

Presenter: Florette Cohen, College of Staten Island

Title: **“Caribbean Jewry: A model of tolerance or assimilation?”**

Panel: Modern History

The term “Great American melting pot” has been in use since the late 1700’s (McDonald, 2007). The American ideology of multiculturalism and assimilation drew many ethnicities and religions to its shores in search of political and religious freedoms. Jews unsurprisingly sought refuge and hope for new lives in the United States. It is therefore surprising that the oldest Jewish community in the Western Hemisphere established in 1639 was in fact established outside the U.S. in the small coastal town of Paramibo, Suriname (South America). Equally astonishing is the fact that several Caribbean Islands established thriving Jewish communities yet reported no incidents of anti-Semitism. For most prejudice theorists this is an enigma. It is difficult to explain a lack of prejudice, specifically anti-Semitism for a people who have been the targets of prejudice wherever they resided for over 2000 years. This presentation therefore has several goals. First, it outlines the history of the Jewish migration to various Caribbean Islands. Second, it investigates various accounts of the lives of Jews in the Caribbean as well as their disappearance. Last, it introduces a psycho-social theoretical approach into the lack of anti-Semitism experienced by Caribbean Jewry in a world where anti-Semitism has always been so pervasive.