

## Featured Faculty

Sean Martin is Associate Curator for Jewish History at the **Western Reserve Historical Society (WRHS)** on the **Case Western Reserve University (CWRU)** campus. He has been a **SAGES Visiting Fellow** at CWRU since 2007. His work at WRHS includes collecting and maintaining materials related to the Jewish history of northeastern Ohio, overseeing the **Cleveland Jewish Archives** and serving as part of the curatorial staff for the **Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage** at Beachwood.

Originally from West Virginia, Martin first became interested in Jewish history as an undergraduate at **Columbia University**. Courses in East European politics and history introduced him to a fascinating region, and he soon became interested in questions of ethnicity, nationality and identity. Curious about the history of Jews in Poland, he studied both Polish and Yiddish and continued his study as a graduate student at **Ohio State University**. His dissertation focused on the history of Jews in Cracow before World War II. His book, *Jewish life in Cracow, 1918-1939*, focuses on how the city's Jews expressed both Jewish and Polish identities in the educational and cultural organizations they founded after Poland became an independent state in 1918.

Martin's work at WRHS takes him into the community in search of artifacts, documents, photographs and other evidence that will help us learn about the history of the Jewish community and of Cleveland. In 2008 he added a scholarly CWRU paper to the Cleveland Jewish Archive. The work, by student Chris Hernandez, was done for Jewish



Sean Martin

Traditional Art and Architecture 220 (offered again this spring). The paper, "Temple Tifereth Israel: Evolution and Reform" parallels the congregation's changing ideology with changes in its synagogue architecture from 1850-1924, culminating with The Temple on University Circle.

Under Martin's direction a student internship is offered at the **Cleveland Jewish Archives of the Library/ Genealogy Center** on campus. The intern assists in researching questions related to local Jewish history, and in preparing resources and public programs. Students earn independent study credit for the **Jewish Archives Student Internship**.

Martin also serves on the **JDST Steering Committee** at CWRU and works with the university on special projects. In 2010 he completed "Cleveland's Land of Promise: Rockefeller Park and the Jewish Community," an article written as the Adelberg Fellow for the Department of History and published by the Trust for Public Land. He continues his research on Jewish history in Poland and is currently writing about the history of Jewish child welfare before World War II. His work in Cleveland's museums has also led to research work for the soon to be opened **Museum of the History of Polish Jews** in Warsaw.

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## Program in Judaic Studies

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# The Jewish Image in Silent Film

Recognition for Outstanding Achievement

Andrea Sterenstein

Prior to 1881 America was home to approximately 250,000 Jews, mostly from Western Europe. From 1881 to 1924 the population of Jews in America swelled to over 4,100,000, the majority of whom were East European (Friedman 1987:10). Between 1900-1929, coincident with the birth of the film industry, Friedman cites 319 films featuring characters that were clearly Jewish, saying "...Jews made America conscious of its films, and in turn, films made America more aware of its Jews" (1987:13,15). The earliest film image of the immigrant Jew was that of a "greenhorn" holding lower class positions and struggling to assimilate. But when the immigrant community itself began to assimilate and gain economic respectability, Jews on screen began appearing in more upwardly mobile, and Americanized roles. In this sense, the silent screen provides a record of the Jewish community's transformation from European immigrants to assimilated Americans.

The earliest silent films, called "one-reelers," relied on ready-made plots adapted from literary classics, such as *Oliver Twist*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Gwendolyn* (based on Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*), and *Ivanhoe*, all of which portrayed Jews as cheats, villains and crooks, exploiting physical stereotypes like hooked noses, and a gaunt appearance (Friedman 1987:19). As this era drew to an end, the Jew was occasionally shown as a victim who triumphed over persecution, as in *The Yiddisher Cowboy* (1909, 1911), but his actions, although perhaps justified, remain those of a devious swindler (Friedman 1987:21).

After the first decade of the 20th century, films began to assign a higher economic respectability to Jewish characters, as in *The Song of Solomon* (1914) where the main character is "making it big," just as Jewish businessmen and Jewish filmmakers were beginning to do. By 1922, in *A Tailor-Made Man*, the Jewish lead was a wealthy shipping magnate. The film was followed by *Abie's Imported Bride* (1925), about a prosperous mill owner who collects funds to relieve suffering

in Europe (Friedman, 1987: 12). In less than twenty years the Jew in silent films had changed from a poverty-stricken European immigrant, to a well-to-do, charitable American, helping to relieve European suffering.

