Religion 499 Special Topics

The History and Culture of the Jews of Spain

Description:
1492 marked the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, which had been one of the most flourishing centers of the Jewish world. But the end of Jewish life in Spain did not mean the end of Spanish Jews; on the contrary, Sephardic Jews (as the Jews from the Iberian Peninsula are called) retain a distinct identity even today. This course traces the Jewish diaspora from Spain and Portugal with particular attention to how Sephardic Jews maintained ties of commerce, language, and identity across increasingly large distances. We begin with a brief overview of the history of Jews in Spain and Portugal. We then move on to examine the nature of Sephardic life in North Africa, the Middle East, Italy, Europe, and the Americas. Some questions we will explore include: how Sephardic Jews used their transnational ties to their coreligionists to advance their commercial interests; Sephardic Jewish identity as expressed through language, literature, and culture; and the unique ways in which Sephardic Jewry faced modernization. We will end the class by examining aspects of Sephardic Jews’ experience in America today, including how a number of Christians in the American Southwest are claiming a “crypto-Jewish” identity as the descendants of marranos (Jews converted to Christianity).

Goals:
First and foremost, the goal of this course is to develop students’ ability to read and critically analyze both primary and secondary sources, and to talk and write about their ideas in an intelligent and intelligible manner. We will spend much of our time engaging in discussions about the assigned readings, and students will be expected to work on their analytical skills both while preparing for class and during class time. The written assignments will offer students a chance to hone their ability to express themselves clearly on the page, and I will do my utmost to help students improve their skills through comments and one-on-one discussions.

In addition to offering students an introduction to the history of Sephardic Jewry, this course offers a global approach to Jewish studies. Students will be exposed to the varieties of Jewish culture on five continents. On the one hand, this course will challenge students’ assumptions about what it means to be a Jew—or a member of any religious faith—and how faith intersects with culture. On the other, students will be asked to re-think their understandings of globalization and connectedness in the pre-modern period, and to what extent recent globalization has transformed the world. In this vein, we will discuss whether and in what ways in which religion is a good way to think through modernization.
No prior knowledge of Jewish studies is necessary, though students without any experience studying Judaism may find they have to complete extra reading in order to succeed in the course. If you have any questions about whether this course is appropriate for you, please email me (marglin@usc.edu).

Requirements:
Class Participation: 15%
4 Reading Reflections: 20%
Midterm Take-Home Exam: 30%
Final Paper (8-10 pages): 35%

Final paper assignment given in lieu of final exam, due by the date of final exam scheduled on the Class Scheduling Website

Grading:
- Students are expected to attend every class and to participate actively. Each unexcused absence will result in your participation grade being lowered by one letter grade (i.e. from an A to a B).
- Readings are required: you are expected to read the assigned secondary literature by the beginning of the first class meeting of the week.
- The four required reading reflections will be graded with a check plus (worth 94 points), check (worth 88 points), or check minus (worth 82 points). They are designed to help you synthesize the reading material and formulate questions based on the readings. You must write at least two reading reflections before the midterm, though you may choose on which weeks you write. (Please note that you must turn in six reflections on different weeks. That is, you cannot write two reflections on a single week’s reading.) Reading reflections for a given week must be emailed to me by the beginning of the first class meeting of that week. They should be approximately two double-spaced pages in length. (You are welcome to write up to two more reading reflections for extra credit.)
- The take-home midterm exam will be based on lectures, class discussions, and the assigned readings. You will be asked to write short essays which demonstrate your ability to analyze and synthesize the material covered in the course. Take-home midterm exam due on February 25
- For the final paper, you must choose among a list of proposed topics on which to write. You will be expected to draw on both primary and secondary sources assigned in class, as well as a minimum of five secondary sources which were not required reading. Assignment given in lieu of final exam, due by the date of final exam scheduled on the Class Scheduling Website

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

(Books can be purchased at the USC Bookstore. Other readings will be available on Blackboard.)

Readings:

Part I: In Spain
Week 1: Sephardic Jewry before the Diaspora
Jan. 12:
• Introduction (no assigned reading)
Jan. 14:

Week 2: Jewish Arts and Letters in Medieval Spain
Jan. 19: Martin Luther King Jr. Day (no class)
Jan. 21:
• Selected poems.

Week 3: The Inquisition
Jan. 26:
Jan. 28:
• Inquisition trial records.

Week 4: The Expulsion
Feb. 2:
Feb. 4:

Week 5: The Ottoman Empire
Feb. 9:
Feb. 11:

Week 6: Early Modern Europe
Feb. 16: President’s Day (no class)
Feb. 18:

Week 7: Between Europe and North Africa
Feb. 23:
Feb. 25:

*Take-home midterm exam due on the second class of this week.*

Week 8: Crypto-Judaism in the Americas
March 2:
March 4:

Week 9: Sephardic Jews and the Slave Trade
March 9:
March 11:

SPRING BREAK!

Week 10: Modernization in the Ottoman Empire
March 23:
March 25:

Week 11: Modernization in the Arab World
March 30:

April 1:
• TBD

Week 12: Migration to the Americas
April 6:
• Susan Gilson Miller, “Kippur on the Amazon: Jewish Emigration from Northern Morocco in the Late Nineteenth Century,” in Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jewries: History and Culture in the Modern Era, ed. Harvey E. Goldberg, pp. 190-209.

April 8:

Week 13: Sephardim and the Holocaust
April 13:

April 15:
• TBD

Week 14: Modern Marranos
April 20:
• Stanley Hughes, To the End of the Earth: A History of the Crypto-Jews of New Mexico, Chapter Eight.

April 22:

Week 15: Sephardic Cultural Revivals
April 27:
• Ilan Stavans, ed., The Schocken Book of Modern Sephardic Literature, selections.

April 29:
• Concluding discussion.

Week 16: Final Paper Due
Assignment given in lieu of final exam, due by the date of final exam scheduled on the Class Scheduling Website

Statement for Students with Disabilities
Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved
accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website and contact information for DSP: http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html, (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) ability@usc.edu.

Statement on Academic Integrity
USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one’s own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another’s work as one’s own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. SCampus, the Student Guidebook, (www.usc.edu/scampus or http://scampus.usc.edu) contains the University Student Conduct Code (see University Governance, Section 11.00), while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A.

Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis
In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies.