Israel is recognized, both inside and outside of the country, as a Jewish state. As such, its history cannot be adequately understood apart from Jewish history.

At the same time, not all Israelis are Jews, and not everything about Israel is part of the Jewish experience. Additionally, after sixty-five years of statehood, Israel has developed its own history and culture. Should this be considered part of or distinct from Jewish history and culture?

The establishment of Israel Studies as a discipline all its own on American college campuses has challenged the place and concept of Jewish Studies. In some universities, Israel Studies is part of a department, center, or program along with Jewish Studies, while in other universities its distinct character is emphasized as separate. In his ground-breaking essay, “Is Israel a Jewish State?,” historian Derek Penslar states that “the idea that Zionism was qualitatively distinct from other Jewish political movements in modern times and that Israel wrought a sea-change upon its immigrants has promoted an unfortunate separation between the fields of Israel and Jewish studies.”

This conference, triggered by the establishment of the Seymour and Lillian Abensohn Chair in Israel Studies at American University, explores the question whether this separation is indeed unfortunate and how American academics confront the positioning of the two fields: as two equal partners, as a minor versus a major field, or as a more established discipline versus an academic newcomer?
Support for travel subsidies for visiting junior faculty was provided by the Salo W. And Jeannette Baron Foundation and Israel Institute.

The Bender Foundation has generously underwritten this program to honor the life of Sondra Dosik Bender; a woman who celebrated Jewish culture, cherished education, and lived life to the fullest. Sondra was a longtime American University trustee, and an active member of the Washington, DC community. She received many honors for her service to numerous organizations and nonprofits, including the esteemed Women of Valor Award from Israel Bonds. She was a devoted wife to Howard Bender, mother of four, and grandmother of eleven grandchildren, including current American University graduate student Jake Bender.
Speaker Biographies

Arnold Band is Professor Emeritus of Hebrew and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Los Angeles, where he was founding chair of the Comparative Literature Department, founding director of the Center for Jewish Studies, and the recipient of a Distinguished Teaching Award. A past president of the Association for Jewish Studies, he has held fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Guggenheim Foundation. His books on Jewish literature, with a special focus on modern Hebrew literature, include Nostalgia and Nightmare, a study of the Hebrew writer S.Y. Agnon, and a translation, with introduction, of Nahman of Bratslav: The Tales.

Michael Brenner, Professor of Jewish History and Culture at the Ludwig-Maximilians University of Munich, will become American University’s first Seymour and Lillian Abensohn Chair in Israel Studies this fall. He has taught at Indiana and Brandeis Universities, and at the universities of Haifa, Paris, Budapest, Stanford, Berkeley, and Johns Hopkins. International vice-president of the Leo Baeck Institute, he is a member of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences. His books, which have been translated into seven languages, include A Short History of the Jews; Prophets of the Past: Interpreters of Jewish History; Zionism: A Brief History; The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany, and After the Holocaust: Rebuilding Jewish Lives in Postwar Germany. He is co-author of the four-volume German-Jewish History in Modern Times. His most recent book is a history of German Jewry from 1945 until today.

Hasia Diner is the Paul and Sylvia Steinberg Professor of American Jewish History at New York University and director of its Goldstein Goren Center for American Jewish History. She has received a Guggenheim Fellowship and held a Fulbright Professorship at the University of Haifa. Her books on immigration and ethnic history and women’s history include: In the Almost Promised Land: American Jews and Blacks, 1915–1935; Erin’s Daughters in America: Irish Immigrant Women in the Nineteenth Century; A Time for Gathering: The Second Migration, 1820-1880, in the series, “The Jewish People in America”; Lower East Side Memories: The Jewish Place in America; Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration; Her Works Praise Her; The Jews of the United States: 1654-2000; and We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence After the Holocaust, 1945-1962.

Sylvia Barack Fishman is the Joseph and Esther Foster Professor of Contemporary Jewish Life at Brandeis University, where she is chair of the Near Eastern and Judaic Studies Department and co-director of the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute. Professor Fishman is the author of seven books and numerous monographs and articles on the interplay of American and Jewish values, the impact of Jewish education, and contemporary Jewish literature and film. They include A Breath of Life: Feminism in the American Jewish Community; Jewish Life and American Culture; Double or Nothing?: Jewish Families and Mixed Marriage; and The Way into the Varieties of Jewishness. Her recent study on young American Jewish leaders focuses on cultural expressions. She is currently heading a research project on new understandings of gender, love, and the Jewish family.

Calvin Goldscheider, Ungerleider Professor Emeritus of Judaic Studies and Professor Emeritus of Sociology at Brown University, was Professor of Sociology and Demography at the Hebrew University. Since 2005, he has been associated as a Scholar in Residence in Jewish Studies and Israel Studies at American University. The recipient of the Association for the Social Scientific Study of Jewry’s Marshall Sklare Award, his research focuses on the sociology and demography of ethnic populations. He is the author, co-author, or editor of twenty-five books, including Jewish Americans; The Population of Israel; The Transformation of the Jews; Jewish Continuity and Change: Emerging Patterns in America; Israel’s Changing Society: Population, Ethnicity and Development; The Arab-Israeli Conflict; Studying the Jewish Future; and A Typical Extraordinary Jew: From Tarnow to Jerusalem.

