

Introduction to Jewish Studies
JWST/WCL 2380
Dr. Caryn Tamber-Rosenau
T/Th 2:30-4 p.m.
Roy Cullen 105

Office: Agnes Arnold Hall 446

E-mail: cmtamber@central.uh.edu

Phone: 713-743-9341

Office hours: Wednesdays 3-4 p.m., Thursdays 1-2 p.m., or by appointment (Please do not hesitate to visit my office to discuss the course, questions you have, assignments, etc.)



Images, clockwise from top left: A close-up of a panel on the Arch of Titus in Rome depicting the Romans sacking Jerusalem and looting the Jewish Temple in 70 C.E. (Image source: biblicalarchaeology.org); Jewish labor activists protest against child labor in New York in the early 20th century (Image source: jewishlaborcommittee.org); Ethiopian Jews move to Israel in 2013 (Image source: NPR); the main gate of the Auschwitz death camp, with its deceptive legend “Work Will Make You Free” (Image source: U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum).

Course description:

The history of the Jewish people is in many ways also the history of the world. Judaism is thousands of years old, bearing witness to much of recorded history, and Jews have lived in nearly every land in the world. In this course, we will explore the sweep of Jewish history from biblical origins to the present day, exploring persistent themes such as ethnicity, religious pluralism, multiple identities, diaspora, in-group/out-group boundaries, and persecution. At several points in the course, we will examine Jewish history for resonances with the history of other groups.

Course goals:

- To gain an understanding of Jewish history from ancient times to the present day;
- To be able to speak and write knowledgeably about that history;
- To understand how the public speaks about Judaism, Jews, and Jewish history;
- To be able to use these skills to understand broader questions of ethnicity, religious pluralism, multiple identities, diaspora, in-group/out-group boundaries, and persecution, both historically and in the present day.

Required book:

Raymond P. Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People: From Legendary Times to Modern Statehood*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Additional readings will be posted on Blackboard.

Course requirements and policies:

1. Attendance is required at all sessions. If you must miss class, please *let me know in advance* if possible; it will be your responsibility to make up work that you have missed.
2. You are entitled to two absences, no questions asked, without your attendance and participation grade suffering. Further absences will affect your grade unless they are excused. Examples of excused absences include holidays, personal illness, or family emergency. Documentation of absences may be requested by the professor for them to count as excused.
3. This class is discussion- and participation-based. Therefore, except in cases of serious extenuating circumstances, students missing more than one-quarter of the total number of class sessions will be ineligible for a passing grade in the course.
4. Please bring assigned readings to class in book form, print-out, or as a PDF on your computer or tablet. **Reading assignments should be completed in advance of the session for which they are listed.**
5. Please come to class having read and annotated all assigned readings. This is a seminar-style class that will involve discussion, and you are expected to make valuable and

respectful contributions. Please come with one or two questions to ask about each reading. Class participation will affect your final grade.

6. For every class session, I have provided below a few questions for you to consider while doing the readings for that day. I hope that this will focus your time and allow you to get more out of both the readings and class sessions.
7. It is impossible to pay attention and participate if you are checking your e-mail or on Facebook (and it's also incredibly rude), so I ask that you refrain from using your computer, tablet, or phone for any non-class-related purposes during class time. Failure to honor this rule will result in a lowered grade.
8. In between class sessions, I will occasionally need to communicate important information to the class via e-mail. It is your responsibility to check your university e-mail regularly.
9. There will be short quizzes given regularly. We will discuss how often and how many as a class.
10. Students will write short response papers (2 pages each) about the films *Constantine's Sword*, *Denial*, and *My So-Called Enemy*, all of which we will watch in class together. For each film, I will give you a set of response questions to choose from. The response papers will be due on TurnItIn.
11. Students will write a final paper on a Jewish Studies topic of their choice. There will be interim deadlines for the paper's topic, bibliography, and annotated bibliography. The final paper will be due on TurnItIn on **December 7**.
12. There will be opportunities to earn extra credit points by attending events on campus and/or completing a bonus assignment.
13. This syllabus is subject to change. I will notify you if I make changes.

