21H.914: Jews from Biblical to Modern Times  
Fall, 2008  

Time: W 7 – 10  
Professor Peter Temin  

This subject provides a comprehensive overview of Jewish history from Biblical times to today. The discussion will focus on two questions. First, how do we “know” what we think we know of Jewish history? This of course is a central question of all history. Since the subject ranges over a wide range of times and places, it is not surprising that the readings are based on a wide range of evidence. Second, how have Jews survived as a continuous ethnic/religious group? They are unique in the length of time they have existed with a continuous history. We will seek to discover what is durable about the Jewish experience that has led to this longevity.

The subject uses recent scholarship in English to suggest answers to these questions. Only English is required for this subject, but there is a lot of reading and writing. Readings should be done before the relevant class to make the class discussion relevant to the comprehension of the reading and the readings relevant to the class discussion. The dates on the syllabus show when the assigned readings will be discussed; they should be read completely by those dates.

This subject is funded by a gift from the Dennis W. and Jane B. Carlton Foundation.

Course Requirements

The subject requires two types of written exercises: papers and exams. Credit will be given for papers, class participation, and exams in that order.

Papers

This course requires two essays of about ten pages each, due on October 1 and November 19. The first essay will be methodological, about the methods and sources of history. It is appropriate to write this paper early in the subject because the readings on the early years reveal the most varied historical evidence. The second paper will be an attempt for each student to answer the second question of the course: Why have Jews survived as a group? The paper should also discuss each student’s relationship to a religion (whatever it may be), with attention to the long-term attractiveness of this religion as well as its current appeal. More detailed instructions for the papers will be provided in class.

Exams

There will be two exams on the readings in class time as shown on the syllabus.
Reading Assignments

Most of the required books on the reading list have been ordered at the MIT bookstore and should be available there for purchase. All required books are on reserve at Hayden Library.

Week 1 (9/3)


Week 2 (9/10)


Week 3 (9/17)


Week 4 (9/24)


**Week 5** (10/1) First paper due


[http://past.oxfordjournals.org/content/vol182/issue1/index.dtl](http://past.oxfordjournals.org/content/vol182/issue1/index.dtl)


**Week 6** (10/8)


**Week 7**
(10/15)

First Exam, followed by preparation for Week 8

**Week 8**
(10/22)


**Week 9**
(10/29)


**Week 10**
(11/5)


**Week 11  (11/12)**


**Week 12  (11/19)  Second paper due**


**Week 13  (12/3)**


Second Exam

Week 14        (12/10)

Overview, discussion of the papers, and thoughts about the future