

NELC0330/ NELC6305/ RELS0335/ JWST0330

JEWISH POLITICAL THOUGHT & ACTION: Spring 2024

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M & F: 10:15-11:45 AM

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In the various identities that Jews have embraced, or been assigned, over time-- e.g., ethnic group, religion, landless nation, sovereign nation – they have generated political thought and manifested political agency.

Through close reading of primary sources in English translation, and through the viewing of films and documentaries, students will explore: conceptions of the scope and limits of Jewish political and legal authority; understandings of chosenness; messianism's relationship to political passivity & political agency; political uses of history; Jewish political activity under the rule of Christians and Muslims; the place of the Israelite's biblical polity in early modern ruminations on governance; advocates and opponents of Jewish civic Emancipation; 19th & 20th century attempts to redefine Jewish identity; religious, cultural and political Zionism prior to 1948; the Holocaust's changing place in Israeli culture & identity; contemporary messianic Zionism; debates over the compatibility of liberal democracy & Jewish identity in the state of Israel; the political leanings of contemporary American Jews. One class session will take place in the Rare Book Room of Van Pelt Library.

There are no prerequisites for this course—only your enthusiasm!

Course Materials

- Please procure a copy of *The Jew in the Modern World*, P. Mendes-Flohr & J. Reinharz, eds. There are many used copies for sale, Any edition is fine.
- Please bring a translation of the Hebrew Bible to class for Session

All other course materials are on the course CANVAS site under "Assignments". (Film/s will be sent to your PennBOX.) Please rely on the syllabus, and not on the CANVAS site when figuring out the sources to prepare for class. (Some sources are NOT on Canvas.)

Print out all pages of the assignment, and annotate them with your questions & comments prior to class. To save money, feel free to print multiple pages on a single sheet.

--NO TEXTING DEVICES ARE PERMITTED IN CLASS--

NO CLASSES ON APRIL 22nd & APRIL 29TH; LAST CLASS WILL BE FRI., APR. 26TH

An evening screening of "Schindler's List" (>3 hours!) will be scheduled in late March.

Course Objectives: By taking this class, you will:

- hone your ability to read a text/film closely, and to discern underlying agendas.
- gain familiarity with the contours of Jewish history, key personages, institutions & practices.
- come to appreciate the range of Jewish political perspectives & initiatives; there is rarely a single “Jewish” view.
- develop sensitivity to the historical, political, economic, regional and cross-cultural factors that shaped the development of Jewish political thought and action in disparate settings.
- come to understand the place of distinct expressions of Jewish thought and culture in the broader contexts of Europe, the US and the world as a whole.
- become sensitized to the ways that non-sovereign peoples have asserted political agency.
- gain an understanding of the global historical developments that have shaped the contemporary turmoil in the Middle East, and over the Middle East.
- engage in a research project of your choosing, digested your learning and craft an audio-visual presentation that maximizes its accessibility to others as well as its impact.

Requirements & Grading: Your course grade will be assessed based on these components:

- Class attendance and participation (25%)
- In each class session, present two questions/comments pertaining to the readings to spark discussion. Hand these in to me at the end of class. *Three “passes” over semester.* (20%)
- Two-group discussion (Session): You will meet in groups ahead of time to prepare response to pre-circulated prompts. (10%)
- Oral presentations:
- Due March 11th, at beginning of class: Essay on two films that you will view over your break
- Final project (30%)

Grading Scale

98–100: A+ | 94–97: A | 90–93: A-
87–89: B+ | 83–86: B | 80–82: B-
77–79: C+ | 73–76: C | 70–72: C-
66–69: D+ | 65–60: D

Class attendance and participation:

Since each seminar session will consist of a group discussion of the readings /viewings assigned for that day, with little lecturing on my part, your attendance, preparation, and active participation are crucial for the success of the course as well as for your success in it. Please complete the assigned readings before class, have them in front of you during class, and be prepared to discuss various points or questions they raise.

