

JEWS ACROSS THE AMERICAS



THE GOLDSTEIN-GOREN SERIES IN AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORY

General editor: Hasia R. Diner

Is Diss a System? A Milt Gross Comic Reader

Edited by Ari Y. Kelman

We Remember with Reverence and Love:

American Jews and the Myth of

Silence after the Holocaust,

1945–1962

Hasia R. Diner

Jewish Radicals: A Documentary Reader

Edited by Tony Michels

An Unusual Relationship:

Evangelical Christians and Jews

Yaakov Ariel

*All Together Different: Yiddish
Socialists, Garment Workers, and the
Labor Roots of Multiculturalism*

Daniel Katz

1929: Mapping the Jewish World

Edited by Hasia R. Diner and

Gennady Estraiikh

Hanukkah in America: A History

Dianne Ashton

*Unclean Lips: Obscenity, Jews,
and American Culture*

Josh Lambert

*Jews and Booze: Becoming American
in the Age of Prohibition*

Marni Davis

*The Rag Race: How Jews Sewed Their Way to
Success in America and the British Empire*

Adam D. Mendelsohn

*Hollywood's Spies: The Undercover
Surveillance of Nazis in Los Angeles*

Laura B. Rosenzweig

*Cotton Capitalists: American Jewish
Entrepreneurship in the Reconstruction Era*

Michael R. Cohen

*Making Judaism Safe for America:
World War I and the Origins
of Religious Pluralism*

Jessica Cooperman

*A Rosenberg by Any Other Name: A History
of Jewish Name Changing in America*

Kirsten Fermaglich

*A Mortuary of Books: The Rescue of
Jewish Culture after the Holocaust*

Elisabeth Gallas

*Dust to Dust: A History of Jewish
Death and Burial in New York*

Allan Amanik

*Jewish Radical Feminism: Voices from
the Women's Liberation Movement*

Joyce Antler

*Jews Across the Americas:
A Sourcebook, 1492–Present*

Edited by Adriana M. Brodsky
and Laura Arnold Leibman

Jews Across the Americas

A SOURCEBOOK
1492—PRESENT



Edited by

ADRIANA M. BRODSKY *and* LAURA ARNOLD LEIBMAN



NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PRESS

NEW YORK

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PRESS

New York

www.nyupress.org

© 2023 by New York University

All rights reserved

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Brodsky, Adriana Mariel, 1967– editor. | Leibman, Laura Arnold, editor.

Title: Jews across the Americas : a sourcebook, 1492-present / edited by Adriana M. Brodsky and
Laura Arnold Leibman.

Description: New York, New York : New York University Press, [2023] | Series: Goldstein-Goren Series
in American Jewish History ; 1 | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2022050025 | ISBN 9781479819317 (hardback) | ISBN 9781479819324 (paperback) |
ISBN 9781479819331 (ebook other) | ISBN 9781479819348 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Jews—America—History—Sources.

Classification: LCC E29.J5 J49 2023 | DDC 970.004/924—dc23/eng/20230105

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022050025>

New York University Press books are printed on acid-free paper, and their binding materials are chosen
for strength and durability. We strive to use environmentally responsible suppliers and materials
to the greatest extent possible in publishing our books.

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Also available as an ebook

Sermon by Samuel Mendes de Sola

CURAÇAO, 1750

Julia R. Lieberman



In 1745, Hakham Samuel Mendes de Sola arrived in Curaçao to lead congregation Mikve Israel, in its beautiful, sixth synagogue. The Jewish community was near its peak of two thousand Jews, or about half the island's white population.¹ Sadly they were completely divided due to conflicts between members of wealthy families, disputes over inheritances, and the building of the Neve Shalom synagogue by a second congregation, across the bay in Otrobanda. While the conflicts preceded Hakham Mendes de Sola's arrival, they were exacerbated by his confrontational character and his habit of taking sides on disputes and publicly shaming those who opposed him. The sermon printed here, however, was delivered to celebrate the historical moment when the community had found a way to stop the bitter arguments between factions.²

