

Spring 2014



From the Director's Desk

Friends:

I imagine many of you kept up with the news this summer and, in particular, followed the harrowing headlines coming out of Israel. For years – decades, in fact – Israel has been the subject of endless conversation –in spheres both journalistic and academic. Suffice it to say, recent events only further prove the importance of engagement with and study of the country and its geopolitics, its history, and its culture. Despite the current circumstances, or perhaps more precisely in light of them, the Institute is proud to be the central location at Columbia University where nuanced, insightful conversations about Israel and Jewish studies regularly take place.

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For the past five years, the Institute has been committed to supporting the Undergraduate Israel Fellowship; undergraduate students spend a portion of their summer in Israel doing internships or academic study, and we supplement their experiences with academic programs about Israel. (For a story about this summer's cohort, read page 4.) The latest hostilities in Israel show just how essential academic programs like the Fellowship are in providing context to a complex situation and giving students safe spaces to navigate and make sense of those complexities. It is equally important to mention our staff, who were essential in providing important physical—and emotional—support for the students while in Israel. So much so in fact that we have been told we set the bar for university program crisis preparation and risk management!

Of course, in addition to engaging our students in, and with, Israel, we've been busy on other fronts as well. We're delighted to announce that the Institute will now offer a Master's degree. This interdisciplinary program offers students the opportunity to create a specialized course of study that will lead to an enriched understanding of the breadth and depth of Jewish studies, and to prepare for careers as scholars or professionals in a variety of fields, including the field of education and the nonprofit sector.

There's a lot going on at the Institute, as you can see; and we're very much looking forward to having you join us at events throughout the year—from our Israel Film Series to academic lectures to foreign policy conversations and more. I hope you'll attend and support our work in exploring Israel and Jewish studies.

Sincerely yours,

Jeremy Dauber
Atran Professor of Yiddish Language, Literature & Culture
Director, Institute for Israel and Jewish Studies

Left to right:
Jordan Hirsch
in conversation
with Israeli
journalist,
Ari Shavit,
author of *My
Promised Land*.



IIJS Course Sampler—Spring 2014

Jewish Language in New York and Beyond

Daniel Kaufman

This course examined the world of Jewish languages with a special focus on lesser known languages, such as Juhuri, Bukharian, as well as Jewish varieties of Arabic and Iranian languages, using digital audio/video recordings to bolster existing documentation.

Magic and Monsters

Agnieszka Legutko

This course focused on dybbuks, and demons in Yiddish literature as well as in film, theater, and popular culture, while addressing questions of memory, trauma, and identity.

Zionism: A Cultural Perspective

Dan Miron

The course, based on Zionist texts of various kinds, offered a view of Zionism as a cultural revolution aimed at redefining Judaism and the Jewish Identity.

Jews: From Babylonia to Bloomberg

Seth Schwartz

An introductory course exploring the broad sweep of Jewish history, from 600 BCE to the present, focused on politics, society and culture, with particular attention to the interplay and tension between integration and separation.

Spotlight on the Students



Rebecca Glanzer, Undergraduate

What brought you to Columbia? I came to Columbia interested in so many different fields, and so I was attracted to Columbia's philosophy of learning that values exploration of different subjects. After testing out environmental biology, Classics, and a few things in between, I am settled in Middle Eastern Studies with a concentration in Economics.

Can you talk about the role the IIJS has played in your studies? I first heard about the IIJS because of the fellowship they offer to students spending the summer in Israel. The program they have organized is so engaging, and each event is different from the next. Once we met with filmmaker Tomer Heymann and then another event was a graffiti tour in Tel Aviv. The program was a great way to stay connected with Columbia over the summer and meet other Columbia students who are interested in Israel. After spending last summer

learning Hebrew at Ulpan during the mornings and participating in the fellowship events in the afternoons, I have become even more invested in pursuing courses at Columbia about Israel and the Middle East. Upon my return to campus last fall, I was involved with the IIJS's Israel Film Series, which brings films from Israel to Columbia. What I have enjoyed so much about the series is that the films emphasize various aspects of Israeli culture that aren't covered in American news. I have really enjoyed being a part of putting the events together.

Jessica Kirzane, PhD Candidate

What brought you to Columbia? What are you studying? I came to Columbia with the knowledge that it was one of the only places in the world where a student could earn an advanced degree specifically in Yiddish Studies. I was excited to dedicate myself to this small but extremely rich field, and to do so in a well established and respected program. I was also attracted to the level of flexibility I would have in choosing coursework and fields of study that suited my interests.

I am a PhD candidate in Yiddish Studies, working on the subject of intermarriage in American Jewish writing, in English and in Yiddish, in the early twentieth century. I am interested in how American Jews imagined their own community and the borders of their community, and how they used intermarriage as a trope through which to consider communal politics.

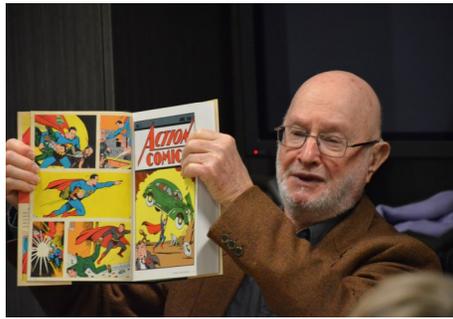
What's been the highlight academic experience of your time here so far? Looking back on it I would have to say that studying for and taking comprehensive examinations was a major highlight for me. It was an opportunity to read deeply and widely in topics that were of profound importance to me. It was a time of pure learning, without having to produce anything of my own. For an entire year my whole job was to absorb as much information as I could, to build connections between arguments and ideas, and to prepare myself for the writing and research I would begin once I had completed the exams.