Absences:

If you are ill and cannot attend a class, please send me an email ahead of time. Your specific situation will help me determine the type of remedial arrangement to suggest in order to prevent you from falling behind in your coursework.

Wellbeing

If you have respiratory symptoms but are able to attend class, please mask yourself. If you are experiencing anxiety, please let me know by email and I will work together with you (privately) to see if any accommodations can be made to lessen the stress. If you have fallen behind in the readings or do not feel like participating in seminar discussions, it is better, if possible, to attend class than to miss it. Please send me an email before class to let me know that you are facing challenging circumstances.

Course Policies

Academic integrity: Students are expected to adhere to the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity in this course. The Pennbook contains our Code of Academic Integrity. These standards include the responsible use and citation of sources, as well as robust intellectual engagement with others in the academic conversations fostered by the course. For more information, please see: <https://catalog.upenn.edu/pennbook/code-of-academic-integrity/>

SYLLABUS

1) Jan.18: Review of Syllabus, Reading Primary Sources

- On reading a primary source

To guide your reading: According to Ex. 19:1-15, what sequence of events preceded the multisensory experience at Sinai? What danger is alluded to in Ex. 20:15-18? Read Ex. ch. 24 as if you are an anthropologist, and try to shed light on the cultural logic of the sequence of events. Cf. the remarks of Moses in Dt. 29-30 and those of Joshua in Josh 24. What do they have in common in content and function? In Ex. 18, is there any significance to the fact that the advice given by Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, comes from a non-Jew? Do you see any linkage between the topics appearing in Dt. 17? What provisions are made there for a future judicial system? What is the image of kingship in I Sam. 8?

To guide your reading: The Temple's destruction in 70 CE demanded a redefinition of Jews' relationship to God, and of Jewish identity in general. How did the rabbis emerge as Jewish authorities between the 4th and 6th centuries? What biblical prooftexts did they invoke, and what extra-biblical claims did they make to support their claim to authority? Why was the prophet Ezra seen as a proto-rabbi?

2) Jan. 22: What Category Fits the Jews? Authority in Bible & Rabbinic Tradition

Batnitsky, "Is Judaism a Religion?" (3 pp.)

Covenant: Ex., chap's 19, 20, 24; Dt. chaps 29-30; Joshua, chap. 24;

Human Authorities: Prophets, Judges, Kings: Ex. 18; Dt. 17; I Sam. chapter 8

Legitimations of Rabbinic Authority & Its Limitations --ESSAY DUE

Deuteronomy (Dt.) chap. 17; Dt., 32:11-14; Nehemiah, chaps 8-10.

“*Rabbinic Legitimations of Rabbinic Authority*”: Avot 1:1; *Babylonian Talmud*, Men. 29b; BM 59b.

Biale, “Sovereignty & Imperialism”, ONLY pp. 22-27

Biale, “The Law of the Kingdom is the Law”, pp. 54-57

To guide your reading:

3) Jan. 26 Notions of Jewish “Chosenness”: Mandate for Moral Mission or Inciter of Hatred?

-D. Biale, “Sovereignty & Imperialism in Antiquity”, ONLY 27-33

-Biblical verses: “A Kingdom of Priests”, and “Light Unto the Nations”

–“Jews as Chosen People” (accessed from Wikipedia, July 2017) 11 pp.

-J. Levenson, “Chosenness and Its Enemies”, 25-31.

To guide your reading: According to Ben Sasson, what political, economic and ideological factors fueled the great Jewish revolt against Rome? According to Nachman Ben Yehuda, how was Josephus's account of Masada's unheroic end transformed into a modern Israeli symbol of a Heroic "last stand"?

