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# The Immigration and Ethnic History Newsletter

## A Minority's Minority: Southern Jewish History By Marni Davis

Before southern Jewish history emerged as an organized scholarly field in the 1970s, historians of the Jewish South had tended toward the celebratory and local. They chronicled the achievements of leading Jewish families and communal institutions, rarely looking beyond elite sources. To quote Steven Hertzberg, author of a deeply detailed social history of Atlanta Jewry before World War I (*Strangers Within the Gate City*, 1978), the field's earliest works were "biographical in orientation, apologetic in tone, and written primarily by amateurs." (5) A harsh but true assessment – though, to be fair, such might be said of most ethnic history fields during their gestational years.

For southern Jewish history, the scholarly turn began with the publication of several pivotal books. Two were intended for a broad book-buying audience: *The Provincials*, by Eli Evans (1973); and Harry Golden's *Our Southern Landsman* (1974). In a third, *Jews in the South* (1973), Leonard Dinnerstein (who had recently authored a history of the trial and lynching of Leo Frank in Georgia) and Mary Dale Palsson collected nearly two dozen academic and journalistic essays reflecting the field to date. These three books galvanized academic historians as well as interested laypersons, and in 1976 they gathered for a conference. By the end of the decade, they had published a volume of essays from that gathering (*Turn to the South*, 1979). They also established the Southern Jewish Historical Society (SJHS), which has shepherded and mobilized the field for nearly four decades.

The founders of the SJHS were responding to a general trend in American Jewish history: its overwhelming focus on New York, the largest Jewish city in the nation since the nineteenth century and the place where so much of what we think of as American Jewish culture was formed. In 1920, approximately 1.6 million Jews called New York City home; by contrast, the Jewish population of all southern states combined added up to about one-tenth of that number. The

resulting (and perhaps predictable) scholarly focus on Jewish life in New York, and in other major metropolitan areas of the northeast and Midwest, relegated southern Jewry to the periphery of American Jewish historical consciousness.

But the men and women of the SJHS wanted to remind their colleagues and co-religionists that religion, and all that came with it – culture, demography, economy, even topography and climate – had influenced the individual and communal behavior of their subjects of study. Just as American Jewish historians, and ethnic historians in general, offered a pluralistic vision of American history, southern Jewish historians insisted that American Jewish history was itself diverse. This intention remains a driving force; some iteration of the sentence "American Jewish history is not only New York Jewish history" appears in nearly every essay examining southern Jewish historiography that has been written in the last several decades. (Including, one might well point out, this one.)

While that statement is indisputably true, the question remained: how *had* the South influenced its Jews, exactly? If American Jewry was heterogeneous, what were the characteristics of the southern variant? Or, as Jacob Rader Marcus asked in the essay collection *Jews of the South* (1984): "is there a special southern Jewish regional history, a distinctive Southern Jewish psyche?" (viii) Though observers of the American South are unlikely to assent to a comprehensive set of shared characteristics that signify southernness as a stable category, most would likely agree on the powerful forces exerted by Protestant religion, a rural and agrarian economy, and rigid social stratification based on race. By contrast, Jews remained outside the Bible Belt's religious mainstream, gravitated toward southern cities and commercial occupations, and were at times precariously positioned within Jim Crow culture. During the early years of the field's de-

(A Minority's Minority continued on page 6)

## From the IEHS President



When I first joined the Immigration and Ethnic History Society in the early 1990s, I received most of my information about the field through the Society's two publications, the *Journal of American Ethnic History* and the bi-annual newsletter, as well through

the Society's sponsored panels at the annual conferences of the American Historical Association (AHA) and the Organization of American Historians (OAH). The IEHS business meetings were always very well attended, especially since email was not yet the preferred form of communication among members.

Almost a quarter-century later, much has changed at the IEHS. We can now access information through an even greater number of platforms. Our revamped website ([iehs.org](http://iehs.org)), which went live eight months ago, has generated 8,700 views so far. Our facebook page has 288 active subscribers (and growing), with dozens more viewers each month. Our twitter subscribers (@iehs1965) are also growing and they, in turn, re-tweet our information on their lists.

Perhaps the most pleasant surprise has been the new IEHS blog, which has attracted thousands of readers. Web analytics tell us that close to two thousand readers engaged online with two of our most recent blog entries: Kevin Kenny's "Insiders and Outsiders in 19<sup>th</sup> Century American Immigration History" and Brian Albert's entry on the craft beer industry and German immigrant brewers. These analytics cannot tell us how many readers printed and shared these entries with others, so the readership is likely much wider.

