

# **Jews and American Capitalism**

## **March 2 - 3, 2008**

**A Joint Conference between**

**The Goldstein-Goren Center for American Jewish History, NYU**

**Institute for Israel and Jewish Studies, Columbia University**

**Convened by**

**Rebecca Kobrin, Columbia University**

**Tony Michels, University of Wisconsin (Madison) / Goldstein-Goren Fellow (2006-7)**

In which moments and in which ways did Jews play a central role in American capitalism? This conference aims to investigate how the experiences of Jews in the U.S. –from entrepreneurs to socialists– shaped and were shaped by the development of America’s particular system of capitalism in the twentieth century. In recent years, a vigorous academic industry has grown around the study of capitalism. While scholars have long examined the development of capitalism in nineteenth and twentieth-century America, historians have most often relegated the study of capitalism to other disciplines, such as economics. Within the field of American Jewish studies, scholars have paid very little attention to the role of Jews in the development of American capitalism, perhaps because of old fears of fueling anti-Semitic stereotypes. Thus the central role Jews played in American economic development and how capitalism has shaped Jewish life, has received little historical research. This conference seeks to facilitate an exchange of ideas that shall highlight, interrogate, and discuss the roles Jews played in American capitalism as both its architects through their participation in the industries of banking and finance and as its most vociferous critics through their support of unionism and radical political movements. We seek to broaden our knowledge of the history of Jewish involvement in American capitalism and use capitalism as a prism through which to understand American Jewish history as a whole.

### **Presenters Include:**

Marni Davis

Hasia Diner

Gennady Estraikh

Jeffrey Gurock

Kenneth T. Jackson

Jonathan Karp

Dan Katz

Ira Katznelson

Rebecca Kobrin

David Koffman

Mikhail Krutikov

Eli Lederhendler

Tony Michels

Jonathan Pollack

Annie Polland

Eddy Portnoy

Jonathan Sarna

Jeffrey Shandler

Nancy Sinkoff

Daniel Soyer

Sara Stein



# Jews and American Capitalism

**Sunday March 2, 2008**

**Panel I 10:00 a.m.-12:00pm**

## **Jews on the Margins of American the Economy**

*Chair & Respondent:* **David Weiman** (Barnard College, Columbia University)

**Jonathan Pollack** (Madison Area Technical College): "*Machers on the Margins: Scrap Dealers and American Jewish Communities, 1890-1960.*"

**Marni Davis** (Georgia State University): "Prohibition, Anti-Semitism, and Economic Anxiety: Jewish Alcohol Entrepreneurs and Their Critics at the Turn of the Century."

**Jonathan Karp** (SUNY—Binghamton): "Jewish and Black Entrepreneurs in the Rhythm and Blues Industry, 1940-1960"

**Panel II 1:30-3:30pm**

## **American Capitalism in Yiddish Literature**

*Chair & Respondent:* **Ellen Kellman** (Brandeis University)

**Eddy Portnoy** (Jewish Theological Seminary): "*Alrightniks and Arbeters: Images of Rich and Poor in the New York Yiddish Press*"

**Gennady Estraiikh** (New York University): "Soviet Yiddish Literary Images of American Capitalism"

**Mikhail Krutikov** (University of Michigan): "In Golden Bog: American Yiddish Literature and Moral Critique of Capitalism"

**Panel III 4:00-5:30pm**

## **Capitalism and Religion in Twentieth Century America**

*Chair & Respondent:* **Jeffrey Gurock** (Yeshiva University)

**Annie Polland** (The Eldridge Street Project): "The Banker, the Realtor and the Delicatessen Owner: The Businessmen-Scholars of the Eldridge Street Synagogue"

**Jeffrey Shandler** (Rutgers University): "Sanctification of the Brand Name: The Marketing of Cantor Yossele Rosenblatt"

**Jonathan Sarna** (Brandeis University): "Selling God: Religion and the American Marketplace from a Jewish Perspective"

**8:00pm Keynote Address**

**Professor Ira Katznelson (Columbia University)**

*This conference is Co-sponsored by  
Columbia University's Institute for Israel and Jewish Studies  
New York University's Goldstein-Goren Center for American Jewish History*

**Columbia University - Kellogg Center - 420 West 118th Street, 15th Floor**



# Jews and American Capitalism

**Monday March 3, 2008**

**Panel IV 9:30am - 12:00pm**

## **Jewish Entrepreneurs and the Creation of American Markets**

*Chair & Respondent:* **Rebecca Kobrin** (Columbia University)

**Hasia Diner** (New York University): "With Packs on their Backs: Jewish Peddlers and the Creation of the New Diaspora"

**Andrew Dolkart** (Columbia University): "Building New York's Garment District, 1919-1929: A World of Jewish Entrepreneurs and Architects"

**Sarah Stein** (University of Washington): "Jews, Ostrich Feathers, and Modern Global Commerce: America and the Trans-Hemispheric Market"

**David S. Koffman** (New York University), "Thick Culture and Thin Capital: Jews in the American Indian Heritage Trade"

**Panel V 1:30 - 3:00pm**

## **Responses to American Capitalism from Left to Right**

*Chair & Respondent:* **Tony Michels** (University of Wisconsin - Madison)

**Eli Lederhendler** (Hebrew University): "Isaac Rivkind's Thesaurus of Jewish Money: *Yidishe gelt* between Cultural Anthropology and the Hagiographic Moment."

**Daniel Katz** (Empire State College, SUNY): "The Multicultural Front: Radical Jewish Organizing in the Garment Industry"

**Daniel Soyer** (Fordham University): "Making Peace with Capitalism? Jewish Socialism Enters the Mainstream"

**Nancy Sinkoff** (Rutgers University): "Lucy S. Dawidowicz and the Neoconservative Embrace of Capitalism"

## **3:30pm Concluding Roundtable on Jews and American Capitalism**

**(Kimmel Center, 60 Washington Square South, Room 909)**

*Moderator:* **Linda Gordon** (New York University)

**Hasia Diner** (New York University), **Kenneth T. Jackson** (Columbia University),

**Jonathan Karp** (SUNY Binghamton), **Eli Lederhendler** (Hebrew University),

**Sarah Stein** (University of Washington).

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**New York University - King Juan Carlos Center - 53 Washington Square South**