Brazil to Brooklyn:
Jewish Cultures of the Americas
Fall 2020 | MWF 11:30-12:20

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Accessibility

Cornell University is committed to diversity and inclusiveness with the goal of providing an accessible, usable and welcoming environment for faculty, staff, students and visitors with disabilities. This semester, I will especially work to meet the new accessibility challenges of remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, I will strive to ensure that our films and video lectures are accurately subtitled. Any student who feels they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a learning, psychiatric, physical, or chronic health diagnosis should contact Student Disability Services staff at 607-254-4545 or at sds_cu@cornell.edu to obtain an official letter of accommodation. For more information, please see https://sds.cornell.edu/.

Wellbeing

Your wellbeing matters to me. I aim to make this class an intellectually exciting space and a welcoming community as we all navigate the COVID-19 pandemic. While supporting you in rigorous academic work, I will also support you in balancing academics with your health and your other responsibilities. For example, per Cornell's guidelines, I will:

- Pay careful attention to workload, scheduling policies, and time zones, understanding that online instruction in multiple courses can lead to unacceptable levels of competition for the student's time.
- Approach accommodation requests with trust, empathy and appropriate levels of flexibility, and will afford necessary accommodations to address disability needs.

- Promote classroom equity by taking steps to ensure that no student is disadvantaged because they have to work in a challenging environment or one that has limited resources and internet connectivity.

Additionally, if you are not sure where to find the resources you need, like free local healthcare, please feel welcome speak with me. To the best of my ability, I will refer you to appropriate resources like Ithaca's free clinic. I have also included a list of emotional and physical health resources on the last page of this syllabus.

Course Description

Jewish cultures in the Americas are far more diverse than most people realize. Some Americans know the history of Ashkenazi (German and Eastern European) Jews, many of whom immigrated to the U.S. between 1880-1920. In addition to Ashkenazi cultures, our course introduces the Sephardi (Spanish/Portuguese), Mizrahi (Arab), Persian, and Ethiopian Jews who have immigrated to the Caribbean, South America, and North America since the 16th century. Students will learn how Jews of all origins have built communities across the Americas, from Jamaica, Bolivia, and Brazil to Mexico, the U.S., and Canada. We will focus on the resources that diverse Jewish communities drew on to face challenges in creating new Jewish American cultures, such as how to navigate assimilation, religious observance, legal discrimination, and gender and sexual reform.

Each topic within this course could generate its own full class. Just a few of these topics will include crypto-Jews in 16th-century "New Spain," Holocaust refugees in South America, Moroccan Jews in 20th-century Montreal, and millennial Jewish American TV comedy. Rather than trying to convey all there is to know about each topic, this class offers students a taste of many topics that they may never previously have encountered, like queer Jewish theology. I envision the course as a series of doorways through which students can step when they find topics that personally interest them. You can then focus on these new themes in your research papers or future coursework.

Note: This Class is Rated R

In order to understand Jewish experiences in the Americas, we will sometimes read, view, and discuss challenging topics. Alongside hilarious and delightful readings, we will sometimes learn about anti-Semitic, racist, sexist, and homophobic or transphobic slurs and violence, sexual assault, domestic violence, murder, and self-harm or suicide. For example, both funny and serious themes arise in the Brazilian Jewish film *The Year My Parents Went on Vacation*. It is not possible to predict each case where challenging themes may come up, so this note serves as a content advisory for all films, readings, and class discussions. These topics may cause distress, and such responses are a great topic for serious discussion in our class. Likewise, we will discuss many topics considered sensitive or controversial. If you think it will be difficult for you to respectfully discuss such texts, topics, or responses

with care and detail—sometimes with people who disagree with you—then you should consider dropping this class.

Learning Outcomes

Through this class, students will learn to:

- Explain the multiple waves of Jewish immigration to the Americas: where these waves originated, what caused Jews to immigrate, where these Jews built new communities, and how these different Jewish communities have interacted with each other.
- Explain the key challenges to Jewish life in the Americas, and how different Jewish communities have responded to these challenges.
- Conduct research, writing, and in-class presentations about Jewish cultures

How to Succeed in This Course

- **Read Cornell's updated Academic Integrity Code:** https://bit.ly/316kRby
- **Attend class by Zoom**
- **Do the readings & viewings** and prepare for class by marking significant passages and main ideas in them, as well as taking notes on the films.
- **Keep the assigned readings at hand for each Zoom class.**
- **Take notes during class.**
- **Ask questions.** You are responsible for understanding the material. If a concept or assignment is unclear, speak up in class or make an appointment with me.

