

# Promised Lands: The Jewish Presence in Latin America

Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies  
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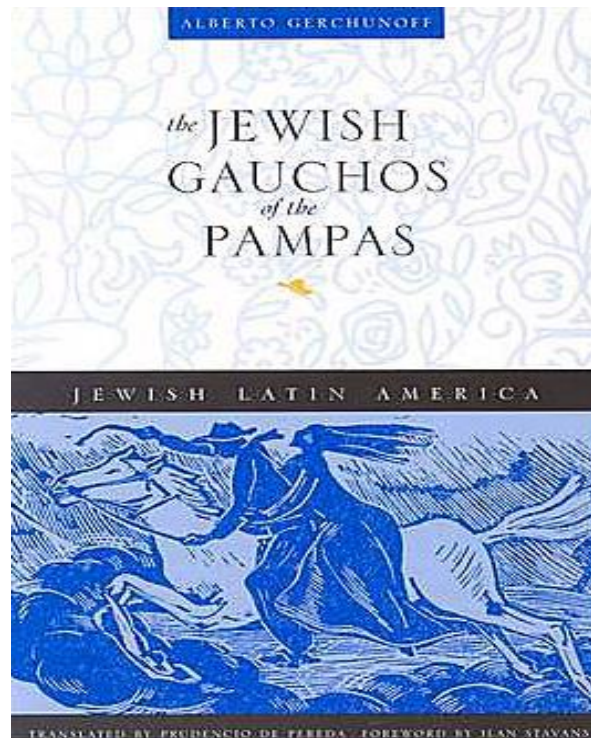
Ronnie Perelis     Spring 2016

This course explores Jewish immigration, settlement, cultural production and religious life from the earliest instances of European conquest and colonization of the Americas until the present day. The Americas are not just a geographic space, but they also function as a dreamscape –paradise, savage frontier, land of refuge, or an *El Dorado/Goldeneh Medineh*. We will explore the interplay between Jews, Judaism and the realities and mythologies of Latin America. The majority of the material will come from the Spanish and Portuguese zones of Central and South America with attention given to the Jewish communities of the Dutch and English colonies of the Caribbean such as Curaçao and Jamaica. The investigation into the colonial period will focus more heavily on aspects of Sephardic history such as crypto-Judaism, Inquisitorial persecution and the expansion of the Western Sephardim to the New World. As the course moves into the modern period, more emphasis will be placed on the experience of Eastern European Jewish immigrants and their descendants. Secondary sources will provide the wider historical context for the wide range of primary texts that will be at the center of the class discussion.



**Goals of the course:**

- \*Develop textual and analytical skills through careful engagement with primary sources
- \*Empower the student to think critically, creatively and personally about the texts and their historical context
- \*Examine the complexities and ambiguities of culture, society and identity



**Please Note:** *If you are a student with a documented disability and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.*

**Structure of the Course and Grading Policies**

Participation	20%
Reaction Papers	10%
Final Essay Project	70%

The class will meet once a week and consist of interactive lectures, student presentations and group discussions of the texts and historical issues under consideration. Performance will be judged on the basis of participation in class discussions, reaction papers, oral presentations, and the final research project.

**Participation (20%):** Attendance, knowledge of assigned readings and active participation in class discussions. (You are expected to bring the relevant readings to class.)

The class is designed to allow for a plurality of voices. You will be expected to share your insights and questions with the class on a regular basis. It is your responsibility to come to class with good questions and concerns about the readings; you are not expected to have definitive answers to these questions.

In addition you are required to submit a question or brief comment regarding the readings to the professor by **5pm of the day of class** via the *Weekly Reaction Blog* on ANGEL.

\*Each student will be responsible to introduce one or two of the primary or secondary texts at some point in the semester.

When you must miss class, it is **your** responsibility to find out what you missed as well as the assignment for the next meeting. Please consult a fellow student in the class for this information. If you would like clarification on any point, however, I will be available on email and we can always arrange a meeting to discuss the material. You are allowed **two** absences. After that point your participation grade will suffer. Regular attendance is essential to building a learning community.

