

AS.100.129
Introduction to Modern Jewish History
Spring 2025 Syllabus
(Draft, 10/27/24)

Lectures: Mondays and Wednesdays, 9:00-9:50AM
Discussion Sections: Fridays, 9-9:50AM
Place TBA

Instructor: Dr. James Loeffler and Graduate Teaching Assistant TBA

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Office hours: TBA

Course description

Jewish history is the study of a civilization that challenges the conventional rules of history. Judaism developed over the course of millennia into a major global religion on par with Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Yet throughout that time Jews remained among the tiniest of communities spread across a vast global diaspora of Europe, Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and the Americas. After 2,000 years of life as a diaspora, Jews created a sovereign state in the middle of the twentieth century, only to see it become permanently enmeshed in one of the world's longest-running global conflicts – and trigger profound divisions within Jewish communities worldwide. Antisemitism is often described as the world's oldest hatred, yet its name only appeared in the late nineteenth century, and its features do not fit easily into the categories of racism or religious hatred. Finally, the Holocaust itself consistently challenges historians to explain the nature of human evil and the rationality of history itself.

In this course, we will explore these puzzles through a survey of the basic narrative of Jewish history from the sixteenth century to the present and across the world. Major topics to be discussed include political emancipation and the Hebrew Enlightenment, Zionism and Anti-Zionism, antisemitism and the Holocaust, the divergent paths of American and European Jewries, and the emergence of Israel and the persistence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We will also examine how Jewish history relates to the fields of modern European, American, Middle Eastern, and global history.

This is an introductory course that assumes no prior knowledge of Judaism or Jewish history. Students will read and critically analyze a variety of primary and secondary sources, including religious, political, and legal writings, artistic images and musical recordings, and scholarly studies. The course introduces students to the critical methods and concepts that professional historians use to engage the past.

Format

This course is a combination of two weekly lectures and one weekly discussion section.

Requirements and Grading

- (a) Full attendance at all lectures and proper in-class participation;
- (b) Completion of all assigned reading by the time of the class meetings under which it is listed;
- (c) Three short papers (750 words each) involving analysis of primary sources;
- (d) A take-home midterm exam;
- (e) A take-home final exam;

The above notwithstanding, to pass the course it is necessary to complete all assignments, including acceptable writing assignments on approved topics, and to attend all lectures. Students with documented accommodations should contact the instructor at the beginning of the term.

Attendance will be taken, and multiple repeated absences will be grounds for failure. Students who need to miss class for religious holidays, family emergencies, athletic commitments or other reasons must obtain permission prior to the date in question. The same applies to the submission of written assignments and exams. Late assignments will be penalized.

For the sake of constructive community and respectful dialogue, recording of any classroom sessions is prohibited. Students are encouraged to bring any related concerns to the attention of the instructor.

Grading Rubric

- Class Attendance and In-Class Participation: 20%
- First Paper 2.5%
- Second Paper 7.5%
- Third Paper 10%
- Take-home midterm exam 25%
- Take-home final exam 35%

Grading Matrix:

A 94-100	A- 90-93	
B+ 87-89	B 84-86	B- 80-83
C+ 77-79	C 74-76	C- 70-73
D+ 67-69	D 64-66	D- 60-63
F Below 60		

Textbooks

Howard Sachar, *A History of the Jews in the Modern World* (Knopf, 2006) (HJMW)
David Myers, *Jewish History: A Very Short Introduction* (OUP, 2017) (JH)

Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, eds., *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History* (Oxford, 2013, 3rd ed. (JMW))

The above titles will be available for purchase at the University Bookstore. Please note the Inclusive Access feature on CATALYST for digital purchase of them. You may opt out of this to avoid the cost if you do not wish to utilize this resource. One copy of each of the books is also on library reserve either as physical or digital version (or in some cases both). Additional required course readings will be available on CATALYST as indicated in the syllabus.

A Note on Readings

The three main textbooks are designed to give you two very different kinds of perspectives on the narrative of modern Jewish history. We will read Myers's *Very Short History* to give us the master storyline and highlight main themes that we will explore. Then we will turn to Sachar's *History of the Jews in the Modern World* in little installments for an ongoing chronological narrative. *The Jew in the Modern World* reader is a massive collection of primary sources from across the Jewish world, translated from multiple languages. We will reference some of these texts in lectures as they relate to key individuals or events. Others we will assign you to read on your own and use for course writing assignments. In each case, we encourage you to refer to the syllabus and the lecture outlines on CATALYST as the underlying skeletal structure of the course and basic roadmap.

Lecture Schedule

W 1/22 Introduction: How Does the Story End?

JH, xxi-xxvi, 1-22

M 1/27 The First Modern Jew? Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment

W 1/29 The Quest for Freedom in Revolutionary Europe

HJMW, 3-50 (chaps. 1-3)

JMW, 27-49, 123-30

Salo Baron, "Ghetto and Emancipation: Shall We Revise the Traditional View?"