Class Requirements and Grade Breakdown

- **25% – Attendance & Participation**
- **17.5% – Short Paper on Jewish Education (4 pgs):**
    - Across the Americas, from the 16th century to the present, Jewish communities have faced the question: how to transmit Jewish identity and Jewish cultural knowledge to the next generation? Each student will pick one example of how a Jewish community has tackled this question. Examples could include crypto-Jewish family transmission in 18th-century Mexico, Jewish students in 19th-century Quebecois public schools, Brazilian Jewish youth outreach programs, or the (oh-so-dreaded) weekly Hebrew School in U.S. synagogues. In four pages, the student will explain: how did this form of Jewish education come into being? How did it gain popularity in a particular time and place? What are its advantages and disadvantages, from the perspectives of the Jewish communities that rely on it? Each paper will cite at least two in-class and two outside sources.
- **17.5% – Short Paper on Creating/Reinventing Rituals (4 pgs):**
    - Jews throughout the Americas have often reinvented Jewish rituals (like updating Chanukah to place it on par with Christmas) or created new ones (like bat mitzvah ceremonies and gender transition blessings). Each student will pick one example in which a Jewish community has created or reinvented a ritual. In four pages the student will explain when, where, how, and why the ritual changed. They will likewise explain if this change has led to any backlash. Each paper will cite at least two in-class and two outside sources.

- **5% – Event Reflection: Jewish Trans Brazil**
    - On Oct 19 at 5pm, Cornell is holding an event called "Jewish Trans Brazil: Identity, Activism & Music." The event will feature two Brazilian Jewish transgender speakers: the pop star and activist Assucena Assucena, and the researcher and activist Lilyth Ester Grover. Each student will attend the event or view the recording, then write a 2-pg reflection linking the event to our course. A more detailed prompt will be provided.
- **35% – Final Research Project & Presentation**
    - Each student will independently research and write one final paper of 10 pages, then present their findings in class. This paper will focus on one Jewish community in the Americas and explain how that community navigated a specific cultural dilemma. For instance, a student could research how 19th-century Argentine Jews created Jewish orphanages to ensure that Jewish children would not find themselves converted to Christianity in mainstream orphanages. Another example could be how 21st-century Jewish Americans address the #BlackLivesMatter movement. In both argumentation and citation, the paper must use at least three course readings and three independently researched texts.

Required Reading & Viewing

- All readings will be available as PDFs on Canvas or e-books through Cornell's library.
- Some viewings are available through free YouTube links. In other cases, I will indicate that films are streamable through platforms like Hulu, Netflix or Amazon, usually for about $3 each. You are always responsible for viewing assigned materials by the given date.

Participation

This is a discussion-based class, so your success requires attending our Zoom sessions and actively participating. During usual semesters, students receive only three excused absences, after which they lose points for additional absences. Likewise, my usual policy is that more than five absences leads to an automatic fail. To reflect our unusual challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, I am taking a more case-by-case approach this semester. Here's the outline:

- Please do your very best to attend every Zoom session. If you expect to miss many sessions, please contact me in advance. Likewise, please keep your camera on whenever possible during our Zoom sessions so we can be present with each other.
- If you accumulate several absences, I will reach out to see how you're doing, and to strategize for your success. I will always let you know if your number of absences is affecting your grade. In rare cases, if you have many absences, I will work with you to figure out if it makes sense for you to stay in the class or to withdraw.