#### **Reaction Papers (10%):**

To help promote meaningful conversations you will be required to write **2** short reaction papers based on your readings. You should focus on one aspect of the reading that you find intriguing. You can also use it as an opportunity to reflect on the connection between different issues that we have previously discussed.

It is essential that your essay **develop** an idea and reflect a **coherent** process of **analysis** and **interpretation** of the text or issue you decide to write about.

You are free to decide when to write a reaction paper but at least one of these papers must be written before **March 1** and the second one must be turned in by **April 7**. The essays should be uploaded to the drop box on ANGEL.

***You are not alone!***

**Free Help with Your Writing! The Writing Center, in Furst 202, offers individualized tutoring that can support your writing for this course. All writers need feedback, even strong ones. Make an appointment and find out about drop-in hours at [yu.edu/wilf/writingcenter](http://yu.edu/wilf/writingcenter).**

**Final Project (70%):** Each student will write a research paper dealing with a topic that they have independently researched.

**Readings:** You will be responsible for the primary texts and secondary readings assigned for each week. The reading will enable you to participate in the discussions of both the literary texts and the larger historical issues covered each week.

#### **Required texts:**

*Atlantic Diasporas: Jews, Conversos, and Crypto-Jews in the Age of Mercantalism, 1500-1800. Ed. Richard L. Kagan and Philip D. Morgan*

ISBN-13: 978-0801890352

ISBN-10: 0801890357

*The Fragmented Life of Don Jacobo Lerner*, Isaac Goldenberg (ISBN 0671818082)

\*Multiple copies of these books can be found online at very reasonable prices.

All other texts for this course will be available digitally either through ANGEL. **Every student is responsible to have an accessible copy of the primary and secondary texts for class either in the form of a hard copy (print-out) or on their personal laptops in class.** We will make ample use of these sources during our class discussions.

It is imperative that you are able to access and fully utilize Angel for this class. If you have any technical issues with Angel it is your responsibility to contact:

[angelsupport@yu.edu](mailto:angelsupport@yu.edu) to resolve these issues.

Please pay attention to you YU email because the assigned readings may shift throughout the semester.

January 28: Introduction

Expulsion and Discovery: Old World and New World Intertwined

“I, a Jew?” Jorge Luis Borges

Selections from Columbus’ Diaries

“The Letter to Santangel”

[www.ems.kcl.ac.uk/content/etext/e022.html](http://www.ems.kcl.ac.uk/content/etext/e022.html)

February 4: Session 2

New World Paradise?: the Americas as screen for Old World hopes and fears

\*Columbus’ Fourth Voyage (PDF on Angel)

\*\* Leonard I. Sweet. 1986. “Christopher Columbus and the Millennial Vision of the New World”. *The Catholic Historical Review* 72 (3). Catholic University of America Press: 369–82.

<http://yulib002.mc.yu.edu:2201/stable/25022335>.

\*\*\*Noah J. Efron, “Knowledge of Newly Discovered Lands among Jewish Communities of Europe (From 1492 to the Thirty Years War)”, *Jews and Expansion of Europe to the West 1450- 1800* 47- 72.

State of the Field:

Ra’anan Rein, Introduction: New Approaches to Latin American Jewish Studies

Jewish History, Vol. 18, No. 1, Gender, Ethnicity, and Politics: Latin American Jewry

Revisited (2004), pp. 1-5 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20100920>

Edna Aizenberg, “How a Samovar Helped Me Theorize Latin American Jewish Literature”. *Prooftexts*

Vol. 19, No. 2 (MAY 1999), pp. 195-204

Article Stable URL:

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20689545>

February 11: TBA

February 18: An Atlantic World

Ronnie Perelis, "The Conversos in the New World", sections 1.1 and 1.2

Three essays from *Atlantic Diasporas*

Jonathan Israel, "Jews and Crypto-Jews in the Atlantic World Systems, 1500-1800", 3-17.

Adam Sutcliffe, "Jewish History in an Age of Atlanticism", 18-32.

Daviken Studnicki-Gizbert, "*La Nación* among the Nations: Portuguese and Other Maritime Trading Diasporas in the Atlantic, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries, 75-98.

