What makes someone Jewish? Is it birth? Does "birth" require two Jewish parents or does one suffice, and if so, will either parent do? Does being a Jew require religious belief or practice? One of these? Both? Do political behavior or social associations make someone Jewish? Is a Jewish-born atheist Jewish? Is a non-Jewish born atheist who converts to Judaism, Jewish? Is someone who is born Jewish, but practices Buddhism, Jewish? How about Jewish born, but practices Christianity? Or converts to Christianity but a) still considers herself Jewish b) does not so consider herself? Does living in Israel, "the Jewish State," serving in its army, make one Jewish? If someone says s/he is Jewish but does not practice any known form of contemporary Judaism, instead going back to the Bible and drawing beliefs and practices from there, is this person "Jewish"?

"Jew" is a far more ambiguous term than many assume. This is the case not only now but since the beginnings of Jewishness. This First Year Seminar examines groups and individuals for whom the boundaries of identity were far from straightforward: Jesus-followers in the first centuries of the Common Era who upheld the same Jewish law and practice as did Jews who rejected Jesus; crypto-Jews (Marranos) of the Iberian Peninsula who, while outwardly Catholic, tenaciously maintained Jewish beliefs and rituals and even married among themselves to preserve and transmit their identity; communities of Jews off the usual map of Jewish experience-- in South America, China, India, Africa-- whose Judaism differs significantly from that of other Jews; assimilated and converted Jews (converted Jews?) who either voluntarily maintain a Jewish identity or are forced to assume an ongoing Jewish identity by antisemitism; individuals-- Disraeli, Freud-- with novel forms of Jewish self-identification; militantly secular Jewish radicals of late Tsarist Russia who created and asserted their own kind of Jewishness, fighting for the Jewish proletariat and for Yiddish culture in the face of the wrath of other marxists as much as the Tsar-- and that of traditional and Zionist Jews, to boot.

Our goal in this Seminar is not to arrive at an authoritative pronouncement on the question, "Who Was a Jew?," but to grapple with the factors that have operated historically and continue to operate to our own times in determining Jewish identity and belonging. The Seminar focuses on critical analysis of sources about Jewish identity: what criteria establish Jewishness, and who decides this?

While accurate data are essential to all historical inquiry, this course will differ from other history courses you may have taken in putting primacy on informed assessment and analysis of historical evidence.

This course is part of the First Year Seminar Program. It is cross listed in Jewish Studies and in History and can be applied for credit toward the major/ minor in those departments; it also receives CD and WRi credit.

As a First Year Seminar, the course is an introduction to liberal arts learning, designed to foster individual skills in critical and creative thinking but also to introduce you to small group discussion and interactive learning-- with the instructor, but also with fellow students; to skills of oral presentation and engaged listening; to respect for the diversity of substantiated opinion, which demands rigorously documented argumentation in an
atmosphere of respect and collegiality.

This syllabus contains detailed information about the course and its requirements, for which you are responsible. If you have any questions, ask me. If you lose your copy of the syllabus, one hard copy of which is given to each student, please print another from the JWST, History, or FYS websites.

**REQUIREMENTS:**

1. **ATTENDANCE at all sessions.** Attendance will be taken. If illness of emergency prevents your attendance, please let me know as much in advance as possible, particularly if you are presenting that session. A doctor’s note or other documentation may be required. In case of absence, you are responsible for all reading for the missed session/s, any other assignments, and for getting class notes and any handouts or announcements from other students unless you and I make other arrangements. Absence may affect your final grade. If any situation affects your ability to participate in the course and fulfill requirements, see me sooner than later. I will make every effort to work with you but can only do so if you alert me to that need promptly. If you cannot do the reading because of illness/ emergency but are able to come to class, DO SO; speak with me.

Please note that one makeup session will be held in place of a class that cannot be held on schedule; see syllabus for details, which we will also discuss in class. We will make every effort to fix the most convenient makeup time for all; I will appreciate your flexibility in working this out. The makeup session is mandatory.