Benjamin Ish-Shalom is founder and president of Beit Morasha of Jerusalem and founder of its “Identity and Purpose” program, which teaches Jewish values and ethics to the officers of the Israel Defense Forces. He is also Chairman of the Joint Institute for Jewish Studies. Professor Ish-Shalom has served on the faculties of Hebrew University, Yeshiva University, and the Technion, and is currently on the faculties of Bar Ilan University and Beit Morasha’s Beren College. In November 2009, he was appointed by Israel’s Minister of Education to chair the committee entrusted with developing a curriculum on “The Culture and Heritage of Israel.” This new curriculum is now included as a first-time mandatory core subject in the Israeli public school system.
Michael Kotzin received a Ph.D. in English Literature from the University of Minnesota and joined the English Department faculty at Tel Aviv University, where he served for a dozen years. He then began a career in Jewish communal service, spending the past twenty-five years on the staff of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, including as executive vice president from 1999 until 2011. He currently holds the title of Senior Counselor to the President of the Chicago Federation.

Pamela S. Nadell holds the Patrick Clendenen Chair in Women’s and Gender History at American University, where she is chair of the Department of History and has also directed the Jewish Studies Program. The recipient of AU’s highest faculty award, the Scholar/Teacher of the Year, she is the author, co-author, or editor of seven books. They include Women Who Would Be Rabbis: A History of Women’s Ordination, 1889-1985; American Jewish Women’s History: A Reader; and the recently published Making Women’s Histories: Beyond National Perspectives. A member of the founding historians’ team for Philadelphia’s National Museum of American Jewish History, where she was also Consulting Historian for Media, she has received the American Jewish Historical Society’s Lee Max Friedman Award for her distinguished service to the field of American Jewish history.

Ami Pedahzur is the Arnold Chaplik Professor in Israel and Diaspora Studies and Professor of Government at the University of Texas at Austin. At its Schusterman Center for Jewish Studies, he is the founding head of the Israel Studies Collaborative, which seeks to advance a multi-disciplinary approach to the study of Israel. His books include: The Triumph of Israel’s Radical Right; Jewish Terrorism in Israel: The Israeli Secret Services and the Struggle against Terrorism; Suicide Terrorism; Political Parties and Terrorist Groups; The Israeli Response to Jewish Extremism and Violence: Defending Democracy; and Extreme Right-Wing Parties in Israel: Emergence and Decline? He is currently working on a new book manuscript entitled: Super Soldiers – The Enigma of Israel’s Special Forces.

Yoram Peri is the Abraham S. and Jack Kay Chair in Israel Studies and Director of the Joseph and Alma Gildenhorn Institute for Israel Studies at the University of Maryland at College Park. A former political advisor to the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, he earned his Ph.D. from the London School of Economics. He was founder and former head of Chaim Herzog Institute for Media, Politics and Society and Professor of Political Sociology and Communication at Tel Aviv University, and is also the former editor-in-chief of the Israeli daily Davar. His books include: The Assassination of Yitzhak Rabin; Between Battles and Ballots: Israel Military in Politics; Telepopulism: Media and Politics in Israel; Generals in the Cabinet Room: How the Military Shapes Israeli Policy; and Brothers at War: Rabin’s Assassination and the Cultural War in Israel.

Marsha Rozenblit is the Harvey M. Meyerhoff Professor of Jewish History at the University of Maryland at College Park, where she directed the Joseph and Rebecca Meyerhoff Center for Jewish Studies from 1998 to 2003. She is a social and cultural historian of the Jews of Central Europe. Her books include: The Jews of Vienna, 1867-1914: Assimilation and Identity; Reconstructing a National Identity: The Jews of Habsburg Austria during World War I; and Constructing Nationalities in East Central Europe. A past president of the Association for Jewish Studies, she has held fellowships from the ACLS American Council of Learned Societies and the National Endowment for the Humanities. She is currently working on a book exploring the relationship between Jews and other Germans in Moravia between 1848 and 1938.

