

**REL/JS 309: Jews and Judaism in Modern Times**  
**Fall 2013 – Emory University**

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**MW 10:00-11:15**  
**Candler Library 114**  
**Office Hours: by appointment**

**Course Description**

The modern period has witnessed radical changes in all spheres of human activity: political, scientific, economic, and social. Religion was no less affected, and Judaism in particular underwent a transformation that could genuinely be characterized as a metamorphosis. Very few Jews today act, speak or think like their great-great-grandparents – even if they claim to do so. For the purposes of this course, we will consider the “modern” period to be the last two hundred years, when Jews were granted equal rights first within the newly emerging nation-states of Western and Central Europe, and later in Eastern Europe and Russia. The United States, of course, presents itself as a unique case in that it never officially discriminated against Jews, requiring no “emancipation” to give them equal status.

The aim of this course in terms of *content* is to enable students to understand how Judaism in the Modern Period evolved – and continues to evolve up to the present day. To be sure, Jews today have multiple sources of identification: not only religious, but national and ethnic as well. However, our course will focus on the religious dimensions of Jewish identity and thinking and how that has changed as a result of Jews’ entrance into Western society and their engagement with its culture. While we will have occasion to address non-religious subjects, our focus will remain the religious dimension.

In terms of *skills*, the goal is to have students understand the religious lives and events of people using the tools of social science – history, sociology, anthropology, and culture – and to be able to interpret contemporary religious artifacts – texts, the arts, decisions and policies people make or follow – using these social scientific lenses. We will learn about the past 200 years in depth, and that will serve as a model for interpreting current events affecting Jews and Judaism.

We should remain aware that currently, Jews continue to reside in many countries around the world, and many of those places do not resemble America. However, because America constitutes one of the two largest Jewish populations in the world (the State of Israel is the other), and the fact that Jewish religious diversity is primarily an American phenomenon, our readings and discussions in the second half of the course will focus on the American scene.

**Course texts:**

Eugene Borowitz, *Choices in Modern Jewish Thought: A Partisan Guide* (=CMJT)  
 Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (=JMW)  
 Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism* (=AJ)  
 Selections of other works, to be posted on Blackboard

**Course requirements:**

1. In my view, the ideal academic experience involves a mixture of pre-class readings, class lectures and discussion, and the ability to collect and analyze the material through assignments and exams. Therefore, doing the readings, attendance and active class participation are all expectations of the course. In addition, there will be occasional short presentations in class in the last portion of the course (see below). More than three (3) absences (excused and unexcused) will severely affect one's participation grade, unless there are extenuating circumstances confirmed by OUE. Taken together, participation constitutes 10% of your grade.

2. Site visits to two houses of Jewish worship and a 2-3 page report for each (10% each). Details will follow in a separate handout. Lateness of submission will result in lower grades (one full letter grade for every day of delay). Site visits are designed for students to attend Saturday morning services at a denominational synagogue, with the aim of contextualizing what they observe (or learn, through asking) with what they learned about the ideologies of each stream. The second visit also expects them to compare/contrast with their first visit.

3. Exams: two in-class exams (40%), final exam Friday, December 13<sup>th</sup> at 3:00 (30%)

## **JS/REL 309: JEWS AND JUDAISM IN MODERN TIMES SYLLABUS**

**I. Introduction**

Aug. 28      **The pre-modern Jewish community**  
                   "The Jews of Medieval Christian Europe," in Raymond Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People*, chapter 5, pp. 97-121 (on BB)

Sept 2        **No Class (Labor Day)**

**II. Enlightenment, Emancipation and Initial Reactions**

Sept. 4        **Enlightenment and Emancipation**  
                   JMW I: intro, #7, #9, #10-12, #17; II: intro, #14, #16, #21; III: #2, #6, #11-17

Assignment: 1) Identify three areas of tension, or even inconsistency, one could anticipate between traditional Judaism and Jews entering society as full members.

2) Name three things the French expected, whether implicitly or explicitly, Jews to do once they were emancipated. For each, state whether Jews expected this as well, and, if not, what they did expect.

Sept. 9        **Assimilation, Conversion, and the Beginnings of Reform**

JMW XII: #1, 3-11; IV: intro, #1-2, #8-10, #12

Assignment: 1) Identify three types of dissatisfaction with Judaism expressed by the writers collected in JMW ch. XII, and explain what evoked this dissatisfaction.

2) Name three aspects of Judaism that early Reform felt most needed changing. What did they feel these specific changes would accomplish?

