Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Otherness is not a descriptive category, an artifact of the perception of difference or commonality. . . . It is a political and linguistic project, a matter of rhetoric and judgment.

Jonathan Z. Smith, "What a Difference a Difference Makes"

In men's writings, to name the enemy politically, as fascist, communist, Zionist, etc., or religiously or economically, exonerates the narrator. By naming the other, he situates himself as morally right, above and against those who are wrong.

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Know your spirits before entering strange orchards.

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One of the more unfortunate results of the rancorous debates about Black–Jewish relations has been to warp scholarly (and not so scholarly) discussion around the topic of Jewish slave trading and the alleged Jewish invention of anti-Black racism, with polemics about who did or did not do what to whom and how badly; in short, the goal often seems to be to name the enemy. Though justified in refuting the specious and outrageously myopic charges of the Nation of Islam's *Secret Relationship Between Blacks and Jews,* Jewish scholarship continues to use Black "anti-Semitism" as an excuse to ignore the significance of Jewish attitudes toward and treatment of Blacks and to engage in feel-good polemics.[1] However ugly and purposefully hurtful Black nationalist tirades against Jewish slave trading have been, one would be hard-pressed to identify any particular impact on Jewish life other than the reactive spawning of a veritable public relations industry bent on proving and maintaining harmonious relations between Jews

and Blacks.[2] Indeed, the questions surrounding Jewish slave trading should be easily and quickly resolved at this point, on the basis of the recent work of such scholars as David Brion Davis, Eli Faber, and Seymour Drescher.[3] Thankfully, the red-herring issue of Jewish slave trading seems to have receded somewhat from the media horizon since its torrid flashes of the early 1990s. In hindsight, the peak of this polemic, which dates back to the racial conflagrations of the 1960s, might be characterized as a result of the ethnic and racial political realignments of the Reagan-Bush years.

Often ironically ignored has been analysis of Black–Jewish relations as a topic of interest in and of itself and for its fruitfulness as an object of study for Jewish history or intergroup relations, in my case, in the early modern era – which I define as spanning roughly from 1450 to 1800 – the era of growing national identities and the formation of the colonial configuration exemplifying the modern world until quite recently (if not still). Astoundingly, given the amount of discussion on Black–Jewish relations under slavery, little effort seems to have been made to look at primary source material concerning the formative early colonial experience of Jews and Blacks, although that is beginning to change. It is therefore my intention to foreground what has been left to the imagination: the social and discursive histories of this early Black–Jewish experience.

This study begins, then, where existing treatments of Jewish slave trading close. In these pages I attempt to describe one face of the cultural history of Jews and Judaism within the Mediterranean region and the increasingly slave-dependent Atlantic territories conquered during the European overseas expansion. Foregrounding the subject of Jewish–Black relations, I have tried to answer what I take to be basic questions about this period of peak Jewish involvement in Black slavery: What do primary sources tell us about relations between Blacks and Jews? What do Jewish sources, textual and archival, convey about Blacks? If Jews lived according to Jewish law, to what degree did Jewish behavior toward slaves take shape under its influence? What *does* the *halakha*, the Jewish legal tradition, say about slavery and behavior toward slaves? Is there a connection between Jewish textual attitudes toward Blacks and Jewish behavior toward them? If so, how do the two inform each other?

In order to answer these questions, I have turned to a wide variety of sources, many hitherto ignored. Jewish sources include biblical exegesis, *halakhic* writings, quasi-scientific literature, sermons, poetry, letters, notarial records, and archival sources. Non-Jewish sources include archival sources and travel literature, ethnography, and colonial histories written by Europeans.[4] I use these materials to construct a cultural and social portrait of Jews amid the larger socio-economic context, one from which Jews differed little, their religious Otherness notwithstanding.

On one level, it is amazing how little source material can be found describing the relations of Jews and their slaves, itself an indication of the small size of the nexus, of the religious politics in which Jewish slaveholding was always already inscribed in the Christian world, and of the degree to which slaves fell below the horizon of respectable subjects about which one should speak and write. Even scholars steeped in the archival material speak in the language of circumlocution. "We do not have any source about the treatment given by Jewish colonists to their slaves," wrote Chilean historian Günter Böhm (in 1992!).[5] Earlier scholar Wilfred S. Samuel's language reveals much about the lack of solid evidence on which to base analysis and about the ways this absence of knowledge so often became filled in by wishful thinking: "*It is to be supposed* that the Barbados Jews were kindly masters to their negroes," or, "Whilst positive evidence is lacking, *it seems probable* that the Jews joined with the Quakers in humanely treating their black people, and that they ever heeded the reminder 'for ye were bondsmen in the land of Egypt.'"[6] Even scholars comfortable enough to draw conclusions usually proffered romantic explanations. Responding to non-Jewish criticism of Surinamese Jewish slave owners, George A. Kohut wrote: "[T]he rigid Mosaic and Rabbinic laws regarding [slaves], were always strictly followed by the Jews and those in Surinam, who had men like the family of Nassy at their head [and] could not have trespassed these ordinances."[7] This turns out to be self-image-boosting mythmaking, as I will show.

