

Modern Jewish Thought: The Emergence of Modern Jewish Politics, 1848-1948



From the top left: a poster of the Jewish National Fund (1950); Palmach (Strike Platoons) women in the Judean desert (circa 1945); Hasidic children, Upstate New York (undated); and a Soviet propaganda poster (in Yiddish), "Religion is an obstacle to the five-year plan" (1928).

An old joke has it that every three Jews have (at least) four different views. We will come to appreciate the kernel of truth in that joke during this class, as we will examine the versatile spectrum of ideologies, movements, parties, and individuals that constituted the emerging Jewish politics during their formative years. Focusing primarily on three centers – Eastern Europe, the U.S., and the Middle East – we will look at how those different movements sought to solve what was called “The Jewish Question”. Moreover, the questions and situations faced by Jewish ideologies and political movements were often, quite literally, a matter of life or death: among other topics, our discussion would turn to patterns of resistance amid the Nazi menace, or the fierce internal Zionist debates about the use of force in the increasing Jewish-Arab conflict in the Land of Israel. Those crucial dilemmas generated profound intra-Jewish controversies and divisions, some of which have continued to this very day.

Note: This course has asynchronous meeting times; there are no set class meetings.



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