Menorah Journal 14:6 (1928): 515-25 (CATALYST)

Optional: *JMW*, 65-66, 72, 94-96, 156-59

M 2/3 The Revolution Within: Haskalah and Acculturation

W 2/5 From Jews to Judaisms: The Birth of Religious Denominations

HJMW, 73-137 (chaps. 5-8)

JMW, 104-7, 182, 189-92, 217-23

Heinrich Heine, "An Edom" (ca. 1819), "The New Israelite Hospital in Hamburg" (1841), and "Commemoration Service" (1851), with accompanying biographical note (CATALYST)

Jewish Liturgical Musical Change PowerPoint (CATALYST)

Optional: *JMW*, 91-93, 236-37, 244-45, 254-55

M 2/10 Jewish Eastern Europe: The Other Story?

W 2/12 Hasidism: A Jewish Fundamentalism?

HJMW, 51-72, 175-206 (chaps. 4, 10-11)

JMW, 350, 365-70, 383-85

Jewish Music in Eastern Europe (CATALYST)

Optional: *JH*, 23-72

JMW, 359-62

"Hasidism" in the YIVO Encyclopedia (CATALYST)

Sarah Shapira, "Remember the Horn" (1886) (CATALYST)

M 2/17 Between Race and Religion? The Peopling of Jewish America

W 2/19 Captives of the East? Jewish Life in the Middle East and North Africa

First Paper due by 2/19 at 5PM via Catalyst

HJMW, 138-74 (chaps. 8-9)

JMW, 501-04, 509-10, 493-94, 449-52, 472-73

Aron Rodrigue, "From Millet to Minority: Turkish Jewry," in P. Birnbaum and I. Katznelson, eds., *Paths of Emancipation: Jews, States, and Citizenship* (Princeton, 1995), 238-61

M 2/24 Antisemitism: A Modern Epidemic?

W 2/26 Zionism: Religious Messianism or Political Revolution?

HJMW, 222-83 (chaps. 13-15)

JH, 73-97

JMW, 306-8, 327, 588, 599-602, 605-07

Optional: *JMW*, 283-84, 300-04, 603-04; Lamed Shapiro, "The Kiss" (CATALYST)

M 3/3 Sibling Rivals: Socialism, Bundism and Autonomism

W 3/5 The Other Option: Immigration to the United States

Take-home midterm exam available 3/3 at 12PM, due 3/5 by 5PM

HJMW, 207-21, 284-309 (12, 16)
JMW, 393-94, 397-403, 407-11, 532, 809

Optional: *JMW*, 813-14

M 3/10 The Re-Invention of Jewish America: Race, Religion & Culture
W 3/12 World War I: A Turning Point in Jewish Politics

Second paper assignment distributed 3/10 by 12PM via CATALYST

HJMW, 310-22, 370-98 (chaps. 17, 20)
JMW, 521-22, 553-56

Optional: *JMW*, 509-10; Israel Friedlander, "The Problem of Judaism in America" (1907) and Anzia Yeziarska, "America and I" (CATALYST)

M 3/17 *No Class* – Spring Break
W 3/19 *No Class* – Spring Break

M 3/24 Interwar Jewish Life in Europe: Prelude to Destruction?
W 3/26 Interwar Jewish Life in British Palestine: A Fight on Two Fronts

HJMW, 323-57, 399-443 (chaps. 18-19, 21-22)
JMW, 658-62, 686-92, 411-16, 423-26

Optional: Isaac Babel, "Gedali," "The Story of a Horse," and "The Rabbi's Son" (CATALYST)

M 3/31 The Holocaust: Historical Origins & Causes
W 4/2 The Holocaust: Global Responses & Evasions

Second Paper due by 4/2 at 5PM

HJMW, 444-91 (chaps. 23-24)
JMW, 422-23, 670-74

M 4/7 1948: The Birth of Israel
W 4/9 1948 and the Jews of the Middle East

HJMW, 492-571 (chaps. 25-28)
JMW, 716-19, 730-33, 750-53, 777, 762-67

Poems of Yankev Glatshteyn & Dan Pagis, "Written in Pencil in the Sealed Railway-Car" and Poems and Songs of the Partisan Movement PowerPoint (CATALYST)

M 4/14 1948 and the Tangled Fate of Soviet Jewry

W 4/16 1948 and Postwar American Judaism

HJMW, 572-628 (chaps. 29-30)

JMW, 702-10, 750-54, 777-78

Optional: *JMW*, 762-66; Yehuda Amichai, "UN Headquarters in the High Commissioner's Residence in Jerusalem" and "God Takes Pity on Kindergarten Children" (CATALYST)

M 4/21 1967 and the Contemporary Middle East

W 4/23 Prisoners of Zion: Israel, Palestine and the Elusive Quest for Peace

Third Paper Assignment Distributed by 12PM 4/21

HJMW, 629-701 (chaps. 31-34)

JMW, 491-92, 711-13

Optional: *JMW*, 497, 813-14

M 4/28 Conclusions: Where Does the Story Begin?

Third Paper due by 4/29 at 5PM

HJMW, 702-44 (chap. 35-36 and afterword)

JH, 116

JMW, 581-84

Yehuda Amichai, "An Arab Shepherd Seeks a Kid on Mount Zion" and

"Temporary Poem of My Time" (CATALYST)

1967 War Documents (CATALYST)

Nobel Prize Speeches of Shimon Peres, Yitzhak Rabin, and Yasser Arafat (CATALYST)

Hamas Covenants (CATALYST)

Take-home final exam available 5/6, due 5/11 by 3PM