Part of the reason wishful supposition could replace substantive analysis was that scholarship until late into the twentieth century tended to dismiss the importance of slaves and the culture of slavery as much as had discourse in the period under study. Before 1991, only Harold Brackman focused an entire inquiry into the subject of Jewish–Black relations in the early development of colonialism.[8] Bertram W. Korn produced a brief study of Black–Jewish relations in the antebellum American South.[9] Both of these studies resulted from the social and intellectual tremors of the 1960s. Generally uninformed by the developing modes of social history, however, most Jewish scholars continued to believe that such topics had little to do with "real" Jewish history. Only with the accusations brought against Jews by Black nationalists did Jewish scholarship deem the topic worthy of investigation, though even here the polemic shaped its contours and results. Next to the growing corpus of American Jewish historical scholarship on the question of ancient rabbinic attitudes toward black people, and a similarly expanding number of studies on late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century Black–Jewish interactions, the entire period in between remained for the most part unexplored until quite recently.[10] Of the three book-length histories of Jewish–Black relations in the United States written by Jewish historians, only that of Bertram Wallace Korn treats pre–Civil War times.[11] A mere handful of works, mostly essays, attended to Black–Jewish relations in the

preemancipation Atlantic world.[12] I have elsewhere suggested some reasons for the unwillingness of Jewish scholarship to engage Black–Jewish relations in the colonial period.[13]

One would think that Jewish scholars would have been interested in Jewish relations with Blacks and Black slaves for a less obvious reason than responding to Black allegations. While much of modern Jewish historiography has been attempting to shed the "lachrymose" theory of Jewish history – the idea that between 70 C.E. and 1948 Jews lived utterly disempowered and persecuted – the fact that a few early modern Jewish communities in effect ruled over groups of slaves many times their size has not been explored as a sign of the possession of power by Jews.[14] This oversight indicates the extent to which modern, liberal, antislavery sensibilities have made such an analysis anathema. It also points to an inability to conceive of power except as a political phenomenon dependent on the existence of a state apparatus.

Though steeped in the minutiae of Jewish history and historiography, my model is less that of Jewish studies than cultural studies. Though built on the findings of social and intellectual historiography, the analysis of "culture" means for me the study of the ideational and ideological construction of and response to "reality" by members of and outsiders to specific demographic collectives. I have tried to recast the discussion of early modern Jewish–Black relations in light of recent theoretical and methodological work in various fields of cultural history, anthropology, historical ethnography, and literary studies. While greatly indebted to the social or intellectual histories of "race" and slavery produced by David Brion Davis, C. R. Boxer, Winthrop D. Jordan, Magnus Mörner, A. J. R. Russell Wood, and A. C. de C. M. Saunders, my approach derives more from later scholars, both those who sought to test and tease out the significance of these earlier forays and those whose analysis more generally provided ways of connecting thought and action "on the ground": the work of Stephen J. Greenblatt on colonial figurations; R. Douglas Cope's exploration of the formation and meaning of racial structuration in colonial Mexico; the excavation by Michael Nerlich of the ideology that produced and drove European merchant adventurers; Peter Burke's ethnographic studies of early modern Italian history; and David Nirenburg's evocation of the violence that bonded the different minorities of medieval Spain.[15] From these and many other teachers I have come to favor analyses of culture that proceed with sensitivity to the dialectic of representation – linguistic, visual – as both social mirror and social agent. In this regard, I have purposely constructed an interdisciplinary study. Since, it seems to me, culture consists of a continuum of ideas (discourse) and actions (social events) constantly informing one another, I felt it imperative not to sever this circulation by treating only one aspect. Ideas and actions pose another challenge in that their provenance is neither solely abstract nor purely local,

respectively. Hence, I follow Clifford Geertz's aspiration to present "continuous dialectical tacking between the most local of local detail and the most global of global structure in such a way as to bring them into simultaneous view."[16]

