

# JDST eJournal

CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY PROGRAM IN JUDAIC STUDIES

SPRING 2011

## Featured Faculty: Sharon Gravius

Sharon Gravius is the Psychological Studies, Sociology, and Religious Studies Librarian at Kelvin Smith Library (KSL), the main library on CWRU campus. Sharon's face may seem familiar to you, and this should be no surprise; she has been on campus since 1992! As a freshman at CWRU, Sharon's first job was at Freiberger Library, where she worked while earning a B.A. in psychology and sociology.

While still a student, Sharon took a year off from her studies and from work with autistic children, to get married and settle in Cleveland. She subsequently worked at a residential treatment facility for children difficult to place in the foster care system of Greater Cleveland. Not a holiday season goes by that she isn't reminded of the impact those children had on her life.

By 1997, Sharon was ready for change. She gravitated naturally to the newly opened Kelvin Smith Library and as luck would have it, a position was available as a departmental assistant. Sharon found she thoroughly enjoyed working with students and faculty and contributing to their education and research experiences. In 1999, much to her mother's delight, Sharon enrolled in the Library and Information Science Program at **Kent State University**. There she earned a Master degree in Library Science (MLS), attending classes after work and on weekends.

In December of 2001, Sharon graduated from Kent and started her first full-time librarian position at the **Harris Library at the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences (MSASS)**, where she served as an Instruction Librarian for four years. In 2005, following the birth of twin sons, she returned to KSL; this time as the Collection



Sharon Gravius, MLS

Management and Planning Coordinator, and as librarian to the Psychology, Sociology, and Religious Studies Departments. Sharon has been an invaluable and tireless resource for **Judaic Studies (JDST)** students and faculty in need of research assistance. She has similarly been instrumental in the growth and expansion of the JDST collections, including General Collections, Special Collections, and our newest area of growth: an outstanding Israeli Film Collection.

"I view my job as an information detective," she says. "If someone needs a piece of information, a book, or a hard to find report, it's my job to find the nugget of information that will lead to scholarly excellence. With the thousands of questions that are asked and the countless projects that happen within the university there is never a dull day at the library!"

Whether questions are big or small, Sharon welcomes them all, along with any comments and feedback concerning KSL. More information about JDST collections in the General and Special Collections Departments at KSL, as well as the music collection at Kulas Library, can be found at: <http://researchguides.case.edu/judaicstudies>.

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## Program in Judaic Studies

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# STUDENT

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## The Ira and Ruth Bressler Prizes

To students who have done outstanding work in the area of Jewish Studies.



### **ERIC STANLEY HAMILTON**

**Hometown:** Prairie Village, KS

**Academic Interests:** Food production-focused biology and plant genetics.

Currently working on a soil-chemistry and plant ecology project at Case's University Farm.

**Extra-Curricular Activities:** Treasurer of the Case Democrats, member of the Student Sustainability Council and participant in Mather Dance Collective. Organized the inaugural Farm Harvest Festival, drawing 600 attendees to Case's Squire Valleeve Farm to highlight the farm food program and the farm's facilities.



### **ANNA OWENSBY**

**Hometown:** Greenville, SC

**Academic Interests:** Major in Chemistry (BS) with interests in chemical biology, bio-organic and medicinal chemistry

**Extra-Curricular Activities:** Teaching and tutoring, research assistant, The Roundtable (undergraduate biomedical journal club), and the cello.

## The Eudese and Elmer Paull Prizes

To undergraduate or graduate students who demonstrate an interest in Jewish Studies or Jewish contemporary life.



### **GABRIEL DASH**

**Hometown:** Massapequa, NY

**Academic Interests:** Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering

**Extra-Curricular Activities:** Israeli Programming Chair, Hillel Undergraduate Leadership Council, Board of Trustees Member, Cleveland Hillel Foundation, AIAA Design-Build-Fly Competition, and the Ultimate Frisbee Team.



### **MORGAN RAYE SIGMAN**

**Hometown:** Beachwood, OH

**Academic Interests:** Juris Doctor (JD) Candidate 2012 at CWRU School of Law, and a Certificate in Nonprofit Management (CNM) Candidate 2012 at the Mandel Center for Nonprofit Organizations. Medical Malpractice, Criminal Justice and Litigation.

**Extra-Curricular Activities:** President of the Jewish Law Students Association (JLSA), Coordinator of the CWRU Law National Moot Court Team, Ambassador Tour Guide for Law School Admissions, Student Board Member of the Cleveland Hillel, Board Member of the JCLE, and a member of the Laurel School Alumni Association.

