.3 | Theodor Herzl, *Altneuland* (Selections) + Michael Gluzman, "The Zionist Body."
- 2.5 | Finish *Black No More* + Eliezer Schweid, "The Rejection of the Diaspora in Zionist Thought."
- 2.10 | Screening: *Oded the Wanderer* + Lital Levy, "From the 'Hebrew Bedouin' to 'Israeli Arabic'."

Immigration Vs. Acclimation

- 2.13 | David Grossman, *See Under Love* (Part I) + Seyla Benhabib "Democracy and Difference."
- 2.17 | Dahn Ben-Amotz, *Screwing isn't Everything* – Selections.
- 2.20 | Orly Castel-Bloom, "Umi Fa Shurel" + Ella Shohat, "Sephardim in Israel."
- 2.23 | Yehudit Hendel, "Small Change." + Anita Shapira, "Native Sons."

Jewish/Israeli/Black

- 2.27 | Katya Gibel Mevorach, *Black, Jewish, and Interracial: "Perspectives on Identity."*
- 3.5 | View: Esti Almo Wexler's *Lady Titi* + Discussion.
- 3.8 | Ars Poetica and Adi Keissar, "Black on Black."

A Pretty Pass

- 3.12 | Sayed Kashua, *Second Person Singular*. Part I
- 3.15 | Finish *Second Person* + Screening: *Avoda Aravit*. Selections.
- 3.20 | **Peer Review Paper Workshop.**
- 3.23 | View: *Fictitious Marriage* (*Nisuim Fictivim* 1989) + Discussion.
- 3.25 | **Student Conferences.**
- 3.27 | Conclusions + **Final Project Due.**