The geographic coverage of this study is double. On the one hand, it ranges from the Muslim Mediterranean, mostly in the East, through southern and western Europe, and into the American colonies belonging to the Dutch and English. But its primary focus is on the Atlantic world system, a unit of analysis that this study justifies as having particular relevance for the study of discourse about Blacks.[17] This range ensures a comparative comprehension of movement within the history of slavery. On the other hand, the study sticks to a close tracking of the Sephardic diaspora within these territories. Somewhat justifiably, Daniel Swetschinski objected to calling the Jewish Portuguese of seventeenth-century Amsterdam "Sephardim" – and the same applies by extension to their coreligionists in places like Jamaica and Surinam – reserving this appellation for the fifteenth-century exiles from Spain and Portugal and their immediate descendants.[18] For lack of a concise substitute, however, the term *Sephardic* will be used. *This* second provenance, a narrow focus on Sephardic space and time, establishes a more unifying element, enabling a comparative view of movement within Sephardic discursive and social manifestations from the Iberian Peninsula to the Ottoman eastern Mediterranean and to northern Europe and finally into the American colonies. I ignore the Catholic colonial territories, as the question of the Jewishness of the Conversos or New Christians residing there introduces tremendous and unnecessary complications into what is already a bountiful survey. The vast geographic canvas of my narrative necessitates a certain flattening out of some of the local specificities, but while these particularities are attended to as much as possible, it cannot be forgotten that the transnational nature of the discourse of "race" meant that individual or local actions and beliefs partook of something operating at a higher level.

The general exclusion of Ashkenazic Jews from this study stems partly from pragmatism but mostly from the fact that these Jews played a far less significant role in the kinds of activities that would have brought them into contact with Blacks, although they do appear on the scene in this study by the eighteenth century. Until around the 1720s, if not later, Sephardic Jews made up the majority of the European colonies' Jewish populations. Jamaica's Ashkenazic congregation was not officially organized until 1787. By the next year's writing of the *Historical Essay on the Colony of Surinam,* its Sephardic Surinamese authors estimated that the "German" Jews of Surinam numbered only about "half of the number of their Portuguese brethren."[19] Sephardim, though also mostly poor, provided the occupants of elite roles within the Jewish community and beyond it throughout western Europe and its colonies. In the 1760s, a French writer compared the

Sephardic and Ashkenazic synagogues in the Surinamese capital Paramaribo in a manner that reflected (perhaps unwittingly) the differing economic positions of the two communities: "The Jews, whose number is very considerable, both Portuguese and German, have two synagogues. That of the former is very beautiful; but that of the Germans is not nearly as beautiful."[20] Indeed, in a move that would be considered extreme today, Jacob Rader Marcus constructed a fourfold periodization of American Jewish history in a 1958 lecture, labeling the first phase "the Sephardic" and setting it as finishing as late as 1840.[21]

While the majority of the Sephardic population (even in wealthy Amsterdam) continued to be poor, what R. David de Rephael Meldola wrote about Amsterdam Jewry in the mid–eighteenth century applies as well to their seventeenth-century counterparts: "Here in the city of Amsterdam most of the wealthy and the Gentlemen have all of their monies abroad, for from early times they placed all or most of their wealth in another kingdom to bear interest or to trade with overseas, and these funds never saw this country [Holland]."[22] Not all Sephardic communities maintained such extensive overseas activities, but Meldola's characterization caught the gist of the entrepreneurial endeavors of their upper and often middle classes. Not for nothing did the Enlightenment philosopher Naphtali Herz Wessely, who had visited Amsterdam in 1755, and had more travel experience than most of his fellow Ashkenazim, look to the Sephardim as late as the 1790s as exemplars of urbane cosmopolitanism: "And moreover you trade in your country with the great imperial powers in Europe, Asia and Africa and are informed of the customs of regions distant from your own."[23] But I am not engaged here in a study of economic history; I take it as a given that many Jews participated economically in colonial endeavors, some gaining great wealth therefrom. In any case, several analyses already treat, more or less satisfactorily, Jewish colonial activities from a purely economic perspective.[24]

While exploring Europe and the Mediterranean world for purposes of comparison, I try to situate post-fifteenth-century Jewish images of Blacks, the contact of Blacks and Jews, and Black images of Jews amid the new world evoked by John Thornton: "Not only did thousands of Europeans move to the Atlantic islands and the Americas, but literally millions of Africans crossed to the Atlantic and Caribbean islands and the Americas, becoming the dominant population in some areas."[25] Blacks were exported from Africa for a simple reason that extended some five centuries. As put so richly in the 1790s by John Gabriel Stedman, the Scottish mercenary sent to Surinam to fight the runaway Black slaves, "The quantum of sugar, &c. will be had, and must be provided by negroes, natives of Africa, who alone are born to endure labour under a vertical sun."[26]

