

In the Spring Semester of 2023, I took on an independent study with Dr. Bernard Cooperman of the History Department. With this, I wanted to both satisfy my intellectual curiosity, but also explore my interests in history without the additional responsibilities of a typical course. However, settling in on a topic proved more difficult than I had imagined. We came in with only a rough idea: to explore parallels between the immigrant cultures and experience of Korean-Americans and Jewish-Americans. While the project sounded interesting at the start, some digging led us both to believe that the idea lacked originality.

By the fifth week of the semester, we still hadn't found the topic we wanted to work on, and I began to lose faith. However, Dr. Cooperman continued to encourage me to dig deeper, and take inspiration from elements of history that I had enjoyed from previous semesters. With this advice, I discovered that I wanted to try exploring the historical realities found in literary fiction and how fiction can be used to understand the “real” world. This is something that I saw Dr. Cooperman do in his class on early modern Jewish history. In that course, he compared Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* with what historians know about the New Ghetto and the lives of Jews in Venice. Similarly, I chose to work on a play, Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*, and I looked to see what it might say about the mid-twentieth century Jews of New York. Since this play chronicles the death of an “everyman,” I wanted to compare it to the descriptions of exceptional Jewish men written about in the *New York Times* obituaries columns. I sought to define what these mid-century Jewish men believed success to be and the image they wanted to be associated with.

Since we were already pretty far into the semester, I really had to get going on my research. Luckily, the UMD library made the information necessary for my research interests very accessible. A lot of my first searches were done through the ProQuest Historical Newspaper database and setting up parameters to search for only *New York Times* obituaries with the search term “Jewish” (there is more on this in the Appendix of my paper). This allowed me to better understand newspapers as a historical source. To find secondary sources on Jewish masculinity, I

relied on the library's home search engine, and I discovered several articles online that I could reference as needed in my piece. Likewise, all of my sources on the analysis of *Death of the Salesman*, along with my copy of *Death of a Salesman*, were accessed either through the library's online access or from the shelves. When I searched for *Death of a Salesman* on the shelves, I ended up finding so many more helpful resources in the book's vicinity! Also, I found that I did not have to undertake any complex searches; I was able to access almost everything I needed through either the library's home screen search engine or through recommendations and scans from Dr. Cooperman.

This project taught me how to properly search for, navigate, and digest both secondary and primary resources. Additionally, this project gave me insights into the process of formulating a research question and narrowing down my thoughts into a concise thesis. Now a member of the Honors History program, I have drawn on the skills that I learned from this project as we now begin to organize our thesis topics. Additionally, my ability to conduct effective research and read through dense materials are certainly a factor at my current internship. In the Publishing Department of the White House Historical Association, my typical workday involves researching and digesting a lot of material both physical and digital, drafting new sections for future publications, and communicating with my supervisors about revisions and the publication process. My ability to look for new topics to write about along with the stamina I have for reading them would not be what they are today if it were not for projects such as this one.

This project would have been impossible without the resources available to me through the UMD Library. The entire base of my research stemmed from resources and

physical books made available through the library. More recently, over the past winter break, I even used the International Library Loan services to check out an Italian version of *Death of a Salesman* so that I could both practice Italian and further engross myself in Arthur Miller's work. Reflecting upon my research experience, I really wish I could have discovered my thesis earlier so that I would have had more time for research and writing. There are so many more directions that I could have taken this paper: creating a more robust, rigorous sample; examining different novels or plays about the Jewish immigrant experience in New York; or by including an examination of female Jewish lives in search for issues of intersectionality.

As for how the library could have been better, I feel as though it can be daunting to contact a librarian for assistance on a project. I know that it is their job to help students and faculty with research, but I feel as though many students feel intimidated by the prospect of it. I think there should be more of an emphasis on making undergraduate students aware of, and open to, the help they can receive through the library faculty—since all freshmen are required to fulfill academic writing requirements, there might be room for collaboration between the English department and the library to increase the awareness of library services. In terms of resource improvements, I found a lot of difficulty creating my sample of obituaries using ProQuest Historical Newspapers. I ended up using the *New York Times* archives directly, accessed through the subscription that I was already paying for. Obtaining better access to the *New York Times* archives for other students' research projects might be something worth looking into!