

# SOUTHERN JEWISH HISTORY

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# Teaching Southern Jewish History: A Dialogue

by

Scott M. Langston and Bryan Edward Stone\*

Southern Jewish history has been an active area of academic study for several decades. During that time, professional scholars from a variety of fields, along with archivists and interested (and well-versed) non-professionals, have been uncovering, exploring, and debating the experiences of Jews in the South. While the Southern Jewish Historical Society (SJHS), with its annual conference and journal, *Southern Jewish History*, is the primary locus and stimulant for this activity, many other venues exist. These include professional organizations, major book publishers, state historical associations, and a host of local, regional, and national archives. These efforts have themselves been the subject of historical treatment.<sup>1</sup>

One aspect, however, that has not received significant attention has been the teaching of southern Jewish history as a high school, undergraduate, or graduate course. Admittedly, these types of courses are not widespread, but they are becoming more common and represent another avenue in which the experiences of Jews living in the South can be studied and presented to new audiences. These courses not only mirror major lines of scholarly treatment, but a review of them also offers the opportunity to reflect on the field itself.

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## 2 SOUTHERN JEWISH HISTORY

### *Statement of Method*

One of the best ways to learn about the practices employed in the teaching of southern Jewish history is to talk at length with those who have taught it. Ideally, we would have liked to bring together a panel of experienced instructors in person to talk about their experiences, but this was impractical. As an alternative, we decided to conduct an online conversation in real time—or as close to it as possible. The Yahoo! Groups website provides a free message board system that allows participants to post comments, reply to others' comments, and receive e-mail notifications of each new message. This seemed the best way to facilitate a long-distance discussion.

We began with an informal effort to identify as many people as possible who had taught southern Jewish history. We posted a query to the SJHS listserv and published a request for information in *The Rambler*, the newsletter of the SJHS. This resulted in a list of respondents with varying degrees of experience teaching the subject. We contacted all respondents, as well as many others who had been recommended to us. We explained our plans, selected a time during which the online discussion would occur, and invited their participation. We were able to gain a commitment from four people who, along with coeditor Scott Langston, became our panel: Marcie Cohen Ferris, Norman Finkelstein, Adam Mendelsohn, and Leonard Rogoff. In addition, Dale Rosengarten submitted responses to the discussion later that have been interspersed as appropriate throughout the dialogue. During the online discussion, coeditor Bryan Edward Stone served as moderator.

Prior to the agreed-upon starting date, we prepared a list of questions that could be addressed one at a time as the conversation flowed. In addition, the panelists were encouraged to ask questions of one another.

Over a two-week period, Stone posted questions and the panelists responded, sometimes within a few hours, sometimes after several days. These responses form the raw material from which we have constructed the transcript below.

In preparing the transcript, the editors of this article took license to rearrange the order of the comments and to group them

into topics to create the sense of an organized conversation. Because of the nature of online correspondence, some messages were posted long after the questions to which they were responding, and, in the meantime, other messages on other topics had been posted. The flow of a message-board exchange is very different from that of a live conversation. We have edited the comments so as to restore the flow and immediacy of a live discussion.

The content and wording of respondents' comments, however, have not been altered. We have edited for consistency in spelling and other stylistic matters, but we have left each panelist's contributions in his or her own words. The completed transcript was submitted to each of the panelists for adjustments. After minor revisions, they approved it in the form that appears below.

Full citations for all works and websites referenced in the transcript are provided in the bibliography.

*Historical Background: Early Course Offerings in  
Southern Jewish History*

Some of our panelists have been teaching southern Jewish history since 2000. They were not the first to do so, however: the teaching of southern Jewish history as a college-level course dates to at least the 1990s.

Although humbly rejecting the honor, Sheldon Hanft, a former president of the Southern Jewish Historical Society (1992–1993) and professor emeritus of history at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina, was among the first— if not the first—to teach such a course.<sup>2</sup> He initially taught the topic as an undergraduate course in 1996 and, then, three years later, as a graduate seminar. These courses grew out of a one-week course Hanft taught during the 1980s within the Elderhostel program, an organization founded in 1975 to provide not-for-credit classes on a variety of topics and in a variety of locations to Americans of retirement age. Hanft's Elderhostel course, titled *Judaism in the South*, encompassed five daily sessions, each two hours in length. After introducing students to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Jewish communities, as well as important Jewish/Hebrew words

#### 4 SOUTHERN JEWISH HISTORY

and concepts, and considering varying definitions of Jewish identity, Hanft guided the class through four chronological phases of Jewish life in the South: the colonial period through the American Revolution, the early Republic through the Civil War, Reconstruction through World War I, and the twentieth century since the war, with emphasis on the consequences of World War II for the South and the impact of migration on southern Jews.

For each phase, Hanft addressed broader issues and events in American history that were important nationally and/or affected southern Jews, along with important events involving southern Jews and how the southern Jewish community was affected by contemporary changes in southern Jewish life. An emphasis on the distinctive characteristics of southern Jews and Judaism provided a common thread running through each of the course's sections. These courses were well attended, and participants, many of whom were Jews who had retired and moved to Florida from the North, demonstrated great interest in southern Jewish history while simultaneously being challenged by the issues studied. Elderhostel students, of course, were not seeking academic credit, so their interest often arose from questions related to Jewish identity. According to Hanft, "Throughout the week many attendees were reluctant to accept the concept that Judaism is a religious rather than an ethnic, cultural, or traditional designation."<sup>3</sup> The notion of southern Jewish identity is a topic that continues to be addressed in college-level courses. It provides context in which to set and understand southern Jewish history. Hanft set his course within the broader scope of Judaism and earlier Jewish history, but our panelists expressed various opinions on this matter. Hanft's chronological approach to the subject is, not surprisingly, one followed by most of our panelists, although readers will see some discussion over alternatives in organization and presentation.

Hanft's undergraduate and graduate courses covered many of the same issues as those he dealt with in the Elderhostel course, but with greater rigor and detail. Students were required to read Eli Evans's *The Provincials* and *Judah P. Benjamin: The Jewish Confederate*. Additionally, students read an autobiography chosen from a



list of books written by southern Jewish immigrants, soldiers and sailors, rabbis, and politicians. Graduate students also read Leonard Dinnerstein's *The Leo Frank Case*, along with Harry Golden's *Our Southern Landsman*.

A few years after Hanft began offering southern Jewish history courses, Gary Zola, currently the executive director of the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives and professor of the American Jewish experience at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR), taught a graduate course at HUC-JIR titled *Issues in Southern Jewish History*. This course, first offered in 2000 and subsequently taught two more times, surveyed "the history of United States Jewry in the South." It was, according to Zola, popular among rabbinical students, especially since many serve student pulpits in the South and want to know more about the region and its Jewish heritage.<sup>4</sup> The initial offering of the course coincided with the SJHS's annual meeting, which was held on the HUC-JIR campus in Cincinnati, Ohio. Zola's students were encouraged to attend the conference. Over the course of the semester, students read selections from a variety of books: *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights*, edited by Mark K. Bauman and Berkley Kalin; *Jews in the South*, edited by Leonard Dinnerstein and Mary Dale Palsson; James Hagy's *This Happy Land: The Jews of Colonial and Antebellum Charleston*; *"Turn to the South": Essays on Southern Jewry*, edited by Nathan Kaganoff and Melvin Urofsky; *American Jewry and the Civil War* by Bertram Korn; *Jews of the South: Selected Essays from the Southern Jewish Historical Society*, edited by Samuel Proctor, Louis Schmier, and Malcolm Stern; and Zola's own *Isaac Harby of Charleston*.