One does not have to be a Marxist to recognize the enormous gravitational pull commerce exerts on culture. This study explores the ways in which the

commerce in Black slaves and the culture of slaveholding influenced Jewish culture. One of the running arguments of this study takes off from the observations of Charles Verlinden, David Brion Davis, Paul Gilroy, and others about the quintessentially modern, capitalistic, and international character of Atlantic slavery. Other scholars have proposed the essentially modern nature of the Sephardic Jews, many of them former Conversos, descendants of Jews converted, mostly by force, to Catholicism: interiority, psychic compartmentalization, cultural commuting.[27] Perhaps more significantly, scholars like Gilroy have persuasively argued that the "history of blacks in the new world, particularly the experiences of the slave trade and the plantation" are "a legitimate part of the moral history of the West as a whole."[28] From a somewhat different angle, David Brion Davis, following the work of Charles Verlinden, has written similarly that

Plantation slavery, far from being an aberration invented by lawless buccaneers and lazy New World adventurers, as nineteenth-century liberals often charged, was a creation of the most progressive elements and forces in Europe – Italian merchants; Iberian explorers; Jewish inventors, traders and cartographers; Dutch, German, and British investors and bankers. From the colonization of Madeira and other sugar-producing islands off the coast of West Africa to the westward extension of the "Cotton Kingdom," black slavery was an intrinsic part of "the rise of the West."[29]

Despite its marginality, then, this phenomenon was not any more anomalous within early modern Jewish history, especially when considering that in the Dutch colonies of Brazil, Surinam, and Curaçao, Jews comprised about a third of the "White" population, a uniquely high profile for the Atlantic world. Combined, these insights afford an excellent case study in the relationship between discourses and social group boundaries and structures. The Sephardim, in their double exile, with their highly differentiated but not always harmonized loyalties, inhabited as at least partial insiders the print and oral discourses about Blacks then circulating through many European cities and colonial towns, and on ships at sea between the two. The behavior of Sephardim in the Atlantic world toward Blacks and toward their slaves so closely resembled that of their host populations and often was so lacking in Jewish particularities that one can forget at times that this slave-owning minority was a severely ostracized and persecuted one. If, as one Sephardi apologist notoriously put it, "the Jew is a chameleon, everywhere taking on the colors of its surroundings," then Jewish slave owning under the colonial regime marks a superb instance of the power of hegemonic discourse at work.[30]

Throughout this study, I try to avoid fetishizing the difference between slave and free, while attending to the continuum of freedoms and unfreedoms in which all people lived. What Rosemary Brana-Shute said in regard to eighteenth-century Surinam holds no less for relations within the more

domestic slavery in Europe and the Mediterranean; these were "interdependent and cooperative, *even if unequal*."[31] The distinction between servants and slaves, though critical, remains extremely murky. Contemporary documents often obscure a neat separation between those who had fully lost their liberty and power and those who exchanged it voluntarily or partially for menial services.[32] In seventeenth-century Barbados, for instance, servants constituted "a species of property," and could be pledged, mortgaged, and sold with estates to which they bore indentures, while in nineteenth-century Curaçao, house slaves often received an annual wage.[33] The confusion between servants and slaves is especially difficult with the Hebrew terminology. The Hebrew term *eved* can mean slave or servant and can refer to the lowliest slave as well as a king's servant or even officer. It can serve metaphorically, and is so used frequently in florid rabbinic greetings ("your humble servant, slave to the Torah, seeks your enlightenment with a query . . ."). It is not clear whether *shifḥa*/שפחה stands as the female equivalent of "slave" or "servant"; it seems to bear a similar fluidity.

Employer and employed might not always agree on the other's status. In 1778, R. Ḥayyim Yosef David Azulai tried at an inn in Macon, France, to pay the customary smaller fee for his servant/assistant Abraham, who "raged at me: why had I said he was a servant so that they would abuse him? And he stormed out . . . saying that he would pay himself because he did not want to be thought a servant."[34] Abraham's reaction marked more than a pose; the outcome of the conceptual struggle determined his identity to those he might meet. Status may also have been subject to external, legal factors. One Jewish slave owner under the Ottomans refused to contribute to the customary collective bribe given in order to keep slaves, claiming that his maidservant was free.[35] A fixation on these categories can obscure their historical fluidity. Examples such as these point to the importance of remaining attuned to the phenomenological conditions of de-pendent labor in a particular setting, not merely its legal or terminological status.

