Class Title: Jewish Life in the Baltic States and Belarus
Instructor: Christine Beresniova
Format: 5 class sessions; 1.5 hours each
Dates: July 21, July 28, August 4, August 11, August 18
Time: TBD

Overview: This five-part class will discuss Jewish life, culture, and destruction in Latvia, Lithuania, and Belarus. The aim of the class is to provide a complex view of the region as a rich center of Jewish life and tradition. The course will follow a thematic format, beginning with discussions about the history and geography of the region in the first session, and then it will move into Jewish beliefs, practices, and community relationships in the next two sessions. The final two sessions will cover death and destruction of Jewish life during the Holocaust, and the current state of Jewish life in the region.

Rodef Shalom clergy will begin each class with a short discussion that relates to the theme.

Instructor: I have a doctorate from Indiana University. Because of this, my approach to the lectures is from an academic perspective. This will become evident in the suggested readings, as this is how I was trained to see and understand these events. Nevertheless, all experiences and backgrounds are welcome in the lectures.

Preparation: No prior background is necessary to attend the classes but for those not attending classes consecutively, a basic historical knowledge of the region is helpful. The YIVO Encyclopedia is a source widely used in university courses and provides an excellent overview of many themes found in the lectures:
http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/

On Latvia: http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Latvia

On Lithuania: http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Lithuania

On Belarus: http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Belarus

Readings: For each class, I have suggested a few readings that discuss relevant themes. These are not required, but are available for those wishing to have a more in-depth look at different angles of the topic before they arrive for class.

I have also compiled a suggested reading list for those who might want to read additional sources at their own leisure.
LECTURE SCHEDULE

July 21:  History, Law, and Geopolitics

This session will talk about the history of Jewish life in Eastern Europe and Russia, including key laws that determined Jewish residency. Other topics covered will be Jewish migration, the development of "shtetl life," the creation of the Pale of Settlement, and laws related to owning land and property. This session will provide an overview of external factors that influenced the daily life of Eastern European Jewish communities and how Jewish life adapted to different situations.

Optional Suggested Readings for the Class:


July 28:  Politics and Markets

This class will take a more micro-level focus to examine the Latvian, Lithuanian, and Belarusian societies in which Jews lived, especially how Jews were able to make a living in different communities. The class will also discuss different community relationships between dominant ethnic populations and their Jewish neighbors and how cities and villages differed. The diversity of Jewish political thought in the early 20th century, especially local politics and views toward emigration and Zionism, will also be discussed.

Suggested Readings for the Class:


**August 4: Religion, Culture, and Education**

This session will cover the development of Ashkenazic Jewish culture more anthropologically, including rituals, education, religious life, and how individuals "made meaning" in local circumstances. We'll especially look at regional developments in practices and food, and explore the history of Vilna as an intellectual capital for Jewish life in Eastern Europe. We'll also cover language and the development of different dialects. This will cover both the diversity and the continuity of what it meant to be Jewish in Eastern Europe.

Optional Suggested Readings for the Class:


YIVO Encyclopedia, *Yeshiva*. Available here: http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Yeshiva (Please note that the contents are broken up into two sections, before 1800 and after 1800)


**August 11: Death and Destruction**

This session will discuss the preconditions for the Holocaust in Eastern Europe. We'll focus on different community responses to Nazi invasion, and how Jewish communities in Eastern Europe experienced the Holocaust differently than Western European communities. This session will take a holistic view of the Holocaust that will explore World War II in Eastern Europe as a multi-layered local experience that affects the way it's understood today. This session will also invite participants to share brief glimpses into their own family histories in the region.

Optional Suggested Readings for the Class:


August 18: **Reverberations and Renewal**

In this session we'll cover the history of Eastern Europe after WWII ended, and how the Soviet Union entrenched Latvia, Lithuania, and Belarus behind the Iron Curtain. We'll also examine the politics associated with post-Soviet collapse and how Holocaust commemoration, education, and remembrance have evolved in Eastern Europe since then. We'll also talk about the opening of Soviet archives and the processes of collecting Holocaust information in post-Cold War societies. The current state of Jewish life and community in Eastern Europe will also be discussed.

Optional Suggested Readings for the Class:


