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# JEM Programs for December, 2019 - March, 2020

# December 2: Harmony in a Divided Identity ~ Rivka Campbell Sponsor: Bev Zaifman

Jews of Colour (JOC) is a pan-ethnic term used to identify Jews whose family origins lie in African, Asian, or Latin American countries. JOC may identify as being of Black, Latino, Asian, biracial, or multi-racial heritage, while Mizrahi and Sephardi Jews from North African and Arab lands vary as to whether they self-identify as JOC. A common question posed to JOCs is “What’s your story?” Rivka’s story will include a brief history of the Caribbean, focusing on Jews of Jamaica, and will culminate with the story of navigating within the Jewish community as a JOC. This presentation will widen the scope of what it means to be Jewish in Canada and throughout the world.

Rivka is a Jew of Jamaican descent, who was born and raised in Toronto, who seeks to build community among JOC in Canada while opening dialogue about the JOC experience among the mainstream Jewish community. She is the co-founder of the group Jews of Colour – Canada and is the sole Canadian recipient of the URJ’s inaugural JewV’Nation Fellowship. She is a recognized speaker on Jewish Diversity and is filming a documentary on this topic.

# December 9: The Universality of *Fiddler on the Roof*: A Jewish Family Story or a Cross-Cultural Tale?

# ~ Judy Ball Sponsor: Hy Goldberg

Based on a book by Sholom Aleichem written in the 19th Century and becoming a smash-hit musical in the 20th, *Fiddler on the Roof* is a cinematic and theatrical phenomenon. This presentation will be a modern exploration and analysis of *Fiddler’s* enduring and global popularity.

Judy Ball is a speech pathologist who has taught workshops to health and education professionals nationally and internationally for more than 30 years. Her interest in *Fiddler on the Roof* began years ago after hosting the cast of a travelling theatre company performing *Fiddler* in Thunder Bay, her former home. Since then, she has seen numerous *Fiddler* performances and served as the Jewish consultant to an amateur production. She remains fascinated by the popularity and universality of this Jewish story.

# December 16: Is Putin Good or Bad for the Jews? ~ Alexis Lerner

Is the current situation in Russia sustainable for its Jewish minority? State prosecution of anti-Jewish hate crimes, and an increased tolerance of Jews and foreign organizations like Chabad Lubavitch and Moishe House, suggest yes; however, a proliferation of cartooned stereotypes, graffitied cemeteries, and allegations that Jews control financial markets suggest otherwise.

Alexis M. Lerner is a Ph.D. candidate in the [Department of Political Science](http://politics.utoronto.ca/) and the [Anne Tanenbaum Centre for Jewish Studies](http://cjs.utoronto.ca/) at the [University of Toronto](https://www.utoronto.ca/). Her research interests are in authoritarian regimes, post-Soviet politics, dissent management, research methods, and the Holocaust. She is the founder and principal researcher of [*Post-Soviet Graffiti*](http://www.postsovietgraffiti.com/), a research project focusing on alternative avenues of free expression in the post-Soviet region.

# January 13, 2020: *Reaching for Pogrom: Social Psychological Observations on the Demonization of Israel*

# ~ Bill Fisher Sponsors: Susan and Harold Merskey

Israel occasionally behaves badly, but it is singled out for demonization uniquely and relentlessly by academics, university students, newspapers, non-governmental organizations, and governments worldwide. Tonight’s discussion will review the nature of such criticism, the motives for it, and the means of responding to it from the perspective of the social psychological study of intergroup relations.

William Fisher is Distinguished Professor in the Department of Psychology at Western University where he has been recognized with the Pleva Award for Excellence in University Teaching and the Hellmuth Award for Research. He was educated at Tel Aviv and Purdue Universities and has applied social psychological theory and research in the analysis and amelioration of social problems for the past four decades.