In sum, certain abstract borders can be erected, even if they were not always realized in actuality or in contemporary discourse. Servants, usually young, for the most part served only temporarily, often until their marriage. They served under contract for specified wages. Slaves belonged wholly to their master and/or mistress, having been purchased outright, and served in perpetuity unless explicitly freed. I try to adhere to a strict use of "servant" for those employed but not owned and "slave" for those bodily owned. For the purposes of this study, I focus mostly on slaves.

It is certainly clear that the slave was a nexus of social, religious, and political relations, as well as a physical body. Belonging as a form of property to his or her master, the slave served as an extension of the master but also as a delimiter of her jurisdiction. Hence, the eternal contestation over the slave's acculturation into the master's household and society. In this regard, it is no

coincidence that the final blow to medieval Mallorcan Jewry came about because of a rumor spread during Holy Week of 1435 that various members of the Jewish community had parodied the sufferings endured by Christ with a (Muslim) slave.[36] Whether the Jews had indeed tortured or even crucified the slave against his will in the manner of Christ, whether he had cooperated in the spoof, or whether the entire charge was an invention or elaboration of ardent Catholics, the slave stood between communities as hinge, threshold, bargaining chip, and two-directional symbolic victim.

Delimiting any historical period entails notorious difficulties, and the early modern period poses no exception. I frequently refer to it as the early colonial period because European colonialism seems to me to have been *the* salient characteristic of the age. As early as 1500, the places to become known as the Caribbean, Mexico, Brazil, and India had been visited by Europeans. The outward motion of European ships, people, ideas, goods, and might burst out around the globe, wresting partnerships and submission from peoples nearly everywhere. European leaders devoted increasing amounts of wealth, energy, and attention toward overseas commercial, military, and religious conquests.

Several appropriate historical events might serve as markers of the colonial period's opening. The 1440s saw the establishment of direct Portuguese slave taking in West Africa, initiating an era in which slavery in the West became increasingly identified with Blacks. In the next decades, a series of papal bulls buttressed this new industry by effectively sanctioning if not encouraging the enslavement of non-European non-Christians for the sake of their Christianization.[37] Unlike the slave trade in existence until then, the West African slave trade quickly became a generator both of enormous profits and colonial possibilities for producing further profit through the harnessing of slave labor on a much greater scale and in a much more planned manner. By 1517, Bishop Bartolomé de las Casas obtained permission to import slaves directly from Africa (shipments of slaves had been sent from Lisbon to Hispaniola as early as 1502) in order to spare the quickly extinguishing American natives. A ship laden with slaves left Africa for the Caribbean within a year. By 1518, Carlos V dispensed a contract (*asiento*) to merchant Lorenzo de Gomenot to import no fewer than 4,000 Africans. By 1528 or 1538, the asiento had become regularized: a four-year privilege of exclusive rights to import 4,000 slaves to the Spanish colonies *in each contract period*.[38] Aside from brief interruptions caused by war, so functioned the modern trade in the Africans whose coerced labor operated the colonial mines of precious metals and the plantations growing tobacco, sugar, and coffee during the next several hundred years.

The new, mostly Black, slave trade that characterized the early modern world accompanied the formation of a new kind of slavery. This new Atlantic-world slavery drew on precedents in the ancient and medieval world, where

agricultural and industrial production, as well as resource extraction, often depended on the coerced labor of slave forces. Yet under Atlantic slavery, the mass-production aspects of the older agricultural slavery were honed and developed. A colony's entire agricultural production might be given over to a single crop, such as sugar, or to a handful of crops whose growth either promised rich profits or served the commercial needs of the motherland's ruling elites. While old world latifundia were interspersed throughout a Mediterranean nation's territories, the new Atlantic colonies often had the sole purpose of serving as the agricultural production lands for the colonizing power. The production of these crops increasingly became the difficult task of the large forces of slaves bought and maintained by individual plantations. Additionally, these slaves increasingly were stolen from a single human source, sub-Saharan Africa. When I call Atlantic slavery an industrial system, these factors are what I have in mind; from the sixteenth century on, this slavery made up an industry in every modern sense of the word. The Atlantic world slavery that comprises the main focus of this study thus continued but also reworked its old world precedents; its novelty should not be exaggerated or underplayed. What was true sociologically regarding the relationship between old and new world slavery also held for the continued but reworked ideological mechanisms justifying slavery.[39]

