



RELG/JWST 257

MWF 10:10am-11:00am

King 237

Office Hours: sign up at [tinyurl.com/profrabin](https://tinyurl.com/profrabin)

Oberlin College, Spring 2021

Prof. [Shari Rabin](#)

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This course will explore the relationship between Judaism and the category of “religion.” Focusing on the U.S. context, we will explore the privileged political and social status of “religion,” its limits in describing non-Protestant groups, and diverse approaches to its description. Topics will include Jews and “religious freedom”; the emergence of Jewish denominations and the role of the synagogue; the multiplicity and creativity of Jewish identity and practice; and the sacralization of “secular” Jewish culture and politics.

### **Learning Goals:**

- to expand your capacity to reflect rigorously on the history and politics of “religion” in the United States
- to gain familiarity with Jewish history, religion, and culture
- to learn how to analyze primary sources
- to strengthen abilities in writing and communication

### **Active Engagement (10%)**

This grade assesses your preparedness and engagement, which can be demonstrated by commenting in class, asking thoughtful questions, and/or attending office hours. Completing in-class activities is necessary to earn a high grade, but completing in-class activities alone will not merit an A.

### Disability Accommodations:

Students should notify the Office of Disability Resources and their instructor of any disability-related needs. More information at: <http://oberlin.edu/disability-resources>.

### On Discussions:

-In a liberal arts course, discussion is one of the main – and best – techniques for learning.

-Everyone is invited to contribute to discussions. When you do so, you should use respectful language and informed arguments that are based on reliable sources. Avoid generalizations and stereotypes, unsupported claims, and logical fallacies. Racist terms and abusive language will not be tolerated.

-It is also crucial that you make space for other voices to be heard. When your classmates are speaking, you should listen carefully, assume good intentions, and respond – especially if you disagree – by engaging with the substance of their argument.

-You will get the most out of this class if you see it as an opportunity to learn and grow. This means approaching discussions with a spirit of openness to the – sometimes difficult – process of understanding new ideas, receiving feedback, and developing as a thinker.

-During class, please avoid texting, checking your cellphone, or doing other activities that distract you, me, and/or your classmates from our shared pursuit of learning.

#### On Written Assignments:

-Papers must be written in Times New Roman, 12-point font, double-spaced with standard margins and using [Chicago citation style](#). They should be submitted via email by 5pm, as Microsoft Word or PDF files.

-You can submit an optional draft 3 days before each deadline to receive feedback.

-You must adhere to the honor code in all class assignments (more info at:

<http://oberlin.edu/studentpolicies/honorcode>). This means submitting your own original work and including clear citations of all sources. If you have questions about this, please contact me!

#### On Deadlines:

Assignment deadlines have an important function within the larger trajectory of this course, so it is important that you meet them whenever possible. If you need an extension to complete an assignment, please do not hesitate to reach out, but you should do so *before* the missed deadline. You can also make up any missed work for partial credit up until the last day of class.

#### On Reading:

The assigned reading is the core of this class and the basis for our shared intellectual endeavors. You are expected to read carefully, take notes on material that surprises/interests/confuses you, and come to class prepared to discuss.

#### **Primary Source Journal (30%) - [Rubric](#)**

At the beginning of the semester, I will distribute a primary source handout ([link here](#)). Once each week (when possible) you should complete the handout for one assigned primary source that is marked in the syllabus with this symbol: \*. I plan to use this assignment to shape class discussion, so it is important that it be submitted before class-time on the day the primary source is assigned. Your work in each unit of the course will count for 10% of your final grade.

#### **Secondary Source Handout (10%) - [Rubric](#)**

At the beginning of the semester, I will distribute a worksheet on reading secondary sources ([link here](#)). Twice you must complete the handout for a source that is marked on the syllabus with this symbol: -. The first must be completed by March 15. I plan to use this assignment to shape class discussion, so it is important that it be submitted before class-time on the day the secondary source is assigned.

**Final Project (50%)**

You will complete a final project rooted in research about a topic related to Judaism in the U.S. You can write a traditional term paper *or* you can produce an unessay, a substantive creative project. Examples include a playlist, a short story, a work of visual art, or any other medium that you think is conducive to your topic. An unessay must be accompanied by a three-page creator’s statement. There will be three steps leading up to the final project:

1) Annotated Bibliography (15%)

Select a topic related to Judaism in the U.S. [Find three scholarly secondary sources](#) related to your topic. Offer a short summary and analysis of each, explaining how each illuminates your broader topic. Due April 4 at 5pm.

2) In-Class Presentation. (10%)

You will give a presentation to your classmates that 1) explains what you have learned about your topic, 2) introduces a primary source that you are engaging in your project, and 3) describes the medium you have selected for your project. In class, April 26, 28, and 30.

