



# Messianism, Secrecy and Mysticism: A New Interpretation of Early American Jewish Life

*Laura Arnold Leibman*

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Winner of the 2012 Jordan Schnitzer Book Award in the Category of Cultural Studies and Media Studies, and in January 2013 a winner of a National Jewish Book Award in the category of American Jewish Studies, *Messianism, Secrecy and Mysticism* offers a new approach to the study of Jews in the New World. The book focuses on the objects of everyday life that were used and created by Jews, such as ritual baths, food, gravestones, portraits, furniture, as well as the synagogue. By uncovering these objects and exposing the common culture of the Jewish Atlantic world, it provides a fresh understanding of a crucial era in Jewish and American history. Messianism and secrecy were two keys to this shared culture. The Jews of the Atlantic world believed that the physical and spiritual could - and would - be united through the Messiah. They were deeply messianic and their belief permeated their visual and religious ethos. *Messianism, Secrecy and Mysticism* presents new insights about the origins of Jewish American messianism, helping readers better understand messianism in contemporary American society. It charts the shared culture of these Jews who lived in the port towns in the Caribbean and on both sides of the Atlantic, and author Laura Arnold Leibman argues that thinking about Judaism as an embodied religion is key to understanding their culture. *Messianism, Secrecy and Mysticism* makes early Jewish American history entertaining, accessible, and interesting to general readers, as well as to academic audiences. A companion website contains thousands of photographs of material culture from throughout the Jewish Atlantic world, as well as study guides for using the images - <http://cdm.reed.edu/cdm4/jewishatlanticworld/> \*\*\* "Leibman has written an extremely ambitious and significantly innovative study of Jewish colonial history. Through combining the study of what she describes as 'material biography' and Jewish religious beliefs centering on messianism, the author deciphers and retells the story of Jewish life in early America with energy and originality. Highly recommended." - Choice, January 2013, Vol. 50, No. 5 \*\*\* Featured in 'Outstanding Academic Titles', a prestigious list of publications for the year 2013. - Choice, January 2014, Vol. 51, No. 5

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