

History 705: Topics in Global History: Jewish History Core

Jewish Emancipation (3 credits)

Prof. Amos Bitzan

Department of History, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Fall 2020

W 1:20-3:15 PM (online)

Course Description

“Emancipation” in Roman law was the act of freeing children from the powers over them accorded to their father. In English usage, as early as the seventeenth century, it came to mean the act of setting someone free – whether from real slavery (as in the United States) or in more figurative senses. In addition to the American context and in reference to the freeing of African American slaves, the word circulated widely as part of the early-nineteenth-century debates around removing civil restrictions imposed on Catholics in England. Later in the century, the term was similarly used for the removal of civil and political restrictions placed on Jews in European states and societies.

In his most recent book, which we will read in this course, the historian David Sorkin argues that “emancipation was, and remains, the principal event” of modern Jewish history. We will discuss whether this is true and how. Sorkin sees Jewish emancipation as a *longue durée* process that is still ongoing today in the twenty-first century and argues for the importance of studying the phenomenon across geographic boundaries. Through our readings and discussions we will try to understand what exactly Jewish emancipation meant for Jews and the societies and states in which they lived. Using Sorkin’s book and other recent works in the field of Jewish history, we will seek to understand this broad historical process in high resolution and see what kind of pictures emerge from our study.

Course Learning Objectives

- Become familiar with recent historical scholarship in the field of modern Jewish history across a range of contexts (Western, Central, and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa)
- Learn to pursue big trends and ideas through the details of synthetic books (such as Sorkin’s) and monographs
- Practice how to prepare and have conversations about history and historiography that are both interesting and intellectually productive

Contact Information and Office Hours

Office Hours: M 12-1 PM via web conferencing

Email: abitzan@wisc.edu

Credit Hours

The credit standard for this 3-credit course is met by an expectation of a total of 135 hours of student engagement with the course’s learning activities (at least 45 hours per credit or 9 hours per week), which include regularly scheduled meeting times (group seminar meetings of 115 minutes per week), dedicated online time, reading, writing, field trips, individual consultations with the instructor, and other student work as described in the syllabus.

Schedule of Readings

Week 1: Course Introduction (September 2)

Salo Baron, "Ghetto and Emancipation" *Menorah* XIV, no. 6 (June 1928): 515–28. Reprinted in *The Menorah Treasury*, ed. Leo W. Schwarz (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1964), 50–63, (<https://canvas.wisc.edu/>).

Week 2: Emancipation in Comparison (September 9)

David Sorkin, *Jewish Emancipation: A History Across Five Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), <https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/9912846462402121>, Parts I-III.

Week 3: Beyond Emancipation (September 16)

Sorkin, *Jewish Emancipation*, Parts IV-V and Conclusion.

Week 4: The Locus Classicus – Germany (September 23)

Robin Judd, *Contested Rituals : Circumcision, Kosher Butchering, and Jewish Political Life in Germany, 1843-1933* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), <https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/9911066866202121>.

Week 5: Wither Emancipation in Poland-Lithuania? (September 30)

Gershon Hundert, *Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century: A Genealogy of Modernity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), <https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/9911034060802121>.

Week 6: In the Russian Empire (October 7)

Natan M. Meir, *Kiev: Jewish Metropolis: A History, 1859-1914* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), <https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/9911070491802121>.

Week 7: The Soviet Union (October 14)

Elissa Bemporad, *Becoming Soviet Jews: The Bolshevik Experiment in Minsk* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), <https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/9911069042302121>.

Week 8: Interwar Poland (October 21)

Daniel Heller, *Jabotinsky's Children: Polish Jews and the Rise of Right-Wing Zionism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), <https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/9912420179702121>.

Week 9: Morocco (October 28)

Jessica Marglin, *Across Legal Lines: Jews and Muslims in Modern Morocco* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), <https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/991022199656502122>.

Week 10: Algeria (November 4)

Joshua Cole, *Lethal Provocation: The Constantine Murders and the Politics of French Algeria* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019), <https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/9912837137102121>.

Week 11: The Shoah (November 11)

Evgeny Finkel, *Ordinary Jews: Choice and Survival during the Holocaust* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), <https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/9912309308602121>.

Week 12: Post-War (November 18)

Lukasz Krzyzanowski, translated by Madeline Levine, *Ghost Citizens: Jewish Return to a Postwar City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020), <https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/9913019651502121>.

Week 13: Ottoman Palestine (November 25)

Michelle Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early Twentieth-Century Palestine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), <https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/9910101573902121>.

Week 14: Mandate Palestine (December 2)

Hillel Cohen, translated by Haim Watzman, *Year Zero of the Arab-Israeli Conflict: 1929* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2015), <https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/9912285382702121>.

Week 15: The State of Israel (December 9)

Orit Rozin, translated by Haim Watzman, *The Rise of the Individual in 1950s Israel: A Challenge to Collectivism* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2011), <https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/9910113462502121>.

Recommended as background: Anita Shapira, translated by Anthony Berris, *Israel: A History* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2012), <https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/9910128355402121>.

Requirements

Weekly Polemic: 10%

By noon on Tuesday, a day before our session, write an angry or ecstatic piece of 200 to 500 words either savaging one aspect of our book that week or extolling its virtues (if relevant, vis-à-vis other works or approaches we have encountered in the course). Post in the appropriate Canvas discussion thread. We will take 5-10 minutes at the beginning of seminar to read these.

Active, Reflective Participation in Every Session: 40%

Every week, each of you should come prepared with three questions you have about the work(s) we have read that will serve as a springboard for discussion. These can be big interpretive questions or smaller factual matters. They can also be responses or critiques of weekly polemics from that week. We will go through the seminar in “round-robin” format, where one person poses the question and then moderates a discussion about it.

Book Review (1,800 to 2,200 words) due on October 23 : 20%

Write a long-form book review of David Sorkin's *Jewish Emancipation* that includes 1) concise and accurate synopsis of the book, 2) assessment of its historiographical intervention(s), and 3) analysis of one of its claims and evidence given for it.

Final Portfolio and Paper (2,800-3,500 words) due December 11: 30%

In a series of mini-reviews, evaluate how each of the books we have read this semester speaks to some aspect of Sorkin's arguments. In a separate section, reflect on what thread of the history of emancipation you found most historically illuminating.

Alternatively: develop a thesis of your own choice that will involve analysis of all the books read this semester.