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Teaching Jewish American History in the Classroom

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What Is National History Day®?

National History Day® (NHD) is a nonprofit organization that creates opportunities for teachers and students to engage in historical research. NHD is not a predetermined, by-the-book program but rather an innovative curriculum framework. Students learn history by selecting topics of interest and launching into year-long research projects. The mission of NHD is to improve the teaching and learning of history in middle and high school. The most visible vehicle is the NHD Contest.

When studying history through historical research, students and teachers practice critical inquiry, asking questions of significance, time, and place. History students become immersed in a detective story. Beginning in the fall, students choose a topic related to the annual theme and conduct extensive primary and secondary research. After analyzing and interpreting their sources and drawing conclusions about their topics' significance in history, students present their work in original papers, exhibits, performances, websites, or documentaries. These projects are entered into competitions in the spring at local, affiliate, and national levels, where professional historians and educators evaluate them. The program culminates at the national competition held each June at the University of Maryland at College Park.

Each year, National History Day uses a theme to provide a lens through which students can examine history. The annual theme frames the research for students and teachers alike. It is intentionally broad enough to allow students to select topics from any place (local, national, or world) and any period in history. Once students choose their topics, they investigate historical context, historical significance, and the topic's relationship to the theme. Research can be conducted at libraries, archives, and museums; through oral history interviews; and by visiting historic sites.

NHD benefits students and teachers. For students, NHD allows self-direction of their learning. Students select topics that match their interests. NHD provides program expectations and guidelines for students, but the research journey is unique to each project. Throughout the year, students develop essential skills and foster intellectual curiosity. Through this process, they gain critical-thinking and problem-solving skills to manage and use information now and in the future.

The classroom teacher is a student's greatest ally. NHD supports teachers by providing instructional materials and hosting workshops at local, affiliate, and national levels. Many teachers find that bringing the NHD model to their classroom encourages students to watch for examples of the theme and to identify connections in their study of history across time. To learn more, visit nhd.org.

Editors' Note

"What is the difference between a bookkeeper in New York's garment district and a Supreme Court Justice? Just one generation, my mother's life and mine bear witness. Where else but America could that happen?"

-Ruth Bader Ginsburg

The history of Jews in America is a story of continuity and change, rejection and acceptance, departures and arrivals. The spirit of this volume is encapsulated by the above quote by U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, as she reflected on the opportunities and challenges faced by Jewish women in the United States. The story of her family, of course, is not the full picture of American Jews, as every experience is a tile in the American Jewish mosaic. It does, however, speak to the feelings of many American Jews about the unprecedented opportunities once granted to their immigrant relatives and forebears, who came to the United States for a better life.

Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg stands on a stool in her office and reviews a book, 1994. Library of Congress (2022630265).

Her words underscore some of the central themes of this resource: the rich diversity of Jewish identities and experiences, and the many ways Jewish Americans have shaped, and have been shaped by, the culture and history of the United States.

Tasked with assembling this volume, we set out to demonstrate an expansive Jewish history that aims to make the vastness of Jewish American experiences as accessible as possible to NHD teachers. We hope that you come away with both an understanding of the diversity of Jewish life and an awareness of the role that antisemitism has played in Jewish history: a part, but not the entirety of, the American Jewish story.

We would like to thank all the authors and educators who contributed their time, effort, and expertise to this collection of lesson plans and articles. In addition, we recognize the following advisors to this project, all of whom offered invaluable guidance: Samantha Baskind, Noralee Frankel, Jason Guberman, Gabrielle Roth, Jeffrey Veidlinger, and Rebecca Scharbach Wollenberg.

We are pleased to present this work as the second volume of *Moving Freedom Forward*, a series created by National History Day® (NHD). The series is part of NHD's *Expansive History Initiative*. The goal of this initiative is to bring the latest scholarship to teachers to help them teach American history in more expansive ways and increase access to the NHD program.

