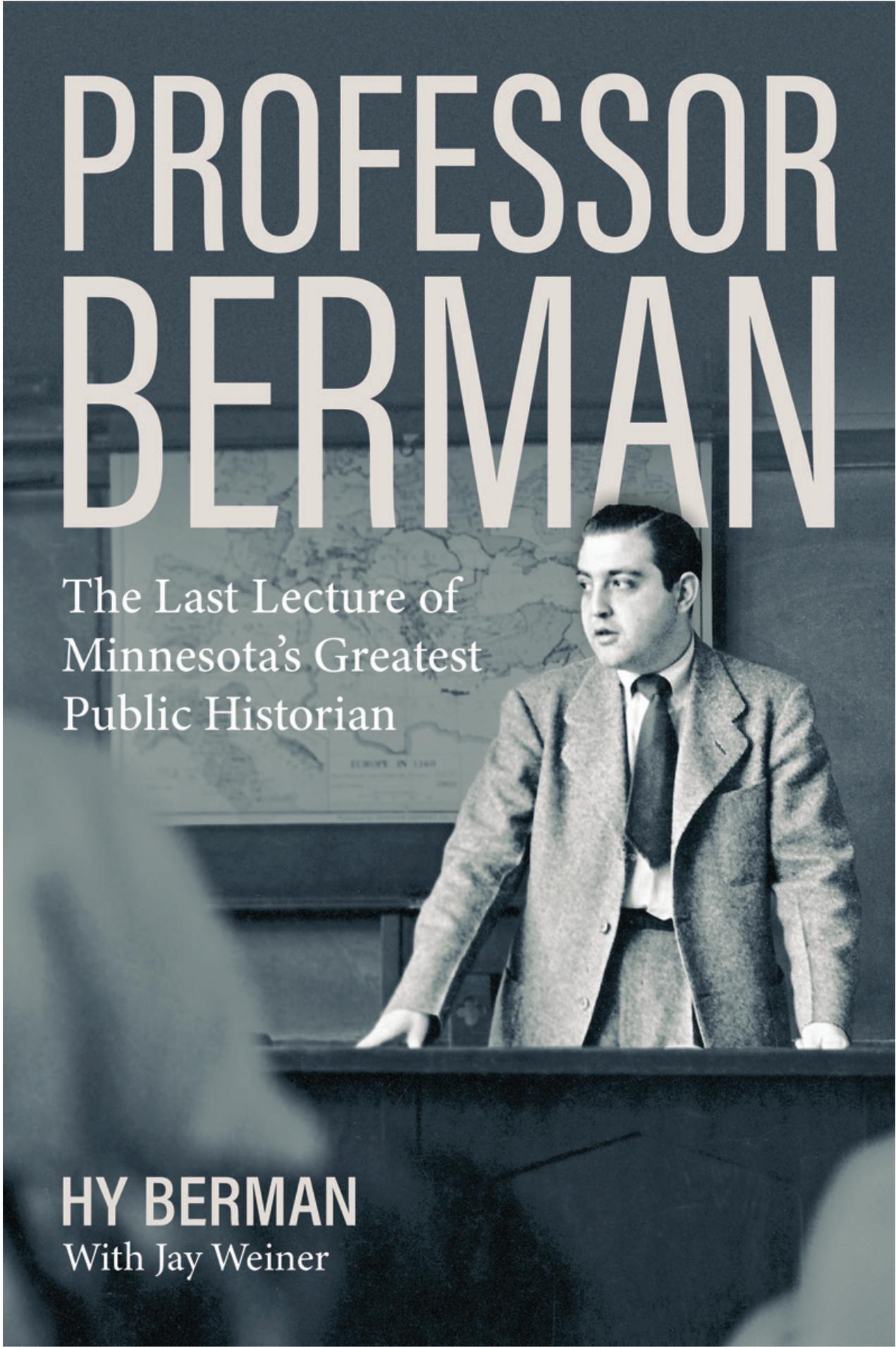


# PROFESSOR BERMAN



The Last Lecture of  
Minnesota's Greatest  
Public Historian

**HY BERMAN**

With Jay Weiner

# A BOOK DISCUSSION GUIDE

for *PROFESSOR BERMAN: The Last Lecture of Minnesota's Greatest Public Historian*

## PRAISE FOR THE BOOK

“Professor Hy Berman’s ‘Last Lecture’ is an incredible lesson for anyone interested in Minnesota and Jewish history. His stories are captivating, and details of his personal relationships, conversations, and experiences bring alive facts of history we all learned but never truly understood. This book should be required reading for any student of history—that is, each and every one of us.”

—MARCIA ZIMMERMAN, Alvin and June Perlman Senior Rabbinic Chair, Temple Israel, Minneapolis

“We know more about Minnesota’s history because of Hy Berman. If you watched Hy on television—and especially if you didn’t—you will learn a lot from this book.”

