



Temple Beth Torah

## Lifelong Learning

A monthly lecture and discussion series devoted to exploration of a wide variety of topics in Jewish history and culture led by distinguished scholars and teachers. Lectures are held via Zoom on first Thursday of each month from 7:00 - 8:15 pm.

### Jewish Studies - Lecture of the Month Spring 2023

#### February 2

##### ***Ostrich Feathers, Jews, and a Lost History of Global Commerce***

Sarah Stein, Ph.D.

Based upon her award-winning book, *Plumes: Ostrich Feathers, Jews, and a Lost History of Global Commerce*, winner of the Sami Rohr Prize for Jewish literature, this presentation explores the unexpected prominence of Jews in the boom-and-bust ostrich feather trade of the turn of the twentieth century, when feathers were coveted (especially by women consumers) as objects of adornment. We will discuss why Jews were drawn to this and other new economic niches **of the modern era, and how they** came to play so large a role athwart the entire breadth of the ostrich feather supply chain, from "bird to bonnet," and across the globe.

**Dr. Sarah Abrevaya Stein** is Professor of History and the Viterbi Family Endowed Chair in Mediterranean Jewish studies at UCLA as well as the Sady and Ludwig Kahn Director of the Alan D. Leve Center for Jewish Studies.

#### March 2

##### ***Memory as Monument: The Catskill Mountains as Holocaust Refuge***

Holli Levitsky, Ph.D.

The quantity and quality of literary, filmic, and testimonial narratives about Jewish life and culture in the Catskills stands as a testament to the power of nurturing such worlds in memory. During and just after the Holocaust, European refugees and displaced persons also found refuge in "The Mountains." In this talk, I share a few of the beautifully written and evocative stories that address the strangely eloquent juxtaposition of genocide and pleasure. These shared memories offer lessons about the challenge of aging, the comfort of old friends, the power of memory, and the importance of embracing joy even in the face of mortality. This legacy is also the broader Catskills legacy and gives us an opportunity to dwell in that world again.

**Holli Levitsky** holds a Ph.D. in English and American Literature from the University of California, Irvine and is Founder and Director of the Jewish Studies Program and Professor of English at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles.

#### April 4

##### ***What is a Jewish Film?***

Clifford Wilcox, Ph.D.

The term "Jewish film" is widely used today. A common usage appears in the many Jewish film festivals held annually in most American cities and in contemporary film literature. Yet the term itself is ambiguous and is rather difficult to define. Is a Jewish film one that features Jewish actors or is made by a Jewish director? Is it one that deals with Jewish history, culture, or themes? Or is it a film that appeals primarily to Jewish audiences? This lecture will explore the emergence and development of Jewish films in America over the last 100 years. We will explore the role these films have played in American culture, particularly regarding identity formation and boundary definition for American Jews.

**Cliff Wilcox** has Ph.D. in American intellectual history from the University of Michigan and is the Director of Education and Operations at Temple Beth Torah in Ventura, CA.

#### May 4

##### ***Speaking at Cross Purposes: The Hidden Impasse in Jewish-Christian Dialogue***

Joshua David Holo, Ph.D.

This lecture is the fruit of four years of teaching about the Jewish-Christian encounter at an ecumenical and inter-religious graduate school. Jews and Christians approach the inter-religious conversation with unspoken and incongruent assumptions that hinder mutual understanding, not least because they are unacknowledged. Through the lens of history and contemporary American realities, we can discern this impasse and tackle it more effectively.

**Dr. Joshua David Holo** is Associate Professor of History and Dean of the Jack H. Skirball campus of HUC-JIR, Los Angeles.

*For additional information on the TBT Jewish Studies: Lecture of the Month program, please contact Cliff Wilcox, Ph.D.,  
Director of Education and Operations at Temple Beth Torah, Ventura, CA (cliff@templebethtorah.com)*