2. **All ASSIGNED READING FOR THE SESSION IN WHICH IT IS ASSIGNED.** Informed discussion is basic to a Seminar. Not only is your own grade heavily dependent on this (see "Grading," below), but your fellow students have the right to expect that you will contribute to their learning through your contributions.

There are 60-70 pages of reading (not including illustrations, notes), for each session. Be sure to leave enough time to read carefully and prepare points to contribute in class. It is a poor idea to try and cram the reading; you need time to digest it and write coherent, substantive, stimulating observations to contribute to class (see below).

Readings are available in a number of ways. Some titles, listed below, are available for purchase in the College bookstore (ask for them by course name/ number/ my name). "Required" titles are those we will read most or all of; I strongly advise that you have your own copies of these rather than rely on Reserve Room copies, which check out for only a limited time. If finances pose difficulties to purchase, you may try to purchase and share required readings with others.

You may also order titles from Ohio Link, details about which are available in Mudd. Since it takes some days for books to arrive, you must order well enough in advance in time to do the reading at the level the course requires.

**ALL ASSIGNED TITLES ARE ON SHELF RESERVE IN MUDD. This is the DEFAULT OPTION** if you have trouble obtaining readings in other ways (see "no excused failure to obtain readings," below).

Some readings that are NOT "Required Titles" are on electronic reserve (eres). Search on eres under title of article, chapter, or book; under author OR editor of the work: try more than one approach. If you have difficulty securing material on any form of reserve, SPEAK TO RESERVE ROOM STAFF-- preferably JULIE WEIR, the reserve room supervisor, IMMEDIATELY. If you email me, all I can do is contact Ms. Weir-- and I may not read your email when you send it. Since glitches do occur, do not leave securing readings for the last minute. Remember: shelf reserve is the default option for ALL readings.
HOWEVER YOU DO IT, PREPARING THE ASSIGNED READING IS THE SOLE RESPONSIBILITY OF EACH STUDENT. THERE ARE NO EXCUSED FAILURES TO OBTAIN ASSIGNED READINGS. If you cannot DO the readings because of illness/ emergency, speak to me.

REQUIRED TITLES:

Jules R. Benjamin, A Student's Guide to History **use required in all written assignments

James Ross, Fragile Branches, Travels Through the Jewish Diaspora

Shaye J.D. Cohen, The Beginnings of Jewishness

Paul Smith, Disraeli, A Brief Life


Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, Freud's Moses, Judaism Terminable and Interminable

N. B.: The following two required titles are out of print and are available on ERES (or through Ohio Link, and on shelf reserve):

Lawrence H. Schiffman, Who Was A Jew


WRITTEN WORK:

1. For EACH class, prepare a ONE PAGE (typed, double-spaced-- do not exceed this limit) observation/reaction paper, based on your CONSIDERED reflection on the assigned reading. You will draw from these prepared observations for your participation in class discussion and hand them in at each session's end.

I will discuss this assignment further in class but in brief: this is to be NEITHER a summary/ recapitulation of the reading NOR simply reactions to it, but your thoughtful, informed OBSERVATIONS ABOUT the reading and its SIGNIFICANCE. After reading all or a section of the readings, ask yourself what is sticking with you, and WHY-- what you are making of the points that have impressed you. Think about the questions/ focus of the author; the sources used; theories proposed; how the author uses evidence to construct her/his argument; conclusions stated-- or that you draw. As time goes on and you have perspective, COMPARE themes from earlier readings to current ones. Doing this assignment calls for skills that you will absolutely develop during the course of the semester, which indeed, are one of the main course goals. If you have trouble at first understanding what this assignment asks or how to accomplish it, just keep at it, do your best, using the guidelines in this paragraph and my directions in class. It will come.

I will not grade your observation papers but their overall quality WILL count toward your grade (participation). They are required for EACH class unless I specify otherwise. Observation papers must be submitted ON THE DAY THEY ARE ASSIGNED. NO LATE SUBMISSIONS accepted. They need not be in polished prose (they can be in outline form), but they must be comprehensible to me: fashioning and presenting clear points is one of your principle tasks in this assignment. All work must be typed, double-spaced.