February 25: Session 3

Conversos and Crypto-Jews in New Spain

Perelis, "The Conversos in the New World", sections 1.3 and 2, pp3-12.

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF LUIS DE CARVAJAL, THE YOUNGER :INTRODUCTION. (1965). *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* (1961-1978), 55(1-4), 277.

*When reading Carvajal's autobiography consider the following: to what extent is this an American/New World story? How does Carvajal construct his religious identity and practice? How does he learn about Judaism? What can the text tell us about Carvajal's religious community?*

**First essay due by March 1 via Angel**

March 3: Session 4

**Tropical Synagogues: Open Judaism in the Dutch Caribbean**

Recife: First Open Jewish Community of the Americas

Perelis, "The Conversos in the New World", section 5 pp19-22.

Bruno Feitler, Jews and New Christians in Dutch Brazil, 1630-1654 in *Atlantic Diasporas* 123- 151.

DUTCH CONQUEST AND OCCUPATION OF BRAZIL

*Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society (1893-1961)*; 1934; 33, AJHS Journal pg. 45

Arnold Wiznitzer, "Jewish soldiers in Dutch Brazil 1630- 1654" PAJHS Vol. 46, 1956

Meyer Kayserling, "The Earliest Rabbis and Jewish Writers of America" Volume 3, 1895



Meyer Kayserling, "Isaac Aboab, The First Jewish Author in America" Volume 5, 1897  
*Be sure to look at Aboab's Hebrew Poem.*

March 10

Sacred Space: constructing Jewish identity brick by brick

Rachel Frankel "Antecedents and Remnants of Jodensavanne: The Synagogues and Cemeteries of the First Permanent Plantation Settlement of New World Jews"

In *The Jews and the Expansion of Europe to the West*

394- 438

\*Images of the Synagogues of the "Nation" in the Atlantic World

\*\* Images of Belisario's paintings

Optional:

James Homer Williams, "An Atlantic Perspective on the Jewish Struggle for Rights and Opportunities in Brazil, New Netherland, and New York" *The Jews and the Expansion of Europe to the West* pp 369- 393

3.16 Special Event: Prof. Erin Graff Zivin will present her new book, *Figurative*

*Conversion, Torture, and Truth in the Luso-Hispanic Atlantic* (Northwestern

University Press, 2014) at noon, Honors Lounge.

March 17: Session 6

Jews and Blacks: Atlantic trade, African slavery and the early modern Sephardic world

Jonathan Schorsch, "Blacks, Jews and the Racial Imagination in the Writings of Sephardim in the Long Seventeenth Century". *Jewish History*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2005), pp. 109-135 Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20100948>

Natalie Zemon Davis, "Regaining Jerusalem: Eschatology and Slavery in Jewish Colonization in Seventeenth-Century Suriname", *The Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*, 3(1), pp 11–38 January 2016.

Optional:

Jonathan Schorsch, "Religious Life of Slaves Belonging to Jews: Seventeenth-and – Eighteenth- Century Dutch and British Colonies", *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World* , pp217-253 Cambridge, 2004.

March 24 Purim- La Fiesta de la Reina Esther

Special Event: Monday March 28: Guest lecturer Claude Dov Stuczynski, "New Christians and 'New Jews' conceptualize Empire"

March 31: Session 7

Polacos y Turcos: Old World Immigration to Latin America

Judith Laiken Elkin, "The Immigration Years", *The Jews of Latin America*, Rev Ed., Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc. New York 1998 pp 25- 102.

Syncretism, mestizaje and the ghosts of memory

Pinkhes Berniker, "Jesús," short story in *Yiddish South of the Border: An Anthology of Latin American Jewish Writing*, edited by Alan Astro (University of New Mexico Press, 2003): 137-148

Abraham Josef Dubelman, "The Faith Healer," short story in *Yiddish South of the Border: An Anthology of Latin American Jewish Writing*, edited by Alan Astro (University of New Mexico Press, 2003): 148-153

April 7: Session 8

Gauchos Judíos: Agricultural Settlements and the birth of the "New Jew" in Argentina

\**Los Gauchos Judíos/ The Jewish Gauchos of the pampas*, Alberto Gerchunoff.

