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; both of these? 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 constructing a religion from there, is this person "Jewish"? Is there a Jewish way to look? Speak? Dress?

"Jew" is a far more ambiguous term than many assume, and this is true not only today but was the case since the beginnings of Jewishness. This First Year Seminar examines groups and individuals for whom the boundaries and content of Jewish 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 considered normatively Jewish; 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 anti-religious, anti-nationalist Jewish radicals of late Tsarist Russia who created and asserted their own kind of Jewishness, fighting for the Jewish (and world) proletariat and for Yiddish culture against the wrath of other Marxists, the Tsar, and other Jews.

Our goal in this Seminar is not to pronounce authoritatively on the question, "Who Was a Jew?" but to grapple with the forces and variables that have operated historically in determining Jewish identity. The Seminar focuses on critical analysis of sources about
Jewish identity and on the questions: what criteria establish Jewishness, and who decides?

While accurate data are essential to all historical inquiry, this course puts primacy on informed, critical analysis and use of historical evidence, on understanding historical argumentation, and constructing such argumentation ourselves.

The methodology in this course is historical; the area is Jewish experience. As a First Year Seminar, this course is also a focused introduction to liberal arts learning in general- to developing advanced skills in: reading; engaged listening and interactive, collegial learning; expressing substantiated opinion and engaging in informed discourse and respectful debate about divergent positions; oral presentation and intellectual leadership; research and writing. While our material derives from Jewish experience, the analytical skills you can expect to learn in this course will be applicable to other groups, and areas of inquiry.

This FYS can be applied for credit to the major or minor in Jewish Studies and/or History. Successful completion also gives SS, CD, and WRi credit. PLEASE READ CAREFULLY “Oberlin’s Criteria for Writing Proficiency (oberlin.edu/rhetoric), and below, “Written Work” to understand the writing expectations in the course, which we will also address in class.

This syllabus contains detailed information for which you are responsible. If you have any questions, ask me. If you lose your copy of the syllabus, please print another from the JWST, HIST, or FYS websites.

REQUIREMENTS:

1. ATTENDANCE at all sessions. As a Seminar, the learning of all is affected by the participation of each of us. Attendance therefore, is a responsibility as well as a requirement, and will be noted. If illness or emergency prevents your attendance, please let me know, particularly if you are presenting that session. You are responsible for the reading for any missed session/s, any other assignments due that day, and for getting class notes and any handouts or announcements from other students unless you have spoken with me and gotten an extension. Absence may affect your final grade. If any situation affects your ability to participate in the course and fulfill requirements in an ongoing way, see me sooner than later. I will make every effort to work with you but can only do so if you alert me to the need promptly. If you cannot do the reading because of illness/ emergency but are able to come to class, DO SO, and speak with me.

2. CAREFUL PREPARATION OF 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 informed contributions, based on assigned reading.
There are 60-70 pages of reading (not including illustrations, notes—pagination on the syllabus includes these), for each session, whose difficulty will vary. Be sure to leave enough time to read carefully. Do not cram; you need time to digest the reading and write coherent, substantive, stimulating observations to contribute in class (see below).

Readings are available a number of ways. Some titles, listed below as “Required,” have been ordered at the College bookstore. We read heavily from them and I expect you to have your own copies. Relying on shelf reserve copies for these readings is not realistic since these circulate for only a few hours. If the cost of purchase poses an untenable burden, try pairing with another student to purchase and share these titles. Ohio Link is another option but be sure to order well enough in advance to have the titles in hand in time to do the reading at the level the course expects.

ALL ASSIGNED TITLES, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF ENCYCLOPAEDIA ARTICLES, WHICH MUST BE READ FROM THE SOURCE, ARE ON SHELF RESERVE IN MUDD. This is the DEFAULT OPTION for doing the reading (see "no excused failure to obtain readings," below).