2. Two essays (4-5-page, double-spaced each, do not exceed this limit, at ca. one-month intervals), based on
assigned readings; due dates on syllabus, to be submitted to me in class. Late submission of these papers will
be penalized one third of a grade for each day of lateness, beginning with the day/time the paper was due
(i.e., an A paper one day late gets an A-; two days late, a B+, etc.) It is your responsibility to print your work
out in time to submit it by the deadline. ALWAYS back up your work as you compose!

3. One 10-page paper, drawing on but also going beyond the syllabus with 2-3 additional books or their
equivalent in articles (ca. 10 articles= 1 book), on a topic of your choice, in lieu of a final exam. This paper
will be due on the day/time the Registrar assigns for a final exam for this class. Preliminary topics and
bibliography and first draft due as stated on the syllabus; we will discuss research methods and paper writing
further in class.

4. NO ELECTRONIC SUBMISSIONS OF ANY WRITTEN WORK. HARD COPY ONLY. You are
responsible for printing out your work sufficiently in advance of a deadline to allow for any glitches.

5. All writing must be coherent and substantive, use correct grammar, style, and spelling, and use the required
Benjamin text (see below). All assignments must be typed, double-spaced, in 12 gauge font, with one inch
margins. Do not use slang; do not inflate your language to try sound more "academic." Write
simply and directly. Avoid passive tense; it hides your subject and obfuscates. The ONLY time passive tense is
appropriate is when the subject is truly unknown: "How the original Biblical texts were created is unknown"
(though this would still be better as: "We do not know how the Biblical texts originated"-- do you see why?) Do
not use "impact" as a verb unless you mean "cause collision;" if you mean "affect," "influence," say that. Use the
fewest number of words needed to make your point.

Your written work must be self-sufficient: comprehensible to an intelligent reader with no knowledge of your
subject aside from what you provide. Do NOT assume I know what you mean; it is always the writer's burden
to make herself clear.

A writing tutor will be assigned to this class, work with whom will be integrated into writing require-
ments; details TBA.

ORAL PRESENTATION/S: Each student will present 1-2 times for not more than 10 minutes on the readings
and the issues raised in, and by, that session's readings. This is NOT to be a recapitulation of the reading but a
spoken, more detailed, version of your one-page observations, meant to lead off and help focus set the day's
discussion. I will signal when your time is up. Practice pacing yourself before you present; you will be
evaluated based on what you do within ten minutes. Ask yourself what you learned from the readings; what
struck you-- and why; how this relates to other readings and always, to the main
questions of this Seminar. What points do you want to make about the reading that further our understanding
of how and why people considered themselves or were considered by others, to be Jews?
Depending on class size, we also may have sessions in which each student contributes a main idea or two from
your one-page observation papers to lead off the session.

GRADING:

-- Participation: 45% (including observation papers and lead off presentation)
-- Written work: 55%, meant to reward improvement, as follows:
  First short essay: 10%
  Second short essay: 20%
  Paper: 25%

HELP: Do see me if you have any difficulties with any other course requirement. Aside from the writing tutor's
help, I will be happy to read and comment on drafts of your written work if you submit this at least 2 week
days in advance of a deadline. Writing is a PROCESS. You should always write and revise DRAFTS. No one,
even Shakespeare, wrote finished work on the first, or even the second, try.

**HONOR CODE:** This course, as all in Oberlin, operates under the Honor Code (HC) which requires but is not
limited to full, accurate attribution of all (including electronic and oral) sources and unassisted individual
effort (unless group work is assigned). It is each student's responsibility to be familiar with and uphold all
provisions of the Honor Code, ignorance of which will not excuse violation. The College requires that all
written work have a signed affirmation of the Honor Code to receive credit. If you have any
questions about the Honor Code, see under HC on the College website; any member of the HC committee; me;
your advisor; Mudd library staff, who are well versed about proper attribution of sources, including electronic,
and provisions of the HC.

