

RELI-370 Judaism

Description of Course

Should we say “Judaism” or “JudaismS”? During the more than 2,500 years of Jewish history, Judaism has been defined as a religion, a civilization, a nationality, an ethnicity, and a culture. In order to sort through all the aspects that make up these collective Judaisms, this course is organized around a comparative examination of Judaism as a regional and global religious system over the last twenty-five-hundred years, but with the bulk of analysis confined to the years since 1945. Chronologically, the course begins with the biblical roots of Judaism in the Ancient Near East, followed by the formation of the Jewish diaspora around the Greek-speaking Mediterranean world and continues through the present. Students will become familiar with the many iterations of Judaism across the globe, including Sephardic, Ashkenazi, Mizrahi, African, and the many varieties of post-Enlightenment Judaism that proliferated in the Europe and the United States. In each geographic and chronological context, students will explore several themes: sacred texts, beliefs, and ritual activity; holidays; values and ethics; and communal institutions and structures.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Specific Learning Outcomes related to Mason Core Global Contexts and Just Societies.

Students will be able to:

1. Students will be able to identify and explain how Judaism developed as a series of global systems organized around exile, migration, trade, and intellectual exchange (**Global Contexts Outcome 1**).
2. Students will use a historical approach to understand that Judaism is diverse because of the experiences of Jews in vastly different global contexts who encountered different cultural, theological, and political challenges (**Global Contexts Outcome 2**).
3. Conversely, students will also identify the concepts and key terms within Judaism that played a part in shaping the Western world (**Global Contexts Outcome 2**), such as monotheism, ethnicity, peoplehood, holiness, purity, covenant, law, and justice, and use these terms to engage meaningfully with their peers about global issues facing Jews and Jewish communities (e.g., the place of Israel in contemporary geopolitics) (**Just Societies Outcome 1**).
4. Students will also discuss global issues related to justice and equality (e.g., racism, reproductive rights, immigration, genocide, antisemitism, Islamophobia) and the ways in which diverse Jewish communities (Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, Hasidic, Reconstructionist, secular) have addressed them using Jewish values and ethics (**Just Societies Outcome 2**).
5. Students will recognize how one’s own positionality affects one’s understanding of what Judaism is within a globally interdependent world. Students will apply this understanding to identify the persistence of antisemitism in today’s world and analyze proposed solutions to this problem. Students will also examine the

relationship between anti-Judaism, antisemitism and anti-Zionism (Global Contexts Outcome 3).

Required Texts

- Segal, Eliezer. *Introducing Judaism*. New York: Routledge, 2009
- Raphael, Marc Lee. *Judaism in America*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.
- Richard Hull, *Jews and Judaism in African History* (Markus Weiner, 2009)
- Sarah Stein, *Family Papers: A Sephardic Journey through the Twentieth Century* (Farrar, Strous, and Giroux, 2019)
- Deborah Lipstadt, *Antisemitism: Here and Now* (Schocken, 2019)
- Ari Shavit, *My Promised Land: The Triumph and Tragedy of Israel* (Random House, paperback 2015)
- Other course readings will be available in pdf form on Canvas.

Assignments and Grading

Short Writing assignments (6)	60% (10% each)
Class participation/attendance	20%
Final Paper	20%

1. Attendance, Participation and Reading – all three are key components to having a valuable learning experience. I will be taking attendance at every class session, and participation grades will reflect attendance records.

Class discussion will take up a significant portion of each class session. Participation is also dependent on you doing the assigned reading before class. See the schedule below for reading assignments. Reading assignments should be completed by the corresponding class date.

2. Short Writing Assignments – You will be responsible for 6 short writing assignments (2-3 pages) that are designed to encourage you to extend your learning about Judaism beyond what we discuss in class. I will hand out further individual instructions for each.

- **Who is a Jew?** Solomon, *Judaism: A Very Short Introduction*; WRITE: What does it mean for someone to be a Jew? How does Solomon answer that question? How would you answer that question?
- **Why Antisemitism?** What are Luther's complaints against the Jews? How do they compare to the complaints raised against the Jews in Strasbourg during the Black Death?
- **American Judaism.** Describe the distinctive place of the following movements on the landscape of contemporary Judaism: Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, Reconstructionist, Hasidic, Secular. Give concrete examples, either in terms of ritual or ethics. Discuss the places where these

movements are most prevalent. Explain which of these branches of Judaism corresponds most closely to your own position in the American culture (you can consider geography, socio-economics, race, gender roles, values, etc.).

