

Tell me about yourself and your own interest in Jewish aspects of History:

My interest in Jewish history stems partially from family history (my maternal grandparents were German-Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany) as well as my education as a historian of modern Germany and Europe. Themes of nationalism, assimilation, and exclusion permeate the courses I teach. When examining German history, for example, I investigate the relative sense of assimilation and self-identification German-Jews possessed in spite of persistent casual prejudice and the baleful advent of antisemitic populism in late nineteenth century Europe.

I also explore themes related to ethnic and religious identity beyond Jewish culture and peoples during this period. Jewish emancipation, and subsequent entry and integration into German social, economic, and civic life, were features of the early nineteenth century. Heinrich Heine, a Jewish convert to Lutheranism, is an instructive example of the limits of Jewish social mobility and inclusivity in predominantly German Christian communities during this era. Heine's criticism of censorship laws and xenophobic nationalist organizations (not to mention his mockery of several royal families) led to his exile from German speaking central Europe. Heine's outsider status also makes his commentaries on nascent German identity, nationalism, and culture especially piquant, and, at times, humorous. In spite of his conversion to Christianity, Heine, was persistently labeled Jewish by both contemporaries and later critics. His books were also later burned by the National Socialist government in the 1930s.

In addition to my teaching interests, Jewish attempts at further assimilation and social advancement also appear in my research. Many Jews petitioned the Bavarian government in efforts to buy disused land as property in the post-Napoleonic Era. In most cases the prospective buyers faced prejudice and government officials unwilling to sell them plots of land.

How does your reading and research in preparing for the course excite you about these aspects?

I am excited to move beyond my usual focus of German and European history into a more expansive exploration of global Jewish history from antiquity to the present. This is such a rich topic with much to examine ranging from the literary, historical, artistic, theological, musical, and other contributions from Jews and Jewish communities.

If I want to focus on Jewish issues in History, where might my own research go, in your class?

My Jewish history class will feature fiction, theology, art history, music, and complex discussions about the nature of Jewish self-expression, nationhood, and identity across several millennia. I look forward to exploring these themes next semester.