# The Persistent Notion of a Jewish Race

Recognition for Outstanding Achievement

Jacob Emmert-Aronson

Jewish mystical tradition holds that the Jewish people share a unique heritage, bound together by a divine spark ignited in those who gathered at Mount Sinai. But the notion of a distinct Jewish race, defined as a biologically distinct inheritance, is a relatively modern concept. Those who generated the mystical tradition could not have imagined, and would not have understood, the modern concept of biological race. Nevertheless, throughout history, the notion that Jews form a biological race has been widely held at the popular level, and without its mystical trappings, by some scientists and historians. For example, in the mystical view of, among others, Judah Halevi (twelfth century), the Maharal of Prague (sixteenth century), and Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (20th century) "... a Jew is set apart from all other men by virtue of his very biology, and even if he strays, is more open to redemption than any non-Jew because of an inherited 'Divine spark'" (Elazar 445). Some scientists have similarly generated what Liphhardt calls a "biohistorical narrative" of Jewish identity, using biological terms to describe historical events; a narrative that has become a primary tool for understanding and debating history, both within the sciences and among the general population (192). So powerful is the idea of a genetic connection that devout Jews will proselytize only Jews who have strayed from the fold (Lubavitcher Rebbe), and not members of other religions. Despite recent studies that refute a genetic basis for Jewish identity, the idea of a common biological inheritance continues to maintain relevance as a powerful cultural construct, and is still applied to developing theories about a Jewish race.

The purported Jewish race first became a serious topic of academic study in the 20th century. "Many scientists up to the 1930es (sic) claimed that the Jews were an isolated, unmixed, and persistent type and thus the 'ideal object' for investigating human heredity and race" (Liphhardt 191-2). The biohistorical narrative that prevailed in scientific publications of the time asserted that the Jewish race had resulted from a cross between the Amorites, the Semites, and the Hittites during ancient times. Despite being dispersed throughout Europe after the fall of the second temple, they supposedly did not intermarry, and scientists explained away variations as adaptations to the local environment. To this narrative was soon added the language of

Mendelian inheritance (Liphhardt 193), emphasizing dominant and recessive traits. This gave a new framework in which to interpret the narrative, but more importantly a way to quantify and test theories.

The mainstream relevance of a Jewish biological heritage continued throughout the 20th century, as the full power of genetics and the ability to study the human chromosome became available. Genetic studies soon began to obtain mixed results, with some suggesting a common origin for Jews and others indicating a wide diversity (Zoossmann-Diskin 1). Biohistorical narratives continue to have their place in the understanding of current studies, but most recently, the narratives themselves have changed drastically.

In recent years, Avshalom Zoossmann-Diskin and others refuted studies pointing to a common Jewish origin, showing in particular that Eastern European Jews "are closer to Europeans than to other Jewish populations" (Zoossmann-Diskin 1). Using this data, Zoossmann-Diskin goes on to assert that East European Jews "are Europeans probably of Roman descent who converted to Judaism at times, when Judaism was the first monotheistic religion that spread in the ancient world" (Zoossmann-Diskin 12). While Judaism as a whole does not actively attempt to convert people, those truly wishing to become Jewish are welcomed into the community. As the genetic data demonstrates, this occurred throughout

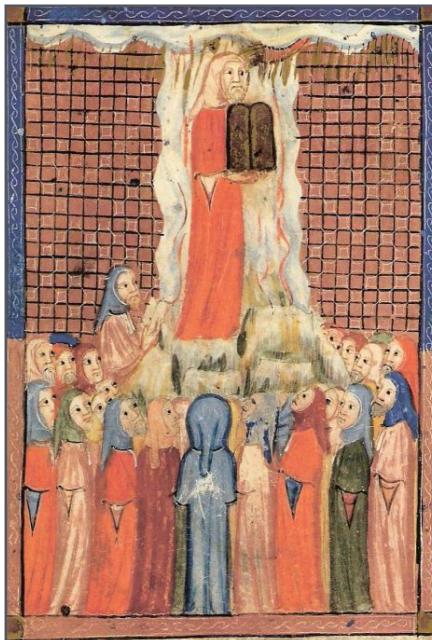
history with sufficient regularity that today's Jews cannot by any means be considered a genetically distinct population (Sutton).