3) Final Project. (25%)

A substantive project, rooted in primary and secondary source research, that conveys an argument about some aspect of Judaism in the U.S. Due Sunday, May 9 at 9pm.

**Schedule**

<a href="#">Week 1 – Introductions</a>	
M Feb 1	Introductions
W Feb 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Complete <a href="#">Welcome Survey</a></li> <li>•“<a href="#">What the heck is religion?</a>,” <i>Keeping it 101 Podcast</i>, episode 101</li> </ul>
F Feb 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Paula Hyman, “The Life of Glikl of Hameln,” <i>Judaism in Practice</i>, 483-497</li> </ul>
<b>SECTION I: THE STATE</b>	

<u><a href="#">Week 2 – A Christian Nation?</a></u>	
M Feb 8	•Tisa Wenger, “Introduction,” <i>Religious Freedom</i> , 1-10
W Feb 10	*Exchange between the Newport Congregation and George Washington (1790), <i>American Jewish History: A Primary Source Reader (AJH)</i> , eds. Gary P. Zola and Marc Dollinger ( <b>e-book</b> ), 41-3 *Samuel Jones, Last Will and Testament (1809), <i>AJH</i> , 65-66
F Feb 12	**“Jacob Henry Demands the Right of Conscience,” <i>Religion and State in the American Jewish Experience</i> , 82-5 **“The Maryland Jew Bill,” <i>Religion and State in the American Jewish Experience</i> , 94-7 **“Letter from Jacob Ezekiel to John Tyler” (1841), <i>AJH</i> , 73-4
<u><a href="#">Week 3 – War and Immigration</a></u>	
M Feb 15	-Shari Rabin, “Wandering Sons of Israel: Europe, America, and the Politics of Jewish Mobility,” <i>Jews on the Frontier: Religion and Mobility in Nineteenth-Century America</i> , 21-43 ( <b>e-book</b> )
W Feb 17	*Police Commissioner Theodore A. Bingham (1908), <i>AJH</i> , 173 *Louis Brandeis, “The Jewish Problem” (1915), <i>AJH</i> , 168-9 *Elkan C. Voorsanger, “Passover Services in France” (1918), <i>AJH</i> , 158-60
F Feb 19	*Congressional Committee on Immigration (1920), <i>The Jew in the Modern World</i> **“Report to the Secretary” (1944), <i>AJH</i> , 262-7
<u><a href="#">Week 4 – Tri-Faith America</a></u>	
M Feb 22	-Sarah Imhoff, “Hoover’s Judeo-Christians: Jews, Religion, and Communism in the Cold War,” <i>The FBI and Religion</i> , 159-178 ( <b>e-book</b> )
W Feb 24	*Excerpts from <i>Religion and State in the American Jewish Experience</i> * <i>Shaare Tefila Congregation v. Cobb</i> (1987)
F Feb 26	*Joseph Lieberman Remarks (2000), <i>AJH</i> , 396-8 *Donald Trump, “Executive Order on Combating Anti-Semitism” (2019)

## SECTION II: THE SYNAGOGUE

### Week 5 – The Rise of Reform

M Mar 1	-Laurie Maffly-Kipp, “The Burdens of Church History,” <i>Church History</i> (June 2013), 353-67.
W Mar 3	*Religious Reform in Charleston, <i>AJH</i> , 79-80 •Dianne Ashton, “The 1842 Hymnal of Penina Moise,” <i>Religions of the U.S. in Practice</i> , 108-121 •Ralph Melnick, “Billy Simons: The Black Jew of Charleston,” <i>American Jewish Archives</i> , 1-6
F Mar 5	*Abraham Rice to Isaac Leeser (1848), <i>AJH</i> , 81-2. **“The Pittsburgh Platform” (1885), <i>AJH</i> , 153

### Week 6 – Immigrant Institutions

M Mar 8	-Jonathan Sarna, “Two World of American Judaism,” <i>American Judaism: A History</i> , 152-207 (e-book)
W Mar 10	**“Will the Old Sephardim Welcome the New? A Sermon to New York’s Oldest Jewish Congregation (1912),” <i>Sephardi Lives: A Documentary History</i> , 328-9 **“A Short History of Congregation Beth B’nai Abraham, New York, N.Y.,” (c. 1920s) in Dorman, <i>Chosen People: The Rise of American Black Israelite Religions</i> , 189-192
F Mar 12	*Excerpts from Mordecai Kaplan, <i>Judaism as a Civilization</i> (1934) *Excerpts from <i>A Bintel Brief</i>