Grading:

Quizzes: 30%

Film response papers: 30%

Final paper: 20%

Attendance and participation: 20%

Grading for assignments will be on the following scale. Please note that the highest *final course grade* the University permits is A.

97-100: A+	77-79: C+
93-96: A	73-76: C
90-92: A-	70-72: C-
87-89: B+	67-69: D+
83-86: B	63-66: D
80-82: B-	60-62: D-
	<60: F

Special accommodations for students with disabilities:

To receive reasonable accommodations for a disability at the University of Houston, students are to register with the Center for Students with Disabilities. If the CSD has granted you accommodations, please make an appointment with me to discuss how we can work together to make sure you receive those accommodations in this class.

CAPS Statement:

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) can help students who are having difficulties managing stress, adjusting to college, or feeling sad and hopeless. You can reach CAPS (www.uh.edu/caps) by calling 713-743-5454 during and after business hours for routine appointments or if you or someone you know is in crisis. No appointment is necessary for the “Let’s Talk” program, a drop-in consultation service at convenient locations and hours around campus. http://www.uh.edu/caps/outreach/lets_talk.html

Academic integrity:

Students at the University of Houston are required to adhere to the university’s academic honesty policy. If you are unsure how the honesty policy applies to a given assignment in this course, please ask me. I have no tolerance for cheating (including plagiarism) and will refer *all* violations to the appropriate officials. According to [plagiarism.org](http://www.plagiarism.org), plagiarism includes:

- a. “turning in someone else’s work as your own
- b. copying words or ideas from someone else without giving credit
- c. failing to put a quotation in quotation marks
- d. giving incorrect information about the source of a quotation
- e. changing words but copying the sentence structure of a source without giving credit
- f. copying so many words or ideas from a source that it makes up the majority of your work, whether you give credit or not” (<http://www.plagiarism.org/plagiarism-101/what-is-plagiarism>)

Schedule:Week 1

Tuesday, August 21: Introductions and syllabus review, What is Judaism?

Thursday, August 23: Judaism basics

Week 2

Tuesday, August 28: Biblical Origins

Read: Scheindlin chapter 1

- Which pieces of the biblical story can we analyze historically?
- According to Scheindlin, what are the results of those analyses?
- What were the major empires that affected the ancient Israelites?

Thursday, August 30: The Diaspora; Talking about World Diasporas

Read: Scheindlin chapter 2

“Toward a Hermeneutics of the Diaspora,” Fernando Segovia, pp60-65

- At what point in history can we begin speaking of “Jews”? Why is it important what we call a group of people?
- What is Diaspora? Where were the earliest Diaspora communities? What were the religious implications of the development of the Diaspora?
- What specific type of diaspora does Segovia treat in his essay?
- How does he describe the experience of living in the diaspora?
- What is the significance of “naming,” for Segovia?
- Is there any way in which you can relate to his comments about “otherness”?
- How might we compare the diaspora about which Segovia speaks to the Jewish diaspora?

Week 3

Tuesday, September 4: The Rabbis and the Rise of Christianity

Read: Scheindlin chapter 3

- How and why did religious authority shift from Temple to synagogue and from priests to rabbis?
- What did life look like for Jews in Roman Palestine after 70 C.E.? What about for Diaspora Jews?
- How did the rise of Christianity in this period affect Judaism? How did the rise of rabbinic Judaism affect Christianity?
- What is the Talmud and why is it important?

Thursday, September 6: The Roots of Christian Anti-Judaism

Read: Amy-Jill Levine, “Bearing False Witness: Common Errors Made about Early Judaism”

- To what does Levine attribute Christian misunderstandings about Jews and Judaism?
- Have you encountered any of these misconceptions before? In what context?
- Are you surprised at any of the points Levine makes?

Week 4

Tuesday, September 11: NO CLASS (Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year)

Thursday, September 13: Jews in the Muslim Middle Ages

Read: Scheindlin chapter 4

- How did the rise of Islam affect the Jews?
- What kinds of intellectual cross-pollination occurred between Jews and Muslims in the Middle Ages?
- Who were the Karaites and why were they important?
- Who was Maimonides?