4) Jan. 29: Masada in History & Myth

“The Great Revolt”, in H.H. Ben Sasson, *History of the Jewish People*, ONLY 296-299; 302-303

"Masada" - via Wiki

Josephus Flavius, *Wars of the Jews*, chapter 7

Nachman Ben Yehuda, *Masada Myth*- “Introduction: The Research Puzzle” (24 pp)

1969 IDF swearing-in ceremony at Masada: [https://jfc.org.il/en/news_journal/59633-2/97927-2/Links to an external site.](https://jfc.org.il/en/news_journal/59633-2/97927-2/Links%20to%20an%20external%20site)

To guide your reading: Does the large scale Jewish perception of Bar Kochba as the Messiah shed any light on the context in which Jesus of Nazareth rose to prominence? What were some of the religious and social conquest of Rome's suppression of the Bar Kochba Revolt? How did the defeat of the Bar Kochba revolt against Rome shape the rabbinic interpretation of the Three Oaths? Zerubavel points out that the image of Bar Kochba underwent significant reframing within early Zionist culture. How was this accomplished?

5) Feb. 2: Two Framings of Bar Kohba Revolt: Aversion to Messianism & Israeli Heroism:

HH Ben Sasson, *History of the Jewish People*, 330-335.

Cassius Dio on Bar Kokhba, 2 pp.

The Three Oaths of the Song of Songs

D. Novak, "Law of the State" on the Three Oaths, p. 94, last par.- 100, 1st par.

Y. Zerubavel, "Bar Kochba in Israeli Culture", 279-297.

6) Feb. 5: Two Group Discussion – Prompts to be pre-circulated

To guide your reading: For Jews of the First Temple period, "Messiah" referred to a military leader, the anointed king of Israel. By the end of the Second Temple period, the concept had metamorphosed into a spiritual savior who would usher in the eschaton. How did this happen? What factors facilitated the world-wide perception of Shabbetai Zevi as the Messiah in the 1660's? What cultural message did SZ's "strange deeds" convey? What factors contributed to the perception of the 7th Lubavitcher Rebbe as the Messiah? How is belief in an individual's messianism sustained after his death, or his conversion to another faith?

7): Feb. 9: Jewish Messianism in Theory & Practice

"Messiah" from *Encyclopaedia Judaica*- p. 1 through top of p. 5.

D. Halperin, Introduction, *Sabbetai Zevi: Testimonies to a Fallen Messiah*, 1-19;

Baruch of Arrezzo, ONLY pp. 38-42, i.e., "Strange Deeds"; "The Prophesying"; "Messiah Arrested",

W. Shaffir, "Jewish Messianism, Lubavitch Style: An Interim Report (1993), 115-127.

"Is/Was the 7th Lubavitcher Rebbe the Messiah?" Via WIKI

To guide your reading: Why were medieval Christian rulers willing to tolerate the presence of Jews in their lands? What were the terms under which Jews could be resident? Why were Jews expelled from various lands, and sometimes recalled? What measures of self-governance did Jews possess in medieval and early modern Christian lands? What was the strongest punitive power that Jewish leaders could impose on members of their communities, and how effective was it?

8) Feb. 12: TWO GROUPS: Sovereign, Church, Jewish Tradition Mold Jewish Legal & Political Conditions

Katz, "The Problem & Its Terms of Reference: Position of the Jews", pp. 3-12

Speyer Privilege, 1084

Charter of Jews of the Duchy of Austria, 1244

Royal Grants to Jews of Barcelona 1241-1271

"Expulsions of Jews" (1 p.)

Taqqanah (= "Ordinance"), Aragon 1354

Judah al-Barceloni, Documents of appointment and ordination

Writ of excommunication, Amsterdam, 1656 in *JMW* p. 62.

Council of the Four Lands, Jaroslaw, 1739

To guide your reading: *What were the different causes for which Jews raised money for Jews outside their own region? What arguments did Menasseh ben Israel present to the British Parliament in petitioning for the readmission of Jews to England?*

9) Feb. 16: PreModern Jewish "Global" Solidarity: Acts of Trans-Regional Political Mobilization

1648 Ransom of Captives

Menasseh b. Israel & English Debate over Readmission of Jews, 4 pp.