\*Edna Aizenberg, "Parricide on the Pampa?". Iberoamericana: Madrid, 2000. pp. 9- 37.

**Second essay due via Angel**

**Tuesday April 12: Thursday Schedule** Session 9

Varieties of the Jewish Immigration experience in Latin America

Jeffrey Lesser, "How the Jews became Japanese and other Stories of nation and Ethnicity"

*Jewish History* 18.1 2004 pp7-17

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20100921>

Margalit Bejarano, "Sephardic Jews in Cuba—From all their Habitations," *Judaism*, winter 2002

Jerry Davila, "Ethnicity, Identity and Nationality in Latin America"

*Jewish History* 18.1 2004 pp95-113

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20100925>

Optional:

Kemal H. Karpat, "The Ottoman Emigration to America, 1860-1914", *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 17 (1985), 175-209.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/163603>

Margalit Bejarano, "The Deproletarianization of Cuban Jewry," in *Judaica Latinoamericana: Estudios Históricos-Sociales*, pp. 57-67.

Jeffrey Lesser and Raanan Rein, "Introduction" and "New Approaches to Ethnicity and Diaspora in Twentieth-Century Latin America pp1-40

Lesser, Jeff H. "From Pedlars to Proprietors: Lebanese, Syrian and Jewish Immigrants in Brazil." In *The Lebanese in the World: A Century of Emigration*, Albert Hourani & Nadim Shedhadi, eds. London: The Centre for Lebanese Studies, 1992.

Lesser, Jeffrey. "The Immigration and Integration of Polish Jews in Brazil, 1924- 1934." *The Americas* 51:2 (October 1994): 173-91.

April 14: Session 10

Guest Scholar Prof. Bruno Feitler

May 5: Session 11

\**Novia que te vea*. Film by Guita Schyfter, based on the novel by Rosa Nissán (México 1994).

Evelyn Dean-Olmsted

*Shamis, halebis and shajatos*: Labels and the dynamics of Syrian Jewishness in Mexico City [Language & Communication](#)

[Volume 31, Issue 2](#), May 2011, Pages 130-140

**Jewish Languages in the Age of the Internet**

Marc Isaac Berliner, "Churches" (Poem illustrated by Diego Rivera), *Yiddish South of the Border* pp156-158

May 12- Yom Ha'atzmaut- No Class

**MAY 17- Tuesday schedule**

May 19: Session 12

**Fractured Lenses**

*The Fragmented Life of Don Jacobo Lerner*, Isaac Goldenberg (ISBN 0671818082)  
1- 89

May 26: Session 13

**Fractured Lenses (Part II)**

*The Fragmented Life of Don Jacobo Lerner* contd.  
90- 186

June 2: Session 14

**J.L. Borges: Jews and Judaism within Modernity's Labyrinth**

"Emma Zunz", "Death and the Compass", "El Aleph", "Ibn-Hakam Al Bokhari, Murdered in his Labyrinth", "In Defense of the Kaballah", "Spinoza"



Erin Graff Zivin (2011): Semitic Mysteries, Universal Truths: Jewishness and Arabness in Jorge Luis Borges, *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies*, 6:2, 121-139  
PDF on angel

\**Borges y la kabala* <http://youtu.be/N7vvdFB7c5s>

June 9: Session 15

**“It tasted better in Cuba”**

\**Adió Kerida*, a film by Ruth Behar

\*\* “While waiting for the ferry to Cuba: Afterthoughts about Adio Kerida”

Ruth Behar *Michigan Quarterly Review*; Fall 2002; 41, 4; Research Library pg. 655

\*\*\*Marti in Yiddish

[http://www.chcuba.org/espanol/vida\\_comunitaria/interesante/marti%20y%20los%20hebreos.htm](http://www.chcuba.org/espanol/vida_comunitaria/interesante/marti%20y%20los%20hebreos.htm)

”Mi tierra”, Gloria Estéfan, “El danzón de Moises”, Roberto Rodríguez [In class audio recordings]

\*Presentation of research topics.