# January 20: Ray Frank: The “Girl Rabbi of the Golden West” ~ Jennifer Lander Sponsor: Arlene Gleason

Many sources assert that the first female rabbi was Regina Jonas, who was privately ordained in Germany in 1935. However, Ray (Rachel) Frank was actually “the first woman since Deborah to preach in a synagogue.” Born in San Francisco in 1861, Frank was a Jewish religious leader who challenged traditional notions of what it meant to be a Jewish woman. Throughout the 1890s, she spoke from the pulpit to audiences across the United States, creating a sensation. Come explore the life and words of this fascinating woman who helped change the way Jewish women participated in the Jewish world.

Jennifer Lander has an MA in History from the University of Alberta and is now a doctoral student in Western University’s Department of Women’s Studies and Feminist Research. Her dissertation focuses on Canadian Jewish women’s experiences on the home-front in WWII.

# January 27: Alley-Oop to Aliyah: African American Hoopsters in the Holy Land ~ David Goldstein

David A. Goldstein will relay the fascinating story of his book, *Alley-Oop to Aliyah,* the first publication to provide an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of African-American basketball players in Israel. He will address how these players ended up in Israel, describe the challenges of their lives there, and relate the reasons some have chosen to return to Israel season after season, or even make it their home. Over the past 40 years, more than 800 African-American players have journeyed to Israel, each finding his personal connection to Judaism and the land.

David Goldstein is a sports executive and journalist based in Toronto. He is the Chief Operating Officer of U SPORTS (the national governing body of university sports in Canada). He is an adjunct professor of sports law at the University of Toronto’s Faculty of Law, and a guest lecturer at Osgoode Hall Law School.

# February 3: Double Exposure: The Positives and Negatives of Lower East Side Photographer Jacob Riis

~ Sonia Halpern Sponsors: Joyce Claire, Lynn Coveney, Kathleen Robinson-Burch,

# Anne Rumbolt, Louise Sabourin, Ruth Tandberg, Carol West, Tova Zarnowiecki

Considered the first photojournalist in America, Jacob Riis has been lauded for his progressive articles and iconic photographs revealing the deplorable conditions of early 20th-century Jewish immigrants (and other ethnic groups) on the Lower East Side of New York. Despite his remarkable work, however, Riis demonstrated profound insensitivity to the very Jews whom he photographed, an aspect of his biography that is often ignored. This presentation will explore some of Riis’ good works in addition to his problematic attitudes about Jewish New York.

Sonia Halpern is an Art Historian and a multi-award-winning professor at Western University. Along with publishing academic articles, two collections of poetry, and a book of original music compositions, she has appeared in many local theatrical productions, and is a regular contributor to Jewish educational programs in London.

# February 10: Meyer Brownstone, Acclaimed Jewish Champion of Social Justice, Peace, and Equality

**~ Shieky Brownstone** Sponsor: Judith Wiley

Professor Meyer Brownstone (1922-2019), who was awarded the prestigious Pearson Peace Prize in 1986, was born and raised in Winnipeg’s North End, a community of Yiddish culture and social activism. His life reflected the spirit and deeds of *tikun olam*. Serving on the Planning Board of the CCF Government of Saskatchewan, Meyer was one of the creators of the plan that led to Canadian medicare provincially and then federally. He also carried out many missions for OXFAM and the UN in developing countries in Africa and Central America. This presentation by his brother, Dr. Shieky Brownstone, will offer us a personal picture of this great Canadian Jew.

Shieky Brownstone is Meyer’s younger brother and a long-time resident of London. He is Professor Emeritus of Western University (Medical Biochemistry) and was a Director of the Biochemistry Laboratory of Victoria Hospital. He is an exhibited photographer (film), and a former violinist with the London Community Orchestra. He is actively involved with Yiddish literature and translations.

# February 24: “Beyond Anyone’s Comprehension”: Canada and the Liberation of the Nazi Concentration Camps ~ Sara Poulin

This talk will focus on the liberation of Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp in northern Germany. It was the largest camp liberated by British and Canadian Allied troops and held the highest number of Jews by the end of the war. Sara will discuss the uniqueness of the Jewish experience in Bergen-Belsen and the impact the discovery of the camp had on its liberators.