In addition, readings that are NOT in "Required” titles" are on electronic reserve (eres; password, fyep167). Try more than one way of searching eres: by title; author/ editor of the work. For any questions or problems with any form of reserve materials, SPEAK IMMEDIATELY TO RESERVE ROOM STAFF, preferably Supervisor Michael Palazzolo. Emailing me is NOT an effective way to help secure reading, since all I can do is contact Mr. Palazzolo, and I may not read your email when you send it. Do tell me about any problems your efforts do not resolve. Since glitches do occur, secure the readings well in advance of when you expect to do them.

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; come to class anyway if you are able.

REFERENCE SUGGESTION: for quick clarification, use the Encyclopaedia Judaica (EJ), either the hard or electronic version.

REQUIRED TITLES:

Jules R. Benjamin, A Student's Guide to History (page refs. on syllabus are to 9th edition)

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*

3. **WRITTEN WORK:**

a. For each class, prepare a one-page (typed, double-spaced—do not exceed this limit) observation paper on the assigned reading. You will draw from these observations for your participation in class discussion and hand them in at each session's end.

The observation paper is to be neither a report on/ recapitulation of the reading nor simply reactions to it. Rather, it is to be a thoughtful, substantive presentation of a few (remember, it’s ONE page) main OBSERVATIONS ABOUT the reading and its SIGNIFICANCE.

To do this, I suggest the following: after reading all or a section of the readings, ask yourself what is sticking with you, and WHY? What major POINTS is the author making; what major points are YOU taking from the reading—what have you learned? What do you make of what you have learned? Another way to think about this is to ask yourself what you would tell an interested friend who saw the book you are reading and asked what it is about. What comes to your mind? When you’ve noted some points, ask yourself why they are significant, and say something about that.

Your observations may be about substance and/or about how the author reaches her conclusions—her sources, methods. You MAY disagree with the author but you must make a substantiated argument for your position. Think about the author’s focus; theories proposed; how the author uses evidence to construct arguments; the conclusions stated—or that you draw. As time goes on and you have perspective, COMPARE themes from earlier and later readings. Doing this assignment calls for skills that you will develop during the course of the semester, which indeed, are one of the main course goals. If you do not at first understand what this assignment asks or how to accomplish it, just do your best, using the guidelines listed here. You are welcome to see me with any questions about this or any other assignment.

I will not grade individual observation papers but their overall quality and your consistency in submitting them at the end of each class 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. They need not be in polished prose (they can be in outline form), but your points must be comprehensible.

b. Two essays (4-5-page, double-spaced each, do not exceed this limit, at ca. one-month intervals, due dates on the syllabus), based on assigned readings, to be submitted to me in class. Use abbreviated citation in body of the text, e.g., (Cohen, p.39); no Bibliography. Drafts due as indicated on syllabus; draft versions will NOT be graded, they are however, required, as is working with the course writing tutor when indicated. Except in case of documented illness or emergency, late submission penalized one third of a grade for each
day of lateness, beginning the day/ time the paper was due (at one day late, an A paper gets an A-; two days late, a B+, etc.) ALWAYS back up your work as you compose!

c. One 10-12 page (typed, double-spaced) research paper on an approved topic of your choosing, in lieu of a final exam. You MUST meet with me for approval of your topic; Statement of Topic and Bibliography due as stated on the syllabus. You MAY choose to expand on a topic on the syllabus; you MAY (indeed, should, use assigned reading); you will be expected to use 5-10 additional books or their equivalent in articles (ca. 10 articles= 1 book). You MUST use primary sources in your paper. The paper will be due on the day/time the Registrar assigns for a final exam for this class. Instructors have no say in this deadline.

d. A 2-3 page write-up of your oral presentation (on which, see below), due one week after your presentation. On the day that you present you need not also submit an observation paper.

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.