After introducing students to the place of the South in American history and the study of southern Jewish history as an academic field, Zola addressed the antebellum communities of Charleston, Savannah, and New Orleans before studying Jews during the Civil War, Reconstruction, and Jim Crow eras. Specific topics included slavery, Jewish merchants, liberal Judaism, immigration, religion, and antisemitism. Under the rubric "The Changing South," students next encountered a variety of subjects: rabbis, Zionism and Israel, southern Jewish women, acculturation,

## 6 SOUTHERN JEWISH HISTORY

Jews and African Americans, and Jews and civil rights. The course ended with a treatment of the future of Judaism in the region.<sup>5</sup>

Zola's approach highlights again the issue of southern Jewish history's contexts. How does one understand and integrate the southern Jewish experience into the broader contexts of Jewish, southern, and American history? Zola's course demonstrates an additional aspect that appears in our panelists' teaching, that is, the roles played by particular communities and individuals in southern Jewish history. Finally, both Zola's and Hanft's courses raise important considerations regarding students' backgrounds and knowledge and the impact these have on teaching. Zola's primary audience was rabbinical students, while Hanft's included, on the one hand, Jewish retirees from the North, and, on the other, undergraduate and graduate students who, for the most part, were not Jewish. Both Hanft's and Zola's students also had little knowledge of American Jewish history, much less southern Jewish history. As readers will notice, our panelists also deal with a variety of students with diverse backgrounds, motivations, and levels of knowledge.

In 2000, the year that Zola first offered his course, three other scholars taught a southern Jewish history course for the first time. Dale Rosengarten, whose experiences and thoughts are included in the dialogue below, co-taught an undergraduate course with Jack Bass at the College of Charleston, and Phyllis Leffler taught an undergraduate offering, Southern Jewish History and Culture, that was developed as part of the new Jewish studies major at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. Leffler offered her course again the following year.

Leffler's course began with exploring American Judaism and southern culture and then proceeded chronologically through antebellum, Civil War, and postbellum experiences of southern Jews. Students read a combination of academic works, historical fiction, and biography, and conducted an oral history with someone who claimed a connection to southern Jewry. Students also were specifically asked to evaluate whether or not a distinctive southern Jewish experience and identity existed, either in the past or present. In the fall 2001 semester, students were encouraged to attend

the SJHS's annual conference that was held in Norfolk, Virginia.<sup>6</sup> As did Hanft's and Zola's courses, Leffler's grappled with the issue of southern Jewish identity, a theme that continues to remain prominent in the teaching of southern Jewish history.

Since these initial offerings, a similar course was taught by another instructor at the College of Charleston and by other teachers from at least five other universities and one Jewish high school. Of those who have taught the course since 2000, six are involved in the following panel discussion, where readers will learn details related to these offerings and trace both continuity with earlier courses and new directions.<sup>7</sup>

#### *The Panel*

**Marcie Cohen Ferris** (ferrism@email.unc.edu) teaches in the American studies department at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is the author of *Matzoh Ball Gumbo: Culinary Tales of the Jewish South* and coeditor, with Mark Greenberg, of *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil: A New History*.

**Norman H. Finkelstein** (nfinkelstein@hebrewcollege.edu), a retired public school librarian, is in his thirty-first year of teaching at Hebrew College in Boston, mainly in its Prozdor High School department. Finkelstein is the author of eighteen nonfiction books including *Heeding the Call* and *Forged in Freedom*, both winners of National Jewish Book Awards. His *JPS Guide to American Jewish History*, like the previous two books cited, deals in part with the history of the Jews of the South.

**Scott M. Langston** (s.langston@tcu.edu) teaches religious studies at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, and American history at Tarrant County College in Fort Worth and Weatherford College in Weatherford, Texas. He is the author of *Exodus Through the Centuries*, as well as numerous articles and book chapters on southern Jewish history, reception history of the Bible, and religion. His article "Interaction and Identity: Jews and Christians in Nineteenth Century New Orleans," in *Southern Jewish History*, (2000), won SJHS's Best Article Award for 1998–2001.

**Adam Mendelsohn** (mendelsohna@cofc.edu) teaches Jewish history at the College of Charleston, where roughly a quarter of

his classes have a southern Jewish history focus. He is the coeditor with Jonathan Sarna of *Jews and the Civil War: A Reader*. His article "Two Far South: Rabbinical Responses to Apartheid and Segregation in South Africa and the American South," won the SJHS journal's Best Article Award for 2002–2005.

**Leonard Rogoff** (lrogoff@nc.rr.com) is research historian for the Jewish Heritage Foundation of North Carolina. He is the author of *Homelands: Southern Jewish Identity in Durham and Chapel Hill, North Carolina* and *Down Home: Jewish Life in North Carolina*.

**Dale Rosengarten** (rosengartend@cofc.edu) is curator of the Jewish Heritage Collection at the College of Charleston Library. Working with McKissick Museum at the University of South Carolina, she developed the traveling exhibition, *A Portion of the People: Three Hundred Years of Southern Jewish Life*, and coauthored and edited a volume of the same name.

Moderator **Bryan Edward Stone** (bstone@delmar.edu) teaches U.S. history at Del Mar College in Corpus Christi, Texas, and since 2009 has taught a summer course on Texas Jews as a visiting professor at the Schusterman Center for Jewish Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. He is the author of *The Chosen Folks: Jews on the Frontiers of Texas*, which won the 2011 Southern Jewish Historical Society Book Prize.

*Scott M. Langston*

*Adam Mendelsohn*

*Leonard Rogoff*

*Dale Rosengarten*

*Bryan Edward Stone*

*(Photos left and above are courtesy of the panelists.)*

*The Discussion**I. Courses and Students*

**S**TONE: Before we get into the details of the courses you've taught, let's start with some background. Can you tell us something about why you taught southern Jewish history? How did your course come about?

**FINKELSTEIN:** I've been teaching courses on American Jewish history for years at the Prozdor High School of Hebrew College in Boston. Aside from a general overview course, there have been offshoot courses as well. Some subjects include *Unsung Heroes in American Jewish History*; *Early American Jews: The Colonial and Revolutionary Period*; *Three Cases of Anti-Semitism: Dreyfus, Beilis and Frank*; *Heeding the Call: Jewish Voices in America's Civil Rights Struggle* (based on my book of the same title); *From Borscht Belt to Broadway*; and the ever-popular *Rough, Tough and Unorthodox: The Jewish Gangster in America*.