Menasseh ben Israel, "How Profitable the Nation of the Jews Are" in *JMW*

"*Haluqah* System" in *EJ* (8 pp.)

??-M. Lehmann, "Rabbinic Emissaries from Palestine & Making a Modern Jewish Diaspora", **ONLY 1229- 1233, 2nd par.; p. 1241, last 3 par's.- end.**

To guide your reading: *SAVE COMMENTS FOR NEXT CLASS SESSION!*

10) Feb. 19: Early Modern Christian Interest in Israelite Polity - RARE BOOK ROOM!

→ Meet in Van Pelt Library 6th Floor

About Spinoza's *Theological Political Treatise* in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

To guide your reading:

11) Feb. 23: Spinoza's Theological Political Treatise

Preface to *TPT*; chap. 3

To guide your reading:

12) Feb. 26: Road to Jewish Civic Emancipation

- Rudavsky, "Emancipation and Its Aftermath", 79-93.
- von Dohm, "Concerning the Amelioration of the Civic Status of the Jews", *JMW*, 27-34
- Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789) in *JMW*, p. 123.
- Debate on Eligibility of Jews for Citizenship, in *JMW*, pp. 123-25.
- Instructions to Jewish Notables, *JMW*, pp 149-150.
- Answers to Napoleon by French Assembly of Jewish Notables, *JMW*, pp. 152-156.

To guide your reading:

13) Mar. 1: Emancipation's Impact on Jewish Identity → *FILM ESSAY PROMPT*

- "Emerging Patterns of Religious Adjustment", *JMW*, 177-181.
- Batnitsky, "Is Judaism a Religion?" (3 pp.)
- "The Question of Patriotism" (1844), *JMW*, 201-202
- "Hebrew as Language of Jewish Prayer" (1845), *JMW*, 202-205.
- "Question of Messianism" (1845), *JMW*, 207-208.

- Rachel Varnhagen, "O How Painful to have been Born a Jewess" (1795), *JMW*, 808.
- Abraham Mendelssohn, "Why I Have Raised You as a Christian" (1820), *JMW*, 805-806
- Heinrich Heine, "Ticket of Admission to European Culture" (1823; 1854), *JMW*, 806.
- Ludwig Boerne, "Because I am a Jew, I Love Freedom" (1832), *JMW*, 807.
- Theodor Lessing, "Jewish Self-Hatred" (1930), *JMW*, 820-822.

To guide your reading & viewing:

14) Mar. 11: ORAL PRESENTATIONS: Pre-WWII 'Anti-Semitism' & 'the Jewish Problem'

- Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Problem” (1844) in *JMW*, pp. 300-302.
- On the term “Antisemitism”, 2pp.
- Wilhelm Marr, “Victory of Judaism Over Germandom” (1879), *JMW* 306-307.
- Karl Eugen Duehring, “Question of the Jews is a Question of Race” (1881), *JMW* 303.
- Ernst Renan, “Judaism: Race or Religion? (1883), *JMW*, 309-310.
- Joseph Stalin, “The Jews are Not a Nation”(1917), in *JMW*, pp. 409-411.
- “Evseksiia”, via YIVO Encyclopedia, 2 pp.
- Yevseksiya, “Liquidation of Jewish Bourgeois Instruments” (1920’s), in *JMW*, pp. 412-414.
- >Excerpt from Soviet film,“ Seekers of Happiness”- Grandmother’s speech, at end

To guide your reading:

15) Mar. 11: Breaking Point for Russian Jews: Search for New Solutions & Identities

-?Kishinev Pogrom, via Wikipedia (SKIM)

-Massacre of the Jews of Kishinev, in *JMW*, p. 389.

-H. N. Bialik, “In the City of Slaughter”

-Dubnow, *Doctrine of Jewish Nationalism*, ONLY pp. 86-99.