REQUIREMENTS FOR WRITTEN WORK (see too, “Criteria for Writing Proficiency at Oberlin College; http://www.oberlin.edu/rhetoric/resources/students/index.html): All writing must be coherent, substantive, use correct grammar, style, and spelling, and use the required Benjamin text (see below) for citations and Bibliography (required for the research paper only). All assignments must be typed, double-spaced, in 12 gauge font, with one inch margins. Do not use slang or inflated “academic” jargon. Write simply and directly, using the fewest words possible to communicate clearly. Avoid passive tense; the ONLY time passive tense is appropriate is when the subject is truly unknown; e.g., "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 not use "impact" as a verb unless you mean "cause collision;" if you mean "affect," "influence," say that.

Your written work must be self-sufficient: comprehensible to an intelligent reader with no knowledge of your subject aside from what you provide. This—not I—should be your imagined audience. Never assume your readers know what you mean; it is solely the writer's job to make herself clear.

To write successfully, drafts and revision are ESSENTIAL. Drafts due as indicated on the syllabus. When indicated, work with the course writing tutor, TBA, is REQUIRED. The Writing Center in Mudd is an additional, recommended, avenue for writing support.

TO RECEIVE CREDIT ALL SUBMITTED WRITTEN WORK MUST HAVE: your name; the date; title of your work or essay question being addressed; a signed Honor Code affirmation; and be paginated AND STAPLED if there is more than one sheet.
4. 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 (think about the difference-- one session's readings. This is NOT to be a report on the reading. Think of it as a spoken, more fleshed out version of your one-page observations, meant to lead off and help focus set the day's discussion by highlighting major questions and themes. SEE AND USE GUIDELINES FOR READING (above), FOR APPROACHES TO THIS ASSIGNMENT—things to think about to evoke good thinking and 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.

Your presentation should have “I” statements, e.g., “Here are 4 main points I took from the readings and what I make of them”; “When I read x, I thought…; “this made me think of x other author we read and made me re-think/ contrasted with/ supported/ amplified the conclusions we reached there”; “Based on these readings, I reached the following conclusions”; “I was confused about x in these readings because…” Cite specifics. While these are not required, you may give handouts, use power point, etc., if you wish. When your presentation is finished, I will open up discussion, inviting comments on your points, directing questions about your points to you.

YOU NEED NOT SUBMIT AN OBSERVATION PAPER ON THE DAY YOU GIVE A LEAD OFF PRESENTATION. Rather, submit the outline of your presentation, which should be no more than1-2 two typed pages. A week after your presentation, submit a more polished form of your presentation points in NARRATIVE, short-essay form, not to exceed 3 typed, double-spaced pages. WORK WITH THE WRITING TUTOR to write this essay.

Depending on class size, we also may have sessions in which each student contributes a point or two from observation papers (round table), rather than having one lead-off presentation, or we may do a combination of lead off presentation and round table to start the Seminar.

It is each student’s responsibility to be signed up for the proper number of lead off presentations. You MAY be able to change the date your presentation/s IF you can find another student willing to switch with you and BOTH of you see me to make the change. 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: 15%
  Leadoff presentation write-up:10%
  Paper: 20%

HELP: please see me with any questions about any aspect of the course. 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.
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 does not excuse violation. See under “Honor Code” on the College website; check with any member of the HC committee; me; your advisor; and especially, Mudd library staff, who are well versed about proper attribution of sources, including oral and electronic. The College requires that all written work have a signed affirmation of the Honor Code to receive credit.
First Year Seminar 167: Who Was a Jew?

1. INTRODUCTORY 9/2

Welcome! Who we all are, why we’re here, about the course.

In class: responses to the questions posed in the first paragraph of this syllabus.


2. APPROACHES TO STUDY; DEFINING “JEWISH”: IN ISRAEL; THE US 9/4


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

3. JEWS IN UNEXPECTED PLACES; “NON-NORMATIVE” JUDAISM 9/9

PRESENTER:

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

Exodus 22-23 and Leviticus 19. Written assignment for next class (in addition to the observation paper): construct a religion from these readings (do not exceed 2 typed, double-spaced pages). Be prepared to discuss what you selected and why.