Four years ago I designed and taught the southern Jewish history course, *Hush Puppies and Matzoh Balls: Jewish Life in America's South*, as a direct result of the other American Jewish courses I had taught, particularly the overview course and the one dealing with early Jews in America, which dealt, in part, with early southern Jewish history. After recommending the course, we discovered that plans were in the works for Prozdor to have a student trip to the South, so the course proved to be most timely as preparation for the trip. I'm teaching the course again this semester [Spring 2012].

**LANGSTON:** During the spring 2008 semester I taught an upper-level history course, *Jews and the American South*, for the Jewish studies program at the University of North Texas (UNT) in Denton. I had previously proposed the course, and both the Jewish studies program and the history department approved it. My primary motivation in teaching the course was my own desire to teach it. Through my involvement in SJHS, I was aware of a few people who had taught this kind of course at other universities and had always hoped that I would one day have the opportunity to do so as well. When given the opportunity to propose a course

to UNT's Jewish studies program, I thought immediately of this one. I solicited advice and syllabi from others who were working in the field, including two of our panelists, Leonard Rogoff and Marcie Cohen Ferris, and then began building my own course.

Several factors made me want to teach it including my interest in southern Jewish history, and in American and southern history and religion (in its many forms and manifestations) and Jewish-Christian interactions. I also wanted to expose students to what I felt (and still feel) is an interesting and exciting field of study. Southern Jewish history, after all, provides the opportunity for students to integrate a variety of areas—those I just mentioned, as well as immigrant experiences and racial issues, to name a few. In short, it was another angle or lens through which to view and consider American and southern history and religion.

Finally, I have always felt that my own research and scholarly pursuits provide fuel for what happens in the classroom, and this was certainly the case in this instance. Attending the SJHS annual conferences and reading the society's journal, *Southern Jewish History*, and other publications of scholars in this field encouraged and motivated me to take a stab at translating some of this information into the classroom.

FERRIS: I developed my course on the Jewish South at UNC-Chapel Hill, just as the new Carolina Center for Jewish Studies (CCJS) program was founded on campus, about 2003, and I teach it each fall. Len Rogoff offered great counsel, and I drew inspiration from American Jewish history courses with Pam Nadell at American University and southern studies courses at UNC.

ROSENGARTEN: Jack Bass and I team-taught a course on southern Jewish history in 2000, when I was in the thick of developing the exhibition and book, *A Portion of the People*. Jack was one of our essayists. (See his chapter, "Just Like One of Us," about growing up in North Carolina and South Carolina, and the history of Jewish involvement in South Carolina's civic life.) As part of my position as curator and historian in special collections at the College of Charleston, I had committed to teaching one Jewish studies-related course each year, and it seemed natural to use material I was reading at the time. It also was a time when new

## 12 SOUTHERN JEWISH HISTORY

sources were appearing in both print and film, and southern Jewish history seemed like an emerging field.

MENDELSON: I teach southern Jewish history both because it's a subject that I enjoy teaching and because I'm expected to teach a regular roster of courses on the subject. Unlike when I teach our regular ancient and modern Jewish history surveys, I can use primary and secondary sources in the classroom that overlap with my own research interests. And I can easily take my students out on site visits and walks through Charleston to places that resonate with topics discussed in the classroom.

*"Hush Puppies and Matzoh Balls  
Jewish Life in America's South."*

*Course sourcebook compiled by Norman H. Finkelstein.*

*(Courtesy of Norman H. Finkelstein.)*



STONE: From the responses so far, there seems to be a general pattern. All of you have taught your courses through Jewish studies or religion programs (or, in Norm's case, through a high school program at a Jewish-oriented college). This leads me to wonder if we've been segregated (if that's the right word!). Scott says that his course was cross-listed in history. Is this the case with the rest of you?

LANGSTON: Actually, my course was a history course and not cross-listed anywhere else. It originated with the Jewish studies program, but was considered an upper-level history course.

FERRIS: I also should have mentioned that the main department for my course on the Jewish South at UNC is American studies. My course on American Jewish women's history is also cross-listed with women's studies. Our Jewish studies faculty "live" in different departments at the university, not just religious studies.

MENDELSON: All of the southern Jewish history courses I have taught have been cross-listed through the history department. More than half of the forty students in the class this semester have signed up under the aegis of history, the rest through Jewish studies.

ROSENGARTEN: My teaching, like that of others here, is emphatically interdisciplinary. All my courses have been cross-listed in Jewish studies, history, historic preservation, and/or arts management.

LANGSTON: To Bryan's question, from my limited experience, I don't get the sense that southern Jewish history has been segregated, but that it is a hybrid course with elements that traverse the boundaries of strict academic disciplines. I would be interested to hear if others have found a hybrid nature to the course and, if so, how that has affected their teaching.

In my course, for instance, I found that the vast majority of students had little knowledge about Judaism, and many knew little about the South itself, much less American Jewish history (or, for that matter, Jewish history). I had planned to spend one day (the second day of class) giving a brief introduction to Judaism, the South, and American Jewish history in order to set southern

Jewish history within a broader context. I found, however, that one day was inadequate and thus, throughout the semester, constantly felt some need to give more context so the specific southern Jewish issues and events would make sense to students. I don't think this need for background and context is at all unique to teaching southern Jewish history, but without some familiarity with Judaism, the South, and American Jewish history, I think some of the specific issues and events run the risk of looking strange and exotic to students more so than anything else. This opens up many issues, but to the point of southern Jewish history being a hybrid course, I think its connections to various academic departments reflects this.

MENDELSON: I've found I've had very little time to cover broader contextual issues in my southern Jewish survey course (whether they relate to Judaism or American history). This is a consequence of time constraints—when I only have time for a handful of lectures on any given time period, southern history plays a supporting rather than a leading role.

By contrast, my courses on the Civil War and black-Jewish relations (which focus thematically on a much shorter time span) are much more closely embedded in broader historiographic debates. When I lecture about Jews and slavery, for example, roughly half the lectures deal with broader processes (the shifting nature of the slave trade, the evolution of abolitionism, etc.), rather than narrower Jewish matters.

FINKELSTEIN: Remembering my high school audience, southern Jewish history can't be taught in a vacuum. It is a part of overall American Jewish and American history. Aside from that practical need considering my students, that is also my belief. I think my writing also reflects this "one step forward, two steps backward" technique of making sure that readers/students get the larger historical background to more completely understand a particular situation.

STONE: Maybe we're getting at two related issues here: the interdisciplinary nature of southern Jewish history (how it "traverses" traditional academic fields, as Scott says) and the

resulting diversity of students who take the course, especially in their varying academic backgrounds and depth of previous knowledge.

Who are your students? Are they mostly Jewish? How much background information do you provide to help them understand southern Jewish history?

FINKELSTEIN: My students are bright high schoolers, whose knowledge of history, Jewish and otherwise, is limited. I'm aware of their limitations and provide appropriate context when needed. Students are great. They're curious and motivated. I'd be interested to hear of any other course on southern Jews geared to high schoolers.

LANGSTON: Out of twenty-five students who took my course, only one individual was Jewish, and he was quite knowledgeable.

