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Jewish Roots in Southern Soil: A New History (Brandeis Series in American Jewish History, Culture, and Life)

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Jews have long been a presence in the American South, first arriving in the late seventeenth century as part of exploratory voyages from Europe to the New World. Two of the nation's earliest Jewish communities were founded in Savannah in 1733 and Charleston in 1749. By 1800, more Jews lived in Charleston than in New York City. Today, Jews comprise less than one half of one percent of the southern population but provide critical sustenance and support for their communities.

Nonetheless, southern Jews have perplexed scholars. For more than a century, historians have wrestled with various questions. Why study southern Jewish history? What is the southern Jewish experience? Is southern Jewish culture distinctive from that of other regions of the country, and if so, why?

Jewish Roots in Southern Soil: A New History addresses these questions through the voices of a new generation of scholars of the Jewish South. Each of this book's thirteen chapters reflects a response with particular attention paid to new studies on women and gender; black/Jewish relations and the role of race, politics, and economic life; popular and material culture; and the changes wrought by industrialization and urbanization in the twentieth century. Essays address historical issues from the colonial era to the present and in every region of the South. Topics include assimilation and American Jewish identity, southern Jewish women writers, the Jewish Confederacy, Jewish peddlers, southern Jewish racial identity, black/Jewish relations, demographic change, the rise of American Reform Judaism, and Jews in southern literature.



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Editorial Review

Review

“This anthology of original essays is the most recent addition to the widening body of work on the history of the Jewish South, a neglected area of research until about 30 years ago. This collection covers an extensive chronology, from the first Jewish settlers in the South in the 1730s up to the present day, and debates what it means to be both Southern and Jewish. The book serves the dual purpose of offering an introduction to the field and furthering discussion of the Southern Jewish experience in the United States.”—*Library Journal*

“The anthology provides thirteen fascinating articles on a variety of topics including southern Jewish women writers, African American-Jewish relations, Jewish peddlers, Jewish Confederates, and the blossoming of Reform Judaism in the region. The book will delight erudite scholars and ‘snowbirds’ who go ‘south’ to escape the cold weather and would like to learn how Jews shaped the region.”—*Jewish Book World*

“An area of history long neglected . . . this book is a must-have for anyone interested in the American Jewish experience.”—*Virginia Jewish Life*

“Jewish Roots in Southern Soil now stands as the best one-volume treatment of the history of Jews in the American South. The thirteen essays, foreword, and excellent introduction are well written, engaging, and informative. The methodologically diverse approaches enliven the volume without rendering it overly eclectic. The editors Marcie Cohen Ferris and Mark I. Greenberg have collected representative, top-rate scholarship that is sophisticated enough for academics while remaining accessible for undergraduate students.”—*Journal of American Ethnic History*

“It is the central theme of race, appearing repeatedly in the essays as a whole, that accords a unique dimension to Jewish Roots in Southern Soil, which thus offers an important contribution to American Jewish historiography.”—*Studies in Contemporary Jewry*

Review

“With Jewish Roots in Southern Soil, the history of Jews in the South has finally come of age. Boldly asserting the power of place, it demonstrates Southern Jews negotiating complicated identities across time and space. The result, these essays masterfully convince, is a claim for this particular and unique American identity.” (Pamela S. Nadell, Professor of History, American University)

“Jewish Roots in Southern Soil: a New History is a superb collection of essays on the still not fully known topic of Jews in the American South. The breadth of the topics discussed and the depth of the individual essays make the book an essential and highly compelling reading. It provides readers with everything they wanted to know about the subject and more.” (Yaakov Ariel, Professor of Religious Studies, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)

About the Author

MARCIE COHEN FERRIS is the Associate Director of the Carolina Center for Jewish Studies and Assistant Professor of American Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is author of *Matzoh Ball Gumbo: Culinary Tales of the Jewish South* (2005). MARK I. GREENBERG is Director of the Florida Studies Center and Special Collections Department at the University of South Florida and has published widely on southern Jewry. He is the author of *University of South Florida: The First Fifty Years* (2006). ELI N. EVANS was born and raised in Durham, North Carolina, and is a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the Yale Law School. He is author of *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South*; *Judah P Benjamin: The Jewish Confederate*; and *The Lonely Days Were Sundays: Reflections of a Jewish Southerner*. He is president-emeritus of the Charles H. Revson Foundation and chairman of the advisory board of the Carolina Center for Jewish Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

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