The dream shared by most immigrants was to see their children well educated, and achieving at a higher socio-economic level than they themselves could ever hope for. But for Jewish children, entering American schools meant entering the non-Jewish mainstream. Inevitably, some Jews and non-Jews grew up and fell in love. Not surprisingly, several early films portrayed



Andrea Sterenstein

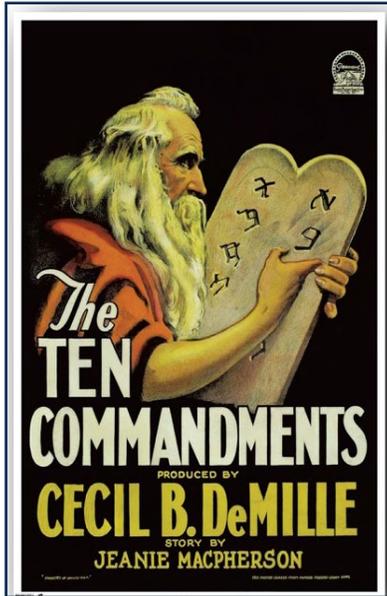
the young Jewish man or woman who died of a broken heart because his or her parents would not allow the marriage, as in *Faith of Her Fathers* (1915). Over time, mixed marriages occurred with greater frequency, also reflected on screen. Such films began with the drama of parental disapproval and ended with a 'happily-ever-

after' scenario, reconciling the parents to the marriage, usually with the birth of a grandchild (Friedman 1987:24).

During the 1920s the movie industry came to feature Jews in sports, science, philanthropy and industry. In 1923, Cecil B. DeMille's highly successful saga, *The Ten Commandments*, confirmed that the Bible and the movies could go hand in hand. In the process, DeMille depicted Jews as people of high moral character, countering the popular notion that they were fast and loose-living (Joselit, 2006, p. 11-15). By the late 1920s, the image of contemporary American Jews in motion pictures was keeping pace with a population that had done well for itself in real life; a population that had thrown off ethnic characteristics associated with persecution, and was contributing to the prosperity of America.



Alec Guinness plays Fagin with fake hooked nose, *Oliver Twist*, 1914



In 1927, with the release of *The Jazz Singer*, the age of silent films came to an end. The image of the Jew in America had changed dramatically from the early 1900s. In *The Jazz Singer*, perhaps the most memorable film of the early 'talkie' era, the hero faces the same conflicts faced by the community. The lead figure of Jack Robin, aka Jakie Rabinowitz, is torn between ethnic and mainstream identity. His reconciliation of both worlds personifies the immigrants' ability to straddle the old life of Jewish tradition, while participating in the modern life of mainstream America. In the film, he emerges from the crisis with a newly hyphenated "Jewish-American" identity, mirroring changes that were taking place in the newly hyphenated Jewish-American community. From the beginning, silent films recorded the changing image of the Jewish community; a community with an assimilative mission that found success, just as silent films faded from the screen.

#### References Cited:

Friedman, Lester D. 1987. *The Jewish Image in American Film*. Secaucus: Citadel Press.

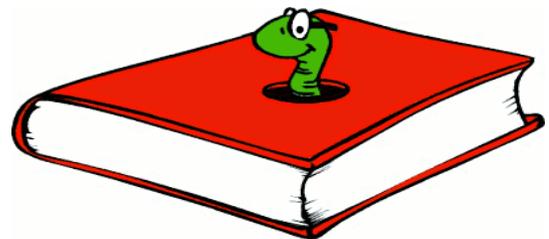
Joselit, Jenna W. 2006. "'Harness My Zebras': American Jews and the Pursuit of Pleasure" in *American Judaism in Popular Culture*, ed. L.J. Greenspoon. Omaha: Creighton University Press.

## CHANGES TO JDST MINOR

When the Program in Judaic Studies began some eight years ago, we aimed to eventually offer a major, but we had to reach out to other departments just to be able to offer a minor, and build a roster of courses; courses that slowly but surely filled up.

Over the past eight years, with the addition of Profs. Neulander and Geller, the JDST curriculum was substantively enriched, bringing the Program closer to its goal. In response to new courses and other changes, the JDST minor has been updated and simplified. The structure is the same, but the process of including courses among the electives has been streamlined. You can see the new minor at the URL below:

<http://www.case.edu/artsci/jdst/minor.html>



# On and Off Campus

## Study Abroad in English!!

### Undergraduates:

Sophomores, Juniors and Seniors:  
Hebrew University, Jerusalem. CWRU's College of Arts and Sciences has partnered with the Hebrew University, Jerusalem in a unique Study Abroad program; one semester or year-long experience is possible. Hebrew is not required. Travel funding may be available. Contact Associate Dean Jill Korbin, College of Arts and Sciences:

[jill.korbin@case.edu](mailto:jill.korbin@case.edu), 216-368-4413.