ROSENGARTEN: The majority of my students have not been Jewish. This is also true of the many students we serve in special collections who come to the archives to do research for term projects, theses, and personal explorations of family history.

ROGOFF: My course at Duke University, *Jews and Blues: The History and Culture of Southern Jews*, in 2004, enrolled fifteen students, thirteen-and-a-half of whom were Jewish. (The half represents one student with a Jewish mother who was raised in a Christian Orthodox church but was in the process of converting to Judaism.) As I recall, only one student was a native southerner. My sense was that the students were taking the course in lieu of American Jewish history, which is not offered at Duke.

FERRIS: About a quarter of my class is Jewish, and there is often a fair amount of racial and ethnic diversity among my students. Josh Evans, son of Eli Evans, was in my first Jewish South class, which began an annual tradition of Eli Evans, who served as our first president of the CCJS, visiting my course each fall to speak to students about *The Provincials* and his student experiences at UNC in the 1950s.

Over the years of teaching this class, I tried a variety of texts/handouts to help introduce my non-Jewish North Carolinian students to Judaism. It was always too much and too little time. Now, instead of focusing on Judaism 101—the core concepts of

Judaism as a religion and as an ethnic identity—I point them to basic websites to explore commonly asked questions. They are comfortable examining these sources on their own.

I find that it works better, given my skills as an Americanist, to move them straight into discussing the broader study of American Jewish history, and how southern Jewish studies fits into the larger canon of this field, as well as southern studies. So simply put, we begin by examining “What is American Jewish history?” and “What is Southern Studies?” Then we spend time discussing major scholarly issues of these fields and a bit of historiography and background on the beginnings of both fields.

LANGSTON: Marcie, I’m interested in your comment about introducing non-Jewish students to Judaism. I found somewhat the opposite. I’m not Jewish, but I felt quite comfortable talking with non-Jewish students about Judaism, especially because I had a good idea of what backgrounds and preconceptions many of them might have. When introducing the class to Judaism, though, I did feel a little awkward knowing that one of my students was Jewish. He, however, was a great guy and very helpful to me and the other students.

STONE: The range of responses here is interesting to me. Some of you, it seems, provide lots of background information and context, especially on Jewish and southern history. Others don’t as much. The difference has been attributed to different degrees of preparation and experience among the students, and to time management. But could this difference also reflect different conceptions of the field among its instructors?

Adam, would you agree that your decision to shift southern history to a “supporting role” suggests a certain set of priorities? Scott and Norm, doesn’t your decision to include more general background suggest a view of southern Jewish history as inseparable from these other subject areas? And for all of you: how do you think your decisions about what you can and cannot cover in a limited amount of time are a product of your own definitions of the subject area?

*"Jews and the American South,"  
syllabus by Scott M. Langston, page 1.  
(Courtesy of Scott M. Langston.)*

MENDELSON: I see my survey as an overview class—an introduction to the basic chronology and major themes of Jewish life in the South. It's a chronology shaped by moments when the southern Jewish experience was unusually important in American Jewish history and to moments of profound change in the South. Thus I devote almost the entire first month to topics relating to the colonial period (commerce within the Atlantic world, colonial Judaism, the impact of the Revolution, gender), and emphasize the Civil War, Reconstruction, and civil rights.

I generally don't have time to spend more than a few minutes in each lecture discussing southern history (this is what I meant by "supporting role"). Instead I try to tell a story about how the experience of Jews was shaped both by events within the Jewish world and by turning points in southern history. I've tried to adopt a thematic approach that enables me to focus on themes that particularly interest me: slavery and race, the Civil War, civil rights.

LANGSTON: I attempted to address students' lack of background knowledge because I see southern Jewish history not only as a subfield of American, southern, and Jewish history, but also because I see it as an intersection between these three disciplines. I hoped that students could see the different forces impacting the lives and actions of Jews living in the South and how those people dealt with and responded to these forces as Americans, southerners, and Jews.

Adam's response has got me thinking about how I organized the course, which I did on a chronological basis. I wonder, though, about the benefits of organizing the course more thematically and subsuming the chronological progression within each theme. That might be a way to offset a bit the feeling that I'm sprinting across the various periods and trying to fit in all the highlights of each period while pushing on to the next era.

FINKELSTEIN: Of course, I'm coming from a different place—the high school. Yet, Scott's comments reflect my experiences, too. My students (whom you will be in contact with in just a few years) have limited knowledge of not only Jewish American history but American history in general. Like Scott, I find myself

needing to present historical background material within the framework of my class on southern Jews. Actually, I don't find that a bad thing except for the time it takes from the intended subject matter. It does, however, begin to provide students with the connectedness of history in general and the Jewish story in particular.

## *II. Methods*

**S**TONE: I'd like to hear more about the materials you use in class. What texts, readings, films, music, etc. do you require students to use?

MENDELSON: The first time I taught the class I assigned both Marcie's anthology, *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil*, and Mark Bauman's *Dixie Diaspora* (2006). I've also used an anthology on black-Jewish relations, *Strangers and Neighbors*, edited by Maurianne Adams and John Bracey, which contains primary and secondary material. This time I've created my own using articles and chapters scanned from a variety of sources.

I rely heavily on photocopied primary source documents to generate class discussion. Many of these come from Morris Schappes's *A Documentary History of the Jews in the United States*; Joseph Blau and Salo Baron's *The Jews of the United States*; Jacob Rader Marcus's *Memoirs of American Jews*; Marcus's *The Jew in the American World*; and Marcus's *American Jewry: Documents*. I've collected others from a variety of places over the past several years. When discussing the colonial period, I make heavy use of images drawn from the Rosengartens' *A Portion of the People*. (I gave a class on colonial Jewish portraits and material culture yesterday.)

Pity there is no anthology of primary sources focused on southern Jewish history.

LANGSTON: As required texts, I used Mark Bauman's anthology, *Dixie Diaspora*, Leonard Rogoff's *Homelands*, Dale and Ted Rosengarten's *A Portion of the People*, and the latest edition of the SJHS journal, *Southern Jewish History*. I used Mark's anthology to provide a framework and overview of many of the important issues related to the field, while I used Leonard's book to focus on issues of southern Jewish identity. The Rosengartens' book helped

give students a sense of how southern Jewish experiences in a particular place—the state of South Carolina—developed and progressed over time (i.e., three hundred years). From these three books, I tried to give students different angles from which to understand southern Jewish history.

I also arranged for students to purchase copies of the society's current journal because it always contains excellent articles that can easily be worked into the course, and it introduced students to the society. In addition to this, students did supplemental reading from previous issues of the journal, as well as from other resources.

Finally, I had students go to specific websites—the “South Carolina Jews Tell Their Stories” site of the Jewish Heritage Collection at the College of Charleston; the Institute of Southern Jewish Life's Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities; and the “Gefilte Fish in the Land of the Kingfish: Jewish Life in Louisiana” site—and view particular portions of these websites in order to expose them to Jewish life in different parts of the South. Students enjoyed the websites quite a bit and commonly were surprised at the various expressions of Jewish life in the South.

