

Privilege and Prejudice: Jewish History in the American South
National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute
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Institute Final Project:
Special Topics Lesson Plan
Graduate Teaching Assistant Lecture
Spring 2020
JUST/RLGS 3001, Judaism

Personal Research Project/Dissertation Focus:

Create a visual rhetoric and methodology for understanding the trajectory of art produced in Medieval Germanic-regions predicated on the bifurcation of the terms "anti-Judaism" and "anti-Semitism."

This bifurcation is crucial for understanding a visual history and lineage of Christian encounters with Jews during a (roughly) 400-year period of violence, as well as understanding the shift from Christian non-rationalism to irrationalism, terms set forth by Gavin Langmuir. By creating a visual rhetoric and methodology for doing so, I hope to apply my dissertation work on a larger scale—creating a visual lineage of the bifurcation of these terms and their importance to understanding non-Jewish violent-visual encounters with Jews.

Application:

Two avenues of inquiry posed by the institute struck me as most beneficial to my overall learning goals, pedagogical strategies, and research trajectory: “the place of Jews in the racial hierarchy, and... the cultural and religious interactions between southern Jews and their Christian neighbors, white and black.” My work in Medieval European anti-Judaic art could be more enlightened and more enlightening to students should I put it into conversation with Judaism in the American south and race relations pre-and-post Civil War, as discussed throughout our two weeks in Charleston.

Tracking the history of Jewish men, women, and children portrayed in primarily Christian-produced art is based on an understanding that in the earliest depictions, Jews are identifiable by physiognomic features. These early features—exaggerated noses, elongated faces, beards, etcetera—are not intended as markers of Christian anti-Jewish sentiment. Rather, artists used these features to convey an embodied or presumed Jewishness. This physiognomic identification was widely used in a European context of *relative* racial homogeneity. Art and “popular media” tended towards physiognomy more than pigmentation to distinguish between people groups.

The institute, while focused on the American south, originally interested me because of notions of race, art, and Jewishness. Questions that were drawn out over the course of our two weeks included: How and when are physiognomic identifiers invoked in art in the American South? How do racialized and stereotyped identifiers of enslaved Africans in American media and caricatures differ from early Christian representations of Jews? How does the interaction of whites, blacks, and Jews differ artistically from the interactions of Christians, Jews, and Muslims

in specific parts of Medieval Europe, if at all? The “Privilege and Prejudice: Jewish History in the American South” institute offered not only new ways for thinking about my own work but offered pedagogical tools to better teach artistic caricaturing of minorities and the cyclicity of these physiognomic stereotypes over geographical and temporal boundaries.

Pedagogical Strategies:

I am continually looking for and am interested in ways to teach and make relevant Medieval Judaism and Christian anti-Judaism in art and media. Students in many of our Religious Studies classes have a vested interest in history or religion, or are fulfilling a requirement. American-born or raised students would have higher familiarity with American history than with Medieval European Jewish History. For my special topics lecture in the University of Denver’s Judaism course, I will use visual media to compare American slave/anti-black rhetoric and medieval anti-Jewish and modern anti-Semitic rhetoric. By using these two things in parallel, I will be able to engage and familiarize something on American soil with Medieval History. By comparing these two forms of visual media, we can then discuss how imagery of Jews from a Medieval European context changed or shifted once Jews began immigrating as well as how the imagery changed when the enslavement of Africans began. I believe that using resources from the institute, as well as imagery from the Rosenthal Collection (specifically newspapers like *The Judge*) will help students to contextualize how visual media has the power to influence as well as the consistent invocation of Jews as psionically different.

Resources:

For my special topics lecture, the students will read the introduction and selected sections of George Fredrickson’s *Racism: A Short History* (2002). Fredrickson discusses both white-over-black variety racism as well as racial antisemitism.¹ Fredrickson’s theory “or conception of racism, therefore, has two components: difference and power. It originates from a mindset that regards ‘them’ as different from ‘us’ in ways that are permanent and unbridgeable. This sense of difference provides a motive or rationale for using our power advantage to treat the ethnoracial Other in ways that we would regard as cruel or unjust if applied to members of our own group.”² The students will also use archived issues of *The Judge* in class to visually compare the satirizing of blacks and Jews side-by-side.

Reading Assignments for Students (prior to class):

Fredrickson, George M., and Albert Camarillo. *Racism: A Short History*. Revised edition. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015. Introduction, selected pages. (bring to class)

Rogoff, Leonard. “Is the Jew White?: The Racial Place of the Southern Jew.” *American Jewish History* 85, no. 3 (September 1997): 195–230.

Have looked over and found one issue of the Judge, and two caricatures of 1.) a Jews and 2.) a black person: <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000056566>

¹ George M. Fredrickson and Albert Camarillo, *Racism: A Short History*, Revised edition (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015), 26.

² Fredrickson and Camarillo, 9.