

HIST 3950: Contemporary Israeli Society and Politics

T 4:30-7:20pm, Sutton Hall 111

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Office hours: Tuesdays, 1:00-3:00pm, Hester Hall 132

The State of Israel was founded in 1948. For Jews, it was the fulfillment of a 2000-year long dream to return to their ancestral homeland of Erets Yisrael. For others, notably the Arab inhabitants known as the Palestinians (named after their land, Palestine), the establishment of a Jewish state was a tragedy. This course, however, will deal very briefly with the dispute between the two parties, also known as the Arab-Israeli Conflict. Although the conflict has undoubtedly shaped Israeli society and its political system, this course will mostly have an inward focus on Israel itself: its political system, international relations, how it functions as a society of immigrants, relationships between secular and religious Jews and between Jews of various ethnic backgrounds, and the role the military plays in Israeli society. We will also look at Israeli culture through the prism of music and film.

Previous knowledge about the history of Judaism, Israel, the Arab-Israeli Conflict, or the Middle East is helpful, but not required. Historical and other background will be provided in class, as well as in the readings for most weeks.

Requirements:

1. **Attendance** – you are expected to show up to all classes. I treat our classes as if they were a personal appointment with each one of you, and expect you to do the same. If you cannot come to class for whatever reason, please e-mail me *in advance* to let me know about it.

Please note that I check attendance at random. There is no way for you to know whether I'd be checking attendance on a given day, so you are better off not missing any classes. The attendance part of your final grade (see below) will be determined by how many absences you have on record (i.e. on days I chose to check attendance). Your grade starts to suffer from the third absence, and will be reduced exponentially the more absences you have. You will not be able to earn a passing grade in this course if you have six recorded absences or more. If you believe you have a justified reason that requires you to miss a number of classes, talk to me.

2. **Participation** – you are expected to do all assigned readings as elaborated in the schedule below, and participate in class discussions that will be based on those readings. This is an obvious prerequisite for serious exchanges. Readings are not only essential to understanding the course material; they also complement the information provided in lectures.

If you don't say anything throughout the semester, come to class late or leave early, don't take notes, use unrelated internet resources while in class, or appear sleepy or hung-over, your participation grade will be affected, and as you can imagine, not in a positive way.

3. **Weekly Question** – in preparation for every week, you will need to answer a question relating to the topic of discussion (as listed below in the course schedule). Your answer should be at most 1 page long, typed single or double spaced, and in a font size not smaller than 12. You are not required to use any footnotes or references, but your answer needs to relate to that week's reading in some way. You may, in addition, choose to search for information online, if you find the assigned texts insufficient to answer the question. When reading your weekly essays, I'll be looking to see whether what you say makes sense, and will also evaluate your writing.

Each answer to a weekly question will be worth 15 points. The maximum number of points you can earn for this section is 90. You may do so by writing as little as 6 answers, but if you don't score 15 every week, you'll need to write more to reach the maximum number of points possible. It is your choice whether to write an answer in any given week, however: (1) You must reach 50 answer points by the end of the semester to earn a passing grade for this course; (2) Essays are due at the beginning of each class in hard copy – no e-mails accepted – and there will be no makeups. If you miss a class or arrive more than 10 minutes late, even for a justified reason, you cannot submit your answer that week. (3) Even if you chose not to write an essay on a particular week, you should still come prepared with an answer, as we will be discussing it in class.

After having reached 90 points, you may answer the remaining questions for bonus. Bonus points will be calculated on a 1:3 ratio (for example, a perfect score = 5 bonus points)

4. **October assignment** – due to prior engagement, we will not have class on October 5. Instead, you will get a short research assignment, which will require you to do some library work and write a very short essay (1-3 pages). The total time needed for this assignment should not exceed the time you would have spent in class and reading for that week. More information on this assignment will be given in due course.

You must earn at least 10 points on this assignment to pass the course

5. **Final take home open-books exam** – due on 12/15/10 at 4:30pm in my office, or by that time via e-mail. The exam will consist of four questions, of which you will be required to answer two. Alternatively, you may choose one of the four given questions and come up with another that you choose and I approve. The questions for the final exam will be distributed sometime after Thanksgiving, and so will further instructions.

You must earn at least 100 points on the exam to pass the course

6. **Middle East and Jewish-related events** – the Program in Judaic Studies, the School of International and Area Studies, and the Center for Middle East Studies organize a number of Middle East and Jewish-related events throughout the semester, and so do other groups on campus. You may earn 5 bonus points for each event you attend and write a short, up

to 1 page, report about, which you submit to me the following class. A list of such events will be updated on D2L, so make sure you check back often.

Grading:

There will be a total of 500 points for the class, distributed in the following manner:

Attendance – 80 pts

Participation – 80 pts

Weekly Questions – 90 pts

October assignment – 30 pts

Final Exam – 220 pts

Your final grade will be determined according to the number of points you have earned by the end of the semester, based on the following key: 455-500 – A; 395-454 – B; 345-394 – C; 300-344 – D; 299 or below: F. You will not receive a final grade lower than what your total number of points is worth, but I may decide for some reason to give you a higher grade.

Course Schedule:

There are two necessary purchases for this course, available from bookstores around campus or from amazon.com and other similar online stores:

Robert Freedman (ed.), *Contemporary Israel: Domestic Politics, Foreign Policy, and Security Challenges* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2009).

Itamar Rabinovich and Jehuda Reinharz (eds.), *Israel in the Middle East: Documents and Readings on Society, Politics, and Foreign Relations, Pre-1948 to the Present* (Lebanon, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2007).

In the schedule below, assignments from these two books appear as Freedman or Rabinovich and Reinharz.

Readings from other sources will be available via the course's website on D2L (under "Content") in a scanned PDF copy available for view online or download and print. Most of the books mentioned in the schedule below are available at Bizzell library (just look them up in the catalog). If you prefer to read from the books themselves instead of the PDFs, please do so in the library and do not check out the books, so others may have access to them as well.

Reading assignments that appear for each week should be read *in preparation for* that week. This includes looking up information about the author of each text, and any other places, organizations, or people mentioned in the text that you have not heard of before. You may use the internet or any other credible source you like to dig out that information. This knowledge will be

naturally assumed when readings are discussed in class. Answers to questions are to be written *for the class under which they appear*.

Week 1 (8/24): Introduction

Week 2 (8/31): The Arab-Israeli conflict

Rabinovich and Reinhartz, documents #: 2-5, 7, 10, 12, 21-22, 34-35, 65, 68-69, 75, 100, 109, 116, 118, 133-134, 139, 142, 145.

Freedman, pp. 175-226.

Question: how has the Arab-Israeli conflict affected Israeli society?

Movie: *The Bubble* (2006, 116 min)

Week 3 (9/7): The political system in Israel

Freedman, pp. 21-95.

Rabinovich and Reinhartz, documents #: 63, 80-81, 84-85, 119, 120, 128.

Question: what are the flaws of the Israeli political system?

Week 4 (9/14): Features of Israeli society: Religious vs. Secular Israelis

Steven Mazie, *Israel's Higher Law: Religion and Liberal Democracy in the Jewish State* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), pp. 165-212.

Rabinovich and Reinhartz, documents #: 124-125.

Question: what are the main points of contention between religious and secular Israelis?

Movie: *My Father My Lord* (2007, 75 min)

Week 5 (9/21): Immigrants from long ago: Ashkenazim vs. Mizrahim

Daniel Elazar, *The Other Jews: the Sephardim Today* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), pp. 41-69.

David Lehmann and Batia Siebzehner, *Remaking of Israeli Judaism: The Challenge of Shas* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2006), pp. 169-202.

Rabinovich and Reinhartz, documents #: 30, 31, 64.

Question: what parties do Sephardic Jews in Israel tend to vote for, and why?

Week 6 (9/28):Recent immigrants: Russians and Ethiopians

Freedman, pp. 97-114.

Rabinovich and Reinhartz, documents #: 113-114, 127.

Tanya Schwarz, *Ethiopian Jewish Immigrants in Israel: the Homeland Postponed* (Richmond, UK: Curzon Press, 2001), pp. 41-71, 98-113.

Question: has the State of Israel treated its various immigrant populations equally?

Week 7 (10/5): No class, research project, due next week

Week 8 (10/12): Features of Israeli society: the military service

Gabriel Sheffer and Oren Barak (eds.), *Militarism and Israeli Society* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), pp. 14-41, 120-144.

Movie: *Beaufort* (2006, 125min)

Question: what role does the military play in the daily lives of Israelis?

Week 9 (10/19): Israel's international relations

Freedman, pp. 227-295.

Question: why is the bond between Israel and the US so strong?

Week 10 (10/26): Features of Israeli society: life in the periphery

Rabinovich and Reinharz, document #: 44.

Oren Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy: Land and Identity Politics in Israel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), pp. 211-258.

Maayan Ashkenazi and Yossi Katz, "From cooperative to renewed kibbutz: the case of kibbutz 'Galil,' Israel," *Middle Eastern Studies* 45 (2009), 4:571-592.

Movie: *Sweet Mud* (2006, 95min)

Question: what is so unique about the kibbutz type of settlement?

Week 11 (11/2): Israeli Music

Motti Regev and Edwin Seroussi, *Popular Music and National Culture in Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 137-190.

Question: what genres of music have influenced Israeli pop and rock the most?

We will watch a selection of video clips, some in class, some at home

Week 12 (11/9): Education in Israel

Yossi Shavit et. al. "Israel: diversification, expansion, and inequality in higher education" in: *Stratification in Higher Education: A Comparative Study* ed. Yossi Shavit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), pp. 39-62.

Question: based on the Israeli case, should higher education be available to all, and if so, should there be stratification in access to it?

Week 13 (11/16): Working and living in Israel: nationalized healthcare and other issues

Shifra Shvarts, *The Workers' Health Fund in Eretz Israel: Kupat Holim* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2002), 1-6, 93-112.

A collection of articles on elective abortions from Israeli media (via D2L)

Question: is nationalized healthcare in Israel a success story?

Week 14 (11/23): Working and living in Israel: social security, workers' unions

Yinon Cohen et al., "The state of organized labor in Israel," *Journal of Labor Research* 28 (2007), 2: 255-273.

Abraham Doron, "Retrenchment and progressive targeting: the Israeli experience" in: *Targeting Social Benefits: International Perspectives & Trends* ed. Neil Gilbert (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2001), 99-128.

Week 15 (11/30): What I want and what society expects of me: Israelis in their 20s and 30s

Movie: *Wisdom of the Pretzel* (2002, 100 min)

Week 16 (12/7): Israeli comedy and satire