4. UNEXPECTED PLACES AND FORMS, continued 9/11

PRESENTER:

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

"Falashas," Encyclopaedia Judaica (EJ), 6:1143-1152 only

Bring your “biblical religion” to class for discussion.
5. A CONCRETE VIEW  9/16

PRESENTER:


Note any terms you don’t understand, ask in class.

SIGN IN FOR OFFICE HOUR APPOINTMENT ABOUT YOUR PAPER TOPIC. DRAFT STATEMENT DUE 10/6 (see below).

6. CONCRETENESS, continued, AND-- THAT'S WHAT YOU THINK  9/18

PRESENTER:

Schiffman, chps. 5-7, pp.51-78

Shaye J. D. Cohen, The Beginnings of Jewishness, Prologue, chp. 1, pp.1-24

7. A MESS  9/23

PRESENTER:

Cohen, chps. 2-3, pp.25-106 * a fair number of these pages are notes. Note how you read Cohen, any difficulties you experience, and how you deal with them.

8. BACK TO SOME CONCRETENESS  9/25

PRESENTER:

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

FIRST ESSAY ASSIGNMENT: DUE 10/16

TOPIC: "Who Was a Jew in Antiquity? How Did They Know, and How Do We Know?"

Using our readings and discussions for sessions 1-10, write a 4-5-page, double-spaced essay; do not exceed this limit. See guidelines, above, re: writing. Your essay must include a comparison of Schiffman and Cohen.

NO CLASS  9/30  Rosh Hashana  In lieu of class today, read Benjamin, chp.3, pp.58-77.
For next class (10/2), write a rough, 1-3pp. draft of your first essay. Work with Naomi Permutt, our Writing Tutor, TBA.

9. FURTHER DEFINING LINES 10/2

PRESENTER:

FIRST DRAFT OF YOUR ESSAY DUE TODAY

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

10. MATRILINEALITY; CONCLUSIONS 10/7

Cohen, chps. 9, Epilogue, pp.263-307, 341-349

Concluding discussion of Cohen and the whole topic of Jewishness in antiquity. Aside from observations on today’s reading, think back on what you have learned in the last month, how your thinking has changed, and why. Re-read your early observation papers, bring these to class, and comment.

NO CLASS Thurs. 10/9 Yom Kippur (College holiday)

SECOND DRAFT OF YOUR ESSAY DUE 10/13; work with Naomi, TBA.

NO CLASS Tues. 10/14 FIRST ESSAY ASSIGNMENT DUE NEXT CLASS.

11. RESEARCH METHODS: CLASS WILL BE HELD IN MUDD LIBRARY
MEET AT THE REFERENCE DESK/ or other location TBA 10/16

FIRST ESSAY ASSIGNMENT DUE IN CLASS TODAY.

For today, read: Benjamin, chp. 4, pp.78-120. Prepare and bring draft statement of research topic or at least, an area you are interested in researching for your paper. Using Benjamin: what is your topic? What might be your theme? Any idea what thesis you might have? How will you start to do your research? The Research Librarian who will lead this session may ask you to email her/him this statement a few days before our session so don’t leave this for the night before class.

FALL BREAK: 10/20–10/26

STATEMENT OF TOPIC AND BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE WHEN WE RETURN. Your Bibliography must use proper citation conventions; read and apply Benjamin, chp. 5, pp.121-177.

12. CHRISTIANS AND JEWS: READING FOR THEORY OUTLINES 10/28
PRESENTER:

STATEMENT OF TOPIC AND BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE IN CLASS TODAY


Daniel Boyarin is a major scholar of rabbinic culture. For today, we read sections of two of his books; I deliberately am assigning here only the Introductory chapters, where he lays out his approach and posits his theses; he attempts to prove these in chapters we will not be reading. What are Boyarin’s theses? How do these differ from those of other scholars whose work he summarizes? Why does he posit what he does?