Those accessing our information are located all over the world: they are teachers, students, genealogists, librarians and archivists, scholars, and citizens who simply wish to know more about immigration to/in North America. The IEHS has always appealed to people outside of academia, but the possibilities for a more popular outreach have multiplied.

I appreciate the speed at which I can access information thanks to these new media platforms. However, the IEHS print newsletter remains one of the most useful forums for accessing information about the field of immigration and ethnic studies. The newsletter alerts us to upcoming conferences, colloquia, museum exhibits, documentaries, and websites; to new publications in the field; to grants and fellowships; to prizes and book awards; and to news about my colleagues in the profession. For fifteen years, Jim Bergquist carefully compiled this information for IEHS members. Nick Molnar has now assumed these responsibilities in addition to his work as Digital Humanities Officer. Our newsletter continues to be an invaluable resource and one of the most important reasons to become a member of the IEHS. Enjoy!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Maria Cristina Garcia".

**Maria Cristina Garcia**

President, Immigration and Ethnic History Society

## Back issues of the Immigration and Ethnic History Newsletter are now available on [IEHS Online!](http://iehs.org/online/)

The website features a digital version of every back issue of the IEHS Newsletter for the previous 40 + years. It is a great way to learn about the evolution of the Society and how historical scholarship on immigration has changed over time.

For issues published during the 1960s to 1970s, visit:

<http://iehs.org/online/1960s-1970s/>

For issues published during the 1980s to 1990s, visit:

<http://iehs.org/online/1980s-1990s/>

For issues published from 2000 to the present (including this issue), visit:

<http://iehs.org/online/back-issues/>

### Winners of the IEHS Prizes for 2016

Congratulations to the winners of the IEHS Prizes awarded in 2016! The following list is of the winners, with the award they received denoted.

#### Theodore Saloutos Book Award

Madeline Y. Hsu, *The Good Immigrants: How the Yellow Peril became the Model Minority*

Honorable Mention: Julie Weise, *Corazon de Dixie: Mexicanos in the US South Since 1910*

#### First Book Award

Adam D. Mendelsohn's *The Rag Race: How Jews Sewed Their Way to Success in America and the British Empire* (New York University Press, 2015).

#### George E. Pozzetta Dissertation Award

Jessica Ordaz (University of California, Davis) "Making Invisible Carceral Spaces Visible: Migration, State Violence, and Activism at the El Centro Immigration Detention Center, 1947-2014"

Stephanie Fairchild (University of California, San Diego) "'Every Generation Has to Win it Again': Understanding SEIU's Justice for Janitors Campaign in the Continuum of Radical Struggle for Justice and Dignity"

#### Outstanding Dissertation Award

Megan Asaka, "The Unsettled City: Migration, Race, and the Making of Seattle's Urban Landscape" (Yale University, 2014)

## New Publications Noted

### Activities Report Spotlight:

**Bayor, Ronald H.** *The Oxford Handbook of American Immigration and Ethnicity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

**Eisenberg, Ellen.** *Embracing a Western Identity: Jewish Oregonians, 1849-1950*. Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2015. Note: A second volume, covering the period from 1950-2010 will follow in late 2016.

**Gerber, David A.** "Moving Backward and Moving On: Nostalgia, Significant Others, and Social Reintegration in 19th Century British Immigrant Personal Correspondence," *The History of the Family*, October 7, 2015. Published Online.

**Leo, Jessieca.** *Global Hakka: Hakka Identity in the Remaking*. Boston: Brill, 2015.

**Cortes, Carlos E.** *Multicultural America: A Multimedia Encyclopedia*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2013. Note: This publication contains 4 volumes, and appears both in print and online.

We want to hear from you and spotlight your work! For future inclusion in this area, mail the completed "Activities Report Form" with your publication and any other pertinent information to the return address on the newsletter or email nmolnar@ccp.edu

### Dissertations:

**Gollner, Philipp.** *Good White Christians: How Religion Created Race and Ethnic Privilege for Immigrants in America*. University of Notre Dame, 2016.