**REFERENCE SUGGESTION:** Obviously, there is no requirement of prior study of Jewish history to take this
course! If you wish to clarify an unfamiliar term, the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (EJ), a copy of which is Reference/
Mudd, is an excellent source. N. B.: Sometimes, EJ articles are assigned reading. These
are available ONLY in Mudd Reference.
First Year Seminar 167: Who Was a Jew?

1. INTRODUCTORY 9/6

2. DEFINING "JEWISH" IN ISRAEL; THE US 9/8


Nechama Tec, In The Lion’s Den, chp.17, pp.222-231

3. JEWS IN UNEXPECTED PLACES 9/13

PRESENTER:

James Ross, Fragile Branches, chps.1-2, pp.15-88

4. UNEXPECTED PLACES, continued 9/15

PRESENTER:

Ross, chps.3-4, pp.89-148

"Falashas," Encyclopaedia Judaica (EJ), 6:1143-1152 only IN MUDD/REFERENCE

5. RESEARCH METHODS: CLASS WILL BE HELD IN MUDD LIBRARY. MEET AT THE REFERENCE DESK 9/20

Jules Benjamin, A Student’s Guide to History, pp.1-77

6. A CONCRETE VIEW 9/22

PRESENTER:


FOR THIS READING, LOOK UP THE FOLLOWING TERMS in Encyclopaedia Judaica (EJ):

halacha; mishna; talmud; baraita; tosefta

7. CONCRETENESS, continued, AND-- THAT’S WHAT YOU THINK 9/27

PRESENTER:
8. STILL A MESS 9/29

PRESENTER:

Cohen, chps. 2-3, pp.25-106 * a fair number of these pages are notes

** FIRST ESSAY ASSIGNMENT DUE NEXT CLASS: 10/6 (no class 10/4; see below)

TOPIC: You have been asked to give a presentation to a civic group on the topic, "Who Was a Jew in Antiquity, and How Do We Know?"

Using our readings and discussions thus far, write that 5 page talk; do not exceed this limit. Your audience is interested and intelligent but has no independent knowledge of this subject; YOU are their only source of information and understanding. This is to be a reasoned presentation, using our readings, not a report on them. Think: how can I use what I have learned to teach others? Make points and substantiate/illustrate them with evidence, writing clearly and coherently, without academic jargon or slang. See guidelines, above, re: writing. Drafts are essential.

** NO CLASS TU 10/4: Rosh Hashana

9. BACK TO SOME CONCRETENESS 10/6

PRESENTER:

Cohen, chps.4-5, pp.109-174

FIRST SHORT PAPER DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS. See above for late penalties.

10. MAKEUP CLASS: Sunday 10/9 Time/ room TBA

FURTHER DEFINING LINES:

PRESENTER:

Cohen, chps. 6-7, pp.175-238

11. "THEY ABSTAIN FROM INTERCOURSE WITH FOREIGN WOMEN" 10/11

PRESENTER:

Cohen, chps. 8-9, pp.241-307

NO CLASS 10/13 YOM KIPPUR COLLEGE HOLIDAY

NO CLASS 10/18 MAKEUP CLASS in lieu of this session

12. MATRILINEALITY; JEWISH CHRISTIANS; CONCLUSIONS 10/20
PRESENTER:

Cohen, chps. 10, Epilogue, pp.308-349

Daniel Boyarin, Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism, chp. 2, pp.22-41

FALL BREAK: 10/22-10/31 PRELIMINARY TOPICS AND BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE WHEN WE RETURN

13. JEWS WHO ARE CATHOLICS (OR IS IT CATHOLICS WHO ARE JEWS?) 11/1

PRELIMINARY TOPICS AND BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE IN CLASS TODAY

PRESENTER:

Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto, chp. 1, pp.1-50

Renee Levine Melammed, Heretics or Daughters of Israel?, chps. 1-2, pp.16-44

14. THE JUDAISM OF CONVERSAS; RE-JUDAIZING THE CONVERSOS 11/3

PRESENTER:

Melammed, Heretics, chp. 4, Conclusion, pp.73-93, 166-174

"Amsterdam," in EJ

Miriam Bodian, Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation, chp.5, 96-131

SECOND ESSAY ASSIGNMENT DUE NEXT CLASS: 5 pages, double-spaced, do not exceed this limit; observe all guidelines on this syllabus re: writing

Topic: Were marranos/ conversos/ conversas Jews?