ORGANIZATION OF THE VOLUME

- **Establishing Historical Context** provides foundational materials that help establish historical context, including overviews of Jewish diversity, key moments in Jewish migration to the United States, and the importance of viewing Jewish American history within a global framework.
- **Teaching About Jewish American History** turns to pedagogy. Here, historians and educators offer insights into teaching about Jewish American history, from defining and understanding antisemitism, to addressing challenges in secular classrooms, to selecting compelling topics for student research projects.
- **Module One: Exploring Jewish Diversity on America's Shores** considers immigration, exclusion, disability, and the legislative forces that shaped Jewish American life, with a lesson focusing on colonial Georgia.
- **Module Two: Culture, Religion, and Community** examines Jewish influence in cultural and social movements, from the comic book industry to women's activism, and includes a lesson on Jewish artists and social realism.
- **Module Three: What Do Jews Make of America?** explores how Jewish Americans have navigated identity and civic participation, including military service, philanthropy, and mutual aid. A corresponding lesson highlights immigrant aid organizations.

Each of the three learning modules contains a lesson, ready for classroom use. These lessons are not designed to be comprehensive (no three lessons could cover the scope of Jewish American history), but instead provide models for teachers to develop their own lessons. Educators can visit nhd.org/expansivehistory to download copies of the lessons with the primary sources and supporting materials for classroom use.

Finally, we offer a **glossary** to support educators and students with clear definitions of key terms related to Jewish American history and the broader themes explored in this volume. In the first instance that they appear in the articles and lessons in this volume, readers will find the following terms in bold text and with a gold background, like this: **glossary term**.

Together, these materials offer educators a range of perspectives, primary sources, and strategies for deepening student understanding of Jewish American experiences as an integral part of U.S. history.

NHD wishes to thank the National Endowment for the Humanities for their generous support of this resource.

Miriam Eve Mora, Ph.D.
Krista Grensavitch, Ph.D.

Establishing Historical Context

Jewish America: A Landscape of Diversity

MIRIAM SOBRE, PH.D., ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT SAN ANTONIO

INTRODUCTION

Nearly eight million Jews reside in the United States.[1] Maybe you know some. Maybe you are one. Maybe you don't know you know any. Maybe you don't know you are one. This article is designed to help you learn more about Jewish people and the complexities of this ancient and diverse identity. Below, we provide a resource for understanding the various categories of ethnic, religious, and language groups. We also offer a timeline that traces the history of Jewish migration to the United States. At the end of this volume, you will also find a glossary. In the glossary, we offer basic definitions to assist readers. The terms included do not represent a complete list of terms relevant to Jewish American history, but are some of the most frequently used in this volume. In the first instance that they appear in the articles and lessons in this volume, readers will find the terms in bold text and with a gold background.

Two countries, Israel and the United States, account for about 82% of the global Jewish population. For most of their two-thousand-year history, the Jewish people have lived in **diaspora** communities, forced from their homeland due to circumstances beyond their control.2 Jews have been forced to leave their homelands for reasons including ethnicity, religion, genocide, and war. From roughly 590 BCE to the mid-twentieth century, Jews did not belong anywhere, moving around trying to find safety and acceptance.

Until the formal establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, nowhere had become a more complete and safer home for its Jewish population than the United States. That does not mean that Jews were fully accepted into all aspects of American life and culture, but it means that the United States was a primary destination for oppressed Jewish populations abroad.

Given the long history of the Jewish people, and the multitude of identities contained within that group, we are providing this article as both a reference point for understanding the terms throughout this teaching resource, and a sort of tip-of-the-iceberg overview of the complexities of teaching and understanding who our subject is, when we talk about Jews.3

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[1] Miriam S. Sobre, *Jewish-American Identity and Critical Intercultural Communication: Never Forget, Tikkun Olam, and Kindness to Strangers*, (Rowman & Littlefield, 2022). For more information about population estimates, see the American Jewish Population Project from Brandeis, ajpp.brandeis.edu/us_jewish_population_2020, or the Pew Research Center report titled "Jewish Americans in 2020," pewresearch.org/religion/2021/05/11/the-size-of-the-u-s-jewish-population/.

[2] R. Brubaker, "The 'Diaspora' Diaspora," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 28 (2006): 1-19.

[3] As this resource is focused on American Jewish history, there are global Jewish groups, languages, ethnicities, practices, foods, holidays, and more that are simply not discussed in this volume.

JEWISH DIVERSITY: THE BASICS

Jews are diverse in almost every way, especially in how they identify as being Jewish. It is hard to imagine just how diverse Jews are as they differ in appearance, language, tradition, and even in the ways they practice Judaism. Jewishness can be defined by ancestry and affiliation; there are Jews by birth and Jews by choice.