- **Zionism and Antisemitism.** What does Herzl propose as the solution to antisemitism? Did the creation of the state of Israel solve the problem of antisemitism as Herzl predicted according to Shavit? Assess recent developments in Israeli history in light of your own values and ethics.
- **Jewishness and Blackness.** Read Hull, chapters 5-6. Compare the experiences of Jews in twentieth-century Africa, United States and Israel to the experience of African Americans in the US.
- **A Global Jewish Family.** Choose two of the chapters in Stein ("Writers," "Nationals," "Emigrés," "Captives," "Survivors," "Familiars," "Descendants"). What were the primary factors that explained the triumphs and setbacks of the Levy family in various global contexts across the span of the twentieth century?

3. Final Paper - Using Deborah Lipstadt's *Antisemitism: Here and Now*, assess the problem of contemporary antisemitism in two different countries, explaining the particular circumstances and challenges. What do you think could help these two societies transcend the challenge of antisemitism?

1. The first step is to select two countries. The United States is an obvious choice because of its relatively large Jewish situation, but there are many possibilities.

2. Drawing on Deborah Lipstadt's definition (though you do not need to agree with it), be certain that you can explain what antisemitism is.

3. Do research. Identify at least five "print" sources (start early, in case you have to order things from other libraries), either books or scholarly articles. Even if you access them as .pdf's, scholarly articles still count as "print" sources. Scholarly articles are essays that appear in academic journals, most often having passed through some sort of peer review or other vetting process. You may also use additional sources that you find electronically, but spend some time assessing the source of the information before using it. Check with me if questions arise. Include a works cited page with your essay. **If you disregard this guideline and rely only on pages and other sources you locate on the web, the highest possible grade for this assignment will be a "C."**

4. Write a six-page essay summarizing your findings. The paper can be extended by one page, but not more. It must be double-spaced, with one-inch margins, in 12 point font.

Here are some particular guidelines to follow as you write:

- The paper must have proper citations—in either footnote or parenthetical author and page number format—for both direct quotations and specific facts or ideas.

- The paper must include a thesis statement that summarizes your basic argument/conclusion and structures the essay.

- Your essay must be your own original work, composed without assistance from others (in the class or not) or undocumented sources. Please see the university plagiarism policy for more details.

Course Schedule

Date	Topic	Reading
Mon, Jan 15	Setting the Stage – Modernity vs. Tradition? East vs. West?	Raphael, 1-12; Segal, 1-6
Weds, Jan 17	Where does “tradition” come from? Part 1: Ancient Israel as a People	Raphael, 16-21 (skip “Jewish Law”) Segal, 11-20
Mon, Jan 22	Where does “tradition” come from? Part 2: Ancient Israelite Law	Segal, 21-38
Weds, Jan 24	Where does “tradition” come from? Part 3: Rabbinic Literature	Raphael, 20-21 (“Jewish Law”) Segal, 40-57
Mon, Jan 29	The Jewish Diaspora: Jews among the Empires	2 Kings 25 Hull, <i>Jews and Judaism in African History</i> , preface and chapter one
Weds, Jan 31	The Roots of European Antisemitism	Gospel of John 19 (King James Version) Accounts of the Jews and the Black Death, 1348-1349, https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/jewish/1348-jewsblackdeath.asp Martin Luther on the Jews (.pdf on Blackboard)
Mon, Feb 5	Jews under Muslim Rule	Hull, chapter two Qur’an, “The Feast,” excerpts (.pdf)
Weds, Feb 7	From Germany to the US: The Enlightenment and the Roots of the Reform Movement	Raphael, 39-56, 64-67 (top), 150-160 Segal, 106-117
Mon, Feb 12	From Eastern Europe to the US: Hasidism, Ultra Orthodoxy and Modern Orthodoxy	Raphael, 24-26, 56-60, 67-68, 144-146, 160-165 Segal, 118-121, 126-127
Weds, Feb 14	Judaism in Africa	Hull, chapters 3-4
Mon, Feb 19	Conservative Judaism, an American middle path	Raphael, 60-64, 142-144, 165-167 Segal 124-126
Weds, Feb 21	Reconstructionist Judaism: Judaism as a Civilization	Raphael, 68-69, 140-142, 167-169