Talk about the role the IIJS has played in your studies - and vice versa. Throughout my time at Columbia I have attended IIJS's lectures, seminars, and events and they have helped me to connect my work to the wider world of Jewish studies, to understand the diversity of topics within the field, and to build connections with other Jewish Studies scholars at Columbia. I have also been deeply involved with the Jewish and Israel Studies Graduate Student Association, attending, and later organizing, their weekly seminars and annual conferences. This has given me an invaluable opportunity to share ideas, ask questions, argue with, and befriend a remarkable group of students whose insights into the process of pursuing a PhD have aided me along this sometimes arduous path.



From Shtetl to Superhero: Exploring Jews and Comics

Thanks to a very generous grant from TENT, a program of the Yiddish Book Center, the Institute organized **TENT:Comics**, a weeklong seminar that explored the connection between Jewishness and comics with some of the most notable comics creators in the field. The seminar, co-led by Professor Jeremy Dauber and librarian Karen Green, focused on a historical overview of the development of the American comics and graphic novel industries, and in its own way served as a historical review of American Jewry and Jewish identity. These lecture sessions were supplemented by relevant background resources and readings; group collaborative projects; thematically-related site visits; and panel discussions with graphic novelists and comic creators. Some of the site visits include guided tours of the DC Comics office; the Jewish Museum's retrospective exhibit of Art Spiegelman's career; and the Jewish Daily Forward's office. Some of the featured comic creators and graphic novelists included veterans and masters of the field, such as Jules Feiffer and Ben Katchor, to younger – but no less accomplished – artists, including among others, Peter Kuper, Miss Lasko-Gross, and Eli Valley.



Jules Feiffer, an iconic American cartoonist, shows off classic graphic novels



Graduate Students Explore Jewish Materiality

On May 28-29, 2014, our **Jewish and Israel Graduate Student's Association (JIGSA)** and the graduate students of New York University's Skirball Department of Hebrew and Judaic Studies put on a conference entitled "The Materials of Jewish Studies" at Columbia University. The conference, supported by the generosity of the Knapp Foundation, used a very broad definition of materiality; papers ranged from discussions of third century BCE coins of Judah to HeBREW Beer, with its characteristic faux Hebrew lettering. The panels were lively and collegial, and included conversations on materials of Jewish studies in America; Jewish practice and the Jewish imagination; kabbalistic manuscripts; and archives. The conversations continued long after the question and answer sessions had ended. Daniel Boyarin (UC Berkeley) delivered an address on the Talmudic production of Diaspora as homeland. Elizabeth Bloch-Smith (Saint Joseph University) discussed the methodological problems around interpreting a series of female figurines from the highlands of Judah, while Mark Smith (NYU) discussed the material and immaterial aspects of divine bodies. In all, the conference presented a fascinating window into the diverse and creative scholarship that is currently taking place in Jewish Studies.

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS from Spring 2014

Ari Shavit

*My Promised Land:
A conversation with
Jordan Hirsch*

Benny Morris

*A New Perspective on the
1948 Israel-Arab War*

Alon Tal

*All the Trees of the Forest:
The Extraordinary Story
of Israel's Woodlands*

Devi Mays

*Forge Your Own Passport:
Sephardic Migrant
Networks in and beyond
Mexico and the Mutability
of Citizenship*

Yehudah Mirsky

*The Uneasy Marriage of
Heaven and Earth
Co-sponsored with the
Jewish Theological Seminary*

Miriam Udel

*Shabbos for Socialists: The
Sabbath Motif in Yiddish
Children's Literature*

Cupcakes

*Screening of the popular
Israeli film*

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The Institute for Israel and Jewish Studies – Columbia University’s center for the academic study and discussion of Jewish life, history, and culture – has long been a national and international leader in the field, and recently, the Institute itself has gone through an exciting season of growth.

With interest in Jewish and Israel Studies reaching new heights in and out of the university, the need to support academic opportunities, innovative programming, and cutting-edge teaching that enrich students, scholars, and the larger Columbia University community alike is crucial.

Please consider supporting the IIJS. To do so, visit <https://giving.columbia.edu/giveonline>.

Despite the rockets, Undergraduate Israel Fellows continue learning about—and in—Israel

This past summer, the Institute sent 23 Columbia and Barnard students to Israel as part of the **Undergraduate Israel Fellowship**. The vast majority of students were already in Israel during the outbreak of the IDF’s Operation Protective Edge – and almost all chose to remain and complete their summer plans as scheduled.

Now in its fifth year, the fellowship supports students spending at least four weeks in Israel to pursue academic study, internships, and volunteer positions. More than half of the students spent their time interning at a wide array of organizations—from Magen David Adom to start up ventures to policy think tanks –while others participated in academic coursework or assisted with research.

Both in Israel and back on campus, the Fellows participate in a series of relevant programs designed to provide a strong understanding of the diversity of Israeli society. While we closely monitored the security situation, and took important safety precautions, we also encouraged the students to go about their life as normally as possible in spite of it all. And for that reason, bearing safety in mind, we continued to hold the programs, not only to provide an outlet but also to provide some context to the complexity of Israel.

They explored Israel through the perspective of African refugees, learned about Israeli culture by means of Israeli graffiti, and participated in roundtable discussions with journalists and foreign policy experts, to name just a few examples. They also spent an evening meeting a handful of Columbia and Barnard alumni living in Israel, and heard from a Jerusalem politician and activist working to make a difference in local politics.

The students are now back safely on campus, and we are looking forward to the academic year ahead with the current Fellows, both discussing their experiences this summer and Israeli society more generally.



Left to right, back: Rachel Azaria, Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem and Chair of the Yerushalmim Party, and Fleur Hassan-Nahoum, another member of the Party, among some of the Undergraduate Israel Fellows.