Classroom & Discussion Decorum

- **Attendance:** Please arrive promptly to our Zoom meetings and be ready-to-go before class starts.
- **Electronics:**
    - Prohibited: Cell phones. Please turn them off and keep them stowed at all times.
    - Required: Electronic or hardcopy access to our readings. During our discussions, you

should always have the following three items onscreen or in hardcopy:
    - The day's articles and your notes on them
    - Your notes on the day's film, with time-stamps
- **Respect:** We will routinely discuss topics that many people consider taboo, controversial, deeply personal, or simply unfamiliar. To ensure a safe, constructive environment, we will establish "ground rules" for class discussion. No comments that deny the humanity of any group, or that justify violence and discrimination against any group, will be accepted.
- **Recording & Sharing Materials:** Per Cornell's guidelines, students agree to "maintain the
- privacy of the virtual classroom environment: we will not record, photograph, or share online interactions that involve classmates or any member of the teaching team. We will not enable anyone who is not enrolled in the course to participate in any activity that is associated with the course. Exceptions require the instructor's written permission." Likewise, students will "respect the intellectual property rights of the instructor by not making course materials accessible to anyone who is not enrolled in the course without the instructor's written permission."
- **Participation:** To receive credit, students must participate in class discussions through a combination of speaking, active listening, eye contact, and general good attention. This means that during Zoom sessions, our cameras should all stay on unless it's truly necessary to switch them off.
    - **Canvas Posting:** One piece of your daily attendance grade is written. For each class meeting, you'll post short responses to the day's readings and viewings. So on a day when we have two articles and a music video, your post will include three short blurbs summarizing your questions, reactions, or the sections you want to discuss. This is *not* intended as a long or burdensome assignment: 3-5 sentences per reading/viewing is great. Through these posts, you earn credit for reading. You also prep for in-class success by recording the ideas you plan to contribute when we all speak together. Noting page numbers and time-stamps is especially helpful. **Posts are always due two hours before we meet**.

SAFETY

All students, faculty, and employees have the right to be free from discrimination, harassment, stalking, abuse or violence. In relationships, abuse includes ridiculing a partner, keeping them financially dependent, or isolating them from friends and family. During the COVID-19 pandemic, harassment and abuse may intensify or take new forms—for instance, because partners or families are stuck at home together with little outside contact. If you ever have to ask yourself, "Could this action possibly be seen as discrimination, harassment, stalking, abuse, or violence?" JUST STOP that action immediately.

If you do experience discrimination, harassment, stalking, abuse or violence, you can report the misconduct through the Title IX Office (https://titleix.cornell.edu/), the Skorton Center staff (https://bit.ly/2Y5dAqG), the Cornell Social Consultants (https://bit.ly/2FyPI8J), and/or the health center's Victim Advocates (https://health.cornell.edu/services/victim-advocacy). You may also speak with an advocate from the Tompkins County Advocacy Center (https://www.actompkins.org/). If located outside Ithaca, you can also contact the national anti-sexual-violence organization RAINN (https://www.rainn.org/), which addresses rape, abuse, incest, and domestic violence.

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT & PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is a very, very serious offense. Plagiarism includes direct copying ***and paraphrasing*** from another author without acknowledging your source. For your own protection, please take the time to understand Cornell's policy on academic misconduct:

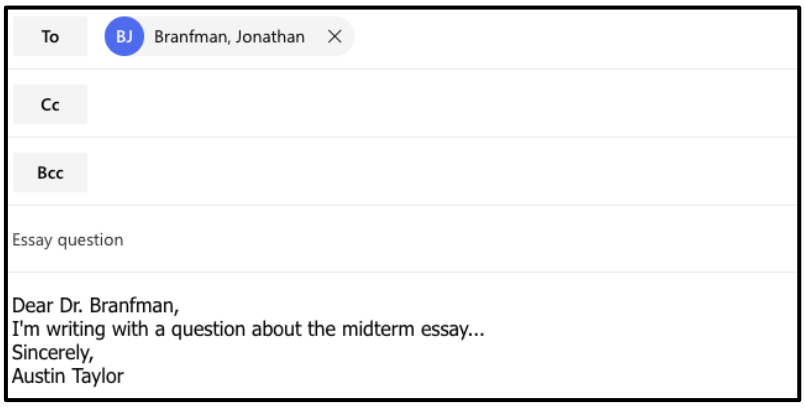
Academic misconduct harms individual and institutional reputations and can threaten the public's perception of the soundness and integrity of all scientific and scholarly activities. All members of the Cornell community are expected to conduct their research, scholarship, teaching, and other professional responsibilities and relationships with the highest standard of integrity. Academic misconduct includes intentional misrepresentation of the work of self or others, falsifying or fabricating data or citations, forging academic documents, and abusing confidentiality as well as retaliation against those who report alleged or suspected misconduct.

Email Etiquette

Please check your email daily and reply to emails within 48 hours. This is an important professional habit: Your coworkers (and bosses) will always expect you to promptly reply to their emails.

Likewise, professional email etiquette is a key skill for being taken seriously in the "real world." I will only respond to emails that follow these formatting standards:

1. Includes a subject line
2. Opens with a salutation (such as "Hi Dr. Branfman" or "Dear Professor Branfman")
3. Ends with a closing statement, i.e. "Sincerely," "Best wishes," etc.
4. Uses proper grammar and spelling.



Wellness Resources

Food Security
Cornell & Downtown Ithaca Food Pantry: https://bit.ly/3g1y8Xb

Resources for Students Who Are Women, People of Color, Undocumented, and/or LGBTQ+
https://scl.cornell.edu/identity-resources

Healthcare
Ithaca Free Clinic: https://ithacahealth.org/

One of America's best-known sci-fi characters is Spock, an alien from *Star Trek*, played by the Jewish actor Leonard Nimoy. Spock's farewell to friends is always, "live long & prosper," paired with an alien salute. Fun fact: Nimoy based Spock's salute on a Jewish gesture for blessing. The original gesture mimics the Hebrew letter *shin* (ש), which begins one of the Hebrew names for God. Like Spock, this resource list helps you look out for your health.

Cornell health services: https://health.cornell.edu/

Cornell 24/7 medical hotline for physical and mental health: https://bit.ly/2PZdf4j

Out For Health: LGBTQ+ healthcare: https://www.outforhealth.org/

Mental Health
Cornell mental health services (many options): https://bit.ly/3iQoTLr

Cornell 24/7 medical hotline for mental and physical health: https://bit.ly/2PZdf4j

LGBTQ+ national support hotline: http://www.glbtnationalhelpcenter.org/, 888-843-4564

Sexual Health
Cornell's sexual health services, including STI/HIV testing, contraception, and support to survivors of sexual violence: https://health.cornell.edu/services/sexual-health-care.

For sexual violence-prevention and response resources, please see the heading "safety" on p.6.

Suicide-Prevention
Cornell suicide-prevention resource list: https://health.cornell.edu/resources/health-topics/suicide

24/7 Ithaca Suicide-Prevention hotline: 607-272-1616

24/7 National suicide-prevention hotline: 800-273-8255

The Trevor Project (LGBTQ+ suicide-prevention hotline): 866-488-7386

IMPORTANT DATES

9/4 – 1-pg sample of your past writing, due by 5pm
9/23 – Essay 1 due by 5pm
10/19 – Zoom event, Jewish Trans Brazil
10/23 – Reflection on Jewish Trans Brazil due by 5pm
11/2 – Essay 2 due by 5pm
12/7 – Peer-review day for final essays
12/14 – Final essay due + Presentations begin
12/16 – Presentations

SCHEDULE

DATE	TOPICS	ASSIGNMENTS
W 9/2	Welcome! What's this class?	
PART I – Sephardim (and a few Ashkenazim) in New Worlds		
F 9/4	Expulsion from Iberia to New Worlds	-To upload by 5pm: 1-pg sample of your past writing -Video lecture -203-208 of Rosenstock, *Messianism* -Edict on the Expulsion of the Jews - Arbell, *The Jewish Caribbean*, 10-19
M 9/7	Early Sephardic Caribbean & New Spain	-Video lecture -Arbell, *The Jewish Caribbean*, 19-33 -Excerpts from Goldish, *Once Jews*: • Intro, xi-xv • Life on a Small Island, 3-17 • Catholic Jews, 158-162 • How Can We Sing?, 267-273
W 9/9	Early Sephardic Caribbean & New Spain	-Video lecture -Silverblatt, *New Christians in Peru*, 524-546 -Optional readings: -Weitzel, *Jewish Latinx Genetic Markers* -Cohen, M. *Luis de Carvajal* -Kirk, *Sor Juana Inés*