### Week 7 – Postwar Transformations I

M Mar 15	-Rachel Kranson, “Pathfinders’ Predicament: Negotiating Middle-Class Judaism,” <i>Ambivalent Embrace</i> , 68-96
W Mar 17	*William Malev, “The Jew in the South in the Conflict on Segregation” (1959), <i>AJH</i> , 310-4 *Abraham Joshua Heschel, “Religion and Race” (1963) *Rabbi Sandra Lawson, “A Prayer for Ferguson,” <i>T’ruah</i>

F Mar 19	Workshop Day - REMOTE with librarian
<b><u>Week 8 – Postwar Transformations II</u></b>	
M Mar 22	No Class – Wellness Day
W Mar 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Pamela Nadell, “Ordaining Women Rabbis,” <i>Religions of the United States in Practice</i>, 389-417</li> <li>*Steve Greenberg, “Gayness and God: Wrestlings of an Orthodox Rabbi” (1993), <i>American Jewish Thought Since 1934</i></li> <li>*CCAR Responsa on Transgender Jews</li> </ul>
F Mar 26	<p>Read one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Frida Kerner Fruman, “Synagogue Life among American Reform Jews,” <i>The Life of Judaism</i>, 51-62</li> <li>•Samuel C. Heilman, “Orthodoxy in an American Synagogue,” <i>LOJ</i>, 63-78</li> <li>•Chava Weissler, “Worship in the Havurah Movement,” <i>LOJ</i>, 79-92</li> <li>•Fran Markowitz, “A Bat Mitzvah among Russian Jews in America,” <i>LOJ</i>, 121-136</li> </ul>
<b><u>Week 9 – Boundary-Crossing</u></b>	
M Mar 29	-Zalman Newfield, “You Can Check Out but You Can Never Leave,” <i>Degrees of Separation</i> , 1-31
W Mar 31	-Emily Sigalow, “Constructing a Jewish Buddhist Identity,” <i>American JewBu</i> , 148-177
F Apr 2	-Bruce Haynes, “Your People Shall Be My People: Black Converts to Judaism,” <i>The Soul of Judaism</i> , 111-140
S Apr 4	Annotated Bibliography Due
<b>SECTION III: BEYOND</b>	
<b><u>Week 10 – Ritual and Family</u></b>	

M Apr 5	-Robert Orsi, "Everyday Miracles: The Study of Lived Religion," <i>Lived Religion in America</i> , 3-21
W Apr 7	*"A New Supplication for a Woman Whose Husband has Deserted her" (1916), <i>AJH</i> , 163-4 *Miriam Anzovin, " <a href="#">An Atheist Does Daf Yomi</a> ," <i>Jewish Boston</i> , January 6, 2020 <u>Read one of the following:</u> •Vanessa Ochs, "The Homemade Passover Haggadah," <i>Religions of the United States in Practice</i> 2, 53-66 •Vanessa Ochs, "Jewish Mourning Practices," <i>Religions of the United States in Practice</i> 2, 284-296
F Apr 9	Workshop Day - REMOTE with a Speaking Associate
<b><u><a href="#">Week 11 – Food and Music</a></u></b>	
M Apr 12	-Rachel Gross, "How Do You Solve a Problem Like Nostalgia," <i>Beyond the Synagogue</i> , 19-38
W Apr 14	*Excerpts from Esther Levy's <i>Jewish Cookery Book</i> (1871) *Michael Twitty, "Mishpocheh," <i>The Cooking Gene</i> , 65-78. •Susanna Capelouto, " <a href="#">Pie by Another Name: The Burkas of Or Ve Shalom</a> ," <i>Gravy</i> , August 24, 2017.
F Apr 16	•Dianne Ashton, "Hanukkah Songs of the 1950s," <i>Religions of the United States in Practice</i> , 75-89. * <a href="#">Spotify Playlist</a>
<b><u><a href="#">Week 12 – Sacralizing the Secular</a></u></b>	
M Apr 19	-Jonathan Sarna, "The Cult of Synthesis in American Jewish Culture," <i>Jewish Social Studies</i> (1999), 52-75 *"We Will Never Die Program" (1943), <i>AJH</i> , 256 *Nathan Glazer, "Fighting for Israel," <i>A Documentary History of Religion in America</i> , 457-8
W Apr 21	-Atalia Omer, "Reimagining Tradition," <i>Days of Awe</i> , 153-78 *David Hartman, "Auschwitz or Sinai?" (1982)

F Apr 23	-Laura Levitt, "Impossible Assimilations, American Liberalism, and Jewish Difference: Revisiting Jewish Secularism," <i>American Quarterly</i> (September 2007), 807-32.
<u><a href="#">Week 13 – Presentations</a></u>	
M Apr 26	Presentations
W Apr 28	Presentations
F Apr 30	Presentations
<u><a href="#">Week 14</a></u>	
M May 4	Conclusions