This course has two components:

1. An exploration of American Jewish history focusing on themes of particular importance to rabbinical students like the emergence of the denominations. We will also spend time contextualizing American Jewish history and thought within the broader currents of American religious history.

2. An exploration of seminal contemporary Jewish thinkers who wrote in an American context such as Mordecai Kaplan, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Joseph Soloveitchik, Judith Plaskow and others.¹

We will ultimately be aiming to place our own historical moment and our own theologies within broader historical/theological frameworks.

Assignments

1. Thorough reading of weekly material. All material [including recommended reading] unless otherwise marked will be on schoology. If the reading is available on-line, I have given the link in this syllabus.

2. Class presentation on one of the thinkers/topics. Students will be responsible for presenting and leading one class discussion of 20-30 minutes. More details to be discussed in class.

3. Final paper which will integrate your own theological ideas within the thinkers we discuss. [10-12 pages]

Books

Please purchase:


*please get second edition*
Class 1, Monday September 23  [note first class is on a Monday]

Setting the Context: The Jewish Encounter with America

Required Readings:
1. AJ, introduction – chapter 2
2. Wikipedia entry on Emma Lazarus

Recommended Reading for Further Study
2. Lou Silberman, American Impact: Judaism in the United States in the Early 19th Century (1964)

Class 2, October 3

Emergence of Reform Judaism

Required Readings:
1. Michael Meyer, Response To Modernity, pp. 225-295
2. AJ, 62-102

Recommended Reading For Further Study:
1. Leon Jick, The Americanization of the Synagogue, pp. 79-97

Class 3, October 10

Early 20th century: American Zionism and Immigrant Experience

Required Readings:
1. AJ, 151-207

Recommended Reading:
Zionism

**Immigrant Experience**


**Class 4, October 17**

*Emergence of Conservative Judaism*

**Required Readings:**

2. *AJ,* 208-255

**Recommended Reading**


**Class 5, October 24**

*Mordecai Kaplan*

**Required Reading:**

1. *Choices,* “Mordecai Kaplan”

**Recommended Reading:**

[Books are all available in library]

Class 6 October 31
WWII & Suburbanization
Required Readings:
1. AJ, 255-306

Recommended Readings:
3. Deborah Dash Moore, GI Jew [not on schoology]

Class 7 November 7
Abraham Joshua Heschel
Required Reading
1. Choices, “Abraham Joshua Heschel”
2. A.J. Heschel, “Toward an Understanding of Halakha,” in Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity, ed. Susanah Heschel

Recommended Reading

Class 8 November 14
Joseph Soloveitchik
Required Readings:
1. Choices, “Joseph Soloveitchik”
2. Soloveitchik, Halakhic Man, pp. 17-29

Recommended Reading


Class 9 November 21

Heschel, Soloveitchik and Meeting the Other

Required Reading:


Recommended Reading:


Class 10 December 5

Responses to the Shoah: Richard Rubenstein, Emil Fackenheim, Yitz Greenberg

Required Reading

1. *Choices*, “Confronting the Holocaust”
3. Emil Fackenheim, various essays, in *Wrestling with God*, pp. 419-449
Recommended Reading:
[all books in library, not on schoology]

Class 11  December 12
*Judith Plaskow, Rachel Adler and Jewish Feminism*

**Guest Teacher:** TBD

Required Reading:
1. *Choices*, “Jewish Feminist Theology” (by Ellen Umansky)

Recommended Reading:

Class 12  December 19

**Forward:** Queer Jewish Thought, Post-Modern Jewish Thought, Art Green Jewish Thought

Required Reading:
2. * Choices, “Postmodern Judaism”