Sonja L. Mekel

History and Jewish Studies

Lecture Course: Jews in Germany, 1807-1945

Course description: The history of German Jewry is often seen as paradigmatic for the modern Jewish experience in Western and Central Europe. The promise of emancipation that began at the end of the eighteenth century was gradually realized in the nineteenth, yet failed to solve many problems facing the Jewish minority. In fact, new political and civil rights created an unprecedented situation for acculturating Jewish communities and individuals that demanded perhaps as much as it conceded.

This course will provide students with a foundation for the study of German-Jewish history: it will deal with emancipation, religious and social change, Jewish-Gentile relations, and antisemitism from the beginning of the nineteenth century until the Holocaust. Jewish German intellectual achievement, as well as poor and rural Jews, will receive special emphasis throughout the semester. A premise of this course is that Jews were not merely “Germans of the Mosaic Persuasion,” that is, different from Gentile Germans only in their religious beliefs.

Course Requirements: You are required to prepare for and attend all lectures, and participate in the discussion sections. If you miss more than three lectures or sections without a valid excuse, you will get a “Fail” for attendance and participation. Write one review of 4-5 pages of one of the assigned secondary sources, and analyze one of the primary sources in 3-4 pages. In the final paper (12-15 pages), discuss one of the weeks’ topics in detail.

Attendance and participation: 20%
Review and analysis: 20% each
Final paper: 40%

All assigned readings are accessible via Blackboard/E-Res.

◆ Primary sources
Week 1: Introduction


Week 2: Napoleon and After


Week 3: Regions

  - “Reminiscences of Jacob Greenebaum, Sr.” (Rheinpfalz), transl. Henriette Greenebaum Frank, JewishGen/Yizkor Book Project (online).

Week 4: Emigrants and Betteljuden

Week 5: The Revolution of 1848/49

- Reinhard Rürup, “The European Revolutions of 1848 and Jewish Emancipation,” in Mosse, Paucker and Rürup (eds.), Revolution and Evolution, 1-54.
- Peter Pulzer, Jews and the German State: The Political History of a Minority, 1848-1933 (Detroit, MI, 2003), 69-85.

Week 6: Reform and Orthodoxy


Week 7: German-Jewish Intellectuals


Week 8: The Jewish Middle Class

- Simone Lässig, “The Emergence of a Middle-Class Religiosity: Social and Cultural Aspects of the German-Jewish Reform Movement During the First Half of the Nineteenth Century,” in Rainer Liedtke and David Rechter (eds.), Towards Normality? Acculturation and Modern German Jewry (Tübingen, 2003), 127-158.
- Marion A. Kaplan, The Making of the Jewish Middle Class. Women, Family, and Identity in Imperial Germany (New York, 1994), 64-84.
Week 9: Antisemitism

- Gideon Reuveni, “‘Productivist’ and ‘Consumerist’ Narratives of Jews in German History,” in Neil Gregor et al. (eds.), German History from the Margins (Bloomington, 2006), 165-84.
- Recommended: Helmut Walser Smith, The Butcher’s Tale: Murder and Antisemitism in a German Town (New York, 2002).

Week 10: Unwelcome Strangers?

- Steven Aschheim, Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800-1923 (Madison, WI, 1982), 58-79; 185-214.
- Shulamith Volkov, “The Dynamics of Dissimilation: Ostjuden and German Jews,” in Reinharz and Schatzberg, Jewish Response to German Culture, 195-211.

Week 11: The “German-Jewish Symbiosis”


Week 12: German-Jewish Politics

- Marjory Lamberti, Jewish Activism in Imperial Germany: The Struggle for Civil Equality (New Haven, CT, 1978), 123-75.
Week 13: Weimar

  - Hirschberg Goldmann Photograph Album, 1927-1928, Center for Jewish History, Digital Collections (online)

Week 14: Jews in Germany, 1933-1945

  - David P. Boder Interviews Otto Feuer; August 22, 1946; Paris, France, Project “Voices of the Holocaust,” Galvin Library, Illinois Institute of Technology (online)

Week # 15: Conclusion