Sara Poulin is a fourth-year doctoral candidate in History at Western University, where she is examining Canada’s role in the Liberation of the Concentration Camps across Western Europe at the end of the Second World War.

**March 2: Jewish Art in a Medieval Textbook: What’s In, What’s Out? ~ Linda Safran**

This illustrated presentation will discuss the inclusion of Jewish art and architecture in Linda’s forthcoming medieval art textbook. The book addresses cultural production from Spain to Central Asia and from Scandinavia to the Sahara over a period of about 1200 years. Our speaker will discuss which Jewish monuments and objects were chosen for inclusion and why. What do these works tell us about the history of the Jews and their interaction with other groups in the Middle Ages?

Dr. Linda Safran earned her Ph.D. at Yale University and, after teaching at the Catholic University of America and the University of Toronto, is now an Associate Fellow at the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies in Toronto. She recently completed six years as editor of *Gesta*, the premier English-language journal of medieval art. She has been working on Byzantine diagrams and on the medieval art textbook which will be published by Cornell University Press. She last spoke at JEM in 2016 and is happy to return to London.

**March 16: Leaving Harry for Rocco Perri: The Ambiguous Identity of Jewish Mob Boss Bessie Starkman   
~ Monda Halpern** Sponsors: Joyce Claire, Lynn Coveney, Kathleen Robinson-Burch,

Anne Rumbolt, Louise Sabourin, Ruth Tandberg, Carol West, Tova Zarnowiecki

When Jewish wife and mother Bessie Starkman left her husband Harry and their children in 1912 to take up with Italian Rocco Perri, it was the beginning of a powerful and sinister collaboration that would rule the Ontario underworld. Unlike other sources that have focused on Starkman’s criminality, this talk will explore her ambivalent relationship with Judaism, marriage, and motherhood.

Monda Halpern is an Associate Professor in the Department of History at Western University. She is the author of two books, most recently *Alice in Shandehland: Scandal and Scorn in the Edelson/Horwitz Murder Case*. Her third book will focus on the Jewish and family life of Bessie Starkman. This will be Monda’s eighth JEM presentation!

**March 23: The Bible in the Age of #MeToo: Reading Rape Narratives ~ Carl Ehrlich** Sponsors: Gerbrig and Harvey Berman

One of the features that makes the Hebrew Bible (or Tanach) such an archetypal work of religious literature is that it touches on the full range of the human experience. Unfortunately, the human experience of biblical times (and today) includes sexual violence. This presentation will look at how this unpleasant subject is treated in both legal and narrative biblical texts.

Carl Stephan Ehrlich (Ph.D. Harvard) is Professor of Hebrew Bible in the Departments of History and Humanities, and Director of the Israel and Golda Koschitzky Centre for Jewish Studies at York University. Among his areas of interest are synchronic, diachronic, and contextual approaches to the biblical text and Israelite civilization. His most

recent publication is the co-edited collection, *Purity, Holiness, and Identity in Judaism and Christianity: Essays in Memory of Susan Haber* (2013). Current projects include a cultural history of Moses and a commentary on *Chronicles*.

**March 30: Sinai: The Real Story ~ Jim Stevens** Sponsor: Judith Wiley

Last year, Jim’s presentation concluded with the Jews leaving Egypt. This year’s presentation will be on the equally fascinating and controversial story of their experiences in Sinai. His unique analysis of the events will be surprising and perhaps even a little unsettling!

Jim Stevens is a retired teacher with a lifelong interest in ancient biblical history and archaeology. His intellectual curiosity and knowledge help us to understand Jewish history within new contexts. He has given numerous presentations to JEM and always leaves his audiences challenging their previous assumptions.

***JEM will return in the autumn of 2020 with more edifying, stimulating,   
and entertaining presentations.***

To receive emailed JEM fliers and notices, please contact Sandra at [sandra@safranhr.com](mailto:sandra@safranhr.com), showing your name and email address, or call her at 519-433-7882.

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