Unlike the lay leader of Neve Shalom, Mendes de Sola represented rabbinical authority that the other congregation lacked. Typically, men who led early American synagogues were given the Hebrew title "hazan" or "hakham." Of the two, hakhams were better trained and had more knowledge of the Talmud. Mendes de Sola gained this training despite being born in Lisbon, Portugal, around 1699 to a New Christian family. His father, Luis Mendes de Sola, a tobacco merchant originally from the Portuguese city of Trancoso, was imprisoned by the Portuguese Inquisition of Coimbra between 1703 and 1706 after being accused of practicing Judaism in secret. Consequently, around 1709, Luis and Samuel fled to Amsterdam and were later joined by Samuel's mother, Brites Mendes, and his five brothers. There, they all returned to the Judaism of their forefathers. Samuel was educated at Amsterdam's famous Ets Haim Yeshiva and completed his rabbinic studies in 1724. A year after, he married Lea de Josua Israel. His acclaimed oratorical skills led the Amsterdam Sephardic community to send Mendes de Sola to Curaçao in 1745. He died on the island in 1761.

This sermon provides a rare window into the largest Jewish community in early America as well as insights into Sephardic preaching practice. Most seventeenth- and eighteenth-century records of congregation Mikve Israel have disappeared. Mendes de Sola's sermon reveals the congregation's delicate balancing of local secular authorities, rabbinical jurisdiction, and the power of the Mahamad. This can be seen in the sermon's dedication to Prince William of Orange-Nassau, who interfered and issued a decree to help resolve the conflict. Thus, unlike the sermon given in Newport, Rhode Island, in 1773 by Hakham Isaac Karigal (chapter 27) for the holiday of Shavuot, Mendes de Sola's sermon addresses community problems as much as religious ideals despite being in front of an audience that included non-Jews. Mendes de Sola's sermon also relies just as heavily on the Greek philosophy of Aristotle as it does on the Torah. His use of philosophy is a good reminder that Sephardic education in Amsterdam and Curaçao required students to learn poetry and philosophy as well as the Torah and Talmud.

Mendes de Sola's sermon helps us understand how religious ideas and practices were transferred to and around the Americas. Initially, the Amsterdam Sephardic community and its institutions served as a model and sent rabbis and other religious personnel to Curaçao. By the 1700s, however, Mikve Israel had become the most important of the Jewish congregations in the Americas, a transition signaled by the arrival of the hakham.

PRIMARY SOURCE

A dedication to the Stadtholder . . . Prince of Orange and of Nassau Stadtholder, Hereditary, Governor, Captain, and Admiral, General of the United Provinces. . . . With the submission of a humble son, and with the consideration of a faithful patriot, I come to your feet, your serene highness, not to offer but to pay, not to dedicate but to return. . . .

With profound respect

[I am] your most humble servant

Samuel Mendes Solla

Curaçao January 1, year 1751

[The Sermon's theme (Isa. 63:7–10):]

G-d's kindness will I proclaim as the praises of G-d, in accordance with all that G-d has bestowed upon us and the abundant goodness to the House of Israel that he has bestowed upon them in his compassion and in His abundant kindness. . . .

An exordium addressed to the audience: Consisting among others of members of the "National Church of the Island" Wigboldus Rasvelt, preacher of the National Church of this island, and the illustrious men, Philip Schonenboom and Pieter de May Lourensz, dignified regents of the said Church. [He also thanks a long list of people, including the members of the Amsterdam Mahamad.]

What a happy day [is today] when . . . we are all triumphant over the most important of our soul's enemy, . . . the disagreement that for so long was among us, . . . the law of honor that under the sight of such a supreme G-d asks us to reconcile with our neighbors. . . . My effort today will be to show the ways we should find so that this peace will last forever and

this reconciliation will be long lasting. To this end, I will divide my discourse [sermon] into two parts. In the first part I will demonstrate that we have to stop the hatred that we [until now] had for one another. In the second part we will see that in order to stop the hatred we must forget the grievances that our next-to-us inflict upon us. G-d help us all with his divine help and [G-d help] me prove such an important point, and [you] my audience be persuaded of such an important matter.

