

English 299X-002

Introduction To Jewish Studies

Instructor Information:

Instructor: Dr. Brent M. Blackwell

Office: RB 392

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Required Texts:

The Tanakh. New York: Jewish Publication Society.

Black, Eric. *Parallel Realities: a Jewish/Arab History of Israel/Palestine*. Minneapolis: Paradigm. 1992.

Dorff, Elliot N. *Matters of Life and Death: a Jewish Approach to Modern Medical Ethics*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2003.

Sachar, Howard M. *The Course of Modern Jewish History*. New Revised Edition. New York: Vintage, 1990.

Schulman, Sarah. *Rat Bohemia*. New York: Plume, 1996.

Shakespeare, William. *The Merchant of Venice*.

Shanks, Hershel, Ed. *Ancient Israel: A Short History from Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*. Third Edition. Englewood, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995.

Wyllen, Stephen M. *Settings of Silver: an Introduction to Judaism*. New York: Paulist Press, 1989.

Course Description:

This course is a multidisciplinary introduction to Jewish Studies. Over the course of the semester we will explore the anthropological, historical, literary, political, and religious foundations of what it meant and continues to mean to be Jewish. Our readings will include primary and secondary sources on such topics as: the Hebrew language and monotheism, Diaspora, Anti-Semitism, Zionism, the Holocaust, the State of Israel, and Jewish identity. Though an introduction, students are expected to have completed at least one upper-division course in any field from the college of the Sciences and Humanities.

In this course, our focus will be an examination of the particularly Jewish concept of Ethics—the relationships between and among human beings, which is quite different from a Christian concept of Morality—the relationship between God and Man. Central to the Jewish concept of Ethics is recognizing what French Philosopher Emmanuel Levinas calls the “Otherness of the Other”—the absolute difference between every human being’s existence (not just their experience). It is from the Jewish concept of Ethics that René Girard’s notion of the scapegoat and Walter Lippmann’s concept of the stereotype emerges in the mid Twentieth century, both of which are crucial to understanding the function of

the Jewish people in Western, that is to say Christian, society.

In Western culture, Jews (not necessarily Judaism) have served as the Other, the Scapegoat, the Stereotype. Traditionally, Jews have been the hidden, suppressed, forgotten, ghosts of our Christian past. But it is no accident that Lippmann and Girard's theories emerge when they do: one just before the Nazi seizure of power, the other shortly after their defeat), as the Nazis would bring this traditional concept of the Jew in Western Society to its horrific and, arguably, inevitable end. The Nazi Holocaust or Shoah (Hebrew for "destruction" or "desolation") did not eradicate Jewishness from the face of Western culture, but instead dispersed it, like the ashes of the roughly six million Jewish bodies they murdered, to the four winds—winds that now blow to every shore and touch ever culture. However, the result is not what the Nazis had in mind, for this dispersion actually strengthened, rather than weakened Jewishness.

The Jewishness that survived the flames of Auschwitz is unlike the Jewishness that preceded it, as Auschwitz and the Shoah are what I call Plague events—events that radically alter the way we perceive and understand reality so much that after such an event, we think categorically differently about the world. The kind of Jewishness that survived the Nazi onslaught has yet to be fully theorized. Only its religious dimensions have been mapped in any great detail.

My desire is that this course will be part of the first step taken at Ball State towards exploring this new territory. If we define Jewishness only along biological lines, as Orthodox Jews today do, then their story is true: Jews are disappearing faster than they are reproducing, and the 21st century will see the statistical end of the Jewish people in America. But American Jewish culture today is stark proof that Jewishness is much more than a biological category. In this course, we will explore the ways in which Jews, particularly Western, Americanized Jews move beyond the role of victim, stereotype, and ghost.

Course Policies:

Attendance/Participation:

Your attendance is vital to your performance in this course. Firstly, unlike some other classes, you will not be able to just read the material and take a test. My courses do not work that way. In fact, they are specifically designed so that this kind of approach to the class will result in a failing grade. We will be discussing the readings in class, true, but if you miss the discussions, then you miss the most vital part of the course. My courses are centered on group discussion. Secondly (and more importantly), each student enhances and adds to the overall quality of the class discussions. This course will teach us, very directly, the value of having your voice heard and the danger in silencing it. When one voice is silenced (in this case, due to poor attendance), then not only does the value of the whole diminish, but that voice itself is irretrievably lost.

If you miss a class, you not only lose any material that was generated in class discussions from questions, etc., but you also lose the privilege of adding your own voice to the discussion, which is a nice way of saying that your opinion doesn't count. As such, it should become obvious that there is no way to make-up for a missed class. Though I have certain information that I want to convey from class to class, what

generates from class discussions is spontaneous and not repeatable. And given the amount of material we cover in each class, missing just one or two puts you at a serious disadvantage, since your workload for the course just doubled or even tripled.