**Schacher, Yael.** *Exceptions to Exclusion: A Prehistory of Asylum in the United States, 1880-1980*. Harvard, 2016.

**Panganiban, Leah L., and Shirley Hune.** *Easing the sophomore slump: the effect of family, ethnic identity, and campus climate on Filipino American students' experiences during their second year of college*. University of Washington, 2016.

### Books:

**Albarracín, Julia.** *At the Core and in the Margins :*

*Incorporation of Mexican Immigrants in Two Rural Midwestern Communities*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2016.

**Baynton, Douglas C.** *Defectives in the Land: Disability and Immigration in the Age of Eugenics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016.

**Bishop, Sarah C.** *U.S. Media and Migration: Refugee Oral Histories*. New York: Routledge, 2016.

**Blank, Joshua C.** *Creating Kashubia: History, Memory, and Identity in Canada's first Polish Community*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016.

**Borjas, George J.** *We Wanted Workers: Unraveling the Immigration Narrative*. New York: Norton, 2016.

**Bowman, Timothy Paul.** *Blood Oranges: Colonialism and Agriculture in the South Texas Borderlands*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2016.

**Conlon, Deirdre.** *Intimate Economies of Immigration Detention*. New York: Routledge, 2016.

**Dauvergne, Catherine.** 2016. *The New Politics of Immigration and the End of Settler Societies*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

**Dean, John E.** 2016. *How Myth Became History Texas Exceptionalism in the Borderlands*. Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 2016.

**Duke, Eric D.** *Building a Nation: Caribbean Federation in the Black Diaspora*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2016.

**Eaton, Susan E.** *Integration Nation: Immigrants, Refugees, and America at its Best*. New York: The New Press, 2016.

**Gest, Justin.** *The New Minority: White Working Class Politics in an Age of Immigration and Inequality*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

**Gjeltén, Tom.** *Nation of Nations: A Great American Immigration Story*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016

(New Publications Noted continued from page 4)

**Gomberg-Muñoz, Ruth.** *Becoming Legal: Immigration Law and Mixed Status Families*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

**Ham, Julie.** *Sex Work, Immigration and Social Difference*. New York: Routledge, 2016.

**Hanson, R. Scott.** *City of Gods: Religious Freedom, Immigration, and Pluralism in Flushing, Queens*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2016.

**Jedwab, Jack.** *Multiculturalism Question Debating Identity in 21st Century Canada*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016.

**Jordan, Benjamin René.** *Modern Manhood and the Boy Scouts of America Citizenship, Race, and the Environment, 1910-1930*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016.

**Knowles, Valerie.** *Strangers at our Gates: Canadian Immigration and Immigration Policy, 1540-2015*. Toronto: Dundurn, 2016.

**Lane, Mark.** *Legal and Illegal Immigration*. Farmington Hills: Gale Cengage Learning, 2016.

**Longazel, Jamie.** *Undocumented Fears: Immigration and the Politics of Divide and Conquer in Hazleton, Pennsylvania*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2016.

**Macias-Rojas, Patrisia.** *From Deportation to Prison: The Politics of Immigration Enforcement in Post-Civil Rights America*. New York: New York University Press, 2016.

**Miller, David.** *Strangers in Our Midst: The Political Philosophy of Immigration*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016.

**Mollenkopf, John, and Manuel Pastor.** *Unsettled Americans Metropolitan Context and Civic Leadership for Immigrant Integration*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016.

**Oh, Joong-Hwan.** *Immigration and Social Capital in the Age of Social Media: American Social Institutions and a Korean-American Women's Online Community*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016.

**Orduna, Jose.** *The Weight of Shadows: A Memoir of Immigration and Displacement*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2016.

**Orosco, Jos-Antonio.** *Toppling the Melting Pot: Immigration and Multiculturalism in American Pragmatism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016.

**Perry, Leah.** *The Cultural Politics of U.S. Immigration: Gender, Race, and Media*. New York: New York University Press, 2016.

**Pierce, Jason.** *Making the White Man's West: Whiteness and the Creation of the American West*. Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2016.

**Provine, Doris Marie, Monica Varsanyi, Paul George Lewis, and Scott H. Decker.** *Policing Immigrants: Local Law Enforcement on the Front Lines*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016.

**Satzewich, Vic.** *Points of Entry: How Canada's Immigration Officers Decide Who Gets In*. University of British Columbia Press, 2016.

**Stevens, Rachel.** *Immigration Policy from 1970 to the Present*. New York: Routledge, 2016.

**Sussman, Robert W.** *The Myth of Race: The Troubling Persistence of an Unscientific Idea*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016.

