**The “Coops”: Bronx Mutual Housing for Leftist Immigrants (VIRTUAL)**

[Jewish Community Library Events](https://jewishlearning.works/event-category/jcl-events/) [FREE event, registration required.]

10 Apr 2022 Sunday – 2:00 PM PDT-3:00 PM PDT

**Presented by Elissa Sampson**

The Bronx United Workers Cooperatives, known as the Coops, were part of a mutual housing movement that sustained immigrants before and during the Depression. In the 1920s, the Coops raised money through bonds and other financial mechanisms to enable mostly immigrant Yiddish-speaking families—who were primarily, but not exclusively leftist—to build multiple high-quality buildings in a relatively undeveloped area of the Bronx. The Coops were proximate to Bronx Park with access to the Bronx River and the then free Botanic Gardens. The availability of public transportation allowed poorer immigrants who primarily worked in the garment trade to dream big for themselves and their offspring in creating a world that was full of Yiddish, leftist politics, and good, affordable housing.

Dr. Elissa Sampson will discuss unique features of the Coops, such as resident employment and its no-eviction policy during the Depression, and highlight the rich, warm childhoods remembered by former residents she has interviewed. Her presentation will incorporate illustrated archival materials, including maps and photos of the Coops and the surrounding community, as well as an excerpt from the 2008 PBS-aired film on the Coops, *At Home in Utopia,* and will address similar cooperative housing projects. She will discuss what went right and wrong there—including the unnecessary movement into bankruptcy—with lessons for advocates of affordable housing today.

**Dr. Elissa Sampson** is an urban geographer who studies how people actively use the past to create new spaces of migration, memory, activism, and heritage. She is a visiting scholar in Cornell’s Jewish studies program, where she teaches courses on Jewish cities, including New York’s Lower East Side and Jerusalem. She has worked to digitize a section of the confiscated archives of the Yiddish speaking immigrant Left housed at Cornell’s Kheel Center, Catherwood Library. Sampson is the author of “Revisiting Their Words: An Archive of the Jewish Immigrant Left” in *Cultura Judeo-progresista en las Américas* (forthcoming, Winter 2022) and of entries on the Jewish People’s Fraternal Order and Jewish Americans in the *Encyclopedia of the American Left* (Oxford University Press, also forthcoming, Winter 2022). She has been featured in films and programs pertaining to Jewish immigrants and their institutions and businesses.

 *Co-sponsored by* [*Workers Circle/Arbeter Ring of Northern California*](https://www.circle.org/northern-california).