JEWISH RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS

Judaism is one of the oldest organized religions practiced today, tracing its roots over 2000 years. Like most organized religions, Judaism has different denominations, or groups within the religion, that follow different beliefs and practices. These Jewish denominations are often defined by how the Jewish scripture (including the Five Books of the Torah, the Talmud, and the rabbinic oral tradition) are translated into practice.[4]

- **Orthodox:** Defined by strict adherence to traditional Jewish law as interpreted by centuries of rabbinic authority, Orthodox Jews maintain practices like strict Shabbat observance and keeping kosher as central elements of religious life. About 10 percent of American Jews identify as Orthodox, but the community tends to have larger families and higher rates of religious retention. Unlike Reform or Conservative Judaism, it lacks a centralized leadership structure and so includes several distinct subgroups, including Haredi, Hasidic, Modern Orthodox, and Open Orthodox.
- **Conservative:** Positioning itself between Orthodox and Reform Judaism, the Conservative movement views Jewish law as binding but allows for a wide range of observance. The movement blends tradition with select modern adaptations, such as gender-egalitarian prayer and and flexible **Shabbat** driving, while maintaining more traditional stances on issues like **kashrut** and intermarriage.
- **Reform:** The largest Jewish denomination in the United States, the Reform movement emphasizes ethical values, social justice, and personal choice over strict adherence to Jewish law. Reform Judaism seeks to adapt tradition to modern life and progressive ideals.

[4] Globally there are many other forms of Jewish tradition and interpretation, many following non-rabbinic Judaism, which can be largely unrecognizable from the more common Jewish practices in the United States.

JEWISH ETHNIC DIVISIONS

As Jewish populations developed across the world in diaspora communities, there are subgroups within what is generally considered Jewish ethnicity. While these groups are the three dominant and most numerous in the United States, 150,000 additional Jews in the U.S. have other ethnic and racial backgrounds, including Beta Israel (Ethiopian), Italquim Jews (Roman or Italian), and Bukhari Jews (Central Asian).[5]

- **Ashkenazim:** (name derived from the biblical figure of Ashkenaz) Jews whose ancestors lived in Central and Eastern Europe (including France, Germany, Poland, and Russia). 85% of Jews living in the United States identify as Ashkenazi. Thus, the cultural and religious aspects of Judaism that most Americans tend to be familiar with come from Ashkenazim.
- **Mizrahim:** (name derived from the Hebrew word for East) Jews of Middle Eastern and North African descent, the largest communities being from Iraq (Babylonia), Iran (Persia), and Yemen. 250,000 Mizrahi Jews currently live in the United States.
- **Sephardim:** (name derived from the Hebrew word for the Iberian Peninsula) Jews of Spanish or Portuguese descent, cast out of Europe during the **Spanish Inquisition**. They were the first Jews to settle in the United States. There are currently around 300,000 Sephardi Jews living in the United States.

THE IMPACT OF DNA TESTING

The growing popularity of at-home DNA testing has led to more people discovering Jewish ancestry (and at times converting to Judaism), because DNA tests can help people identify Jewish ancestors they were unaware of, increasing interest in Judaism. For converts, this fits a narrative that converts to Judaism are lost Jews "returning to the fold." With this in mind, it is worth noting that there are more people with Jewish heritage than are recognized in global census data.[6]

JEWISH LANGUAGES IN THE UNITED STATES

Various languages have been spoken by Jews throughout the ages due to the many movements of a diaspora community. Often, these languages were created by combining multiple other languages, as Jews often needed to be able to identify one another but not be understood by non-Jews.[7] Aside from the three languages identified below, there are many more glossed or hybrid languages (most of which are endangered) that may be spoken by ethnic Jews in the United States and around the world.[8]

- **Hebrew:** A Semitic language spoken by ancient Israelites, used as the liturgical language of Judaism, and revived as a spoken language in the nineteenth century. Hebrew is the official language of Israel.

[5] Sergio DellaPergola, *Jewish Demographic Policies: Population Trends and Options in Israel and in the Diaspora*, (The Jewish People Policy Institute, 2011).

[6] To learn more, see Sobre, *Jewish-American Identity.*

[7] B. Spolsky and S.B. Benor, "Jewish Languages," in *The Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*, ed. Anne Anderson and E.K. Brown (Elsevier, 2006).

[8] For a helpful map from the Jewish Language Project, visit jewishlanguages.org/map.