The closing date of the study's period, 1800, is arbitrary and could easily be pushed later. From the perspective of the Atlantic slave system, the termination of the early modern world was particularly unclear. I wanted to avoid the false premise that abolitionism and full legal emancipation changed everything for slaves or their owners, and so I ended my treatment before the full implementation of the latter but while the former had already begun to assert itself. The day-to-day lives of slaves changed hardly at all, despite transformations in Euro-American discourse regarding the propriety or humaneness of slavery. Frank J. Klingberg, for instance, noted about the eighteenth century that "[h]umanitarianism in the course of a century shifted from the acceptance of the view that the Negro could be a Christian and a slave to the more radical position that slavery was contrary to the Christian spirit and therefore that emancipation was necessary."[40] Jamaica, for example, passed general amelioration laws in 1787, but many of these laws remained barely implemented, while others sought more to make slavery "look better" than to improve slave conditions. Discussing Surinam, sociologist R. A. J. van Lier argued that while "the number of humane slave owners increased in the nineteenth century under the influence of the Enlightenment and liberalism, . . . neither of these two currents brought about any drastic changes in the slave colony."[41]

The slave trade and slavery continued unabated throughout the period covered herein, temporary and local fluctuations notwithstanding. In 1776, six of the newly declared United States, among them Delaware, banned the

importation of Africans. Massachusetts enacted a statute banning slave trading sometime prior to 1789. In Jamaica, the trading of slaves continued at full steam until the abolition of the slave trade throughout the English empire in 1807. Imports of slaves into Surinam were prohibited only in 1808, although the Dutch decision to end completely trading in slaves "did not stem from a national debate, but was imposed by Britain."[42] Legal abolition of the slave trade to Mexico came in 1817. The Bey of Tunis agreed to prohibit the import and export of slaves in 1842, an action taken in turn by the Ottoman regime in 1857. England became the first industrial country to legislate the emancipation of its slaves in 1833. Slavery "was not abolished in Portugal until 1869, though the freed slaves constituted a legal class up to 1878. In Spain the importation of slaves from the colonies was prohibited in 1836. In France, the emancipation of slaves was decreed in 1818, while in Sicily Moslem slaves still existed in 1812."[43]

Changes in plantation management and technology continued to be minor until well into the nineteenth century. On Surinamese sugar plantations, the introduction of water mills came "only gradually during the eighteenth century," steam mills were "introduced around 1815," and large-scale mechanization "only gained momentum around 1850."[44] This same decade found Georgia rice plantation owner Charles Manigault quite ambivalent about "his new, labor-saving tidal-powered mechanical thresher, with which his slaves seemingly refused to cooperate."[45] Despite late-eighteenth-century attempts to increase plantation efficiency, only beginning in the 1830s did plantation slavery in the southern United States fall under the scrutiny and sway of "scientific" reform efforts to manage slaves and plantations systematically, mechanistically.[46]

Administrative changes likewise failed to have much impact, if any, until the second half of the nineteenth century. The Surinamese "plantocracy" continued to rule the colony even after the introduction of a constitution in 1865. The first attempt to eliminate the influence of landowners on the administration of Surinam came in 1828, and claimed only short-lived success.[47]

Indeed, the passage of the early modern into the late modern world might be seen not in the rise of humanism and enlightenment but in an opposite trend born of the same rise of reason, the formation of a scientifically buttressed system of racial hierarchy. Regarding Jews and Blacks, the long eighteenth century proved to be a liminal epoch, during which Sephardic Jews firmly implanted themselves in this new Atlantic world system. Partially, this movement, centripetal or centrifugal depending on one's perspective, manifested itself in the falling away of the Jewish worlds characterized by the centrality of Hebrew-language and halakhic discourse. The contours of this incremental rupture shed light on the trajectory of Jewish assimilation into "the West," as well as on the power and spread of a peculiarly Atlantic discourse of race, not

so much from dominant majorities to subaltern minorities as *among* ethnic and religious groups all playing the game of self-advancement, if not survival.

Still, I am convinced by Michael Bernstein's arguments about the dangers of writing the past from the perspective of its future, of early modern Jewish history in light of the Nazi murder of European Jewry or of Black history from the perspective of late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century scientific racism.[48] I have tried, almost excruciatingly, to avoid writing the period of my study as if it led inevitably to these two tragedies. The arguments of Bruno Latour against seeing the "modern" age as somehow inherently different and more advanced led me to similar conclusions and efforts.[49] The common linear and progressive narrative posits the rise of Enlightenment humanism, writing from a perspective of achievement. But such political edens, in thought or practice, seem all too delicate, rare, and brief. Analyzing violence, power, and exclusion means following traces beyond labels such as "liberal," "medieval," or "religious."

