

**DRAFT Syllabus It may be revised slightly before first class**

**History 099/410/510  
Jews and Conversos in Spanish History**

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Portland State University: History/Judaic Studies Program

Summer 2003: Tuesdays/Thursdays, 2:15-4:35 p.m., 242 Shattuck Hall

Office hours: Tuesday/Thursday, 1:00-2:00 p.m., 217 Cramer (Sociology department)

**Course Description**

This course is an introduction to the history, literature, and culture of *Sefarad*, which was the ancient Hebrew name for the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal). Although today the Sephardim, or Jews of Spanish descent, are a minority of the overall Jewish population, Spanish Jews once formed a society still regarded as one of Judaism's most outstanding. The course seeks to explain why this important component of medieval Spanish society was expendable, and how the Sephardim and their descendants adjusted to and often prospered in the new conditions forced upon them. Readings and discussions will cover Jewish settlement of the Iberian Peninsula, the Golden Age of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the expulsion and conversions of 1492, the fate of New Christians who remained in Spain, crypto-Jews and their descendants in the Americas, and Spain's little-known role facilitating the flight of Jews from the Nazis.

Class discussions will be based on your answers to questions assigned with each reading and on small group activities. Lecturing will be kept to a minimum. We have two guest speakers and from time to time will listen to music and watch video segments that bring to life the vitality of Sephardic culture.

**Requirements**

1. Please come to each class having completed and ready to talk about the reading assigned for that particular day.
2. I will give you several discussion questions to prepare for each class, or I may ask you to prepare questions on your own while completing the readings for a certain day's class. These questions will serve as starting points for the following day's discussion.
3. All students will write a short paper (typed and double-spaced) that poses a question (or questions) and then attempts to answer it (or them). You may write about any issue related to the Sephardic experience, but please make sure your topic pertains to the material studied in class. The length of the paper will be 3-4 pages for students taking the course pass/no pass, and 5-6 pages for students taking the course for a grade. Graded students must do outside research and prepare a bibliography of sources used; pass/no pass students are encouraged but not required to do research beyond the required texts.

Papers will be due no later than noon on **Monday, July 21**. Please confirm your topic with me by **Thursday, July 10**.

## **Calendar**

- 6/24: Gerber, Introduction and Chapter 1 (please try to read this before the first class)
- 6/26: Gerber, Chapters 2 and 3
- 7/1: Gerber, Chapter 4  
Reader: Poems (Nagrela, Halevi, Ibn Gabirol)  
Maimonides, "Letter to Jews of Yemen" (fragment), 183-191
- 7/3: Chapter 5, Expulsion decree (Appendix 1, 285-289)  
Reader: Victor Perera, "Columbus and the Jews: A Personal View," Tikkun 7:5 (1992): 53-55, 79-80  
Lazarillo de Tormes, Prologue and Chapters 1-2 (23-48)
- 7/8: Gerber, Chapter 6  
Reader: Paulo Valadares, "Basta mi nombre que es Abravanel," Gerações/Brasil Novembro/96 e Abril/97 3:1-2, 1-2  
Antonio Enríquez Gómez, "Ballad in honor of the divine martyr, Judah the Believer," 1-7, 137-139, 212  
Guest speaker: Allan Abravanel (descendant of Isaac Abravanel, the financier and adviser to Queen Isabel and King Ferdinand)
- 7/10: Gerber, Chapter 7  
Reader: Martin Cohen, The Martyr: Luis de Carvajal, A Secret Jew in Sixteenth-Century Mexico, 236-239  
Yigal Schleifer, "The New Jews of Mexico," The Jerusalem Report, October 10, 2000, 34-39  
Barbara Ferry and Debbie Nathan, "Mistaken Identity? The Case of New Mexico's 'Hidden Jews,'" The Atlantic Monthly, December 2000, 85-96
- 7/15: Gerber, Chapter 8  
Reader: Nathaniel Weyl, "Israel and Francisco Franco," Midstream: A Monthly Jewish Review 38:2 (1982): 11-16  
Haim Avni, Spain, the Jews, and Franco, 138-156  
Guest speaker: Victor Russo (Holocaust survivor from Salonika, Greece)
- 7/17: Gerber, Chapter 9  
Reader, Trudi Alexy, The Mezuzah in the Madonna's Foot, 73-79, 111-133, 163-168