

Utopias and dystopias are topics of Jewish studies conference

February 06, 2013 4:45 AM Fran Simon
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The Tulane Jewish Studies Department is hosting an international conference on “Jewish Secular Utopias and Dystopias in Israel, America and Eastern Europe,” with funding from the Center for Cultural Judaism in New York. Zeev Sternhell, Leon Blum Professor Emeritus at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, will give the keynote lecture on “Utopia and Its Enemies.”



Zeev Sternhell, the Leon Blum Professor Emeritus at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, will give the keynote lecture at a conference on utopias and dystopias on Feb. 17 on the Tulane uptown campus. (Photo by Helène Gallimard)

An Israeli historian, Sternhell is one of the world's foremost experts on fascism. He writes for *Haaretz*, Israel's oldest daily newspaper, and has authored numerous books. In 2008, Sternhell won the Israel Prize in political science.

“Jews often have an ideal goal in politics, and this ideal has sustained the Jewish people for 2,000 years,” says [Brian Horowitz](#), chair of the Tulane department, who is writing a book about Zionism as a utopian movement. This is reflected in “the return

to the promised land, the return to justice, the diaspora, the religious revival; and God, the state and the brotherhood of all men and women.”

However, Horowitz says, “sometimes it doesn't work out,” resulting in dystopia. “It's impossible to remove violence from Jewish history,” he says. “Violence can be an instrument for positive things or for negative things.”

Sternhell has been the victim of threats and a pipe-bomb attack by suspected right-wing Jewish extremists because of his controversial views, including publicly criticizing Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank.

[Rabbi David Goldstein](#), associate director of Jewish studies at Tulane, says bringing speakers such as Sternhell to campus “opens students up to new ways of thinking, to new people and their viewpoints.”

The [conference](#) will be held on the Tulane uptown campus on Feb. 17 and 18, with Sternhell's keynote lecture on Sunday (Feb. 17) at 5:30 p.m. in the Lavin-Bernick Center. The conference is free and open to the public.