**Thiessen, Janis.** *Not Talking Union: An Oral History of North American Mennonites and Labour*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016.

**Tirman, John.** *Immigration and the American backlash*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016.

**Triandafyllidou, Anna.** *Routledge Handbook of Immigration and Refugee Studies*. New York: Routledge, 2016.

**Vile, John R.** *American Immigration and Citizenship: A Documentary History*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016.

**Yoo, David, and Eiichiro Azuma.** *The Oxford Handbook of Asian American History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

(A Minority's Minority continued from page 1)

velopment, southern Jewish historians regularly asserted southern Jewish “distinctiveness.” But they rarely stopped to ask what such a claim might mean.

In *Voices of Jacob, Hands of Esau: Jews in American Life and Thought* (1984), Stephen J. Whitfield explored the issue more explicitly. He, too, insisted that the southern Jewish experience was intertwined with and deeply influenced by the southern spaces in which Jewish immigrants settled and Jewish communities grew. To a degree far greater than was true of Jews of the North, wrote Whitfield, southern Jews adapted to their environment, transforming their religious practices and orienting their social values so as not to seem too exotic or threatening to local norms. Yet in essential ways, Jews were outsiders in their southern communities. Despite a “contrapuntal tension” between Jewish and southern “character ideals,” he observed, Jews had found in the South a relatively easy place to live. (215) More important for Whitfield, however, was the idea that Jews played an important role in the secularization of southern culture. Even while they remained marginal men, their presence as merchants and middlemen had served as a transformational force throughout the region. “Jewish businessmen altered the moral climate that all southerners breathed” by making the South more religiously pluralistic and economically modern. (244)

Though southern Jews had not fully melted into the larger white population, Whitfield insisted, their historical experiences were significantly different from that of their northern brethren – different enough, anyway, to justify the use of region as an analytic tool. A decade later, Mark K. Bauman published an essay calling that assertion into question. In “The Southerner as American: Jewish Style” (1996), Bauman challenged the field’s presupposition that southern Jewish history was substantively distinct from American Jewish history writ large. Southern Jewish historians’ mistake, he wrote, was their unquestioned assumption that the behaviors ascribed to southern Jewry – concentration in mercantile trades, tendencies toward simultaneous cultural assimilation and maintenance of Jewish institutions, enthusiastic participation in civil society, and so forth – were inspired (or necessitated) by local, regional culture. Rather than relying on region as the primary category of analysis, Bauman declared, historians should instead look to social ecology; the size and demography of a city or town mattered more to the development of Jewish identity and institutions than whether that city or town was located in Louisiana or Oregon or New Jersey. Jewish culture and identity itself exerted a more powerful force on these im-

migrants and their descendants than did local culture, and whatever differences had emerged between northern and southern Jews were “of minor degree rather than of substance.” (26) From a historical perspective, he concluded, the southern Jewish experience was “far more similar to those of Jews in similar environments elsewhere in America” than they were to those of their white Protestant neighbors. (5)

Bauman’s rejection of one of southern Jewish history’s fundamental tenets was intentionally provocative, and, unsurprisingly, has not been universally accepted by his peers. Nevertheless, his revisionist challenge had a most productive effect. Scholars now do more to actively and purposefully situate Jewish history and identity within its southern contexts. Some focus on southern Jewry’s internal heterogeneity: did Sephardic, German, and Russian Jews experience the South in different ways? Did a Jew in rural Appalachia share the same identity as a Jew in Dallas, or Miami? They also acknowledge the limits of southern Jewish “exceptionalism” as a framing device. These developments have mirrored similar shifts among historians of the American South, many of whom have spent the last several decades interrogating claims of southern distinctiveness, making a case for “many Souths,” and arguing for the deep connections between regional and national history.

In recent years, historians have frequently focused on the southern Jewish experience within the contexts of race, religion, and economy. Of the three, southern Jews’ status within and responses to the region’s racial conventions has received the most attention. Were Jews considered “white” by other southerners? The answer, by all measures, seems to be: yes, but it’s complicated. In a time and place where every aspect of civic and social status was determined by racial identity, Jews were generally regarded as on the white side of the black/white divide. Antebellum southern Jews adapted to slavery as a labor and social system, and though they infrequently owned slaves themselves, their opinions about it were generally indistinguishable from those of other southern whites. Though it predates the formation of the SJHS, Bertram W. Korn’s essay “Jews and Negro Slavery in the Old South” (1961) remains the standard on the subject.