Arieh Saposnik holds the Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Foundation Chair in Israel Studies and is Associate Professor in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures at the University of California, Los Angeles, where he is the founding director of the Younes & Soraya Nazarian Center for Israel Studies. He has taught at Arizona State University and is the author of Becoming Hebrew: The Creation of a Jewish National Culture in Ottoman Palestine. His research focuses on the history of Zionism and Israel and on the varieties of Jewish nationalism. His current research explores the construction of imagery and symbolism of the sacred in the making of Jewish nationalism generally, and in Zionist and Israeli culture in particular.
Miriam Shenkar received her Ph.D. in educational policy and leadership from The Ohio State University and is the author of *The Politicization of Israel Studies*, a book about the emergence of Israel Studies as a scholarly discipline. She has taught courses on the history of Israeli society and culture, Israeli education, Holocaust education, and comparative education. She has recently developed a curriculum for the history of teaching for creativity/divergent thinking within an international context. She holds a master’s degree in Asian Studies from the University of Hawaii, a certificate in journalism from Tel-Aviv University, and an undergraduate degree from Barnard College.

S. Ilan Troen is the Stoll Family Chair in Israel Studies and Director of the Schusterman Center for Israel Studies at Brandeis University. Before joining Brandeis, he directed the Ben-Gurion Research Institute and Archives in Sede Boker, Israel, and was dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Ben-Gurion University. The founding editor of the journal *Israel Studies*, he has authored or edited eleven books. They include *Jewish Centers and Peripheries: Europe Between America and Israel Fifty Years after World War II; Divergent Jewish Cultures: Israel and America; Imagining Zion: Dreams, Designs and Realities in a Century of Jewish Settlement; Jews and Muslims in the Arab World: Haunted by Pasts Real and Imagined; and Tel Aviv, The First Century: Visions, Designs and Actualities.*

Howard M. Wachtel, Professor Emeritus of Economics at American University, writes about globalization in the world economy. At American University, he was chair of the Department of Economics, acting dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, director of the Paris Semester, and founding director of the Center for Israel Studies. He has held visiting appointments at the American Academy in Berlin, the London School of Economics, and at Cambridge and Hebrew Universities. He chairs the Association for Israel Studies Task Force on Endowed Chairs and Centers. He is the author of four books: *Workers’ Management and Workers’ Wages in Yugoslavia; Labor and the Economy; The Money Mandarins: The Making of a Supranational Economy; and Street of Dreams - Boulevard of Broken Hearts: Wall Street’s First Century.*

Ronald W. Zweig is the Marilyn and Henry Taub Professor of Israel Studies and Professor of Hebrew and Judaic Studies at New York University. An Israeli historian, he specializes in Hebrew and Judaic studies, with particular reference to the British Mandate in Palestine. His books include: *The Gold Train: The Destruction of the Jews and the Looting of Hungary; Escape through Austria: The Flight of Jewish Survivors from Eastern Europe, 1945-1948; David Ben-Gurion: Politics and Leadership in Israel; German Reparations and the Jewish World: A History of the Claims Conference; and Britain and Palestine during the Second World War.* His fellowships and honors include Visiting Senior Scholar at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, Research Fellow at the International Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at Yad Vashem, and the Herbert Katzki Prize for Archival Research.

Leon Wieseltier is an American writer, critic, and magazine editor. Since 1983 he has been the literary editor of *The New Republic*. Wieseltier has published several books of fiction and non-fiction. *Kaddish*, which won a National Jewish Book Award and was a finalist for a National Book Award, is a genre-blending meditation on the Jewish prayers of mourning. *Against Identity* is a collection of thoughts about the modern notion of identity. During Wieseltier’s tenure as literary editor of *The New Republic*, many of his signed and unsigned writings appeared in the magazine. Wieseltier also edited and introduced a volume of works by Lionel Trilling entitled *The Moral Obligation to Be Intelligent* and wrote the foreword to Ann Weiss’s *The Last Album: Eyes from the Ashes of Auschwitz-Birkenau*, a collection of personal photographs that serves as a paean to pre-Shoah innocence. Wieseltier’s translations of the works of Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai have appeared in *The New Republic* and *The New Yorker*. He is a member of the editorial board of the *Jewish Review of Books.*

Keynote Speaker

**Leon Wieseltier**

*The New Republic*
AU’s Center for Israel Studies presents the creative and intellectual contributions of the modern state of Israel in the arts, sciences, social sciences, and humanities. As a university center in Washington, DC it is uniquely positioned to be a national and international hub for the examination and interpretation of Israel’s achievements and complex geopolitical challenges.

Jewish Studies Program

College of Arts & Sciences

At American University, Jewish studies, an interdisciplinary program, enables students to analyze the civilization of the Jews and its various cultural and religious expressions from the patriarchal period to the present.

Ludwig-Maximilians University of Munich was the first university in Germany to have established a Chair for Jewish History and Culture within its History Department. Classes on Jewish history and Israel are an integral part of the curriculum at LMU.

The Israel Institute (Washington and Jerusalem) works in partnership with leading academic, research and cultural institutions to enhance knowledge and study of modern Israel in the United States and around the world.

Front Photo: Werner Coppel (top row, second from left) and other young Jewish children in 1937 in the small room of the synagogue where they gathered everyday. They are pictured with the Zionist flag, which later became the flag of Israel. – Courtesy of Werner Coppel and the Center for Holocaust and Humanity Education