FERRIS: The PBS *The Jewish Americans* series has been a terrific resource because it is so nicely divided into discrete topics that you can easily play in class. Len Rogoff's documentary, *Down Home: Jewish Life in North Carolina*, is terrific, and much enjoyed by my students. Another favorite: Mike DeWitt's *Delta Jews*—a really powerful, insightful exploration of Jewish life in the Mississippi Delta and the impact of changing Jewish demography in the second half of the twentieth century. *A Portion of the People*—both the published text and the online exhibit developed with UNC-CH library—has been an invaluable resource for my course.

ROSENGARTEN: I find that students respond to films, memoirs, and novels more readily than secondary sources and primary document study, but I am committed to using any and all means and materials available. If I were teaching my southern Jewish experience course today, I'd change the reading list significantly, use even more multimedia, and probably change the title to reflect the considerable diversity within the region. The quality of the



sources is critical. Among the many fine films I've used, for example, *Delta Jews* is one of the best.

FERRIS: For class resources, I work with Jacqueline Solis, a terrific UNC librarian who has developed an online course page for the class—a central go-to location for all of the course readings, assignments, writing guidelines, and resources—from bibliographies to listings of films to archives, museums, research websites, and scholarly databases for American Jewish history and all things southern.

LANGSTON: I'm envious of what Marcie's developed with help from the UNC librarian. That's a great idea.

ROSENGARTEN: Yes, that's intriguing. Digital media are clearly the modern students' comfort zone and the wave of the future.

Our special collections staff at the College of Charleston has initiated a collaborative project to digitize archival materials and provide online access to primary documents. The College's Lowcountry Digital Library (LCDL) incorporates material from the Jewish History Center's oral history archives, our Holocaust archives, our manuscript collections on Zionism, selected collections of family papers (especially the Thomas J. Tobias papers), and the great William A. Rosenthal Judaica collection. Even students on our own campus who shy away from coming into the special collections use our online resources in research projects.

FINKELSTEIN: I use a mix of materials with my students. Most printed materials are put together in a course reader containing selections from history texts to provide background and articles from newspapers and journals. In particular, contemporary newspaper articles hold the most interest for students. I show several documentary films: *Delta Jews*; *Shalom Y'all*; and one on Leo Frank. "A picture is worth a thousand words," so they say. I also show one film in its entirety, *Driving Miss Daisy*, which students also enjoy and which leads to several interesting in-class discussions—the Temple bombing, for example.

STONE: Norm, I'm curious about your use of contemporary news accounts, especially because you're the only one so far to

*Dale Rosengarten and class on a field trip, in 2007,  
visiting Charleston's historic congregation, KK Beth Elohim.  
(Photo by Theodore Rosengarten, courtesy of Dale Rosengarten.)*

mention it. Can you be more specific about some issues your students have found interesting?

FINKELSTEIN: Let me give you the long answer. I go back in time to the Civil War era to find articles dealing with Jews, North and South, with a focus on Grant's Order #11. The Leo Frank case is another subject that lends itself to newspaper research as well. The *New York Times* is a great source for old stuff as well as more contemporary issues (e.g., the declining Jewish population in Mississippi). I also use the Library of Congress Chronicling America database of newspapers from 1836 to 1922. Not all southern states are included, but there is enough material to get representative articles about such varied subjects as missionaries, local synagogue events, and individuals. The Pittsburgh Jewish Newspaper Project, housed at Carnegie Mellon University and available on line, contains papers published between 1895 and 1962.

As a side benefit, it's often possible to find newspapers that have old advertisements from local Jewish-owned stores which

students find interesting not only for the items offered for sale but their prices as well. These give good indications of how Jews fit into their local communities. I haven't done this previously, but with every student walking around with a computer and/or smartphone, I'm thinking of having students search out relevant articles on their own as we cover specific events.

LANGSTON: I think what Norm expressed is a great idea—using online databases to have students gain access to primary documents. I thought I'd add that, for some time, the University of North Texas has been digitizing documents related to Texas history and making them available online with a search function. It's called the Portal to Texas History. There is much there related to Jewish history in Texas. I know Hollace Weiner, our colleague who oversees the Fort Worth Jewish Archives, took documents, photographs, and flyers to be digitized and uploaded to the Portal. There are also lots of copies of the *Jewish Herald*, a historic Houston paper, and other primary sources. Students can easily search this database for information related to research projects or particular events. If others know of similar databases like this one and those that Norm and Dale mentioned, I'd appreciate knowing about them. I'm sure there are other resources like these that could be useful to the teaching of southern Jewish history.

Speaking of Hollace Weiner, I took advantage of some local expertise and had Hollace come to class to speak on Jewish life in Texas and, in particular, in Fort Worth. Students had to engage in some primary research, and having Hollace in class gave them a wonderful contact, especially if they were interested in researching something local.

STONE: So now we know that both Eli and Hollace (who, by the way, also visited my class in Austin) have found part-time gigs as classroom experts-in-residence. Nice work if you can get it—and what great local resources to have available!

This reminds me also of Adam's comment earlier about taking his students off-campus to historic sites in Charleston. Are there other examples of making use of unique local resources to expose your students to southern Jewish life? Have you found ways to merge the on-campus world with the off-campus one?

ROSENGARTEN: Charleston's unique local resources give Adam and me an advantage in that we can guide our students toward historic sites, artifacts, archival documents, and living sources of history. No matter what the subject, my teaching has focused on methodology and field work. I teach how to research and write about ethnic history using an experiential approach, visiting archives and museums, conducting oral history interviews, and carrying out other documentary assignments.

LANGSTON: I remember that the one Jewish student in my course was graduating that semester and going on to law school at Tulane. I contacted some of the SJHS members in New Orleans and was able to supply this student with a list of congregations and other Jewish organizations, as well as phone numbers of a few people. I don't know how things have turned out for him there, but the contacts, at least, were a byproduct of the class. He, in turn, was quite enthusiastic about the need for congregation members to know more about Jewish history in general, but especially the history surrounding the congregations and their members (in this case, Texas). He arranged for me to speak at his local congregation, although it fell through due to issues beyond his control.

FERRIS: I encourage and require students to attend public lectures on campus—both those sponsored by the Carolina Center for Jewish Studies and UNC's Center for the Study of the American South.

LANGSTON: I wonder if any of you have thought about incorporating into your courses people who actually participated in some of the events of southern Jewish history. Of course, this would only work for later events. So, for instance, in dealing with southern Jews and the modern civil rights movement, students could be exposed to and given the opportunity to interact with people who lived through that era and who might have beneficial insight. I did not do this, but I toyed with the idea of bringing in, either in person or through videoconferencing, some actual participants, or putting students in touch with certain individuals via e-mail. While these people would not necessarily bring an academic perspective, they could bring the participant perspective.

**S**TONE: Here's another subject that several of you have touched on but on which there's more we could discuss: How would you describe your teaching methods in your SJH courses? Do you rely mostly on lecture? Do students contribute to the class through presentations or group work? I'm also very interested in learning if your students conduct original research for your course. If so, what kinds of topics and materials have they pursued? Has any of your students' work been published?

