History of the Jews in the Modern World
HI 219
Fall 2013, MWF 1:00-2:00 CAS 229
Office hours: MW 10:30-12:00 and by appointment

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Course Outline

This course is a survey of the history of the Jews in the modern world, with an emphasis on European Jewry. We will examine Jewish interaction with non-Jewish society from medieval Spain to Europe, Israel, and the United States today and explore this relationship’s creative and destructive products. We will focus in particular on how Jewish society, culture, religious practice, and political definition changed in relation to how Europe, and the world, became modern. European states and societies changed through a variety of processes we now associate with modernity such as urbanization, industrialization, state centralization, and the development nationalism and secularism. Many of the key issues we discuss in this course therefore stem from the bigger question of how changes in European society over the past 250-300 years affected the Jews.

The following are a few of the topics we will discuss:

- Jewish religious and communal changes in the late-medieval and early modern period
- How different European states sought to integrate their Jewish populations
- How Jews sought to adapt to the demands of the modern state
- The development of new forms of Jewish culture
- Modern antisemitism
- The development of Jewish nationalism
- The world wars
- Soviet, American, and Israeli Jewries

Course Websites

- All required texts not for purchase, numbered primary source packs (see schedule below), assignments, handouts from class, and any essential course documents will be available on Blackboard.
- I will maintain a facebook page for the course where I’ll post interesting contemporary news and multimedia. Students are encouraged to “like” the page and to post materials and comments (please, keep it civil). The facebook page can be accessed from the Teaching page of my website, blogs.bu.edu/srabinov/teaching/.
Students are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the writing and research guides and other multimedia on the Student Resources page of my site blogs.bu.edu/srabinov/student-research-resources/.

Student research guides are hosted and posted on the site blogs.bu.edu/guidedhistory. Students are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the page For Students on that site, as well as the many research guides already on the site.

Course Requirements

The class format mixes lecture with class discussion. You will be given enough time to read the texts and it is expected that you come to class having done so.

Your final grade will be determined as follows:

2-3 page book review, 10%. Each student is responsible for reviewing one book of their choosing from the bibliographies of suggested further readings in the textbook, from chapter 7 onward. I recommend that students run their selection by me well in advance of the due date. Reviews written on books not in one of the textbook’s bibliographies (again, chapter 7 onward) will not be graded. The book review is due October 9.

Midterm examination, 20%. To be held in-class on October 18. The examination will be open-book and you will be given a preparation guide ahead of time.

Online research guide, 20%. You will write an online research guide (essentially a multimedia annotated bibliography) on a topic pertinent to the class. I will provide more detailed instructions and help you get started. Research guides will be published on the website http://blogs.bu.edu/guidedhistory and will form the groundwork for your term paper. For the purpose of grading your guide will be considered complete on November 15, though you will be free to continue to update and upgrade your guide thereafter.

Term paper, 25%. Students must complete one research paper (+/- 8-10 pages) examining some aspect of Jewish history pertinent to the course. Topics might cover political, religious, intellectual, cultural, social, or economic history and should correspond approximately to the topic of your research guide. I will frequently suggest topics during the course of the semester and students are encouraged to come to my office to discuss possibilities. Both the syllabus and the bibliographies in the textbook are good places to start your search for a topic. The term paper is due December 6.

Final take-home examination, 25%. The final examination will be distributed on the last day of class and will be due at a specified time during the final examination period.

Class discussion and preparation. Attendance and informed participation in class discussion is required. Although a grade will not be allocated for participation, in the case of final grades which are borderline good participation may boost a student’s grade. Prolonged absence is grounds for failure.
All assignments should be completed independently and plagiarism from any source is unacceptable. Cases of suspected academic misconduct will be referred to the Dean’s Office. If they have not already, students should familiarize themselves with the Academic Conduct Code of the College of Arts and Sciences: http://www.bu.edu/cas/students/undergrad-resources/code/

Texts

Required and available at BU Barnes and Noble Bookstore:

All other required readings for the course will be available through our Blackboard website (indicated with a “*” in the syllabus). Students may benefit from purchasing several of the books we use from an online retailer. I would recommend purchasing the following three books in particular because they are excellent references and are also fairly inexpensive and easy to acquire.


David Biale ed., Cultures of the Jews: A New History (Schocken, 2002). This book can be purchased in three separate volumes or in a single three-volume edition. [Cultures of the Jews in syllabus]


Course Schedule and Assignments

The course schedule is divided by weeks. In most cases readings have been specified by class, but in some cases readings are indicated for the week as a whole. It is your responsibility to read the syllabus regularly and to know where we are in the readings.

Part I – Jewish Society from Medieval to Modern

Week 1 - Introduction

September 4
Introduction to the course
When does modern Jewish history begin? Did it end?
“The end of the Jewish people,” aka “The Great Jewcy Debate”

September 6 – no class

Week 2 – Jews in Medieval Europe
September 9
Sepharad and Ashkenaz: How the Jews got where and why
  • Efron, p. 178.

