

Jewish Countercultures: Remaking American Judaism, 1967-1990

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Course description:

In the late 1960s, many young American Jews decried what they perceived as a stagnant, suburban American Judaism that was out of touch with their generation's culture and politics – identifying with a broader American thirst for community, meaning, and political engagement. Seeking to revive and re-spiritualize American Judaism, these young activists, writers, rabbis, and students created Jewish communities and organizations that reflected their new, radical worldviews. Emerging out of the New Left, second wave feminism, and the Gay Liberation Movement, among other American progressive social and cultural movements, the Jewish “counterculture” reinvigorated American Judaism.. Once defined as outsiders storming the gates of the Jewish establishment, these “New Jews” went on to redefine many of the central tenets and practices of American Jewish life. In this course, we will examine several examples of this American Jewish creativity: The Havurah Movement and Jewish Renewal; the Jewish identity politics of the 1960s and 1970s, the Free Soviet Jewry Movement, and Jewish feminism; and the founding and growth of gay and lesbian synagogues, a particularly American form of LGBTQ Jewish community building.

Session Two, March 9: Centering Jewishness: Jewish Particularism and the Embrace of Jewish Identity Politics

Suggested readings (recommended to do in advance of our meeting):

- 1) Watch this 9-minute video from the original 1969 Freedom Seder, an interfaith and multi-racial event held to mark both the first anniversary of the death of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the third night of Passover in 1969. Structured by a new Haggadah created by Arthur Waskow, the Freedom Seder linked the Jewish Passover liberation narrative with the struggle for racial justice and equal rights for Black Americans.
<https://theshalomcenter.org/video/freedom-seder-1969>
- 2) Browse this detailed timeline of the American Soviet Jewry Movement, created by the American Jewish Historical Society:
<https://ajhs.org/timeline-american-soviet-jewry-movement>
- 3) Skim through six key pages of this short 1968 working paper (note: this was a draft plan) from the then newly-formed Jewish Liberation Project, a small group of New York-based radical Zionists. Please look at the “intro” (pages labelled 1-2, although they are pages 2-3 of the PDF since the opening page is not numbered in the original); “relationship to constituencies” (pages labelled 5-6 in the original); and “goals” (the pages labelled 9-10 in the original):
<https://www.dropbox.com/s/dk10alcvtjtqmfz/Jewish%20Liberation%20Project%20Working%20Paper.pdf?dl=0>

One of the key founders of the JLP, and editor of the group's *Jewish Liberation Journal*, was the feminist activist, writer and editor Aviva Cantor, a co-founder of *Lilith* magazine:

<https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/cantor-aviva>