F 9/11	Jews in New France & New England • Plus intro to essay 1	-Video lecture -Anctil, *Jews in New France*, 13-20 -Jacobson, Maxine. *18th-Century Canada*, 21-28 -Sarna, *American Jewish Experience*, xiii-xix -Marcus, *American Colonial Jew*, 6-17

PART II: Mass Ashkenazi Immigration, and Smaller Sephardi/Mizrahi Immigration, 1880-1920

M 9/14	Old & New Stigmas on Jewish Bodies	-Video lecture -Geller, *Gnoseology*, 247-255 -Gilman, *The Jew's Body*, 169-178 -Erdman, *Staging the Jew*, 23-39
W 9/16	Old & New Stigmas on Jewish Immigration	-Video lecture -Tulchinsky, *Goldwin Smith*, 43-72
F 9/18	Ashkenazi Flight & Arrival: North America	-Video lecture -Dwork, *Immigrant Jews on the Lower East Side*, 120-135 -Brown, *Jew or Juif*, 239-243 -Optional: Gontovnick, *Farming Colonies*, 39-52
M 9/21	Ashkenazi Flight & Arrival: South America	-Video lecture -Elkin, *Jews of Latin America*, 51-72 -Socolovsky, *A Different Kind of Shtetl*, 69-76
W 9/23	New Mizrahi & Sephardi Cultures in Latin America	-Due by 5pm: essay 1 -Video lecture -Dahan & Bentes, *The Rabbi's Tomb*, 85-90 -Tarica, *The Coffee Party*, 173-180 -Heads-up: today's reading is intentionally light because we have a longer reading due Friday. Please plan ahead.

PART III – The Wave That (Mostly) Wasn't: Closed Borders during the Holocaust

F 9/25	Struggling at Closed Borders	-Video lecture -Abella, *None Is Too Many*, 1-37 -Trailer: *Cuba's Forgotten Jewels*
M 9/28	Yom Kippur. No class meeting.	-Optional (but short and neat!) readings about Holocaust refugees in Ecuador, Peru, & Uruguay -Stein, *Patches from the Past*, 43-48 -Solon, *The Mortician*, 111-121 -Karszenbaum, *The Boat Ride*, 91-94

W 9/30	Postwar Survivors & Communities: Bolivia	-Video lecture -Spitzer, *Hotel Bolivia*, 73-106 & 183-189
F 10/2	Postwar Communities & Transformations: Canada	-Video lecture -Bialystock, *Postwar Canadian Jewry*, 93-119
M 10/5	Postwar Communities & Transformations: Race in the United States	-Video lecture -Jacobson, M.F. *Becoming Caucasian*, 83-104
W 10/7	Postwar Moroccan, Syrian, & Sephardic Jewries in the Americas	-Video lecture -Rosen, *Moroccan Jewish Saint Veneration,* 108-125 -Nissán, *Like a Bride*, 166-176 -Perera, *Kindergarten*, 22-30

PART IV – Lesser-Known Immigrations in the 1960s-1970s: Afghan, Persian, and Indian Jews

F 10/9	Afghan Jews, from Kabul to Queens	-Video lecture -Aharon, *Kabul to Queens*, 1-6 & 101-129
M 10/12	Current events: Disinformation targeting Jewish communities as scapegoats & audiences	-LaFrance, *Prophecies of Q* -Lavin, *QAnon, Blood Libel, & Satanic Panic* -Stack, *Virus Surge Among Ultra-Orthodox Jews* -Ziri, *Brooklyn Protesters Attack*
10/14	No class	
F 10/16	Persian Jews: the Iranian Revolution & the birth of "Teherangeles"	-Video lecture + intro to essay 2 -Soomekh, *Jewish & Muslim Iranians in LA,* 133-144 -Episode 6 of Padma Lakshmi's *Taste the Nation*, "Where the Kabob is Hot" (Hulu)
M 10/19	Diversity within Persian Jewry: Mashhadi Women in New York	-Zoom event: Jewish Trans Brazil -Nissimi, *Mashhad to New York*, 303-328 -From *Megillah* Mashhadi women's magazine: • Etessami, *A Fair Chance* • Dilmanian, *Emancipation Proclamation* • Lavian, *Our Right to Vote*

