Spring 2018

**Wandering Jews**

& **Zionists**

**RE 230 C**  **Prof. G.** **Spinner**

classroom: Tisch 308 [gspinner@skidmore.edu](mailto:spinn1g@cmich.edu)

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Wed1:00-2:00, *or by appt.*

***Course Description***

From biblical images (God’s Holy Mountain, a Promised Land flowing with milk and honey) to classical rabbinic texts about exile and return and on through medieval and modern literatures, ideas about Zion are deeply embedded in Jewish culture. This course considers that long history, wherein religion and politics are closely entwined, and examines how older discourses, saturated with nostalgia and utopia, are translated into the modern idiom of the nation state. Employing academic theories of sacred space and diaspora, we critically investigate changing identities in Jewish communities around the globe. As our course coincides with *This Place*, a photography exhibition at the Frances Tang Teaching Museum, we will use that show to frame our learning experience and consider how the history of Zionism informs current debates about Israel/Palestine.

***Learning Goals***

By taking this course, a student will:

(1.) become informed about Jews and Judaism as a global phenomenon, thereby

improving her religious literacy and understanding of global diversity;

(2.) be conversant with the beliefs, practices, and debates most relevant to analyzing Zion as a Jewish homeland, mastering enough history to complicate overly simple narratives, whether Zionist, anti-Zionist, or Counter-Zionist;

(3) interrogate the furtive term “Jew,” which moves between identifying a nation,

an ethnicity, and a religion;

(4.) employ theories from Religious Studies and cognate disciplines in order to think critically about sacred spaces and diasporas, and to rethink notions such as “utopia” and “nostalgia”;

(5.) engage materials from *This Place*, a photography exhibit at the Frances Tang Teaching Museum, thereby connecting classroom learning to a broader public discourse and wider circle of conversations;

*and* (6.) develop and articulate her own positions, so that she can confidently express an informed opinion, and respectfully disagree with opinions she does not share.

## Required Texts

Michael Stanislawski, *Zionism:* *A Very Short Introduction,* second edition.

All other readings will be distributed as handouts or Course Readers.

#### Course Requirements

Your grade consists of the following components:

Participation 7%

Preparing responses or questions 4%

*This Place* report 7%

*Palestinian Voices* report 7%

Mid-term Essay 10%

Final Essay 15%

Presentation: other places 20%

Presentation at *This Place* 15%

Presentation: PechaKucha 15%

**Participation** is not a “gimme,” as it requires a strong and continual effort throughout the semester. Our goal is have a sustained and thoughtful conversation about this topic, and this will not be achieved through half-hearted attempts. So: understand that ***attendance is mandatory*.** You should make every effort to always be at class (and to be on time, and not leave prematurely). Of course, participation is far more than showing up. It is an active engagement: you must have done the reading and be prepared to discuss it. It is talking with and listening to others: you will be an integral part of that conversation. You should have questions; you should have comments; above all, you should have curiosity.

Be assured that **you need to do all of the assigned readings**. There is no way to understand the subject and to fully participate in class if you skip, or skimp, on this most fundamental of labors. To aid in this endeavor, I will either give you prompts to which you respond, or I will ask you to write your own questions, which you will then ask your fellow students. You are not trying to stump your classmates; rather you are trying to direct the conversation to some of the more salient points from the readings.

**Essays** are an essential component to a liberal arts education, as writing them prompts you to integrate new information and ideas with your previous knowledge and prior experiences. This new synthesis should be expressed in an effective and orderly fashion, carefully attending to the interplay of argument and evidence. In the mid-term and final essays, you will more directly engage academic theories.

*Late work will be marked down*. I will deduct half a letter grade for each day any assignment is late. While due dates are firm, the instructor is not inflexible. It is, however, incumbent on you to explain to me why you deserve an extension. And here’s some good advice: *one asks for an extension* before *a deadline is missed*.

Looking at how your grade is weighted, you can see that emphasis is being placed on research and on **student presentations.** You will make two presentations in class, as well as deliver one at the Tang Museum. One underlying goal of peer-to-peer instruction is to help you become more comfortable with public speaking; another is to excite your ownership of the course materials.

The presentation about “other places” has you select a diasporic locale from a list. Although the tale of the **Wandering Jew** is a Christian story of decidedly anti-Jewish sentiment, we will spend almost one month of this course “wandering” across the globe. We want to sample the diversity of Jewish communities outside the Land, and consider both the continuities and innovations of diasporic Judaism. **PechaKucha** is a presentation format of 20 slides, each shown for 20 seconds. You will select a topic covering an aspect of contemporary life within Israel/Palestine.

