

**HIST 190/ JS 190/ LAS 190:
Jews of the Americas: Comparative Perspectives
Prof. Jeffrey Lesser and Eric Goldstein**

Course Description:

"Jews of the Americas: Comparative Perspectives" examines of the immigration and settlement of Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews throughout the Americas from various perspectives. The focus will be on variations within countries, between countries and on relations between Jews and other ethnic groups. We will examine Jewish experiences in a number of different national contexts (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Cuba, Mexico, Canada and the United States) via a topical lens that will include studies of gender, economics, religion, and culture.

"Jews of the Americas" will use comparison to reveal the breadth and diversity of the immigrant experience and to challenge some of the simplistic assumptions with which students and scholars alike often approach the study of this field. We hope to encourage students inclined toward Jewish Studies to broaden their vision beyond the familiar North American environment, and to push students interested in Latin America and the Caribbean to consider the role of an ethnic and religious community that is often neglected in the study of that region. In approaching this comparison, we will focus mainly on the primary sources of Jewish life in these regions (immigrant accounts, photographs, novels, music, film, oral histories conducted by students) and incorporate a strong cultural dimension into the course in order to create an experiential and interdisciplinary approach to our subject.

The course will begin with an overview of key concepts such as minority, ethnicity, religion, and race from North and South American perspectives. We will discuss the concept of "ethnic" or "minority" history and how it differs from other types of historical analysis. We then hope to explore certain aspects of the Jewish immigrant experience and determine the extent to which they were shaped by these various social environments. Among the comparative questions we will be asking are: How have the cultures of each region helped to determine whether Jewishness is expressed in primarily ethnic or religious terms? Why did Latin America seemingly provide more fertile ground for a vibrant and enduring Yiddish culture (including schools, publications, and theater) than did the United States and Canada, where it faded with the immigrant generation? How have the presence of different ethnic minorities in each region shaped their respective definitions of "insider" and "outsider" and how have these distinctions, in turn, shaped Jewish identity? How have the different economies and political institutions created different opportunities and dangers for Jews? Both regions were the sites of failed Jewish agricultural experiments in the 1880s. Why were these ventures largely forgotten in North America while they lived on as part of the founding myths of Latin American Jewish communities?

Scheduling and Departmental Support:

This course is slated to be offered in the 2002-2003 academic year and will be cross-listed in History, Jewish Studies and Latin American Studies. See the attached letters of support from the Chair of the Department of History, Walter Adamson, and the Director of Undergraduate Studies for the Institute for Jewish Studies, Michael Berger. Dr. Lesser, one of the applicants, is the Director of the Program in Latin American and Caribbean Studies.

Relationship of Course to Existing Offerings:

This course will serve to build constituencies among freshmen for two growing areas of study at Emory: Jewish Studies and Latin American and Caribbean Studies. Students who complete this course would be strongly encouraged to continue on in courses such as History 242/Jewish Studies 242: American Jewish History and History 360 and 361 (the Latin American and Caribbean History survey courses). More broadly, "Jews of the Americas: Comparative Perspectives" will encourage students to take classes on issues of race, ethnicity and national identity and engage in nationally specific courses in new ways. Given the History Department's growing number of scholars of race and ethnicity, and Emory University's expanded commitment to Jewish Studies and Latin American and Caribbean Studies, a course like this one is crucial both to the repertoires of the individual faculty but more widely to programmatic initiatives at Emory. For Profs Lesser and Goldstein, the clarifications and refined analysis that emerge from a comparative approach will help them immensely in fine tuning their existing courses on ethnic life in the Americas.

Plan of Work:

The applicants will meet regularly for three weeks during the month of June, 2001 to identify relevant aspects of comparison between Jewish life in the two regions, share ideas about potential readings and other course materials, and plan the schedule of lectures, discussions and activities. They will also work on identifying potential resources in the Atlanta area (museums, collections, potential oral history interviewees) that will aid in the cultural dimension of the course as well as in the completion of student projects. Finally, the two faculty will begin to work on a course web page. The end result will be a finished syllabus that will link the classroom segment of the course with a series of cultural events and community resources.

Stipends: Stipends should be awarded as salary.