—ERIC ESKOLA, co-host of Twin Cities Public Television’s *Almanac*

“A product of the Yiddish-speaking, red-diaper-baby Bronx, Hy Berman became the embodiment of what is best in Minnesota and its land-grant university. He lived, taught, modeled, and preached egalitarianism, public citizenship, intellectual honesty, and humility. Jay Weiner has done a great service to both history and letters in elegantly weaving this autobiography from the brilliant, vivid miscellany of writings and interviews that Berman left behind at his death. Anyone interested in labor history, higher education, the Jewish Left, and so many other subjects in Berman’s questing mind will be grateful for this memoir.”

—SAMUEL G. FREEDMAN, author of *Letters to a Young Journalist*

## ABOUT THIS BOOK

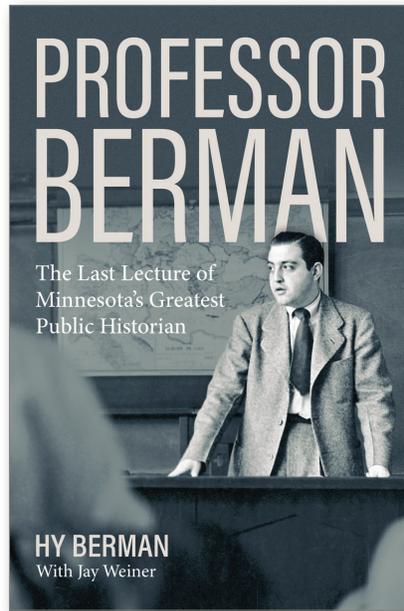
Professor Hy Berman (1925–2015) was, by most accounts, the face of public history in Minnesota for many decades—a peerless political observer and labor historian, popular lecturer and university professor, and familiar presence on the Twin Cities PBS show *Almanac*, dependably interpreting Minnesota history—and making some of his own. In *Professor Berman: The Last Lecture of Minnesota's Greatest Public Historian*, readers encounter the Hy Berman audiences and students loved, telling stories as only he could—stories that are at once a close-up view of Minnesota history and a conversational self-portrait of a man who often found himself in the middle of that history even as it was unfolding.

Berman came by his passion for history and politics naturally: as the “red diaper baby” of left-wing, Yiddish-speaking Polish immigrants in New York. With humor, sharp wit, and the insight of wisdom acquired over ninety years, he takes us back to that heady 1920s milieu that set him on a path that would one day lead to, among other adventures, a brush with the House Un-American Activities Committee, a role in a black student takeover on the University of Minnesota campus, and a lifelong alliance with Minnesota’s “Happy Warrior” for civil rights, Hubert Humphrey.

Featuring an all-star cast of the state’s politicians (from Humphrey to Rudy Perpich, Harold Stassen, Arne Carlson, and Jesse Ventura) and full of engaging, often surprising anecdotes, Berman’s “last lecture” describes a rich life devoted to teaching that reached far beyond the classroom—and that found the professor translating history for an avid TV audience, helping to appoint the state’s first female Supreme Court justice, and testifying at Minnesota’s landmark tobacco trial. Edited and with an Introduction and Afterword by long-time Twin Cities journalist Jay Weiner, Hy Berman’s final lecture is a strong and powerful contribution to Minnesota’s story.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does a person's background influence his perspective on history? How did Hy Berman's upbringing influence the historian he became?
2. Why do you think Hy Berman, the son of left-wing Jewish immigrants, related so well to Minnesota and the values of the state?
3. At one point in his life, Hy Berman was a committed Communist fellow traveler. But he turned away from that. What were the many factors that led to his rejection of the Communist Party?
4. What are your thoughts or opinions of a college professor who becomes part of the "kitchen cabinet" of an elected official, as Professor Berman did with Governor Rudy Perpich? Is there danger in that for the university and the professor's credibility?
5. Berman and Perpich had a close and then a contentious relationship. What did their falling out say about each of them?
6. Professor Berman's analysis of anti-Semitism in Minnesota is well known. Do you think anti-Semitism lingers in the state today? Can you imagine a candidate exploiting anti-Semitism today in a Minnesota election campaign as was inserted in the campaign of 1938?
7. Does academia have a place for a Hy Berman personality today? Is there too much pressure on aspiring professors to publish or perish and not to relate in an open way with the public as he did?
8. Did you lose respect for Berman when you learned that he testified for the tobacco companies in the State of Minnesota's lawsuit claiming the companies defrauded the public around smoking's health dangers?
9. Which of Professor Berman's stories is most memorable to you? Which one made you laugh the hardest?
10. Think of Hy Berman and then think of five adjectives that describe him. Why did you select those five? What stories that he told triggered those adjectives?



HY BERMAN (1925–2015) was one of the most popular professors at the University of Minnesota, where he taught in the history department from 1961 until 2004.

JAY WEINER is author of *Stadium Games: Fifty Years of Big League Greed and Bush League Boondoggles* and *This Is Not Florida: How Al Franken Won the Minnesota Senate Recount*, both published by the University of Minnesota Press.

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## MORE INFO:

[z.umn.edu/profberman](http://z.umn.edu/profberman)