REL1203 Jews and Judaism: Race, Religion, Culture

Instructor: Yaniv Feller (yfeller@wesleyan.edu)
Meeting Times: Mo. and Wed. 14:50-16:10, BOGH114
Office Hours: Wed. and Thur. 10-11 (171 Church Street, Religion Department #207)

Course Description:
This course offers a presentation of Jewish experience throughout history in a way that allows us to question contemporary discourse: What is a Jew? Are Jews white? Must a Jew believe in God? What is at stake when defining someone as a Jew? Using sources ranging from the Hebrew Bible to graphic novels, we will examine the various facets of Jewish life, paying special attention to contesting definitions of Jewishness as race, religion, and culture. Building on a chronological discussion of Jewish history, we will ask theoretical questions such as the relation between gender and Judaism, the relevance of religious law in contemporary society, and the meaning of diaspora in the age of national sovereignty.

Course Outcomes:
• You will be acquainted with Jewish history, religion, and culture.
• You will understand the multifaceted nature of contemporary Jewish life, and its historical antecedents.
• You will gain the ability to read primary sources in translation
• You will engage in critical thinking on definitions of race, religion, and culture.

Required Texts (all are also on Reserves at Olin):
4. All other readings are on Moodle and as a course-pack.
Methods of Evaluation

Active Participation (20%): This class is based on your active participation. You are expected to come to class prepared, having read the texts and thought of at least one or two topics you wish to discuss.

Midterm Exam (20%): In-class one hour written exam covering all the material in the class and readings up to that point. You will be handed sample exam in advance and there will also be a tutorial shortly before. Date: Mar. 4

Jewish Engagement with Christianity and Islam (25%): 6-8 pages. Jews have lived as a minority under Islam and Christianity for the majority of their history. In this this assignment you will analyze primary source (Halevi’s *Kuzari* or Nahmanides’ *Disputation*) and see how it engages the other religious tradition. Deadline: Apr. 10

Final Essay Proposal (5%): 3 pages. Based on all that we know about Jews and Judaism, Are Jews white? How has religious praxis and the culture of prayer changed? Do Jews have art? For your final project you are welcome to pick any question or problem that you identified throughout the semester. You will provide your research questions, tentative description, and a bibliography of five items (based at least in part on the syllabus). Creative projects will be considered but be sure to talk to me about it in advance before submitting the proposal. Deadline: Apr. 29

Final Assignment (30%): 10 pages. This is your opportunity to explore the question you had in mind in the proposal. Most papers will begin with an introduction, followed by a description of the historical circumstances, the theory you use and/or the comparison (when applicable), the analysis of the issue at hand, and the conclusion you reach. Detailed instructions will be provided. Deadline: May 14

Late Submission Policy: A penalty of a third letter grade will be assigned for each day past the deadline, including weekends. If you have a valid, documented reason for late submission, please let me know as soon as possible.

Course Policies

A Note on Academic Integrity: Academic integrity is essential to the scholarly pursuit and the success of the learning process. Ensuring the proper academic conduct also guarantees that a degree from Wesleyan University is reflective of each individual student’s achievements. Please review the Honor Code carefully (http://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/studenthandbook/StudentHandbook.pdf). If you have any doubts or uncertainties in this regard, do not hesitate to contact me.

Accessibility and Accommodations: Students with diverse learning needs are welcome in this course. Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from its programs and services.
Please note that in order to receive accommodations, you must have a recognized and documented disability. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible. You can find more information here: [http://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/disabilities/Student/academic-accommodations.html](http://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/disabilities/Student/academic-accommodations.html) Do not hesitate to talk to me in person and I will do my best to assist.

Office Hours and E-Mail: Talking in person rather than via email is usually much more effective. Please do come visit me at my office! If you cannot make it to the office hours, but would like to meet – let me know and we will find time. When writing emails, please use your university email account (other accounts may land in the spam folder) and include a topic-line, your name, and the question(s) you have. I try to respond quickly, but please note that emails will receive a reply within two working days. This means that if you send me an email on the weekend, or if you send a request for extension in the last minute, they might be answered only later, and the penalty incurred will be implemented.

Electronic Free Zone: Electronic devices improve our lives in numerous ways. They are also a source of constant distraction, both to their users and the immediate environment. There is now evidence that students who use electronic devices in class, as well as people who sit next to them, tend on average to receive lower grades. I therefore ask you not to use laptops, phones etc. during class. Please bring the readings in a printed form for every class. If there are any accommodation concerns, do contact me and we will find a solution.
Schedule

Is It Jewish? Why Should We Care?

Jan. 28: SNL “Jew, Not a Jew”;


I. The Hebrew Bible

Feb. 4: Brenner, 1-17; Hebrew Bible: Gen. 12; Gen. 22:1-19; Ex. 1-12.

Feb. 6: Brenner, 18-29; Comparison Table; Christine Hayes, “The Prophetic Response to History: Amos as Paradigm,” *Introduction to the Bible*, 248-262.

Feb. 11: Brenner 31-53; *Letter of Aristeas* (selections)

II. The Emergence of Judaism


Feb. 25: David Nirenberg, “Early Christianity: The Road to Emmaus, the Road to Damascus,” *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition*, 48-86

Feb. 27: Baker, 16-46

Mar 4: Midterm exam

III. Under Crescent and Cross

Mar. 6: Brenner, 69-81; Judah Halevi, *Kuzari* (selections from book 1)

March 8-24: Spring Break

Mar. 25: Brenner, 83-93; Nina Caputo, *Debating Truth*, 5-83

Mar. 27: Brenner, 95-135

IV. Encounters with Modernity


Apr. 10: Brenner, 167-207

ASSIGNMENT: Jewish Engagement with Christianity and Islam

V. In the New World

Apr. 15: Brenner, 209-254

(Special Topic: Gender) 8pm ATTEND Sarah Imhoff, “Manliness and Its Opposites: A Brief History of American Jewish Gender” – Jeremy Zwelling annual lecture, 8pm Russell House.

Apr. 17: (Special Topic: Passover) Selections from the Haggadah, Oren Baruch Stier, “Memory,” Key Terms in Material Religion, 145-151; Jonathan Sarna, How Matzah Became Square


VI. The Holocaust

Apr. 24: Brenner, 287-348

Apr. 29: Brenner, 273-286; Ethan Katz, “Jews as Muslims and Muslims as Jews,” The Burdens of Brotherhood, 111-154

Final Paper Proposal

VII. Zionism and Genomic Jews

May 1: Brenner, 255-272; Baker, “Zionism’s conflicted claim on Jew,” 91-96; Baker, 97-104 (until “Genomic Jews”)


May 8: No class

Final Assignment deadline: May 14