The **Tang exhibit**, *This Place*, runs Feb 3 to Apr 22. Early in that run, you will visit the show and write up a report. Before it closes, we will return to the exhibit en masse. At that point in time, each student will have crafted a historical fiction and then role-play that persona in the gallery. I will say (much) more about this assignment as the semester goes on.

Please note now that you need to set aside two evenings (**Mar 7** and **Apr 19**) to attend required events at the Tang Museum. Attending other events, such as the Dunkerley Dialogues marked on the class schedule, is encouraged but optional.

***Palestinian Voices***

While our course focuses on Jewish sources, understanding Israel/Palestine requires an engagement with Palestinian perspectives. This Spring, MDOCS is presenting a series of four events that make such perspectives available:

**Feb 6** Early Photography and Palestine: A Talk by Issam Nassar

**March 28** Student Films from Palestine

**Apr 2** *Lyd in Exile*: documentarians Rami Younis and Sarah Friedland

**Apr 26** Razan Al-Salah: Screening and Artist Talk

**You are required** **to attend and report on** ***one* (1) of these events**; you may do additional reports for extra credit. A report is 2-3 pages (double spaced) in which you summarize the event, and then consider two prompts: (1.) what did you find novel or unexpected in the material? *and* (2.) where you disagree with points in the presentation, then articulate your difference of opinion.

***An Impassioned Subject***

As our semester concludes with a historical and critical examination of the modern state of Israel, a topic that can lead to acrimonious debate, the instructor would like to state at the outset that that this course is *not* designed to be *either* pro-Israeli *or* pro-Palestinian. I would like the tone of our discussions to be civil, and their contents to prioritize analysis over advocacy. You are certainly entitled to your personal opinions, but taking this course should make those opinions better informed: more historically grounded and nuanced, recognizing the complexity of the issues, and thus equipped to acknowledge positions other than your own as legitimate. Any conclusions you draw should be your own. But if spending an entire semester learning about different types of ‘Zionist’ and diasporic identities does not, at some level, invite rethinking some assumptions, then I will consider this course a failure.

***Fair Grading & A Reasonable Workload***

As even a brief glance at the above sections makes clear, I expect you to work. I think the workload is entirely appropriate for this level of course; and I trust that we can have some fun working through it together. But, in the interest of fairness, allow me to be more explicit about what my expectations are, and the standards to which I will hold you.

For each hour spent in class, I expect you to spend *3 hours outside of class* reading and writing. This means that you should commit approximately 9 hours per week in preparing and executing assignments.

In an era of grade inflation, let me address my understanding of what letter grades signify. I take “C” to be the baseline grade: it is *acceptable*. Thus doing all the assigned work, and doing it adequately, earns one a solid “C.” “B” then stands for doing *better than acceptable*, demonstrating some measurable improvement over “C” quality. And “A” translates to *excellent - -* a superlative I do not dispense lightly. I am not interested in employing mathematical models, such as by grading on a curve; I will happily give as many “A”s as I have students earning them. But do understand that such a high grade must be achieved through diligent effort, and can not merely be assumed.

I do not just attach a grade to your written work, but provide you with feedback on your writing. I make this effort in order to help you improve your writing skills, and so it behooves you to attend to that critique, and learn from your mistakes. While not my primary concern, errors in spellings, punctuation, and grammar detract from your writing, and thus impact your grade. The overarching goal, however, is more focused on content, so that you learn to express your ideas clearly and to build convincing arguments through a careful use of evidence. This pedagogical concern is shared across disciplines, and this course contributes to that ongoing effort.

With this goal in mind, you will have the option to rewrite certain papers. If you receive a B- or lower on an essay, then you may exercise that option. (This option does not apply to the ekphrasis or visualization assignment, to the creative project, and due to time constraints, to the final essay of the semester). If I hand you back a paper with a grade of B- or lower, then you can chose to meet with me. We will discuss the shortcomings of the paper, and set a new deadline for the rewritten version. You will turn in the older version along with the newer, and receive the average of the two grades.

***Classroom Civility***

Do not be late, and do not be rude. I hope that we will engage each other in open and honest ways, but both our speech and our demeanor should reflect common courtesy for those around us. Inappropriate or disruptive behavior will promptly result in being asked to leave the class. Feel free to bring a beverage or snack, and, if you are so inclined, enough to share. I just ask that any eating and drinking not disrupt with our learning.

Please turn off cell phones and any other small electronic devices before you come to class. Take your headphones off, and stow anything that texts or beeps well out of sight. I will start the semester out by allowing the use of laptops, as some students prefer to take their notes this way, but I will promptly rescind this permission if I feel that people are paying more attention to their computer screen than to class. In short, anything that might provide a distraction to the user, to other students, or to the instructor will not be indulged.