September 11
Judaism and Jewish society in medieval Ashkenaz
  • Efron, chapter 7.

September 13
Jews, Christians, and Muslims in medieval Spain
  • Efron, chapter 8.

Week 3 – Jews in the Early Modern World

Readings for the week:
  • Efron, chapter 9.
  • Brenner, chapter 9.*

September 16
The Sephardic Diaspora

September 18
The Jews in early modern Poland-Lithuania

September 20
Judaism and Jewish society in early modern Europe

Part II – Jews and the Modern State, the Modern State and the Jews

Week 4 – Enlightenment and Revolution

September 23
The Enlightenment and the Jews
  • Amos Elon, *The Pity of it All: A Portrait of the German-Jewish Epoch* (New York, 2002), 1-64.*

September 25
The idea of “Jewish Enlightenment”
  • Efron, 269-284.

September 27
The French Revolution
  • Primary source pack 1 (selections from JMW).*

Week 5 – Franco-German Rivalry
September 30
Napoleonic Europe
  • Efron, chapter 10.

October 2
Jewish Emancipation in Central Europe
  • Primary source pack 2 (selections from JMW).*

October 4 – no class

**Week 6 – The Jews in Eastern Europe**

October 7
Prussian Poland and Austrian Galicia

October 9
The Russian Empire – the Kingdom of Poland
  • Theodore Weeks, *From Assimilation to Antisemitism: The “Jewish Question” in Poland, 1850-1914* (Dekalb, 2006), 33-70.*

October 11
The Russian Empire – the Pale of Settlement and beyond

**Week 7 – Jews of the Ottoman Empire and Southeastern Europe**

October 14 – no class

October 15 – substitute Monday
Ottoman and Turkish Jewry
  • Aron Rodrigue, “The Ottoman Diaspora: The Rise and Fall of Ladino Literary Culture,” in *Cultures of the Jews.*

October 16
The Jews in southeastern Europe
October 18 – Midterm examination

Week 8 – Religious Responses to Modernity

Readings for the week:
- Efron, chapter 11.
- Primary source pack 3 (selections from *The Golden Tradition* and *JMW).*

October 21
The emergence of Hasidism

October 23
Progressive Judaism and Orthodoxy

October 25
Assimilation and acculturation

Section III – Jews and the Fin-de-Siècle

Week 9 – Anti-Judaism and Antisemitism

October 28
Antisemitism in Central Europe
- Efron, 298-308.

October 30
Anti-Jewish violence in the Russian Empire
- Efron, 309-313.

November 1
The question of migration: the United States
- Efron, 326-332.

Week 10 – New Challenges, New Politics

November 4
The emergence of Jewish nationalism
- Efron, 313-326.

**November 6**  
Jews, socialism, and Jewish socialism  
- Primary source pack 4 (Chaim Zhitlovsky and Vladimir Medem in *The Golden Tradition* and *Jews and Diaspora Nationalism*).*

**November 8**  
The question of migration: the Yishuv  
- Primary source pack 5 (selections from *The Zionist Idea* and *The Origins of Israel*).*

**Week 11 – War, Revolution, and the Creation of Soviet Jewry**

**November 11**  
World War I and the Jews  
- Amos Elon, *The Pity of it All*, 297-354*  
- Primary source pack 6 (selection from S. Ansky, *The Enemy at his Pleasure: A Journey Through the Jewish Pale of Settlement During World War I*).*

**November 13**  
Empires into nation states: Jews in a reconstructed Europe  
- Efron, chapter 13.

**November 15**  
The Creation of Soviet Jewry  

**Part IV – Catastrophe and Rebirth**

**Week 12 (and Monday of Thanksgiving week) – Europe and America between the Wars**

**November 18**  
Film and discussion: “American matchmaker”  

**November 20**  
Film and discussion continued: “American matchmaker”

**November 22**
Interwar Poland and the Baltics
  • Primary source pack 6 (selections from JMW and Polish Minorities Treaty).*

November 25
Soviet Jewry
  • Zvi Gitelman, A Century of Ambivalence, chapter 3.*

November 27 and 29 – Thanksgiving

Week 13 - Upheaval

Readings for the week:
  • Efron, chapter 14.
  • Brenner, chapter 19.*
  • Michael Marrus, The Holocaust in History (New York, 1987), 31-83.*

December 2
The Holocaust and World War II

December 4
The Holocaust and World War II

December 6
Postwar Europe

Week 14 – The Creation of Israel and Postwar America

December 9
Israel and America
  • Efron, chapter 15.
  • Primary source pack 6 (“Excerpts from a Correspondence between David Ben-Gurion and Simon Rawidowicz on the State of Israel, the Diaspora, and the Unity of the Jewish People”).*

December 11 – Last day of class
“the end of the Jewish people”? The Great Jewcy Debate revisited
  • Gerson Cohen, “The Blessing of Assimilation in Jewish History,” in Jewish History and Jewish Destiny (JTSA Press, 1997).*