If factual accuracy were all that mattered in recovering reality, nothing more would need to be said. But people's perception of reality is just as important, and often has a more clearly visible impact on history, than reality itself. Biohistorical

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Jacob Emmert-Aronson



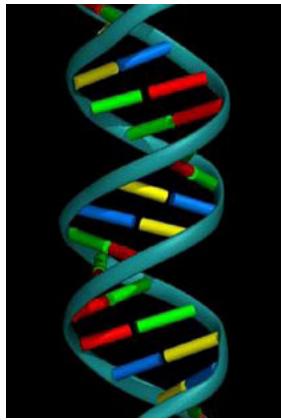
Gathering at Mount Sinai

# Jewish Race

continued from page 3

narratives now "constitute integral elements of the identity building of many nations, families, ethnic groups or other social entities" (Liphhardt 192). This isn't because they are perfectly accurate; rather, these narratives explain observations in a way that is satisfactory to people, and resonates with their intuition. In many ways, they are a lens through which we view the world.

The notion of a Jewish race continues to resonate among Jews and non-Jews. Its prominence among the general population arose specifically because many people could integrate it into their often diverging points of view. For instance, during the early 20th century, many believed that the Jewish population had remained largely isolated throughout the centuries. To many non-Jewish authors, this purported



isolation was seen as Jewishly self-imposed, while Jewish authors saw it as the result of discrimination by non-Jews (Liphhardt 193). But both groups accepted the idea specifically because it fit with and reinforced their own worldviews.

How individuals approach the results of the newest studies will be similarly determined. For some people, the idea that Jews do not have a common ancestry simply will not mesh with their outlook, and they are likely to reject the idea outright. Others may take a more nuanced outlook. There is no question that the Jewish people are

connected, but this common heritage need not be genetic to retain its validity. After all, the Jewish people willingly accepts those who choose to become Jewish. And this bond of choice and acceptance is far more meaningful than a biological relation could be.

While the idea of a Jewish race has not been borne out by evidence, this need not be seen as an attack on the validity of Judaism itself. By looking past pre-biological literary traditions, as well as biohistorical notions of a Jewish race, we can see that what truly binds the Jewish people together is choice; the choice to accept Jewish identity and everything that comes with it.

## Works Cited

Elazar, Daniel J., ed. 1997. *Kinship and Consent: The Jewish Political Tradition and its Contemporary Uses*. 2nd Ed., New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.

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Sutton, Wesley K., Ph.D. Dept. of Anthropology, New York University. E-mail interview. 25 January 2011.

Zoossmann-Diskin, Avshalom. "The origin of Eastern European Jews revealed by autosomal, sex chromosomal and mtDNA polymorphisms." *Biology Direct* 5. (2010): 57-75. Academic Search Complete. EBSCO. Web. 28 Jan. 2011.

## Phi Beta Kappa Initiates 2011

Congratulations to the JDST students elected to the Phi Beta Kappa Society for their academic excellence in the liberal arts and sciences:



**Meridith Ginesi  
Eric Stanely Hamilton  
Anne M. Murphy  
Kelly Opalko  
Zachary Hass**



# On and Off Campus



## **Neulander Invited to Partner with IPATIMUP**

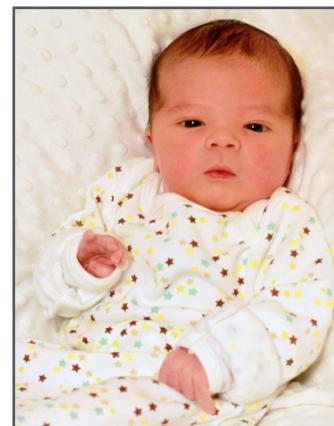
Professor **Judith Neulander**, Co-Director of Judaic Studies at CWRU, has been invited to partner with a research team at **The Institute of Molecular Pathology and Immunology (IPATIMUP)**, at the **University of Porto, Portugal**. Pending grant approval, the team will investigate post-exilic crypto-Jewish migrations on and off the Iberian Peninsula. The international project will enlist specialists in multiple academic domains including population genetics, history, medicine, biology, Judaic studies, and ethnography.

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## Post It

### **JDST Staff Welcomes a New Baby Boy!**

**Taylor Hall**, coordinator of interdisciplinary programs and events for the College of Arts and Sciences, and her husband Matt, recently welcomed their first child into their family. Their son, **Carter Matthew Hall**, was born on **April 15, 2011**. Taylor assists the Program in Judaic Studies with eJournal design, distribution, and website development. Congratulations, Taylor and Matt!



LET'S HEAR FROM YOU!