***Academic Integrity***

I have a zero tolerance policy for any form of intellectual dishonesty. Make sure your work is entirely your own, and that you give credit to any ideas or formulations that originate with others. Plagiarism is a serious violation of academic integrity, whether fully intentional or not. Recall that Skidmore’s Honor Code does not accept ignorance or error as adequate defense for violations; on this, see <cms.skidmore.edu/writing\_guide/honor\_code.cfm>. Suspected infractions will be reported to the Dean of Studies to investigate.

***Student Disabilities***

I am happy to make reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If you believe you will need it, then you must formally request academic accommodation from Meg Hegener, Coordinator for Students with Disabilities, and provide documentation verifying your disability. For further information, please call 580-8150, or stop by the office of Student Academic Services in Starbuck Center.

***Title IX***

Skidmore College faculty and staff are committed to supporting our students and upholding gender equity laws as outlined by Title IX. We consider sexual and gender-based misconduct to be one of the most serious violations of the values and standards of the College. Unwelcome sexual contact of any form is a violation of students’ personal integrity and their right to a safe environment and therefore violates Skidmore’s values. Sexual and gender-based misconduct is also prohibited by federal regulations.

If you choose to confide in a member of Skidmore’s faculty or staff regarding an issue of sexual or gender-based misconduct, that person is obligated to tell Skidmore’s Title IX Coordinator or Title IX Deputy Coordinator. That administrator will assist the student in connecting with all possible resources for support and reporting both on and off campus. Identities and details will be shared only with those who need to know to support the student and to address the situation through the college’s processes. If the student wishes to confide in a confidential resource, The Counseling Center Staff, Health Services, and Victim Advocates are all options available to the student. For further information, consult ://www.skidmore.edu/sgbm/ or contact Joel Aure, Title IX Coordinator, or Sarah Green, Deputy Coordinator.

***Partners in Learning***

To my mind, this syllabus establishes a kind of social contract, in which you and I agree to create a stimulating and supportive learning environment. I hope that at the core of this agreement we find a mutual interest in critical inquiry, a shared passion for learning, and a commitment to respect those with whom we disagree. Whether engaging the instructor or other students, I ask that you be civil, even as I will push you to be honest and open in your thinking.

I trust that with this syllabus I have made clear my expectations, and that if I have not, you will call me to account. I also ask that you make your own expectations clear to me, letting me know how we can best achieve that partnership in learning. Please do not hesitate to contact me about matters pertaining to the course.

I look forward to an exciting semester working together. Dr. Spinner

Schedule for **RE 230 C**

**Wandering Jews**

& **Zionists**

Jan 23. Introductions.

Jan 25. **Songs of Zion**. Reading 1.

Jan 30. **Promises & Covenants**. Reading 2.

Feb 1. **Sacred Center & Holy Land**. Reading 3.

Feb 3. *Dunkerley Dialogue*: Stephen Shore, with Terence Diggory. 5:00 pm.

Feb 6. **Gentiles & Jews**. Reading 4.

Feb 8. **Mourning for Zion**. Reading 5.

Feb 13. **Returning Home**. Reading 6.

Feb 15. **Magicians & Saints**. Reading 7.

Feb 20. **Houses of Prayer**. Reading 8.

Feb 22. **Out of this World.** Reading 9.

Feb 27. *Dunkerely Dialogue*: Wendy Ewald. 6:00 pm.

Feb 27. **In Place of Sacrifice**. Reading 10.

Mar 1. **Christians & Jews**. Reading 11.

Mar 6. **At Home in Babylon**. Reading 12.

Mar 7. Inhabiting/Excavating/Sustaining:

Understanding *This Place* with Paul Mendes-Flohr, Jodi Magness, and Michael Ben-Eli

7:00 pm. **Attendance is required.**

Mar 8. **A Palace in Time**. Reading 13.

***S p r i n g B r e a k***

Course Schedule, *continued*

Mar 20. **Jews in al-Andalus**. Reading 14.

Mar 22. **Jews in Morocco, Greece & Turkey**. Reading 15.

Mar 21-22. Staring Back at the Sun: *Video Art from Israel*. 8:00 pm.

Mar 27. **Jews in Ashkenaz**. Reading 16.

Mar 29. **Jews in India & China**. Reading 17.

Apr 3. **Jews in Safed**. Reading 18.

Apr 5. **Jews in Ethiopia & Uganda**. Reading 19.

Apr 10. **Jews in Bratslav**. Reading 20.

Apr 12. **“Our Hope Is Not Yet Lost.”** Reading 21**.**

Apr 17. **New Jews**. Reading 22.

Apr 19. **The Modern State of Israel.** Reading 23.

April 19. *Evening presentations at the Tang Museum*.

**Attendance is required.**

Apr 24. **Religious Revivals & Counter-Zionism**. Reading 24.

Apr 26. **The Situation Today**. *PechaKucha* presentations.

May 1. Conclusions.