

## **The Zionist Idea HIS170**

### **Course Description**

Israel is not a single idea: it is the product of many minds. Zionism, the theoretical vision that created Israel, has historically consisted of divergent and often conflicting beliefs. The debate on what Israel should look like continues to this very day: Should there be more of an emphasis on the country's Jewishness or its democratic values? Can the only Jewish state accommodate different faiths and ethnicities? Should there be an exchange of territory for a two-state solution, or will a single bi-national state come into being? Should all Israeli citizens serve in the army? Should Israel separate religion and state?

This course will trace the Israel idea from its theoretical beginnings through to its manifestation in the modern State. We will examine how ideas become realities, what flaws in thinking then gave rise to problems we face now, what we got right, and what we got wrong. The course will be politically and socially polyphonic, offering students a range of ideas and of voices. Throughout, students will be encouraged to form their own opinions (based on emotion and critical thought) so that each can create their own "Israel Story", a reflection on a personal understanding of Israel, its meaning and future.

Taught thematically and chronologically, the course will cover six main topic areas:

1. A timeline of Zionism and the creation of the State.
2. Visions and Voices: Students will encounter a range of opinions on the Zionist project, including Religious, Cultural, Labor, and Revisionist. In addition, voices representing Haredi (Ultra Orthodox), Arab and Diaspora communities will be considered.
3. Tribal Israel: Students will discuss the major social and political issues facing Israeli society today.
4. What is an Israeli? Students will meet Israelis, read Israeli literature, see Israeli films, and consider how national identities are constructed.
5. Causes of the Conflict: Taking a long view, students will gain a greater understanding of the historical roots of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.
6. Solutions to the Conflict: Students will learn about the Two State Solution and the One State Solution. They will read commentators from the right wing and the left wing of Israeli politics, and they will consider their own positions having explored the dilemmas from all angles.

Units 1-3 will be taught by Year Course in the academic semester and include a series of in-class, on-line and field classes, visits and discussion.

Unit 4 will be taught to the entire Year Course in seminar form.

Units 5-6 will be taught to the entire Year Course in the spring, once all students have completed the first units.

### **Course Core Questions**

- What were the social and historical circumstances that led to the creation of the state?
- What are the varying visions of the should be structured?
- Is the original goal of Israel as both a Jewish and democratic state viable?
- Should a Jewish State be obligated to accommodate other ethnic and religious minorities?
- What social, historical, psychological, and religious factors have contributed to the formation of the Israeli personality and national identity?

- What are the roots of the conflict, and where are the battle lines today?
- Is peace between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples possible and if so, under what circumstances?

### **Course Goals**

- To deepen your connection to the history, people, and culture of Israel.
- To explore the history of Jewish Nationalism.
- To identify a spectrum of Zionist ideas and appreciate their significance in contemporary Jewish life.
- To comprehend the socio-political conflicts that Israelis deal with in the ongoing effort to create a more perfect State.
- To appreciate the nuances in the different narratives surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- To help you sharpen your own Zionist identity and vision for the future of Israel and the region.

### **Course Materials**

Students will have access to the primary Textbook for the course:

Troy, G. (2018). *The Zionist Ideas*. Philadelphia, PA, Jewish Publication Society.

Additional online resources and discussions will take place through the class Moodle page.

### **Assessment Overview**

Assessment will include the following:

Class participation	15%
Quizzes: (3 in total)	15%
Group Assignments (3 in total)	30%
Final Paper (“My Israel Story”)	25%