PART V – The 1970s: Traumas, Transformations, and New Diasporas within the Americas

W 10/21	Jewish identity under the Latin American Dictatorships	-Video lecture -Timerman, *Prisoner w/o a Name*, 1-11, 130-145, & 159-164

F 10/23	Jewish Identity under the Latin American Dictatorships Guest speaker: Jeffrey Lesser	-Video lecture -Lesser, *Jewish Brazilians, or Brazilian Jews?* -Film: *The Year My Parents Went on Vacation*, 100 min (YouTube, subtitled)
M 10/26	Latinx Jewish Diasporas in the U.S.	-Due by 5pm: event reflection -Video lecture -Clip: Hausman, *Jewish AND Latino?* -Limonic, *Kugel & Frijoles*, 157-179
W 10/28	The roots of religious innovation: North American denominations, from the 19th century to the 1970s	-Robinson, *Orthodox Judaism*, 277-281 -Shaffir, *Hasidism*, 282-292 -Alpert, *Reconstructionist Judaism*
F 10/30	Feminist Judaisms	-Video lecture -Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai*: • Intro, vii-xix • Reimagining God, 121-146
M 11/2	Jewish Feminisms	-Due by 5pm: essay 2 -Video lecture -Klepfisz, *Anti-Semitism in the Feminist Movement* -Beck, *The Politics of Jewish Invisibility* -Optional: Branfman, *Teaching for Coalition*
W 11/4	LGBTQ Jewish Communities • Plus: intro to final project	-Video lecture -From *Twice Blessed*: • *Hiding is Unhealthy*, 48-58 • *Joining Together*, 157-170
F 11/6	LGBTQ Jewish Theology Guest speaker: Hayley Goldstein	-Video lecture -Plaskow, *New Theology of Sexuality*, 141-54 -Ladin, *The Genesis of Gender*

PART VI – The 1990s & 2000s: New & Newly Visible Jewish Diasporas

M 11/9	Russian, Bukharan & Israeli Immigrants in North America	-Video lecture - Cohen, *The New Immigrants*, 213-227 -Somekh, *A Walk Through Bukharan Queens* -Benaim, *Bukharan Jews*
W 11/11	Jews of Color in the US: Long Overdue Visibility	-Video lecture -Clip: Aaron Samuels, *Covered in Grass* -Bolton-Fasman, *Marra Gad Reflects* -*Judaism Unbound: Why the Uncounted Count*

F 11/13	Jews of Color in the US: Long Overdue Visibility	-Video lecture -Buchdahl, *Kimchee on the Seder Plate* -*Judaism Unbound: The Torah of Jews of Color*
M 11/16	Study day	-Research proposal + sources due by 5pm
W 11/18	No classes for semi-final exams	
F 11/20	No classes for semi-final exams	
M 11/23	No classes for semi-final exams	
W 11/25	Thanksgiving Break	

PART VII – Old Roots, New Branches: Crafting Jewish Identities Today

M 11/30	Navigating Racism, White Privilege & Anti-Semitism in Today's Racial Landscape	-Essay outline due by 5pm -Atkinson, *Charlottesville* -VICE, *Charlottesville*
W 12/2	Navigating Racism, White Privilege & Anti-Semitism in Today's Racial Landscape	-*DOJ report on Ferguson (excerpts)* -Larks, *Black Jews Are Grieving* -*URJ on #BlackLivesMatter*
F 12/4	Navigating Racism, White Privilege & Anti-Semitism in Today's Racial Landscape	-Timeline of Migrant Family Separations -Rosenberg, *You've Set Back The Jewish Contribution* -Judaism Unbound: *Never Again Action*
M 12/7	Peer-review for essays	
W 12/9	Jewish Linguistic Revivals Guest speaker: Michele Byers	-Video lecture -Byers, *Playing with Time*, 33-44 -*Yidlife Crisis* minisodes, S1 E1 and S2 E3
F 12/11	Millennial "Jewesses" Onscreen	-Video lecture -Branfman, *Plow Him Like a Queen!* -*Broad City*, S1 E1 and S2 E4

PART VIII – Student Presentations

M 12/14 Final Paper due + Student presentations

W 12/16 Student presentations and concluding the course

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