



## Dissertation Abstract

---

### **The Archaeology of Cassipora Creek: Jewish Identity Formation in Colonial Suriname**

**Author:** [Simon Goldstone](#), *University of Florida, Department of Anthropology*

Not far from Paramaribo, the capital of Suriname, in an overgrown section of jungle lie the remains of an unlikely community: a 17th -century settlement established by Sephardic Jewish settlers. Many of these early colonists were, or were the descendants of, Spanish and Portuguese conversos. Granted communal autonomy and unprecedented privileges (e.g., freedom to own land and slaves, right to form their own militia), the Surinamese Jewish community flourished for over a century. Because Jews occupied liminal positions in Dutch society, they were often at the center of debates surrounding citizenship and national belonging, both in Europe and in the colonies. Yet, their contested legal position in the colonies provided the context for them to construct their communal identity in new ways. Burgeoning ideas of whiteness were embraced by Jewish colonists in Suriname who sought to align themselves with non-Jewish, white colonists and to secure their tenuous legal position in Dutch colonial society. This dissertation explores how the Surinamese Jewish community constructed their communal identity around religious practice, notions of citizenship and national belonging, and the concept of whiteness. It also examines the contributions that Jewish colonists made toward the expansionist projects of European imperial powers during the 13 early modern period. To accomplish this, historical, archaeological, and remote sensing data from Cassipora Creek and Jodensavanne, the two 17th -century Portuguese Jewish settlements on the frontiers of Suriname, are analyzed. These data are used to create a long-term plan for future research at these sites aimed toward investigating the roles of Jewish colonists in European imperial expansion in the Americas, understanding Jewish racial ideologies and notions of whiteness in the early modern period, and highlighting the experiences of black and mixed-race Jews living in a plantation society.

*This dissertation abstract was submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Florida in Summer, 2021.*