

**Jewish Studies 10**  
**Introduction to Jewish Cultures**

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There is no one Jewish culture. As Jews have lived all over the world in many and varied environments their cultures have differed. Jewish cultures have developed both by adapting to and resisting the cultures around them. In these many Jewish cultures, religious teaching was just one important component. This course will examine the wide variety of Jewish cultures in the modern world, and then survey the history of Jewish cultures from Late Antiquity to the modern period.

Readings for this course will include essays by contemporary scholars about different Jewish cultures. We will also read primary texts that come from different Jewish cultures and shed light on them. During many classes we will read these texts together using the traditional Jewish study form known as *hevruta*, in which students discuss texts in pairs. There will also be a fieldwork component in which students are required to visit a Jewish institution or cultural event and reflect on what they encountered there.

**Office hours:**

**Required readings:**

Raymond Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People* (background reading)  
David Biale (ed.), *Cultures of the Jews: A New History* (primary textbook)  
Course reader containing original texts for *hevruta* study.

**Grading:**

Summaries of readings (see guidelines, due each class for which reading is assigned):  
30%  
Fieldwork assignment (guidelines to be distributed in class, due XXX): 20%  
Take-home exam (due on day of final): 40%  
Class participation: 10%

**Class expectations:**

Because of the rapid pace of the course, it is essential that all assignments be turned in on time. Extensions will be given only with a doctor's note. Any student with special circumstances or problems should see me during office hours as soon as possible so that we can find a solution.

Students should be familiar with the University policy on plagiarism.

**Class Schedule** (27 classes)

**Part 1: Jewish Cultures of the Modern Period**

Introduction: What is Jewish culture?

Reading: David Biale, "Preface," *Cultures of the Jews*,

The Culture of Jewish scholarship

Reading: Rabbi Yohanan and Reish Lakish (reader)

Modern Varieties of Judaism

Reading: Sylvia Barak Fishman, "Coalescing American and Jewish Values," in *Jewish Life and American Culture*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2000.

Reprinted in reader.

Note: Even though this is in the reader it is an article and a summary must be submitted for it.

Guidelines for the field research assignment will be handed out in class.

Traditional and Creative Liturgy

Reading: Orthodox and Reconstructionist blessings, reader

Foundations of Modern Judaism

Reading: Richard I. Cohen, "Urban Visibility and Biblical Visions: Jewish Cultures in Western and Central Europe in the Modern Age," *Cultures of the Jews*, 977-1001.

American Jewish Culture

Reading: Stephen Whitfield, "Declarations of Independence: American Jewish Culture in the Twentieth Century" *Cultures of the Jews*, 1099-1142.

Sacred and Secular in American Jewish Culture

Reading: Lenny Bruce, "God Talk," Leonard Cohen, "Who by Fire" (reader)

Contemporary Sephardic Culture

Reading: "Multicultural Visions: The Cultural Tapestry of the Jews of North Africa," *Cultures of the Jews*, 887-932.

Israel and Hebrew Culture

Reading: Ariel Hirschfeld, "Locus and Language: Hebrew Culture in Israel, 1890-1990," *Cultures of the Jews*, 1011-1062.

Sacred and Secular in Israel

Reading: Yehuda Amichai, "Tourists," (reader)

### Folk Cultures of Israel

Reading: Eli Yassif, "The "Other" Israel: Folk Cultures in the Modern State of Israel," *Cultures of the Jews*, 1063-1098.

### African Jewish Cultures

Reading: Hagar Salamon, "Religious Interplay on an African Stage: Ethiopian Jews in Christian Ethiopia," *Cultures of the Jews*, 977-1010.

**Field research assignment due.**

## **Part 2: The Variety of Jewish Cultures in History**

### **Late Antiquity**

#### The Beginnings of Post-Biblical Jewishness

Reading: Eric M. Meyers, "Jewish Culture in Greco-Roman Palestine," *Cultures of the Jews*, 135-180.

#### Rabbinic Cultures of Learning and Authority

Reading: "Not in Heaven" (reader)

#### Byzantine Jewish Cultures

Reading: Oded Irshai, "Confronting a Christian Empire: Jewish Culture in the World of Byzantium," *Cultures of the Jews*, 181-222.

#### Babylonian Rabbinic Cultures

Reading: Isaiah Gafni, "Babylonian Rabbinic Culture," *Cultures of the Jews*, 223-266.

### **Middle Ages**

#### Jewish Cultures in Medieval Christendom

Reading: Ivan Marcus, "A Jewish-Christian Symbiosis: The Culture of Early Ashkenaz," *Cultures of the Jews*, 449-518.

#### Jewish Biblical Exegesis and the Christian World

Reading: Rashi on Genesis 22 (reader)

#### Jewish Cultures in Formative Islam

Reading: Reuven Firestone, "Jewish Culture in the Formative Period of Islam," *Cultures of the Jews*, 267-304.

#### Spanish Jewry Between Christianity and Islam

Reading: Benjamin R. Gampel, "A Letter to a Wayward Teacher: The Transformations of Sephardic Culture in Christian Iberia," *Cultures of the Jews*, 389-448.

#### Jewish Literature in Two Worlds

Reading: Poems by Ibn Ezra (reader)

## **Transitions to Modernity**

### Jewish Folklore

Reading: Shalom Sabar, "Childbirth and Magic: Jewish Folklore and Material Culture," *Cultures of the Jews*, 671-725.

### Eastern Europe

Reading: David Biale, "A Journey Between Worlds: East European Jewish Culture from the Partitions of Poland to the Holocaust," *Cultures of the Jews*, 799-862.

### Haskalah

Reading: Baruch Spinoza on the Interpretation of Scripture (reader)

### Sephardic Transitions

Reading: Aron Rodrigue, "The Ottoman Diaspora: The Rise and Fall of Ladino Literary Culture," *Cultures of the Jews*, 863-886.

### The Communities of the East

Reading: Yosef Tobi, "Challenges to Tradition: Jewish Cultures in Yemen, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Bukhara," *Cultures of the Jews*, 933-976.

Review for final

## **Guidelines for Reading Summaries**

The purpose of the summaries is to help you identify the major arguments and main points of each article. The summaries should answer the following questions:

1. What is the author's main argument?
2. What is his proof for this argument?
3. What questions does this article leave you with?
4. What did you learn from this article that surprised you?
5. How does this article add to or challenge your understanding of Jewish cultures?

Summaries should be approximately 500 words, or one single-spaced typed page. You may write an essay that answers all the above questions, or if you prefer you may answer them one at a time. Please be economical with your words. No extra credit will be given for going over the word limit.

You are welcome to prepare these summaries in pairs or groups of up to four. If you do, please hand in only one copy with all your names on it.

Summaries must be handed in on the day for which the article is assigned. You may bring it to class or e-mail it to me.

Summaries are expected for secondary sources (articles by scholars) only. These include the articles in *Cultures of the Jews* plus the article by Sylvia Barak Fishman in the course reader.