### Grad Students:

Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv

A new, one-year international Master's Program is being offered for the first time. Students will study classical texts of Jewish cultures from biblical to modern times through a critical and humanistic framework. Enroll in excursions to key locations in the Galilee, Jerusalem, and various archaeological digs.

[http://humanities.tau.ac.il/jewish\\_studies/](http://humanities.tau.ac.il/jewish_studies/)

# Post It

Hi from Turkey,

I've thought of you often on this trip because of the many ancient goddesses in the museums; I'm able to make so many Queen Esther connections! So glad for all the things you taught me!

Becky Glass



Hi,

I'm doing well! I'm living in Wisconsin now, and I'm working at a healthcare software company. I really miss Cleveland, but it's nice to be out on my own.

My class with you last semester was really my first experience with Judaism. I wanted to tell you how valuable it has been--I learned so much practical knowledge about Jewish art and architecture. (I also learned that I love paper cuts and bought one at an antique store!).

Hope your school year is off to a good start!

Thanks,  
Laura Boylan

LET'S HEAR FROM YOU! [postit@case.edu](mailto:postit@case.edu)



# Courses of Interest for Spring 2012



## **RLGN/JDST 208**

### **INTRODUCTION TO WESTERN RELIGIONS**

Peter J. Haas

Basic introduction to the three great monotheistic religions of the Western World: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. All three of these religious traditions trace their roots to the faith of Biblical Israel as revealed by a series of prophets including Noah, Abraham, and Moses. Each absorbed the philosophy and science of the Greco-Roman world and went on both to influence and struggle with each other. Many of the religious problems of the contemporary world, from Afghanistan to the Middle East to Yugoslavia, can be traced to tension within and between these religious groups.

## **RLGN/JDST 211**

### **GREAT BOOKS OF WESTERN RELIGION**

Peter J. Haas

Students will engage with the major writings that have shaped Western religions (Christianity, Judaism, Islam) from the earliest expressions until the present day. Readings include not only the foundational Scriptures (Hebrew Bible, New Testament, Quran) but also influential classical writers on spirituality and religiosity within each of these traditions.

## **JDST/ARTH 220**

### **JEWISH TRADITIONAL ART AND ARCHITECTURE**

Judith S. Neulander

The course will trace tradition and transformation in Jewish artistic expression over time and across space. The semester will carry us from the Israelite phase beginning with Solomon's Temple, to the present day in Israel and America, over the course of which 29 centuries terms like "Jewish," and even "art," will undergo remarkable change.

## **RLGN/HSTY/JDST 254**

### **THE HOLOCAUST**

Jay Geller

This class seeks to answer fundamental questions about the Holocaust: the German-led organized mass murder of nearly six million Jews, and millions of other ethnic and religious minorities. It will investigate the origins and development of racism in European society, the manifestations of that racism, and responses to persecution. An additional focus of the course will be comparisons between different groups, different countries and different phases during the Nazi era.

## **RLGN/ JDST/ WGST 268**

### **WOMEN IN THE BIBLE: Ethnographic Approaches to Rite, Ritual, Story, Song and Art**

Judith S. Neulander

From Ishtar to Esther, the Christian Marys to the Muslim Mary, we will explore the creative and strategic ways that women in religious rite, ritual, story, song and art, have shaped, and were shaped by, divergent religious views. Students will come to understand how these varied views of biblical women inform, reflect and challenge gender roles in modern society.

For courses in **Hebrew** and **Arabic** visit the Modern Languages and Literatures website:  
<http://www.case.edu/artsci/dmll/>

# Sampling of Final Paper Titles

A sampling of titles for final research papers in Introduction to Judaic Studies JDST 201 reflects the diversity of interests in a typical JDST classroom.

*From Bavaria to Beachwood: The History of Jews in Cleveland*  
**Benjamin Bell**

*What's in a Cannon?: A Study of the Development of the Hebrew Scriptures*  
**David Ferro**

*Discovering What's Under the Hat: An Analysis of Judaism's Head Coverings*  
**Meral Sayir**

*The Sect Effect: Judaism Confronts Modernity*  
**Kaitlyn Shiltz**

*Why Hebrew?: How Hebrew Became the National Language of Israel*  
**Benjamin Yabrow**

Happy Holidays

*from the JDST eJournal!*



# 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.



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## Support the Program in Judaic Studies

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)



Students gather to lunch and chat with **Amos Oz**, internationally recognized Israeli author and political commentator, November 2011.