Therefore, *I do not have a formal attendance policy* in this course. But I do have an informal one. You are free to miss as many classes as you need to, but realize that your grade will reflect your absences, since it will be impossible to pass the course if you miss too many days. A good rule of thumb to follow would be to allow yourself no more than THREE absences. If you give me advanced notice of your absence (for medical issues, deaths, etc.), then I will allow you to ask me to go over what you will miss in class ahead of time. If I do not receive prior notice of your absence, then I am no longer responsible for providing you with the information that you have missed. You must now ask other students for the material, which they may or may not wish to give to you, as it is the product of their diligent work—work, you recall, that you chose not to do.

Grading:

The assignments in this course consist of a Midterm and a Final examination. While most English courses require students to write some form of paper, the nature of our subject matter does not lend itself to researched analysis by those not at least partially familiar with its contents. Therefore, you will not be required to write a formal paper in this course.

A topic as large and as diverse as the study of the Jewish people from time immemorial to now (5766 years to orthodox Jews) does not lend itself to easy summation. While much of what we study this semester can be measured objectively to a certain extent, there are also parts of our study that are more subjective. The history, customs, beliefs, and practices of the Jews, though always a product of negotiation and even argument amongst Jews themselves, exist in a world of facts: of rights and wrongs. But when we deal with areas such as literature and politics, such objective frameworks fail to measure significance.

Therefore, the Midterm will cover the more objective portion of our study this semester, which we will be covering in the first half of the semester, while the Final will cover the subjective portions of the course that we tackle in the second half of the semester. The format and structure of each examination will be discussed as the semester proceeds.

Scale:

The grading scale is the standard BSU scale:

A = 93-100

A- = 90-92

B+ = 87-89

B = 84-86

B- = 80-83

C+ = 77-79

C = 74-76

C- = 70-73

Breakdown:

MIDTERM:	40%
FINAL:	40%
Participation:	20%
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Total:	100%

Plagiarism:

In accordance with the rules and guidelines of the BSU student Handbook and in accordance with the Dean of Students, plagiarism (intentional or not) will result in the student failing the course, and may lead to expulsion from the university.

Syllabus:

Unit One: The History of the Jews

Week One: From Negative Infinity to Moses

1/10 Intro to Course: Minority Politics

1/12 Beginnings to the Exodus

Week Two: From Disagreements to Maimonides

1/17 A Divided Kingdom to the Second Temple

1/19 Medieval Judaism

Week Three: French Revolution to the Pale

1/24 Enlightenment and Emancipation

1/26 Russian Jewry

Week Four: The Nazis and their 'Solution'

1/31 Nazism and the Jewish Question

2/2 The Holocaust

Week Five: The State of Israel

2/7 The Birth of Israel to the Six Day War

2/9 Form the '67 War to the 1990's

Readings

None

Shanks: Ch. 1 & 2

Shanks: Chs. 5 & 8

Wyllen: Chs. 15 & 16

Sachar: Chs. 1, 2, 3

Sachar: Chs. 9, 12

Sachar: Ch. 20

Sachar: Ch. 21

Black: Chs. 1-6

Black Chs. 7-13

Unit Two: Jewish Religion and Ritual

Week Six: Ancient Religion and Henotheism

2/14 Jewishness and Torah

2/16 Monotheism

Week Seven: Practices

2/21 Beliefs

2/23 Festivals

Week Eight: Americanized Judaism

2/28 Branches

*Study Session 5-7 pm in RB *

3/2 MIDTERM

Wyllen: Chs. 1 & 2

Wyllen: Chs. 3 & 4

Wyllen: Chs. 5-7

Wyllen: Chs. 8-11

Wyllen: Ch. 20

Unit Three: Jewish Literature

Week Nine: The Texts: Torah, Talmud, Mishnah, Midrash

3/7 Texts Wylen: Chs. 12-14

3/9 Readings CP:

Week Ten: Torah Readings

3/14 Genesis Chs. 1-11, 37-50

3/16 Exodus Chs. 1-14, 19-24

Week Eleven: Antisemitism?

3/21 The Merchant of Venice Acts 1-3

3/23 The Merchant of Venice Acts 4-5

* EVENING VIEWING* 7:00pm in AJ 174

Week Twelve: Outsider Issues

3/28 Rat Bohemia Parts 1 & 2

3/30 Rat Bohemia Parts 3 & 4

Unit Four: Jewish Politics and Issues

Week Thirteen: Jewish Politics

4/4 Antisemitism Sachar: Ch. 11, Wylen: Ch 21

4/6 Zionism Sachar: Ch. 13, Wylen: Ch. 22

Week Fourteen: Israeli-Palestinian Issues

4/11 Israeli-Palestinian Issues CP:

4/13 Israeli-Palestinian Issues CP:

Week Fifteen: Jewish Bioethics

4/18 Beginning of Life Issues Dorff: Chs. 2, 5, pp.139-151

4/20 End of Life Issues Dorff: Ch. 8, pp. 267-272

Week Sixteen: Summaries

4/25 America and Jewishness Adam Sandler's "Hanukah Song"

4/27 Evaluations