In many ways, I read a remarkable stasis in Jewish and general discourse about Blacks. Yet I am not seeking to produce a structuralist or determinist perspective; social relations and discursive images have specific local causes and variations of incalculable complexity, which cannot be predicted in advance based on universal laws. The internal domain of any religious culture is heterogeneous. To call both Alonso de Sandoval and Voltaire elements of "Christian discourse," as I do, may strain the bounds of terminological usefulness, although I endeavor to specify the particular segments of this discourse as I discuss them. The absence of extensive comparative analysis results only from the fact that while attendant to external transformations and their significance, readers will quickly note from my vocabulary and approach that this study is written from within the discipline of Jewish history. It is usual to segregate Jewish and Black histories from "general" European history. This study of Jews in the Mediterranean and Atlantic worlds will, it is hoped, contribute to the "normalization" of their history into these geopolitical histories. Despite their Otherness, Jews were active participants in the formation of the cultures in which they lived and suffered, especially in the Atlantic world. I hope, however, that this investigation will also make some contributions toward the historiography of Blacks in their own diaspora and of the Atlantic slave system, especially as much of the material herein has never before been published in English, or at all. In particular, the thorough tracing I attempt of the textual and social vicissitudes of the early modern formation of the Atlantic racial system through the lens of its Sephardic subculture better reveals some of the dialectics – between continental metropoles and their colonies, between "pure" theory and quotidian social administration – that informed this development.

One reader called this study "baroque," a term I will wield as a laurel and program for several reasons. The "baroque" style of presentation reflects on

the one hand the quintessentially Baroque origin of modern racial thought, a theme picked up by Robin Blackburn and in perfect fitting with the general thesis of José Antonio Maravall.[50] The cornucopia of microhistories and the plethora of textual examples to follow also reflect a certain preemptive exhaustiveness summoned by the contentious nature of the topic of Black–Jewish relations.[51] Presenting the contentious quality of the original material as such serves as a way of coping with – I do not say harmonizing – the necessity of grasping its conflicting and conflicted interpretation. The riot of particularity on paper does greater justice, to my mind, to the irreducibility of historical events. Throughout, I endeavor to leave unresolved the tensions and gaps of the multiple statements and acts that constitute the object of my attention. In each, one sees the local negotiations of general and diffuse cultural themes, constructing an endless set of attempts to work out the meaning of Whiteness, Blackness, Jewishness, servitude, and freedom.

This study for the most part follows a chronological framework. Within each rough period, particular themes are treated in separate chapters or chapter subsections. The analysis of Chapter 1 centers on the figure and writings of the fifteenth-century writer Isaac or Yitsḥak Abravanel. Through his passages regarding Blacks, I glance at medieval discourse in order to assess the lack of significant change in early modern Jewish discourse. Here I balance Abravanel's generic images of Black figures, mostly plagiarized from earlier sources, with possible influences from fifteenth-century developments in the trading of Black slaves, concluding that in Abravanel's case, factors such as class may have played a significant role in the construction of his statements.

Chapter 2 provides a brief survey of Jewish slave owning from the perspective of law, both non-Jewish and Jewish, and from the perspective of social reality. The Jewish ownership of slaves was continually contested, yet early modern colonial pragmatics dictated that this theological reluctance remain ignored in practice.

In Chapter 3, I turn to a cultural analysis of social interactions between Jews and Blacks in the Mediterranean and in Europe. Several fragments of textual and archival materials, treating Jewish masters and their Black maidservants, serve as a springboard for assessing certain facets of "old world" Jewish slaveholding and the apparently undifferentiated place of Blacks within it.

In Chapter 4, I trace the topos of the Kushite wife of Moshe in Jewish discourse before the eighteenth century. This figure provided an opportunity for various rabbis to elaborate images of Blacks that were strongly gendered and heavily eroticized.

The fifth chapter continues the discussion of textual images from before the eighteenth century, now of Blacks or Kushites more generally. The mostly

negative, hardly innovative statements to be found in Jewish discourse do not significantly differ from those appearing in the larger discourse about Blacks. These passages can only with difficulty, if at all, be linked to the actual social presence of Blacks.