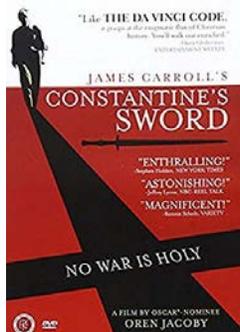
Week 5

Tuesday, September 18: Jews in the Christian Middle Ages

Read: Scheindlin chapter 5

- What are the origins of Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews?
- What was the general status of Jews in Christian Europe in the early Middle Ages? How did the Crusades affect Jewish-Christian relations?
- What kinds of anti-Jewish sentiments and actions took hold during this time period? Why?
- What led to the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492?

Thursday, September 20: Jewish Life under Islam and Christianity and Contemporary



Resonances

Read: Mark R. Cohen, “The Neo-Lachrymose Conception of Jewish-Arab History,” and Madeleine Schwartz, “The Origins of Blood Libel”

- What does Cohen mean by “lachrymose” and “neo-lachrymose”?
- In Cohen’s argument, what is the relationship between history-writing and modern debates about Israel? What does he think of this relationship?
- How did the blood libel start? How and why did it spread?
- What reasons does Schwartz suggest for the blood libel’s persistence?
- Modern readers are often surprised that people could have believed such a ridiculous charge against the Jews. Can you think of any modern examples of people buying into absurd stories and rumors?

In class: Start watching *Constantine’s Sword*

Week 6

Tuesday, September 25: In class: Finish watching *Constantine's Sword*

Thursday, September 27: Jews in the Ottoman Empire—guest speaker Dr. Cengiz Sisman

Read: Scheindlin chapter 6

Cengiz Sisman, “Sabbatai Sevi’s Conversion to Islam”

- What led to the growth of Jewish life in the Ottoman Empire?
- What is a “messianic movement”? Why did these movements flourish in Renaissance Europe?
- Who was Sabbatai Sevi, and how did his story affect ordinary Jews?
- What happened to the status of the Jews in the Muslim world in modern times (1800s and after)? How did these Jews fare during and after World War II?

Week 7

Tuesday, October 2: Jews in Western Europe

Read: Scheindlin chapter 7

- How did the Reformation and Counter-Reformation affect the lot of the Jews in Western Europe?
- What is a ghetto? How does the original meaning of “ghetto” differ from the word’s usage in America today? Why do you think the word’s meaning shifted?
- What was the Jewish Enlightenment? How was it related to the idea of “emancipation”? How did these ideas affect the Jewish community?
- What kinds of religious changes were introduced starting in the 1800s? Why? Why might these religious changes have made some Jews nervous?

Due: *Constantine's Sword* response

Thursday, October 4: Jews in Eastern Europe

Read: Scheindlin chapter 8

- What was the “Pale of Settlement”?
- What kinds of religious changes were introduced in Eastern Europe? Why?
- How would you describe the importance of Yiddish to Jewish life in Eastern Europe?

Week 8

Tuesday, October 9: Library Day—research seminar and Torah visit

Due: Final project topic and one-paragraph description

Thursday, October 11: Jewish Immigration to the U.S.—Guest speaker Tim Quevillon
Read: “Opening of the Hinterland,” “The Galveston Movement,” Jacob Schiff, “The Galveston Movement,” Morris D. Waldman

- What factors led Eastern European Jews to emigrate starting in the 1800s?
- What were conditions like for Jewish immigrants to the U.S.?
- What was the Galveston Movement and why did it fail?

Week 9

Tuesday, October 16: Jews in America in the 20th Century
Listen: StoryCorps Yiddish Radio Project Part I

- How did Jews on Yiddish Radio in the 1930s-1950s navigate being Jewish and being American?
- Can you make any connections to the way other ethnicities navigate their identities in America?

Thursday, October 18: The Shoah
Read: Scheindlin chapter 9

- What was Hitler’s early message about the Jews? Why did it gain popularity?
- How did German restrictions and violence against Jews progress over time?
- To what extent did Germany’s allies and occupied countries cooperate with Hitler’s policies toward the Jews?
- Describe the ghetto system during the Shoah.

