

Contact: Darcy Maher, 732-406-6584; Email: dbmbildner@comcast.net
February 9, 2024 / FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Rutgers Bildner Center Wins NJCH Grant for Symposium, “Black Americans, Jewish Americans: Historical Intersections, Collisions, and Passings,” and Public Programming

NEW BRUNSWICK/PISCATAWAY, N.J. – Nancy Sinkoff, professor of history and Jewish studies and the academic director of the Rutgers Bildner Center, has had a longstanding interest in themes of racial and ethnic “passing” for Black and Jewish Americans. After the murder of George Floyd, the attack on the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, and the rampage of white supremacists in Charlottesville, Virginia, she and colleague Donovan L. Ramon—a Rutgers alumnus who is now assistant professor of African-American and English literature at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville—felt an urgency to explore the shared history of discrimination against Black and Jewish Americans.

Sinkoff and Ramon have organized an interdisciplinary symposium, “Black Americans, Jewish Americans: Historical Intersections, Collisions, and Passings,” which will be held March 4 to 5 at Rutgers–New Brunswick and engage a diverse group of scholars of literature, history, and philosophy. The symposium and associated public programming (see below) have been made possible by an action grant from the New Jersey Council for the Humanities, a state partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Additional funding comes from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, Rutgers University Equity and Inclusion, and the Rutgers Institute for the Study of Global Racial Justice.

A public program, “Not Quite White in Fiction and Film: Laura Z. Hobson’s *Gentleman’s Agreement* and Nella Larsen’s *Passing*,” will be held Monday, March 4, at 7:30 p.m. at the Douglass Student Center, 100 George Street, New Brunswick. Professor Rachel Gordan (University of Florida) and Professor Donovan Ramon will discuss these critically-acclaimed novels about racial and ethnic passing, as well as their adaptations for the screen, in a program moderated by film and cultural critic Gene Seymour. Supported by a gift from the Karma Foundation, in memory of Abram Matlofsky, this panel discussion is free and open to the public. Advance registration is required at **BildnerCenter.Rutgers.edu**. Free campus parking is available. A two-part virtual book club led by Professor Ramon will be held in June with a focus on Philip Roth’s *The Human Stain* and Nella Larsen’s *Passing*. (Details TBA.)



The Allen and Joan Bildner Center for the Study of Jewish Life connects Rutgers University with the community through public lectures, symposia, Jewish communal initiatives, cultural events, and teacher training in Holocaust education.