

JST2930/RELI2600 Jews, Judaism, Jewishness

Instructor: Yaniv Feller

Meeting Times: Tuesdays, 3:00-4:55pm; Thursdays, 4:05-4:55pm

Location: Jewish Studies Seminar Room

Office Hours: Thursdays 2pm or by appointment: <https://calendly.com/yfeller-1/30min>

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 thematic and 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: This course will help you:

- 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:

1. Michael Brenner, *A Short History of the Jews* (Princeton, 2012) ISBN: 978-0691154978
2. All other readings are on Canvas.

Methods of Evaluation

Active Participation (12%): 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.

Responses (6 x 3% = 18%): 12-font, double-space, one or two pages. The main structure of the class is composed of seven units (I-VII). You are required to submit **six responses**, but only one per unit. This gives you flexibility in your schedule. If you submit for all seven, the six highest grades would count.

A response should consist of the following elements: a) a one or two paragraph summary of the main argument of the text; b) an observation about its methodology or a critique of its content. Remember that critique is not simply a disagreement, but an argument about potential flaws in logic, contrasting it with other readings etc.; c) a question you were left with after the careful reading and critique.

Date: You are required to submit the response **by 9am the day of the class**. This would allow me to understand what you found interesting or difficult and adjust the class accordingly. Since there is great flexibility in terms of the deadlines, no late responses will be accepted.

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: October 11, in class.

Jews and Others (20%): 3-4 pages. Jews have often lived as a minority, and needed to engage other minorities as well as the majority culture. For this assignment, you would receive a choice of prompts that would require to analyze a case-study of this phenomenon with clear instructions on how to do so. Date: November 22, 23:55.

Final Paper Proposal (5%): 3 pages. This is your chance to explore some of the themes we have learned throughout the semester and develop new ideas. You will provide your research questions, tentative description, and a bibliography of five items (based at least in part on the syllabus). Creative projects would be considered but be sure to talk to me about it in advance before submitting the proposal. Date: November 29, 23:55

Final Paper (25%): 8-10 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. Date: Based on the exam schedule

Bonus Events (1% each, up to three times): Throughout the semester, a Google document will be updated with events of interest happening around campus. To get the bonus you have to attend the event and submit a one or two pages response summarizing the key argument/plot, raise an observation, for example by connecting it to the class materials, and a question you were left with after the event.

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

Classroom Etiquette: This class does not espouse, promote, advance, inculcate, or compel students to believe concepts concerning race, gender, national origin as listed in Florida House Bill 7. We, as students and faculty, have a shared responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, color, culture, religion, creed, politics, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity and gender expression, age, ability, and nationality. Unauthorized recording of the class is prohibited. It goes against these values and the fostering of a community of learners.

Religion is a sensitive topic for many people. You may come from a faith tradition, or you may not. Everybody is welcome in this class. Our shared focus is on fostering critical learning and emphatic listening. We are here together to learn more, so any question that comes from an honest desire to learn is a good question. Our goal is to explore and learn, but not to judge either each other's traditions, or ignorance about them. You do not ever need to volunteer anything about your own beliefs, traditions, or practices (or lack thereof) but if you do, make sure that you speak in the first person, thereby making clear that you are representing yourself and not an entire tradition in the discussion.

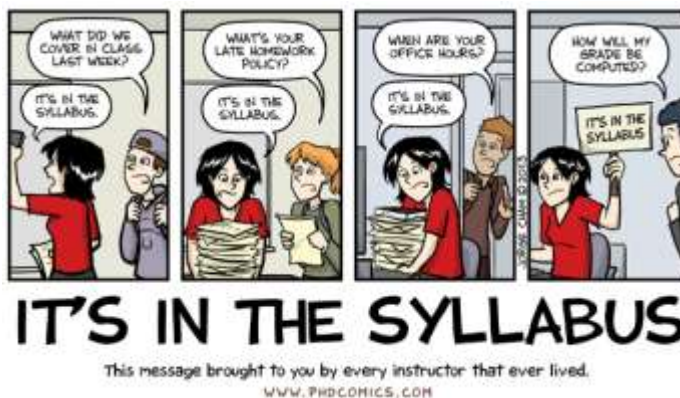
Academic Integrity: UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The Honor Code (<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conducthonor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. When in doubt, come talk to me beforehand in order not to make mistakes.

