**Contemporary Jewish Thought in Historical Context**
Dan Judson

**RB-JTHT-518**
2 graduate credits  
Tuesday, 11:30 am – 1 pm  
Level: Year 5

Rabbi Dan Judson

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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.

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:


Class 1

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

Emergence of Reform Judaism

Required Readings:
1. AJ, 62-102

Recommended Reading For Further Study:
1. Michael Meyer, Response To Modernity, pp. 225-295
2. Leon Jick, The Americanization of the Synagogue, pp. 79-97

Class 3

Early 20th century: American Zionism and Immigrant Experience

Required Readings:
1. AJ, 151-207

Recommended Reading:
Zionism

Immigrant Experience – please read one of the following:


**Class 4**

Emergence of Conservative Judaism

**Required Readings:**

2. *AJ*, 208-255

**Recommended Reading**


**Class 5**

Mordecai Kaplan

**Required Reading:**

1. *Choices*, “Mordecai Kaplan”

**Recommended Reading:**

[Books are all available in library]

### Class 6

**WWII & Suburbanization**

**Required Readings:**

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

### Class 7

**Abraham Joshua Heschel**

**Required Reading**
1. *Choices*, “Abraham Joshua Heschel”

**Recommended Reading**

### Class 8

**Joseph Soloveitchik**

**Required Readings:**
1. *Choices*, “Joseph Soloveitchik”

**Recommended Reading**


**Class 9**

**Heschel, Soloveitchik and Meeting the Other**

**Required Reading:**


**Recommended Reading:**


**Class 10**

**Responses to the Shoah: Richard Rubinstein, 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**

*Judith Plaskow, Rachel Adler and Jewish Feminism*

**Guest Teacher: TBD**

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

Recommended Reading:

**Class 12**

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

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