- Sept. 11      **Ultra-Orthodoxy**  
 JMW IV: #3-4, #13, #16; skim Michael K. Silber, [“The Emergence of Ultra-Orthodoxy: The Invention of a Tradition”](#)  
 Assignment: What threats do these authors find in Reform? What is their underlying vision of Judaism, and why do they think Reform can’t preserve that?
- Sept. 16      **Reactions to Reactions I: The Historical School**  
 JMW V: intro, #1-2, #4-5, #8; IV: #14  
 Assignment: To Frankel, there was no inherent self-restraint contained in the “logic” of Reform. What was Frankel’s proposed substitute “logic,” and why did he think it was immune from the excesses of Reform? Explain whether you agree or disagree with him and why.
- Sept. 18      **Reactions to Reactions II: Neo-Orthodoxy**  
 David Rudavsky, “Neo-Orthodoxy in Germany” from *Emancipation and Adjustment*, ch. 9 (BB); JMW IV: #15, V: #9  
 Assignment: To whom do you think Hirsch is responding more: Reform Jews or those of the Historical School? Defend your answer.
- IV. Uneasy Modernization and Jewish responses**
- Sept. 23      **The Emergence of Modern Antisemitism**  
 JMW VI pp. 277-78, then #4, #15-16, #19-21, #26. #29  
 Assignment: Provide four (4) arguments used by the new antisemites to oppose Jewish emancipation, and explain how these are uniquely modern.
- Sept. 25      **Emerging Zionisms: Political, Cultural, Socialist, Religious and American**  
 JMW X: #2, 5-6, 8-9, 12, 19-21, 39; IX: #39; CMJT ch. 4  
 Assignment: 1) What does each writer cited in JMW think is the essence of modern antisemitism, and how it can be solved?  
 2) In Kook’s thought, how can traditional Judaism and Zionism be reconciled?
- Sept. 30      **Eastern Europe and its Growing Jewish Diversity**  
 JMW VII: #11-15, #19-21, #33; , David Rudavsky, “Hassidism and Neo-Hassidism” from *Emancipation and Adjustment*, ch. 6 (BB); Arthur Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea*, part 7 (selections) (BB)  
 Assignment: What were the historical and ideological forces that led to the emergence of Hassidism and Religious Zionism? Try and identify similarities and differences between the two processes.
- Oct. 2        **Modern Jewish Thought: Rationalists and anti-Rationalists**  
 CMJT ch. 2, 6, and 7  
 Assignment: How does each of these three thinkers understand the role of Jewish tradition in forming a Judaism that can thrive in today’s world?
- Oct. 7        **In-class Exam #1**

## V. Judaism in America

### Oct. 9 **Judaism in 19<sup>th</sup> c. America**

JMW IX: #15-18, #37, #40; *skim* AJ ch. 3-4 (pp. 62-111, 124-193)

Assignment: 1) What social and economic conditions in America do you think allowed radical Reform to take root there more than in Europe? For each condition, explain how it assisted in this growth.

2) What spiritual, demographic, economic, and social needs led to the evolution of American Conservative Judaism? How did it go about meeting those needs? Be specific.

### Oct 14 – No Class (Fall Break)

### Oct. 16 **First site visit due; class discussion**

### Oct. 21-23 **American Judaism Comes into its Own**

Background: AJ pp. 193-293

**\*\*Continue to next page for Oct. 21 assignment!\*\***

### Oct. 21 **Reform's Ongoing Reform**

Columbus Platform (1937) & Centenary Perspective (1976), at [CCAR website](#)

Assignment: Take the Columbus Platform and Centenary Perspective, and compare them to the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform. Identify what's changed, and suggest how/why.

### Oct. 23 **Conservative Judaism Holds the Center**

JMW IX: #15-18, #37, #40; read [Emet ve-Emunah](#) (1988)

Assignment: Does American Conservative Judaism maintain a clear ideological position in the middle, or is it simply "pulled" by forces on the right and left? Is it possible to avoid being pulled apart by these forces? Cite quotations from *Emet ve-Emunah* to back up your claims.

### Oct. 28 **Reconstructionism**

JMW IX: #41; CMJT ch. 5

Assignment: Reconstructionism has evolved in several dramatic ways since its inception. 1) Describe two such changes. 2) State whether these changes mean the movement may no longer call itself Reconstructionist in the way Kaplan meant it. Justify your answer.

### Oct. 30 **Modern Orthodoxy**

JMW IX: #19, 43; CMJT ch. 10

Assignment: To what degree is Soloveitchik's dialectical approach to the human condition and religious life an outgrowth of the 20<sup>th</sup> century American experience? Feel free to consult the internet for an answer.

### Nov. 4 **American Jewish Civil Religion: The Holocaust, Israel, and the Community**

JMW IX: #13, 33, 44; Lyn Rapaport, "The Holocaust in American Jewish Life" (BB); [review](#) of Jonathan Woocher's *Sacred Survival*

Assignment: Look up the notion of “civil religion” on the web, and write down a definition in your own words (remember to cite your source(s)). Why do you think “Federation Judaism” evolved in America over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century? Justify your answer.