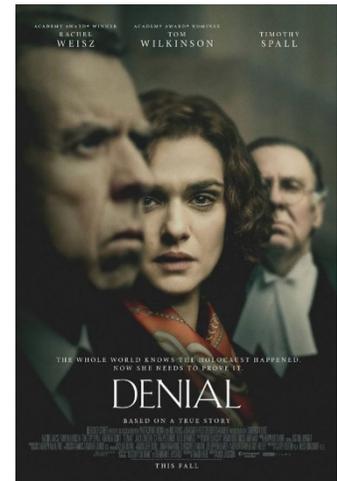
Week 10

Tuesday, October 23: Thinking about the Shoah
Explore: U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum’s “Confront Genocide” page (cases, blog, definition of genocide):
ushmm.org/confront-genocide

- What are some of the places where genocides have occurred or are threatened, according to the USHMM?
- Why do you think the USHMM is talking about genocides other than the Shoah?
- How does the USHMM work against genocide?

In class: Start watching *Denial*

Thursday, October 25: In class: Finish watching *Denial*



Week 11

Tuesday, October 30: The Founding of the State of Israel

Read: Scheindlin chapter 10

- How and why did Zionism develop?
- What was the relationship of the Shoah and World War II to the founding of Israel?
- What discussions and challenges were there around the revival of the Hebrew language?

Thursday, November 1: Jews after 1945, in Israel and America

Read: Scheindlin chapter 11

Optional to watch: Drunk History, “The Capture of Adolf Eichmann”

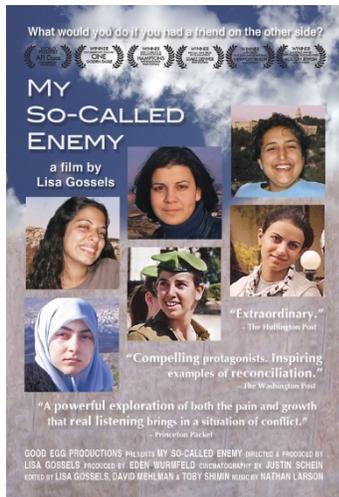
- What early challenges did the state of Israel experience? Outline its major wars and their outcomes.
- Describe the capture, trial, and execution of Adolf Eichmann.
- What is Hamas? What is Hezbollah?
- Who was Yitzhak Rabin and why was he important?
- What changes occurred in the American Jewish community in the 1960s and beyond?

Due: *Denial* response

Week 12

Tuesday, November 6: Exploring Israel-Palestine Questions

Read: Avi Shlaim, “The Debate about 1948”



- What is the “new historiography”? Why is it controversial?
- What claims does the “old historiography” make about Israel’s founding, according to Shlaim?
- Does what happened in Israel in 1948 still matter? Why?
- What are the main points of disagreement between “old” and “new” historians about Israel’s founding?

In class: Start watching *My So-Called Enemy*

Thursday, November 8: In class: Finish watching *My So-Called Enemy*

Week 13

Tuesday, November 13: Contemporary Jewish Issues: Emerging Jewish Communities

Read: Suzanne Selengut, “The Converso Comeback”

Thursday, November 15: Contemporary Jewish Issues: Emerging Jewish Communities
Read: Sam Kestenbaum, “Can This Rabbinic Revolutionary Make Hebrew Israelites
Mainstream?”
Due: *My So-Called Enemy* response

Week 14

Tuesday, November 20: NO CLASS (Society of Biblical Literature conference)

Thursday, November 22: NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)

Week 15

Tuesday, November 27: Contemporary Jewish Issues: Modern Anti-Semitism, on the Right and
the Left

Read: John-Paul Pagano, “How Anti-Semitism’s True Origin Makes It Invisible to the
Left” and Oren Segal, “The Alt-Right Isn’t Going Away”

Thursday, November 29: Wrap-up and discussions of final paper

Final paper due: **December 7**