In the decades following Reconstruction, however, Jews were often excluded from the inner circles of southern civic life, despite their efforts to participate – which sometimes included explicit and vocal support of the south’s racial caste system. Southern Jews were not subject to the kinds of legal discrimination that defined Jim Crow society; in fact, historians

(A Minority's Minority continued on page 7)

(**A Minority's Minority** continued from page 6)

have suggested that as whites, they benefited from it in ways that made the southern Jewish experience unique. Yet Jews still feared the potential repercussions of being considered outsiders. Indeed, the racialized anti-Semitic rhetoric surrounding Leo Frank's trial and murder suggested that those repercussions could be horrifyingly dire. Mark Bauman and Berkley Kalin's *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights* (1997) and Clive Webb's *Fight Against Fear: Southern Jews and Black Civil Rights* (2001) both examine the diversity of southern Jewish responses to the region's movements for racial equality in the twentieth century.

Eric L. Goldstein's *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (2006), has taken up Bauman's challenge directly with a wide-ranging exploration of American Jews' attitudes toward racial ideologies and their own place in American race systems. Goldstein places southern Jewish racial identity into a broader national context, and shows that southern Jews were unquestionably affected by the local primacy of white supremacy. Though their approaches to race and to African Americans were not identical to those of their white neighbors, Goldstein makes clear that they were significantly distinct from their northern co-religionists.

Other historians who consider southern Jewish history from a regionally comparative perspective look at Jewish economic endeavors that have connected Jews across regional and national boundaries. Two recent works, Adam Mendelsohn's *The Rag Race: How Jews Sewed their Way to Success in America and the British Empire* (2014), and Hasia Diner's *Roads Taken: The Great Jewish Migrations to the New World and the Peddlers Who Forged the Way* (2015), not only document both the regional similarities and differences among Jewish peddlers and *shmatte*-dealers. They also illuminate the familial, entrepreneurial, and cultural connections between them, uncover both national and international networks, and place southern Jewish history within the broader story of the global Jewish diaspora.

Today, production within the field is growing, and includes local, comparative, and transregional histories. Two recent essay collections – *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil* (2006) and *Dixie Diaspora: An Anthology of Southern Jewish History* (2007) – reflect the historiography's robust engagement with a range of analytic themes and questions. As southern Jewish history has matured, expanded, and accommodated internal

debates about what it has meant to be both Jewish and southern, it has added significantly to scholarly conversations about the complexities and contingencies of ethnic and regional identity.

**Marni Davis** is associate professor of history at Georgia State University. She is the author of *Jews and Booze: Becoming American in the Age of Prohibition*



(New York University Press, 2012), and is currently writing a history of immigrants and ethnic communities in Atlanta.

### Upcoming Historiographical Articles

Thank you Marni for your contribution to this edition of the *IEHS Newsletter*. Upcoming issues will feature exciting discussions and overviews of fields that will be of great interest to our membership, including German Migration and Mexican Migration. The upcoming contributors are:

Winter 2016: **Heiko Wiggers**, Wake Forest University

Spring 2017: **Jaime Aguila**, Arizona State University

Any reader who has an interest in contributing to future issues of the *IEHS Newsletter* is encouraged to contact the Editor, Nicholas Trajano Molnar, at [nmolnar@ccp.edu](mailto:nmolnar@ccp.edu) for more information.

# The Immigration and Ethnic History Newsletter

27 Washington Avenue, Unit 9  
Milltown, New Jersey 08850



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## Activities Report Form

New Publications? Awards? Conferences Planned? Research Projects? Give us full details in the space below. Attach an additional sheet to provide more information if necessary.

Mail to the return address on the newsletter or email [nmolnar@ccp.edu](mailto:nmolnar@ccp.edu)

## Membership

All rates include membership in the Immigration & Ethnic History Society, the quarterly *Journal of American Ethnic History*, and the biannual *Immigration and Ethnic History Newsletter*.

### Individuals (1 Year):

Print or Online: \$45; Both: \$55

### Students (1 Year):

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Print or Online: \$257; Both: \$310

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Other Non-U.S. Locations: + \$35

### Single Issues of the JAEH:

Individuals: \$20; Institutions: \$50

### Back Issues of the IEHS Newsletter.

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