Mon, Feb 26	Secular Jews	Rabbi Eric Yoffie, "The Self-Delusions of Secular Jews," <i>Huffington Post</i> (pdf) Adam Chandler, "Confessions of an Unaffiliated Jew" <i>Tablet Magazine</i> (pdf) Adam Chandler, "Is There a Tent for Secular and Cultural Jews?" <i>Tablet Magazine</i> (pdf) Jonathan Zimmerman, "An Atheist's Synagogue Search," <i>Tablet Magazine</i> (pdf)
Weds, Feb 28	Places of Worship: From the Jerusalem Temple to Diaspora Synagogues	Raphael, 97-108 Segal, 245-255
Mon, March 12	Forms of Worship: From Israelite Sacrifice to Prayer	Raphael, 21-24 Segal, 266-269
Weds, March 14	Marriage and Divorce	Raphael, 36 Segal, 299-301 Eddy Portnoy, "My Yiddishe Divorce," in <i>Bad Rabbi: And Other Strange but True Stories from the Yiddish Press</i> (pdf) Marilyn Cooper, "Is Inter-marriage Good for the Jews?" <i>Moment Magazine</i> (2017), (pdf) **read at least four of the responses**
Mon, March 19	God and Social Justice	Biblical text of Amos Raphael, 14-16, 26-27 Segal, 137-top of 141; 153-top of 158; 160
Weds, March 21	The High Holidays and Repentance	Raphael, 27-30 Segal, 285-288 Sholem Aleichem, "A Yom Kippur Scandal" (pdf)
Mon, March 26	Holidays and the Challenge of Assimilation	Raphael, 31-32 Segal, 289-290 Jeffrey Shandler and Aviva Weintraub, "'Santa, Shmanta': Greeting Cards for the December Dilemma," <i>Material Religion</i> (2007) (pdf)
Weds, March 28	Shabbat, Work and Rest	Raphael, 34-35 Segal, 279-280 Excerpt from Abraham Joshua Heschel, <i>The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man</i> (pdf) Excerpt from Blu Greenberg, "Shabbat," 25-34 (pdf)

Mon, April 2	Passover: Conceptualizing Slavery and Freedom	Raphael, 32 (“Pesach”) Segal, 280-283 Irving Greenberg, “Judaism as an Exodus Religion: Passover,” from <i>The Jewish Way</i> , pp. 34-49 (pdf)
Weds, April 4	The Holocaust and Antisemitism	Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin, “Why Jew-Hatred is Unique,” in <i>Why the Jews?: The Reason for Antisemitism</i> , 3-13 (pdf) Elie Wiesel, <i>Night</i> , excerpts (.pdf)
Mon, April 9	The Promised Land, Zionism and the State of Israel	Segal 173-178 Raphael, 129- top of 133 Theodore Herzl, <i>The Jewish State</i> (.pdf) Shavit, introduction and chapters 1-9
Weds, April 11	Jewish Food and Ethnic Identity	Segal, 269-271 Gaye Tuchman and Harry G. Levine, “Safe Treyf,’ New York Jews and Chinese Food,” 1-23 (pdf)
Mon, April 16	Jewish Ethics and Values: Queering Judaism	Segal, 259-265 Vanessa Ochs, “Ten Jewish Sensibilities,” <i>Sh’ma Journal</i> (2003) (pdf) Isaac Bashevis Singer, “Yentl the Yeshiva Boy” (pdf)
Weds, April 18	Jewish Ethics and Values: Judaism and Environmentalism	Segal, 226-234 David Vogel, “How Green is Judaism? Exploring Jewish Environmental Ethics,” <i>Business Ethics Quarterly</i> 11 (2001) (pdf)
Mon, April 23	Jewish Ethics and Values: Judaism and Reproductive Rights	Fred Rosen, “Quality and Sanctity of Life” in <i>Biomedical Ethics and Jewish Law</i> (2001) (pdf)
Mon, April 30	Jewish Ethics and Values: Judaism and Sexual Ethics	Daniel Boyarin, “Dialectics of Desire: ‘The Evil Instinct is Very Good,’” in <i>Jewish Explorations of Sexuality</i> , ed. Jonathan Magonet (Providence: Berghahn Books): 27-38. (pdf) Elliot Rose Kukla, “Created by the Hand of Heaven”: Sex, Love, and the Androgynos” in <i>The Passionate Torah</i> , ed. Danya Ruttenberg (2009) (pdf)
Weds, May 2	Jewish Humor: Coping with Persecution	Ruth R. Wisse, “The Best Medicine,” in <i>No Joke: Making Jewish Humor</i> , 1-28 (pdf)