Accessibility and Accommodations: Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center by visiting <https://disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started/>. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester. Do not hesitate to talk to me in person and I will do my best to assist.

Counseling and Wellness Center: Taking care of your mental and physical wellbeing is very important. The University of Florida has great resources and people to help you with any

struggles you might have in this regard. Please see <https://counseling.ufl.edu/> or come talk to me if you have any questions about who to contact in this regard.

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

Introduction

Thursday, August 25: Syllabus

I. The Hebrew Bible

Tuesday, August 30: 1: Brenner, 1-17; Hebrew Bible: Gen. 12; Gen. 22:1-19; Ex. 1-12

Thursday, September 1: 1. Brenner, 18-29; 2. Christine Hayes, “The Prophetic Response to History: Amos as Paradigm,” *Introduction to the Bible*, 248-262

Tuesday, September 6: Visit to the Judaica Library and meeting with Dr. Rebecca Jefferson.

Meet five minutes before class at the entrance to the West Library.

Thursday, September 8: Brenner 31-53

II. Prayer and Practice

Tuesday, September 13: Aaron Tapper, “Laws,” *Judaisms*.

Thursday, September 15: Brenner, 55-67

Tuesday, September 20: Ruth Langer, “Jewish Worship and Liturgy,” *The Cambridge Guide to Jewish History, Religion, and Culture*, 337-356

Thursday, September 22: Amnon of Mainz, “U-netanneh Tokef”; Gotthard Deutsch, “Amnon of Mayence.”

Tuesday, September 27: **Rosh Hashanah (NO CLASS)**

Thursday, September 29: Ezekiel 1:1-26; Hava Tirosh-Samuels, “Jewish Mysticism,” *The Cambridge Guide to Jewish History, Religion, and Culture*, 399-423

Tuesday, October 4: **Yom Kippur (NO CLASS)**

III. People of the Book?

Thursday, October 6: David Nirenberg, “Early Christianity: The Road to Emmaus, the Road to Damascus,” *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition*, 48-86

Tuesday, October 11: Midterm *Agggghhh***

Thursday, October 13: Brenner, 69-93

Tuesday, October 18: James Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History*, chapter 1.

IV. Encounters with Modernity and the Rise of Denominations

Wed., Oct. 19: **MAKE UP CLASS**: Screening of American Birth, 7pm at the Hippodrome

Thursday, October 20: Brenner, 151-187

Tuesday, October 25: **NO CLASS**

Wednesday October 26, 4:30pm: **MAKE UP CLASS**: Josh Lambert, The Jewish Literary Mafia (yes, mafia!)

Thursday, October 27: **NO CLASS**

Tuesday, November 1: 1. Brenner, 167-188; 2. Protocols of the Rabbinical Assembly in Frankfurt (1845).

V. In the New World

Thursday, November 3: Brenner, 209-222

Tuesday, November 8: 1. Brenner, 223-254; 2. James Baldwin, “Negros are Anti-Semitic because They Are Anti-White” (1967); 3. Norman Podhoretz, “My Negro Problem – And Ours” (1965)

Thursday, November 10: David Myers and Nomi Stolzenberg, *American Shtetl*, 1-27.

Tuesday, November 15: **GUEST LECTURE**: David Myers and Nomi Stolzenberg (Dauer Hall)

VI. Old-New Land

Thursday, November 17: Brenner, 255-272

Tuesday, November 22: **NO CLASS** (research time for Final Paper Proposal).

Assignment Deadline

Thursday, November 24: **Thanksgiving**

VII. Genocide and Its Aftermath

Tuesday, November 29: Brenner, 319-348

Final Paper Proposal

Thursday, December 1: Brenner, 349-388

Tuesday, December 6: Concluding discussion: Pew Survey