FERRIS: I try to keep this class seminar-sized, so we limit it to twenty-five, which is still big for a seminar. My fifty-minute class (short!) is a mix of lecture/PowerPoint, response to reading assignments, and music. I usually begin class with music playing related to our topic – Civil War songs, ragtime, Tin Pan Alley, civil rights, a southern klezmer group. I often include ten minutes of film, sometimes at the end of class to reinforce or illustrate what we've discussed.

In the past, my students gave presentations at the end of the semester on their final research papers, but I'm thinking of switching this, and I plan to let them choose from a list of topics related to the syllabus and incorporate fifteen-minute student presentations on a regular basis throughout the semester. I want to get them more involved and to avoid presentations at the end of the term.

FINKELSTEIN: Given the limited class time during the semester (fifty minutes, one day a week, average of fourteen weeks), I do a mix of lecture and student reactions to articles in the course reader. Add to this class time for films and discussion, and not much time is left. I assign a brief "final report," giving students a list of possible subjects. We then spend the class hour discussing the student reports. It's a great opportunity to fill holes and bring closure.

LANGSTON: I *hope* in class to have a discussion rather than a lecture, but I'm sure we all know how that goes.

As I tell students, an informed discussion depends on them having an informed basis from which to discuss, and that basis comes, in large part, from the assigned readings. So, in a perfect world, students will come to class having read the assigned read-

ings, and then we have a guided discussion. This is accompanied by some lecture on my part. In reality, like with other classes, it's hard to get students to do the readings, especially as the semester grinds on. I guess I would describe my style as a conversational lecture. Students are encouraged to participate in the conversation—and many do—and I ask questions of the class based on the readings while also adding new information from the lecture.

When I taught the course, students were required to do lots of reading, take two exams (in part, to help them focus on and go through the discipline of memorizing and processing specific important aspects of southern Jewish history), write a critical review of Leonard Rogoff's *Homelands*, and carry out a research project. Students chose a topic (with guidance from me) and had to engage in some archival-type research, along with integrating the appropriate secondary material. This culminated in a ten-to twelve-page paper. Not surprisingly, some papers were very well done, others not so much, and the rest fell somewhere in between. It's been four years since I taught the course and I don't remember the topics of most of the papers. However, some focused on aspects of Jews and the Civil War, crypto-Judaism (which brought out other issues besides the topic itself), and issues related to local Jewish groups (such as the Fort Worth community). No papers have been published or presented.

Students also wrote four brief responses to selected websites, those I mentioned earlier. If I were doing this again, I might do what I currently do in my upper-level classes, which is to have students post their papers to the course website and assign other students to read particular papers and come to class prepared to ask questions of the author of the paper. The author would be given ten to fifteen minutes to comment on his/her paper (but not recount it, since students will have, at least in theory, read it) and then field questions from the assigned students and from the class as a whole. Of course, doing this would depend on the number of students in the class.

FERRIS: Scott, your term of "conversational lecture" is so accurate. That works for me, too. Constantly encouraging students to read and engage in discussion—a challenge!

I also give two exams, and I completely agree about the opportunity for students to memorize and really *study* the chronology and themes of southern Jewish history. I usually include terms for identification, a short and long essay question, and a photo/artifact to discuss. Up to this year, we've even used old-fashioned blue books for taking exams. Imagine students writing with real pens and pencils in class! My students are also required to write a ten to twelve-page final paper, a film critique, and a book review. When I teach the course in the fall of 2012, I'm thinking about designing a symposium-style format for the students to present their research, so that small groups can work together to organize panels and model professional presentation criteria.

LANGSTON: Thanks, Marcie. I'll be interested to hear how the symposium-style format works out if you decide to go in that direction. I like having students collaborate on projects, in part because "two heads are better than one." I also like students to begin to develop the ability to ask critical (but, not necessarily negative) questions as part of learning how to evaluate historical interpretations.

ROSENGARTEN: I'm also drawn to Marcie's proposal to incorporate regular student presentations throughout the term, rather than stockpiling them at the end. It is a perennial challenge to get students to do the reading and engage in discussion. Any devices that encourage reading, thinking, and class participation are worth a try—and yes, worth a workshop at the next SJHS meeting.

Students in all my courses are required to conduct term projects based on original research and to submit both written reports and audio/visual presentations. Weekly assignments include reading, site visits, and written essays. I have kept copies of many term projects and in a few cases have encouraged the students to pursue publication.

MENDELSON: My courses mix lecture with discussion of documents and images. The more senior the level, the less time I spend talking. All of my southern Jewish history courses involve independent research projects. These range from the conventional (eight-to-twelve-page papers) to the more experimental (each

student in my class on Jews and African Americans designed a themed historical walking tour of Charleston). I encourage my students to pick research topics that will involve them in research using Dale Rosengarten's Jewish Heritage Collection. Very few do. Most choose to use online newspaper collections or read memoir literature.

**S**TONE: Thanks everyone. Now, many of you have already brought up the problem of background information—that is, how much knowledge students already have—as a challenge (or perhaps we might say “opportunity”?) in teaching southern Jewish history. Are there others? What challenges have you encountered, and how have you faced them down?

**L**ANGSTON: In addition to the background issues and student knowledge that we've already discussed, there is for me an issue that arises with every course—so much to cover and so little time. So, making decisions about what issues to deal with is a struggle, on the one hand, but on the other, it presents opportunities to explore different aspects in future teachings of the course. Related to this is how best to organize the course—chronologically or thematically, or according to issues currently being debated among southern Jewish historians, or in some other way. The first and only time I taught this course I followed a chronological arrangement which gave students a good feel for the broad development of southern Jewish communities and experiences over time, but it left me wondering how well students grasped the development of particular important themes such as racial debates or religious struggles, both within the different expressions of Judaism and between Jews and Christians, as well as issues like freedom of religious expression. I felt that religious and racial issues sort of overwhelmed much of the focus of the course, as well as the question of southern Jewish identity. These are all quite important, but I felt I had slighted (although not totally neglected) some other important issues such as those related to immigration, politics, economics, class, Israel and Zionism, and so on.

I also found it challenging, especially when dealing with religious issues, to keep from making southern Jewish history primarily the history of Reform Judaism in the South.



Undoubtedly, Reform is important, but I feared students leaving the class without some sense of the role and contribution of traditional and Conservative communities. It was also challenging for me to find a good balance between highlighting the experiences and contributions of significant individuals without neglecting or under-representing the majority of southern Jews who were lesser known, as well as determining which communities to represent, which themselves can be quite diverse. All of this is to say, I guess, that there isn't *the* southern Jewish experience, but many southern Jewish experiences, so which ones do we study?

And, finally, I'd mention something discussed previously. I had hoped that students would not think of southern Jews as living in a cocoon apart from other Jews, southerners, and Americans, but achieving this was challenging. One thing I'd do differently is spend much more time thinking about what exactly I'd like students to take from the course and then explicitly identify how I want to accomplish this, that is, force myself before teaching the course to connect the various issues, people, and communities covered in the course with these specific goals and then reinforce these throughout the semester.