-The Bund, “Decisions on Nationality Question”, in *JMW*, pp. 399-401.

--Proclamation of the Jewish Labor Bund, after Kishinev Pogrom

-Bundist Anthem with visuals from non-East European struggles of Jewish Labor Activists

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5l544PzUkP4>Links to an external site.

To guide your reading:

16) March 15: International Rescue of East European Jews, Pre-1948 →FILM ESSAY DUE

-Mordecai Manuel Noah, “Proclamation to the Jews (1825)” in *JMW*, pp. 512-514

-The Bethlehem Judea Colony, South Dakota (1883), in *JMW*, pp. 536-37.

-Israel Zangwill, “The Jewish Territorial Organization” (1905), in *JMW*, pp. 624-25.

-Israel Zangwill, Pamphlet of *Jewish Territorial Organization*

-Jacob Schiff, "The Galveston Project," *JMW*, pp. 548-49.

-I. Troen, "Organizing Rescue of Jews in the Modern Period", ONLY pages 6-13

To guide your reading:

17) Mar. 18: Minority Rights and Nationalisms in the Early 20th Century

To guide your reading:

18) Mar. 22: ORAL PRESENTATIONS: Political, Cultural & Religious Zionism, Pre 1948 & Post 1967:

-Pinsker, "Auto-Emancipation," in Hertzberg, *Zionist Idea*,

-Herzl, "The Jewish State," in Hertzberg, *Zionist Idea*, SELECTIONS

-Ahad HaAm, "The Jewish State and the Jewish Problem," in Hertzberg, *Zionist Idea*

-Rabbi Yehudah Alkalai, "The Third Redemption," in Hertzberg, *Zionist Idea*, pp. 103-107.

-Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer, "Seeking Zion," in Hertzberg, *Zionist Idea*, pp. 109-114

-Rav Abraham Isaac Kook on Zionism, 3 pp

To guide your reading:

19) Mar. 25: Perceptions of Jews as All-Powerful

-Protocols of the Elders of Zion-- about

-Hitler, "Race and People", *Mein Kampf*, MARKED PASSAGES

-Bauer, "Myth of Jewish Power: Beyond the Balfour Declaration:"

-Bernstein, Discussion of Biale, *Power & Powerlessness in Jewish History*

To guide your reading& viewing:

20) Mar. 29: The Place of the Holocaust in American and Israeli Jewish Identity

- Idit Gil,
- On Adolf Eichman
- Clip from Eichmann Trial, Jerusalem,1961
- S. Magid, “Holocaust & Jewish Identity in America”, **ON particularism vs universalism**
- R. Sheramy, “From Auschwitz to Jerusalem: re-enacting Jewish history on the March of the Living”
- Bar Mitzvah Twinning, *Yad VaShem*
- R. Alter, “Deformations of the Holocaust”, Selections (1 page)

To guide your reading

21) Apr. 1: Messianic Religious Zionism Today: Jews and Christians

-D. Newman. “Impact of Settler Movement on Israeli Politics & Society”, **ONLY THRU p. 203**

-A. Ravitzky, “Roots of Kahanism”

<On Evangelical support for Israel>

To guide your reading:

22) Apr. 5: Political Inclinations of American Jews

-Liebman “The Ties that Bind: Jewish Support for the Left in the US”, ONLY pp. 335-353

-Jonathan Sarna, “Church-State Dilemmas of American Jews”, ONLY Intro and Section IV

- E. Hanau, “Pew: 75% American Orthodox Jews Vote Republican”, *JTA* 5-21

To guide your reading:

23) Apr. 8: The Historical Liberalism of American Jews

To guide your reading:

24) Apr. 12: US Jews’ Relationship to the State of Israel Today

25) Apr. 15: <TBD>

26) Apr. 19: STUDENT PRESENTATIONS, A

27) Apr. 22: STUDENT PRESENTATIONS, B

28) Apr. 26: Course Wrap Up