SECOND ESSAY ASSIGNMENT: DUE 11/18

CHOOSE ONE:

ESSAY #1: Discuss and compare the question/problem of Jewishness and Christianess in antiquity and in the Marrano experience.

ESSAY #2: Discuss and compare the question/problem of the Jewishness of Marranos and that of what I call “loyal Jewish converts” (sessions 16-17)

ESSAY #3: Were Marranos Jews? Argue for or against this proposition, using evidence. At stake is whether descendants of Marranos today qualify for citizenship under Israel’s Law of Return or must undergo conversion in order to immigrate to Israel as Jews. (The Law of Return is a given; your only task is to argue the Jewishness of this group).

13. JEWS WHO ARE CATHOLICS-- OR IS IT CATHOLICS WHO ARE JEWS? HOW DOES GENDER AFFECT JEWISHNESS? 10/30

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/OS; RE-JUDAIZING 11/4

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

2-3 PAGE DRAFT OF SECOND ESSAY ASSIGNMENT DUE NEXT CLASS. Work with Writing Tutor, TBA.

15. DRIFTING FROM JEWISHNESS: MODERN JEWISH ASSIMILATION
   11/6

2-3 PAGE DRAFT OF ESSAY #2 DUE TODAY

PRESENTER:


16. LOYAL JEWISH CONVERTS: HEINE, BOERNE, CHWOLSON, DISRAELI
   11/11

2-3 PAGE SECOND DRAFT OF ESSAY #2 DUE NEXT CLASS.

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 (this is not a book on Jewish history or identity. Do this reading keeping in mind our purposes in this course).

17. JEWISH BY "RACE": DISRAELI, continued
   11/13

SECOND DRAFT OF ESSAY #2 DUE IN CLASS.

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

18. ATHEIST JEWS: FREUD  11/18
SECOND ESSAY DUE IN CLASS.
PRESENTER:
“Sigmund Freud,” EJ, 7:161-165


19. FREUD, continued  11/20
PRESENTER:
Gay, chp.3, pp.71-154

20. FREUD, ANOTHER VIEW  11/25
PRESENTER:

THANKSGIVING NO CLASS 11/27
REVISED STATEMENT OF TOPIC AND BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE NEXT CLASS. For this 1-3 page statement, you should have begun reading, at least skimming, sources for your paper and articulate a more defined sense of its parameters and focus. Bibliography must use citation conventions as in Benjamin.

21. FREUD, CONCLUSION; JEWISH SOCIALISM  12/2
REVISED STATEMENT OF TOPIC AND BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE
PRESENTER:
Yerushalmi, chps. 4-5, Provisional Postscript, pp.57-100, 111-112

“Bund,” EJ, 4:1497-1506
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 to this reading)
22. JEWISH SOCIALISM; SOCIALIST, RADICAL, JEW: VLADIMIR MEDEM 12/4

PRESENTER:
Nora Levin, While Messiah Tarried, chps. 16-18, pp.250-300

"Vladimir Medem," EJ, 11:1175-1176

23. VLADIMIR MEDEM 12/9

PRESENTER:

The Life and Soul of a Legendary Jewish Socialist: The Memoirs of Vladimir Medem, chps. 1-14, 16-19, 21, 24-26, pp.1-77, 82-100, 105-109, 119-135

ON ERES; shelf reserve; through Ohio Link; copies may be available from my office, see me. Memoir reading is easier/ quicker than much we've done, which is not to say there is not much to learn, it’s just easier to get! Focus on Medem's odyssey to becoming a Jew: how does this happen? How did he become/ make himself, and come to be seen by others as, a Jew? What did “Jewish” mean to him-- how does he define Jewishness? How much of his odyssey is ideological and conscious?

24. MEDEM, continued; COURSE CONCLUSIONS 12/11

PRESENTER:

Medem, Life, chps., 29-31, 48, pp.152-179

Your observations today should partly on Medem and partly a retrospective statement on "Who Was A Jew?," giving conclusions you draw from the course as a whole. What have you learned? How has your thinking changed over the course of the semester?