Using our readings and discussions, argue for and against this proposition, including discussion of the problems in posing and answering the question. What factors went into determining Jewishness IN the Middle Ages-- i.e., how did people THEN debate or decide who was Jewish? How do scholars NOW grapple with assessing Jewishness in that period? What factors changed, were novel, and what factors, if any, were similar to those we studied when we assessed Jewishness in antiquity?

15. DRIFTING FROM JEWISHNESS: ASSIMILATION IN JEWISH MODERNITY 11/8

SECOND ESSAY ASSIGNMENT DUE IN CLASS TODAY

PRESENTER:


---------, The Jews of Georgian England, 1714-1830, chp. 9-10, pp.272-293
16. LOYAL JEWISH CONVERTS: HEINE, BOERNE, CHWOLSON, DISRAELI 11/10

PRESENTER:

"Heinrich Heine," EJ, 8:270-275

"Ludwig Boerne," EJ, 4:1166-1168

"Benjamin Disraeli," EJ, 6:103-109

"Daniel Chwolson," EJ, 5:558-560


Paul Smith, Disraeli; A Brief Life, Introduction, chps. 1-2, pp.1-53

17. JEWISH BY "RACE": DISRAELI, continued 11/15

PRESENTER:

Smith, chps. 3-4, pp.54-135 (*longer than usual reading, please allow some extra time)

18. ATHEIST JEWS: FREUD 11/17

PRESENTER:


19. FREUD, continued 11/22

FIRST DRAFT OF YOUR PAPER DUE NEXT CLASS

PRESENTER:

Gay, chp.3, pp.71-154

THANKSGIVING NO CLASS 11/24

20. FREUD, ANOTHER VIEW 11/29

FIRST DRAFT OF YOUR PAPER DUE TODAY IN CLASS

PRESENTER:
21. FREUD, CONCLUSION; Jewish Socialism, first readings 12/1

PRESENTER:

Yerushalmi, chps. 4-5, Provisional Postscript, pp. 57-100, 111-112

Nora Levin, While Messiah Tarried, Jewish Socialist Movements, chps. 14-15, pp. 219-249

22. JEWISH SOCIALISM 12/6

PRESENTER:

Levin, chps. 16-18, pp. 250-300

Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, The Jew in the Modern World (SECOND edition), pp. 419-423, 428-432 (be sure to read the notes, assigned with this reading) ON SHELF RESERVE

23. SOCIALIST, RADICAL, JEW: VLADIMIR MEDEM 12/8

PRESENTER:

"Vladimir Medem," EJ

The Life and Soul of a Legendary Jewish Socialist: The Memoirs of Vladimir Medem, chps. 1-14, pp. 1-77 ON ERES; shelf reserve; through Ohio Link Memoir reading should be easier/ quicker than some of what we've done! Focus on Medem's odyssey to becoming a Jew; what did this mean to him/ how does he define Jewishness? How did he become/ make himself/ come to be seen by others as, a Jew?

24. MEDEM, continued 12/13

PRESENTER:

Medem, Life, chps. 16-19, 21, 24-26, 29-31, 48, pp. 82-100, 105-109, 119-135, 152-179, 265-271

25. SUMMARIES, CONCLUSIONS 12/15


Your observation paper today should be a retrospective statement on "Who Was A Jew?," giving conclusions you draw form the course as a whole. What have you learned? How has your thinking changed over the course of the semester?