MENDELSON: I've been struck by two challenges. Firstly, the absence of a single narrative text that covers all (or most) of the themes I want to focus on in the classroom. Students have enjoyed Marcie's and Mark's anthologies, but I've had to supplement these with additional reading. I've tried *A Portion of the People* in this role, and found that it doesn't quite fit: it has wonderful images that make for great classroom discussion, but does not offer a broad narrative applicable outside South Carolina. Leonard's books might fit the bill but for my heavy focus on the colonial period and emphasis on South Carolina.

Secondly, as I mentioned earlier, there is no single collection of southern Jewish history primary documents, along the lines of one by Jacob Marcus. This would be a wonderful addition.

ROSENGARTEN: I agree with Adam that we lack an anthology of primary source materials focused on southern Jewish history—a project I would happily undertake in collaboration with others.

STONE: I, for one, think we should hold Dale to that offer. Now, on the flip side, what have you found the most rewarding things about teaching southern Jewish history?

LANGSTON: One of the most rewarding things for me was to hear students say after studying any of the topics, "I had no idea." Seeing eyes opening and lights coming on was very gratifying, and especially so as my students, who were with one exception non-Jewish, began to appreciate (not just know about) the experiences of people who were different in some ways from them, but similar in others. Personally, I find southern Jewish history absolutely fascinating, and having the opportunity to teach it and further my own understanding was quite a privilege. And, hopefully without sounding too weird or something, reminding myself that my students and I were studying real people—individuals—who lived their lives with hopes and disappointments. Seeing how they dealt with the various challenges and forces was something special. For these reasons, I'd teach the course again in a heartbeat, and I hope that at some point in the future I'll be in a position where I can do so.

### *III. The Field*

STONE: What do you think is the future of southern Jewish history as a teaching field? Do you expect to see more such courses or fewer offered in the future? Will you, or would you, teach it again? And is there anything that the SJHS could do to advance teaching in the field?

ROSENGARTEN: The Southern Jewish Experience in 2000 was the first and only time I taught this particular curriculum. Before and after, I have offered more experiential classes, exploring neighborhoods and ethnic history. In the spring of 1998, I taught an upper-level course in documentary field work, *St. Philip Street as a Classroom*, focused on Charleston's immigrant Jewish community. During the fall semester of 2002 when the *Portion of the People* exhibit was at the Gibbes Museum of Art, I offered a course titled *Anatomy of an Exhibition*, organized around the exhibit and catalog. While my course syllabus involved visiting the museum and using the installation as a "laboratory," I believe the

course could be replicated without the live exhibit as a resource by using the book as the core text. I'm interested to hear about Scott's experience teaching from *A Portion of the People* and Adam's use of the book to illustrate artifacts.

I've developed a number of ethnic history/documentary studies classes that feature Charleston Jewish history, though the focus is not exclusively on Jews: *King Street as a Classroom*; *East Side/West Side: Charleston's Ethnic Neighborhoods*; and *Charleston as a Classroom: Exploring the City's Archives and Historic Sites*. I've found that I attract more students and a more diverse group if the course encompasses a range of identities—ethnic, religious, racial, national.

MENDELSON: Since American Jewish history is not widely taught in the U.S., I wonder whether we can realistically hope that southern Jewish history—an even more specialized area—will catch fire as a teaching field. Perhaps we can target particular institutions that already have suitable faculty (Emory, Tulane, etc.)? Or create a database on the society's webpage of syllabi, scanned primary documents, and documentaries suitable for classroom use, maps and images that will aid anyone who plans to teach such a course? Or perhaps arrange an occasional informal gathering of those who teach it at the society's conferences to chat about classroom strategies?

FINKELSTEIN: I'm afraid I may not be the appropriate person for this question, but that doesn't stop me from commenting! If the teaching of American Jewish history on the college level is limited, imagine the situation on the high school level, particularly in the varied Jewish high school programs that exist. My students often tell me that what they learn about American Jewish history carries over in subtle and non-subtle ways to their American history courses in high school and even later in college. When I offer more specific courses (e.g. *Southern Jewish History*, *Jews in America's Civil Rights Struggle*, *The Jewish Gangster in America*), I fortunately have a bit more time to focus on a specific American Jewish history subject area. My northern-oriented students sometimes cannot imagine Jewish life beyond New York and Boston, so a separate southern Jewish history class is an eye-opening

experience. I'm fortunate that my school recognizes the importance of offering history electives, and has a large enough enrollment to permit this.

My dream is that one day we have an American Jewish history curriculum in our elementary and high school programs. Alas, it's probably a pipe dream since most kids end their Jewish education shortly after bar/bat mitzvah, with their schooling revolving around preparation for that singular life event. (Someone pass the hors d'oeuvres.)

LANGSTON: I agree with the ideas expressed by the others throughout this discussion. Southern Jewish history is certainly not a stand-alone field in that it cannot sustain (or, at least, it hasn't yet) a large enough following to generate consistent and common teaching. So, I think it serves more of a support role to bigger fields. It does, for instance, bring out an important aspect of southern history that would otherwise probably go unnoticed. My experience with non-Jewish students suggests that they would give little or no thought to Jews in the South were it not for the course. Those who teach American or southern history and who have little reason or motivation to consider southern Jews will likely overlook the Jewish presence in the South. The course, as well as the society and its journal, can continue to raise the visibility of Jews in the South, as well as emphasize their contributions. In addition to giving voice to Jewish experiences, this course also expands and, at times, challenges the dominant narratives of southern and American history. This is especially important, I think, given the predominantly Christian character of the South (and the U.S.).

Southern Jewish history opens up an important dimension related to American and southern religious history. In addition, it can bring new or different insights to other issues, such as race. I also think a southern Jewish history course can make significant contributions to a religious studies curriculum by teaching students not only about Judaism, but also the important relationship among religion, culture, social values, and institutions. So, I don't think I'll ever see anything like a significant slate of southern Jewish history courses in any college or university curriculum, but

this course can make important contributions by helping faculty and students view familiar areas of study from a different angle.

Convincing faculty and administrators of this benefit, however, may prove difficult, but the SJHS can help make this case by continuing to maintain high quality conferences and editions of the journal, as well as encouraging presentations on southern Jewish history at other professional conferences and publications in other professional journals. Another important role the society can play is encouraging and assisting archival preservation of the artifacts of southern Jewish history. Finding, preserving, and making accessible these artifacts is vital to maintaining the vibrancy of the field.

ROSENGARTEN: Scott's comments about the future of the field of southern Jewish history boosted my morale. I think the College of Charleston is moving in the right direction. Our proposed Center for Southern Jewish Culture has the potential to make a significant contribution, to paraphrase Scott, toward understanding the relationships among religion, culture, social values, and institutions.

STONE: Very good. Thank you all for participating.