Chapter 6 explores some early modern instances in the cross-cultural genealogy of the curse of Ham, showing its general insignificance in early modern Jewish discourse and its relative stasis as a trope, both signs that the notion of this curse played little role in the Jewish culture of this period and that what presence it did have reflected an internal and abstract rabbinic conversation, rather than contemporary social realities.

In Chapter 7, I look at a cluster of moments in the invention of Jewish Whiteness in the seventeenth-century western Sephardic diaspora, especially in Amsterdam. Here, for the first time, one can trace a specific cultural impact due to the presence of Blacks within Jewish society. The chapter's first section covers the decline of the circumcision of slaves in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a decline reflecting an increasing discomfort with the religious absorption of slaves, now mostly Black, on the part of western Sephardic Jews, themselves uneasy about their own status vis-à-vis Whiteness. The theme of the chapter's second section comprises Jewish and non-Jewish views of Jewish darkness.

Chapter 8 begins in earnest coverage of social interactions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, perhaps the height of Jewish participation in the Atlantic world system, in an effort to test the significance of the relations between discourse and practice. This chapter continues the coverage of the previous chapter, laying out the communal legislation constructing and reflecting the Jewish response, as it were, to racial anxieties in Sephardic Amsterdam. The chapter's second section investigates a fascinating instantiation of Sephardic Whiteness, a result of a late-seventeenth-century visit of some Amsterdam Sephardim to their newfound cousins in Cochin, India.

In Chapter 9, I begin a series of thematic studies of strictly "new world" themes in Jewish slaveholding and Black–Jewish relationships in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. I analyze several practices or sites of master–slave interaction – the circumcision/conversion, the naming, and the manumission of slaves belonging to Jews – in an attempt to determine more about the alleged Jewish identities of the slaves belonging to Jewish masters. The variety of evidence reveals only a minimal exposure to Jewish concepts and practices among slaves and the general nonintegration of slaves into the religion of their masters.

In Chapter 10, I resume the exploration of Jewish discourse about Blacks, bringing it "into the Enlightenment" following on my discussion about the social realities of Jewish slaveholding. I show the minimal impact that the culture of Atlantic slavery had on Jewish discourse regarding Blacks east of the Atlantic, which remained for the most part steeped in traditional tropes.

In colonial Jewish discourse, one finds again a high degree of similitude between Jewish and non-Jewish images of Blacks, both of which presented overwhelmingly negative depictions.

Though of book length, this study is very much an essay, in the old sense of the word, meaning an attempt. Not only because it delves into frequently uncharted areas, I have doubtlessly made the consequent number of mistakes, which readers are invited to report to me.

A few final notes on terminology and stylistics. Where I do mention members of the population known variously as New Christians, Conversos, Marranos or crypto-Jews, I follow the definition of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, who argued that those individuals and families maintaining Jewish allegiance or practice "were a *part* of the New Christian group, but were not coextensive with it."[52] Therefore, I use "crypto-Jew" or "Marrano" to indicate an individual with actively and consciously "Jewish" or "crypto-Jewish" loyalties or practices. By use of "Converso" or "New Christian," I refer to an individual only in a neutral sociological sense as a descendant of forcibly or willingly converted Jews, without implying anything about his or her personal ideology or allegiances.

I capitalize Black and White as nominal terms for kinds of human beings. This is to emphasize their conceptual, socially constructed character; obviously, there is no such thing as black or white skin. I prefer the artificiality of capital letters to the constant use of scare quotation marks. I have chosen to leave "mulatto" and cognate terms uncapitalized, though they were no less a social construct, in deference to the thorny question of mulatto identity until the eighteenth century and its dissipation by the twentieth century. Although I at times identify Blacks and mulattos separately, for convenience I mostly collapse all "people of color" into the category of Blacks.

All translations are my own unless otherwise noted. Biblical quotations in English are generally based on *The JPS Torah Commentary* (1989), but have been reworked where necessary.

When I capitalize the term "Rabbinic" it is with the intention of denoting the rabbis of the period of the composition of the classical post-biblical Jewish texts and their work: the Mishnah, the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds, and the collections of midrashim, dating very roughly from the first century to the ninth. When not capitalized, "rabbinic" refers sociologically to personalities and intellectual elements stemming from and belonging to the class of rabbis within the Jewish world throughout later history.

For Hebrew names and figures from the Hebrew Bible I have chosen to transliterate the original form. Thus, Moshe is Moses, Ya'akov is Jacob, and so on. I do this not out of fawning literalism or religious fundamentalism but in