Foreword

As a child of Ashkenazi Jewish Holocaust survivors, I grew up in a Queens, New York shtetl, seeing the world divided not only between Jews and non-Jews, but between post-war Jewish immigrants who referred to themselves as “greeners” and their American-born children. Yet there was another world of Jewish immigrants who were little known to Ashkenazi offspring such as myself—a Sephardic and Mizrahi world that was experiencing distinct yet similar battles between the preservation of their unique Sephardic heritage and their desire to achieve the American dream in a place where fellow Jews—let alone Christians—were not always so accepting of their cultural and religious differences.

This volume explores the myriad ways in which Sephardic immigrant communities have engaged in the timeless struggle of how to remain distinct yet successful Americans. From geographic to linguistic to religious to artistic struggles involving the multiplicity of identities that mark immigrant communities, this volume examines how Jews from Rhodes, Morocco, Iran, Iraq and Egypt have experienced many of the same challenges that Ashkenazi Jews contended with for decades. While Hollywood may have built an image of the American Jew as a bespectacled Woody Allen who is seen as a black hat Hassid in the eyes of his gentile in-laws, the reality of the landscape of American Jewry today is much different than the schmaltz we are fed by the movies. The USC Casden Institute is delighted to present a volume that explores and celebrates the trials and achievements of the Sephardic and Mizrahi communities of America. I owe a special thanks to Dr. Saba Soomekh for her tremendous work as guest-editor and to the Tarica and Amado families for their dedication to the advancement of Sephardic Studies as an academic field and to the steadfast friendship they have shown the USC Casden Institute over the years. May we grow from strength to strength “Mashallah”!

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