

ESSAY OPTIONS FOR HARRIET LEDER AWARD

Please read the following two essay options and select one; read the passages noted for the ESSAY OPTION chosen and address the questions that follow in an essay of at least 750 words (1,000 maximum). Using sources to back up your ideas is suggested, and they must be cited and documented. The completed essay should be saved as “ESSAY” and e-mailed to barbara.horn@ncc.edu as an attachment along with the “APPLICATION” on or before the March 15, 2011 deadline. You will receive a confirmation upon receipt.

OPTION ONE

Excerpts are from “JAP: The New Antisemitic Code Word” by Francine Klagsburn in Kesselman’s *Women: Images and Realities* (pp. 57-60).

Write an essay of 750 words in response to the following:

Francine Klagsburn asks: “Isn’t it odd that the term JAP, referring to a spoiled, self-indulgent woman, should be so widely used at a time when women are working outside their homes in unprecedented numbers...?”

“Jewish women, like women throughout society, are trying to find their own paths, their own voices. And, along with other changes that have taken place, they have been finding themselves Jewishly. And yet we hear the term JAP being used, perhaps almost more now than ever before. Why?”

From Goldie Hawn in the movie *Private Benjamin* to Sarah Jessica Parker in the series *Sex in the City*, the label “JAP,” Jewish American Princess, has been affixed to the Jewish woman. The label is associated with the traits of materialism and entitlement on the one hand, and neediness and dependency on the other.

Write your comments about the “JAP phenomenon” by responding to the following questions:

- a) What does the label JAP signify about Jewish women and does its meaning apply to Jewish women alone?
- b) Why has such a label come to be associated with Jewish women and not with women from other backgrounds?
- c) What other stereotypes about Jewish women appear in the media today and why?

OPTION TWO

Excerpts are from *Seek Her Out: A Textual Approach to the Study of Women and Judaism* by Elyse Goldstein and “Seeking a Jewish Feminism” by Julie Greenberg in Kaye/Kantrowitz and Klepfisz’s *The Tribe of Dina* (p.186).

Write an essay of **750** words in response to the following:

“Jewish feminists have ‘rediscovered’ the concept of the *Shechinah*. . . . With the development of Kabbalah, Jewish mysticism, . . . the *Shechinah* takes on feminine characteristics” and “begins to be described as princess, daughter, and the feminine principle in the world. . . . On a metaphoric level, *Shechinah* holds tremendous power for us. . . . God and the *Shechinah*. . . originally were One. . . . The ultimate goal of Judaism is one of harmony. We must look for harmony between God and *Shechinah*, between masculine and feminine, and ultimately between male and female persons. As the *Shechinah* and God are One, so too the masculine and feminine ultimately are also one and need only be brought back together. We do so through daily acts that reunite the broken fragments of masculinity and femininity” (Goldstein 94-96).

“A commitment to feminist Judaism pervades our lives. . . , not only the spiritual elements of our lives. . . . In fact, the freedom to have a spiritual life is integrated with the material organization of our lives.” For example, it is hard “to be part of a spiritual community if the cost of the religious retreat or synagogue membership is prohibitive (and women are the poorest people in a patriarchal system). Feminist challenges for economic justice. . . could have a major impact on the very shape and standards of progressive Judaism. We discover that the spiritual is political” (Greenberg 186).

Write your comments by responding to the following questions:

- a) What positive role can reinforcing God as both male and female play in our modern world?
- b) If human communities held gods in high esteem that incorporated both feminine and masculine attributes, how might the daily lives of women and men be affected positively?
- c) How can Judaism and other religions answer the need for “harmony. . . between male and female persons”?