



A monthly lecture and discussion series devoted to exploration of a wide variety of topics in Jewish history and culture led by distinguished scholars and teachers. Lectures are held via Zoom on first week of each month from 7:00 - 8:15 pm.

Jewish Studies - Lecture of the Month

June-December 2023

June 13

Israel at 75, Divided and Unsettled: Roots and Nature of Today's Political and Judicial Conflicts

Samuel Sokol, Haaretz (Israel)

As it turns 75, the Jewish state is wracked with controversy, facing bitter disputes over its future and increasing Palestinian violence in Judea and Samaria. Since returning to power, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has embarked on a wide-ranging legislative blitz to fundamentally alter Israel's judicial system and religious status quo that has split Israeli society. Learn about the causes of the conflict and nature of the legislation which has sparked one of the biggest political controversies since the 2005 Gaza disengagement.

Samuel Sokol is an award-winning Israel-based reporter for Haaretz. He was previously correspondent for the Jerusalem Post and has reported for the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, the Israel Broadcasting Authority, and the Times of Israel.

July 6

Is the Statue of Liberty Jewish?

Clifford Wilcox, Ph.D.

The Statue of Liberty is one of the most iconic symbols of America. Few public objects portray more powerfully American ideals of acceptance and freedom. Yet is it possible that the Statue of Liberty is most appropriately considered a Jewish statue? While the face of the statue is not of a Jew nor was the sculptor Jewish, many attributes of the statue reflect a deep Jewish connection, specifically the imprint on the statue made by the Jewish American poet, Emma Lazarus. The message at the pedestal beckons the world to "give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." This lecture will explore the efforts of Emma Lazarus as philanthropist, social reformer, and poet, specifically her work to bring the Statue of Liberty into public display and through her poetic inscription installed at its pedestal that has provided its unique cultural significance. We will assess if these contributions sufficiently define the Statue of Liberty as a Jewish construction.

Cliff Wilcox has Ph.D. in American intellectual history from the University of Michigan and is the Director of Education and Operations at Temple Beth Torah in Ventura, CA.

September 7

A Jewish Tale of Two Cities: Los Angeles and San Francisco and the Creation of Jewish Life in California

Joellyn Zollman, Ph.D.

In the 19th century, San Francisco was home the largest, wealthiest, most important Jewish community in California. In the 20th century, Los Angeles assumed this role. What do we know about the Jewish history of these two cities? How do we understand the shift in population and prominence? Join historian Joellyn Zollman to explore how Jews have impacted California, and how California, in turn, has impacted the American Jewish experience.

Joellyn Zollman holds a Ph.D. in Jewish Studies from Brandeis University, and she is scholar-in-residence for the Melton Travel Seminar's U.S. Jewish Heritage tours.

October 10

The Last Days of Stalin

Joshua Rubinstein

Josh Rubinstein will speak to us on the events described in his recently published book *The Last Days of Stalin*. This book takes us back to the second half of 1952 when no one could foresee an end to Joseph Stalin's murderous regime. He was poised to challenge the newly elected US President Dwight Eisenhower with armed force, and was broadening a vicious campaign against Soviet Jews. Stalin's sudden collapse and death in March 1953 was as dramatic and mysterious as his life. It is no overstatement to say that his passing marked a major turning point in the twentieth century. But after Stalin's death, the overly cautious response by the Eisenhower administration to the Kremlin's conciliatory gestures missed an opportunity to significantly reduce the tensions of the Cold War.

Joshua Rubinstein is a longtime Associate of Harvard's Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies and is currently Associate Director for major gifts at Harvard Law School. The Last Days of Stalin is his tenth book.

November 16

The Secret History of Jews in Baseball

Peter Dreier, Ph.D.

Since the late 1800s, American Jews have had a love affair with baseball – as players, fans, sportswriters, owners, and executives. Professor Peter Dreier will discuss the key Jewish figures who have influenced baseball from the Little Leagues to the Major Leagues. He will also present some surprising facts about how American Jews have participated in baseball, including some little-known and controversial moments.

Dr. Peter Dreier is the E.P. Clapp Distinguished Professor of Politics at Occidental College, where he has taught since 1993. He earned his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. He has written eight books, including The Next Los Angeles: The Struggle for a Livable City. His two most recent books, published in 2022, are Baseball Rebels: The Players, People, and Social Movements That Shook Up the Game and Changed America and Major League Rebels: Baseball Battles Over Workers' Rights and American Empire.

December 5

Beyond Bagels and Burekas: American Jewish Language and Identity

Sarah Bunin Benor, Ph.D.

Using quotes and images, this talk highlights the diversity of American Jews by focusing on the diverse uses of “Jewish American English” – enriched by Yiddish, Hebrew, Aramaic, Russian, Farsi, Arabic, and other influences. Jews of various stripes use subtle variation in language to signal their textual knowledge, religious denomination, generation from immigration, ancestral origin, and orientation toward Israel. In short, “Jewish language” serves not only to distinguish Jews from non-Jews but also to distinguish Jews from Jews.

Sarah Bunin Benor holds a Ph.D. in Linguistics from Stanford University and is Vice Provost and Professor of Contemporary Jewish History at HUC-JIR, Los Angeles.

*For additional information on the TBT Jewish Studies: Lecture of the Month program, please contact Cliff Wilcox, Ph.D.,
Director of Education and Operations at Temple Beth Torah, Ventura, CA (cliff@templebethtorah.com)*