### *Conclusion*

It seems unlikely, as Adam Mendelsohn observes above, that southern Jewish history will ever "catch fire as a teaching field." It is, looked at one way, too specific an area to attract very many students and instructors. It has a clear personal appeal to southern Jews themselves, but its interest to non-Jews, non-southerners, and historical generalists is less obvious. In fact, many of the students who take southern Jewish history, perhaps even the majority, are not Jewish. They are drawn to these courses for a variety of reasons, from the mundane (they need a history credit and it fits their schedule) to the more topical (they have an interest in Judaism, in religion, or in the South). In any case, the field must generate a broad appeal if it is to continue finding an audience among American students and attracting high-quality instructors. It must be about more than the personal stories of individual southern Jews, families, or communities.

As the conversation above demonstrates, the importance of southern Jewish history is indeed far more than antiquarian. It is a teaching field with great potential in its interconnections to more general subject areas. The experience of Jews in the American South touches on historical themes as diverse as slavery and immigration, global trade and regional folkways, colonial Americans and Imperial Russians, the Civil War and civil rights. It provides an opportunity, too, for history students to discover the great variety of methods and materials available to them. Our panelists expose their students to archival research, fieldwork, textual analysis, oral history, newspaper studies, and site visits, and their courses draw on primary works from literature, memoir, film, architecture, material culture, food, music, and painting. Southern Jewish history may be a narrow road, but it is one with many intersections opening onto great avenues of historical study.

Despite its specificity, furthermore, the inclusion of southern Jewish history in academic curricula is justified by the wealth of excellent scholarship available in the field. Since the 1973 publication of Eli Evans's *The Provincials*, a profound but non-academic introduction to Jewish life in the South, scholarly publication has flourished. An instructor planning a survey of southern Jewish history can select from two fine recent article anthologies as well as several now-classic ones; a growing number of state and local historical monographs and biographies; a variety of scholarly examinations of southern Jewish life, religion, politics, and identity; and fifteen years' worth of the rigorously refereed journal *Southern Jewish History*.<sup>8</sup> In addition, as our panelists describe, online resources are constantly expanding as universities, libraries, archives, and other historical agencies digitize and disseminate materials from their collections, making research easier for both students and professional scholars. And the commitment that many southern universities have made to Jewish studies—nearly every southern state today has a Jewish studies program and/or research center at a flagship university—secures a home base for southern Jewish history courses. The growing professionalization of southern Jewish history should assure it a permanent presence, if on a small scale, at major colleges and universities.

There are challenges, however, that future instructors in the field will need to address, and these seem to arise regardless of the context in which the course is taught. Student knowledge and background is a particular dilemma, especially given the interdisciplinary nature of the course and the wide variety of reasons students take it. How much time should teachers devote to constructing a contextual framework for the subject that includes general treatment of American, southern, and Jewish history, culture, and religion (including both Judaism and Christianity)? How much do students need to know about these issues in order to understand southern Jewish experiences? It is clear from our panelists that this is a universal problem, and there is a variety of ways to deal with it.

What's more, there is not a single lens for viewing and teaching southern Jewish history, but many frameworks into which it can be situated and contextualized. This offers many exciting possibilities for analyzing and explaining the subject, but instructors must consider carefully which interpretive frameworks will work best for their students. For example, notions of southern Jewish identity are a common theme in the courses that have been taught in the past. Some instructors deal with the question of whether a distinct southern Jewish cultural identity exists, while others address changing perceptions of such an identity. The difference of focus, which reflects a debate that is at the center of southern Jewish studies, is slight but significant. An instructor's decision on this point will affect every other aspect of their course design.

Finally, the vital role of access to primary documents and scholarly literature is evident. Exposing students to a variety of primary documents and classic and current scholarship is essential to these courses' success. There are many ways to address this issue, but one seems particularly important: continued support of archival preservation and widespread dissemination of these materials. Our panelists brought up the lack of an anthology of primary documents related to southern Jewish history. Such an anthology would, of course, reflect materials produced by Jews in the American South, but might also include relevant non-Jewish

materials that have bearing on southern Jewish experiences. However organized, the need for an anthology is great.

Although most of our panelists teach at the college level, it is important, finally, to note that southern Jewish history has been taught, and could be taught, in a wide variety of instructional settings. Norman Finkelstein teaches at a Jewish high school, and Sheldon Hanft pioneered the field through Elderhostel. None of our panelists has offered such a course at a Jewish Sunday school, day school, JCC learning program, or summer camp, but it is easy to imagine that someone could. It is possible, too, that non-Jewish historical societies, and even churches or Christian schools and study groups, might find it a valuable field to explore. Our panelists point the way toward a wide array of instructional opportunities, and so there is every reason to be optimistic about the future of southern Jewish history.

The authors would like to hear from anyone not mentioned here who has taught a course specifically or wholly devoted to southern Jewish history at any academic level. Please contact Scott Langston and/or Bryan Stone, and provide your name, the title of the course, the institution and department where it was taught, and the date.

Thank you very much.



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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See for instance, Mark K. Bauman, "A Century of Southern Jewish Historiography," *American Jewish Archives Journal* 59.1-2 (2007): 3-78, and *Southern Jewish History* 10 (2007), where several articles recount the history of the Southern Jewish Historical Society.

<sup>2</sup> While there are others who taught courses devoted exclusively to southern Jewish history, Hanft is the first person that we have been able to verify as having done so. We also have been able to verify either conclusively or with some degree of certainty that the following individuals have not taught such a course: Mark K. Bauman, Paul S. George, Henry Green, Mark Greenberg, Bertram Korn, Jacob Rader Marcus, Sam Proctor, Stuart Rockoff, Jonathan Sarna, Louis Schmier, Arnold Shankman, Jason Silverman, Melvin Urofsky, Clive Webb, and Stephen Whitfield. We communicated directly with many of these individuals, while for others, particularly those no longer living, we relied on either information provided by those who knew them well and/or searches of institutional catalogs when available. It should be noted, however, that such a course taught as a special topics course would be unlikely to appear in college catalogs. In addition, many of those mentioned above have incorporated sections devoted to southern Jewish history into courses dealing with broader aspects of Jewish history.

<sup>3</sup> Sheldon Hanft, e-mail message to Scott Langston, January 12, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Gary Zola, e-mail message to Scott Langston, January 23, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> "Issues in Southern Jewish History" course syllabus, History 657, fall 2000, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, Ohio.

<sup>6</sup> "Southern Jewish History and Culture" course syllabus, JWST 352, fall 2001, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.

<sup>7</sup> In addition to Sheldon Hanft, Gary Zola, Phyllis Leffler, Jack Bass, and our panelists, Mark Pinsky ("The Jewish Experience in the American South: 'Kasha and Cornbread,'" Rollins College, Winter Park, Florida) and Eric Goldstein ("Jews and the American South," Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia) have taught courses devoted exclusively to southern Jewish history. Others unknown to us or unconfirmed by us may also have taught the course. Of those courses known to us, all but one (Scott Langston's) have been taught at institutions located east of the Mississippi River.

<sup>8</sup> The most comprehensive survey of scholarship in the field is Bauman, "A Century of Southern Jewish Historiography."