**postit@case.edu**

# Courses of Interest for Fall 2011



**JDST 201**

**INTRODUCTION TO JUDAIC STUDIES**

**Peter J. Haas**

An introduction to the academic study of Judaic religion and culture, this course does not presuppose any study of, or experience with, Judaism. The course takes an interdisciplinary approach to Judaic Studies, drawing on a variety of methods used in the Social Sciences and Humanities. Through the use of these methods, the students will examine the diverse issues and questions that are driving the current field of Judaic Studies and come to conclusions about the state of the question. There will be some "field" experience including a visit to a synagogue and to a Jewish museum.

**JDST 228**

**THE JEWISH IMAGE IN POPULAR FILM**

**Judith S. Neulander**

The course will explore film as social practice, from the flickering silent era, through Hollywood's Golden Age, to the technological dazzle of the present day. Standing at the confluence of society, history, ideology and culture, students will come to understand how popular film is shaped by, and how it actively shapes, the constant reconstruction of Jewish identity in the American mainstream.

**RLGN 218**

**ISLAM: FAITH AND POLITICS**

**Ramez Istambouli**

The course provides an overview of the relationship between Islam as a religion and Islam as a political system, and the effect of this relationship on Islamic society from its origin to the present time.

**JDST 231 (RLGN 231, HSTY 238)**

**JEWS IN THE MODERN WORLD**

**Jay Geller**

The course examines the socio-economic, political, and cultural development of Jews in the modern world from the mid-eighteenth century to the present. While particular emphasis will be on the Jews of Europe, we will examine the Jewish communities of the United States, pre-1948 Palestine, and Israel. Central themes of the course are the challenges to the traditional religious and social structures of pre-modern Jewry, migration, cultural innovation, and politicization.

**RLGN 223**

**RELIGIOUS ROOTS OF CONFLICT IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

**Peter J. Haas**

The course is about the rhetoric and symbols used by various voices in the Middle East in the ongoing debate about the future shape of the region. For historical and cultural reasons, much of the discourse draws on religious symbolism, especially (although not exclusively) Islamic, Jewish and Christian. Because of the long and complex history of the region and the religious communities in it, virtually every act and every place is fraught with meaning. The course examines the diverse symbols and rhetorical strategies used by the various sides in the conflict and how they are understood by various audiences within each community and the different communities.

Visit the **Department of Modern Languages and Literatures** website for courses in Hebrew and Arabic:

[case.edu/artscli/dmll](http://case.edu/artscli/dmll)

# Sampling of Final Paper Titles

A sampling of titles for final research papers in JDST 233: Introduction to Jewish Folklore, reflects the diversity of interests in a typical JDST classroom.

From the Promised Land to Tin Pan Alley: How Jewish Music Influenced Popular Songwriting  
**Adam Spektor**

Feminism and Folklore: How Women Defy Oppression in Jewish Folktales  
**Christine Cadman**

"City of Sepulchers": The Jewish Cemetery as a Unique Cultural Institution  
**Kathryn Grane**

Trail of the Golem: History and Legacy of a Jewish Folk Tradition  
**Jacob Emmert-Aronson**

Superhero USA: Jewish Influence on American Comic Books  
**John Cleaver**

A Jewish Rite of Passage: The Bar/Bat Mitzvah from Past to Present  
**Symone Fields**

Job, Some Rabbis, and a Goy's Teeth: Folklore in the Coen Brothers' *A Serious Man*  
**Sean McGaw**

The Celebration of Passover: Finding a Place in a Changing World  
**Matt Behrman**

A Folkloristic Perspective on Male Circumcision in Judaism  
**Anna Owensby**

Laughter is Free: Humor as an Adaptive Strategy in Jewish Tradition  
**Eric Hamilton**

# The Program in Judaic Studies

By bringing a variety of fields and disciplines to bear on its subject, the Judaic Studies Program at Case Western Reserve University conveys to students the complex interaction of forces that create Jewish ethnic identity. Students completing the program will have a broad knowledge of the field along with the tools necessary for continued academic study of Jewish civilization in all its manifestations.



For more information, contact:

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## Support the Program in Judaic Studies



*Students at the 22nd Annual Midwest Jewish Studies Association Conference in October 2010.*

Please consider supporting the Program in Judaic Studies as we continue building on our achievements. You can contribute to our success by making a gift to the College of Arts and Sciences. Your gift allows us to continue to offer opportunities for our students to excel academically and to conduct important research. You can give online at [giving.case.edu](http://giving.case.edu).



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