Nov. 6           **Post-Holocaust Jewish Theology**  
CMJT ch. 9

Assignment: Like all religious developments, theology too must be understood in terms of its context. For two of the theologians Borowitz presents, explain in what ways their post-Holocaust theologies are uniquely 20<sup>th</sup> century Western responses.

Nov. 11           **In-class Exam #2**

## VI. Late 20<sup>th</sup>-early 21<sup>st</sup> Century Trends

**Note:** Starting at this point in the course, we will begin looking daily at Jewish newspapers (available on reserve) and websites as ‘cultural anthropologists,’ unearthing deeper layers of meaning and interpretation to all aspects of Jewish culture evident in these publications. These will involve daily assignments in addition to the readings. Details follow after syllabus.

Nov. 13           **Overview of changes in American society & religion**  
Robert Bellah et al, *Habits of the Heart*, ch. 9 (BB); skim Pew Charitable Trusts “Religion and Public Policy” [website](#).

*Internet assignment:* Click on a few of the links at the Pew website to see what their surveys have revealed about changes in American religion. Note four and suggest in what ways American Judaism would be affected.

Nov. 14, evening (place and time TBA)  
Screening of “A Life Apart: Hasidism in America”

Nov. 18           **The Ultra-Orthodox (*Haredi*) Enclave**  
Haym Soloveitchik, [“Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy.”](#)

Assignment: What are the methods the Ultra-Orthodox have used to preserve their distinct culture in America? What about American society and culture has enabled these strategies to succeed in ways that pre-1970 were impossible?

Nov. 20           **Feminism and inclusivity**  
CMJT, ch. 13; Dana Kaplan, “Inclusivity as a Social Value” in *Contemporary American Judaism* (BB)

*Internet assignment:* browse <http://www.jew-feminist-resources.com> and do an ‘ethnography’ for the website (what is its goal, who is its audience, what does it link to, etc.)

Nov. 25           **The Jew Within: Jewish spirituality and new movements**  
*The Jew Within*, ch. 2 (“Sovereign Self”) and Conclusion; Dane Kaplan, “The Re-engagement with Spirituality” in *Contemporary American Judaism* (BB)

*Internet assignment:* search for “Jewish spirituality” and “Jewish Renewal” and bring to class at least 3 websites that relate to this topic and summarize them in your own words.

Nov. 27      **The returning Jew: *Ba'al teshuvah* movement, Outreach and Chabad**  
 Jack Wertheimer, [“The Outreach Revolution”](#) in *Commentary* April 2013; Steven Windmueller, [“Unpacking Chabad: Their Ten Core Elements for Success”](#); Adam Ferziger, [“Centered on Study: Typologies of the Community Kollel”](#) pp. 21-49

Dec. 2      **Judaism in Israel; Israel in the Mind of American Jews**  
 Shaul Kelner, *Tours that Bind* (selections) (BB); recommended: T. Sasson, [“From Mass Mobilization to Direct Engagement: American Jews’ Changing Relationship to Israel”](#)  
*Internet Assignment:* Look up articles on “March of the Living” and “Birthright.” What role does Israel play in the religious identity formation of American Jews?

Dec. 4      **Second site visit due; class discussion**

Dec. 9      **Conclusion**  
 Berger, *The Intentional Jew* (BB)

## **The Jewish Newspaper**

Anthropology of contemporary Judaism using Jewish newspapers: you will each receive a copy of The New York Jewish Week and a more local Jewish newspaper. Look over your two papers, and note:

- sorts of articles (news, editorial/opinion, human interest, politics, etc.)
- topics chosen
- types of advertisements (what are the Jewish readers buying, or interested in knowing about - how are they marketed? presented?)
- community events (either through ads, a calendar, or articles - what's happening in that Jewish community?)
- personals (if there are) - like classified

You are an anthropologist, so you have to have your eyes wide open to notice everything: look at the layout of the paper (what's on the front page, back page, etc.), how things are written (e.g., what's the opening 'hook' of an article), etc. Take special note of the differences or commonalities between the large Jewish community and the smaller Jewish community.

One of our goals is to discuss in groups what you observed, and imagining you are a future scholar that discovered these artifacts in an archive, formulate what claims you can reasonably make about early 21st century American Judaism based on the newspapers.

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Fall 2013

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Cell phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Year (Fresh/Soph/Jun/Sen) \_\_\_\_\_

Interest in taking this course \_\_\_\_\_

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Any information about yourself (background, previous courses) which would assist me in making this course more suitable and interesting to you \_\_\_\_\_

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