[The sermon proper:]

Point I

Today, my first endeavor is to show that we have to stop our hatred and transform hatred into love and affection. I know too well that this commandment [to love] has against it not only our natural repulsiveness but also the strength of special reasoning [which is that] the object of love, said the philosopher [Aristotle], has to be good, [and as] the enemy is not good; therefore, the enemy cannot be the object of our love. Let reason and truth reply. Or, instead of them, I will respond and reply.

I agree that the object of our love has to be good, however, not only do I disagree [with the second part] that those we call enemies are not good, but I will prove that they are good. The enemy even at his most hostile is good in relation to ourselves because he purifies our virtues and our vices; our enemy's censorship uncovers our faults, makes obvious our defects, makes public our vices and the fear of this censorship, the knowledge of these faults corrects more vices than the love of virtue. If gold in the cupel purifies its carats, virtue purifies itself from the persecution, injuries, insults, offenses and injustices that the enemy does to us, hence because of our enemies we get to correct many vices and practice many virtues.

Now, supposing that abandoning hatred and loving our enemies is in itself or for itself right, I will propose today two reasons that will persuade us that our enemies are worthy of love. G-d willing, the reasons will be effective, but to make them so I will base the reasons on two excellences that will prove to us the necessity that we have to love our enemies. . . .

[De Sola discusses the virtues of *honra* (honor) and *valentia* (bravery). He then discusses the dilemma of wanting to avenge grievances.]

I have concluded the first part of my discourse and have demonstrated that we have to let go of grievances because by forgiving [them] we carve for our nobility the best crowns, and we prepare for our bravery the most glorious trophies.

Point II

Let us now [discuss point 2] where we will see how important it is to forget grievances in order to let go of hatred.

Let us take as an example two aggrieved and offended brothers [in the Bible], the first Esau, aggrieved by his brother Jacob. We are all familiar with the reasons for their grievances and I do not need to go over them here. What I will point out is that Rebecca, their mother, asked her son Jacob to flee and told him these words (Gen. 27:43-45) "*So now, my son, heed my voice and arise; flee to my brother Laban [to Charan], and remain*

with him a short while until your brother's wrath subsides . . . and he forgets what you have done to him."

If Rebecca's only intention was that Jacob would flee until his brother was placated, only the first clause of the verse would be needed: *until your brother's anger subsides*, but why does she try to send Jacob to live far away until his brother forgets? For the one who forgets, would it not be enough to be placated? [My response is] no, because Rebecca was considering (and rightly so) that while Esau could be placated, one could not be certain about the punishment Jacob would receive, as long as Esau did not forget the aggravation. Let us consider the same [situation] with another offended brother [the story of Joseph and his brothers].

[In Hebrew] Although offended and aggravated, Joseph still loved his brothers, and with so much intensity, that on listening to them telling of their miseries, he could not stop his tears (Gen 45:1–2). [He goes on to explain this example and then concludes.]

Semuel Mendes de Solla, *Triunfo da Uniao contra of pernicioso vicio da discordia. Sermao que em quarta feira 17 de Menahem anno 5510 pregou of H. H. Semuel Mendes de Solla* (Amsterdam: Gerred and Joan de Broen, 1751).

QUESTIONS

1. Like many Western Sephardic sermons from this era, Mendes de Sola's sermon was delivered in Portuguese. What are the ramifications of his choice of language?
2. Mendes de Sola begins with a dedication to Prince William of Orange-Nassau (William IV). How does Mendes de Sola position himself and his congregation vis-à-vis the Stadtholder and why include him?
3. In the second part of the sermon, Mendes de Sola discusses two biblical stories of brothers' rivalry. How do these biblical narratives comment on what happened between him and other members of the congregation?
4. The sermon was delivered in the synagogue in the presence of the local Christian authorities. How might the selected stories have been meaningful to both Christians and Jews?
5. In the first part of the sermon, Mendes de Sola presents a syllogism that he attributes to the philosopher Aristotle. Like all syllogisms, it consists of (a) a major and (b) a minor premise and (c) a conclusion. In this case, these were (a) the object of our love has to be good; (b) our enemy is not good; (c) the enemy cannot be the object of our love. Do you think Mendes de Sola's objection to the minor premise is a valid one?

NOTES

1. Arbell, *Jewish Nation of the Caribbean*, 165.
2. Emmanuel, *Precious Stones*, 309, 341–343.