- **Ladino:** Otherwise known as Judeo-Spanish, Ladino is a Romance language primarily spoken by Sephardi Jews. It is derived from Castilian Spanish, and incorporates elements of Hebrew, Turkish, and Aramaic.
- **Yiddish:** A language spoken primarily by Ashkenazi Jews, which combines elements of Hebrew, Jewish-French, Jewish-Italian, and various German dialects. When Yiddish-speaking Jews settled in Eastern Europe, Slavic elements were also incorporated into Yiddish.

ADDRESSING JEWISH DIVERSITY IN THE CLASSROOM

Why is this focus on diversity within Jewish life so important? Because when one group within the Jewish mosaic becomes the stand-in for all Jews, we end up with an incomplete and inaccurate idea of who Jews are. Given the dominance of Ashkenazi culture in the United States, some refer to this inaccurate representation as **Ashkenormativity**. Ashkenormativity is the bias that treats Ashkenazi culture as the default, often ignoring other Jewish traditions. Scholars and educators can combat this by telling a more expansive history.[9]

Educators should include content, lessons, and curricula that capture, or at least recognize, the vast diversity within and across Jewish communities. Indeed, this is a necessary practice for teaching and learning about any group of people in history.

Comic by Carol Isaacs, also known as The Surreal McCoy. In addition to her cartoon work, Isaacs is the author of *The Wolf of Baghdad*, a graphic memoir that traces her Iraqi-Jewish family's memories of their lost homeland.[10]

[9] The editors thank Jason Guberman for his contributions to this article, especially for his explanation of Ashkenormativity.

[10] Find out more about Carol Isaac's *The Wolf of Baghdad* at myriadeditions.com/books/the-wolf-of-baghdad/ and access a free reading and teaching guide at myriadeditions.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/WoB_Educators_Guide_UK_UPDATED.pdf. *The Cloak From Baghdad*, an adaptation of *The Wolf of Baghdad* for middle-grade readers, will be published by Kar-Ben Publishing in the fall of 2026.

JEWISH MIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES: A TIMELINE[11]

1492

The **Spanish Inquisition** took place from 1478 to 1834, and the 1492 Alhambra Decree expelled Jews from Spain and Portugal.[12]

1585

The first Jew arrived in the Roanoke Colony (in present-day Virginia). A metalworker from Bohemia (now the Czech Republic), Joachim Gans was recruited by Sir Walter Raleigh due to his talents in metallurgy. He eventually returned to Europe, where he was jailed for his religious beliefs.[13]

1654

A boat containing 23 Sephardic Jews from Recife, Brazil, landed in New Amsterdam (now New York City).[14] Governor Peter Stuyvesant adamantly opposed a permanent Jewish presence in his colony and planned to expel all Jews. After appealing to the directors of the Dutch West India company that ran the colony, Stuyvesant was instructed to permit them to remain, on the condition that the poor among them shall not become public charges. The so-called **Stuyvesant Promise** is often credited for initiating the 300-year tradition of charity that has become a mainstay of Jewish American life.

1730

The first North American **synagogue**, Congregation Shearith Israel, was constructed in New York City by 50 to 60 Spanish and Portuguese Jews, serving both Sephardic and Ashkenazic communities.

1820s–1880s

FIRST WAVE OF IMMIGRATION

Drawn by the religious freedom promised in the United States, many Ashkenazi Jews from Central Europe (Germany, Hungary, Romania) migrated in the mid-nineteenth century. These **migrants** were considered enlightened, progressive, and upwardly mobile, establishing the first Ashkenazi Reform congregations in the country. They often arrived and lived in New York, Baltimore, and Philadelphia. During this period, there was an almost hundred-fold increase in the Jewish population of the U.S. from 3,000 in 1820 to 300,000 in 1880.

1880s–1924

SECOND WAVE OF IMMIGRATION

After 1880, a second wave of Eastern European Jews arrived from Russia, Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, and elsewhere in eastern Europe, and migrated to the East Coast and the Midwest. Most of those who arrived as part of this wave of migrants settled in cities as working class, Yiddish-speaking migrants with strong networks of cultural, spiritual, voluntary, and social organizations. During this second wave, there was another massive increase of the Jewish population in the United States, this time a ten-fold increase from roughly 300,000 to roughly 3,500,000.

[11] For another helpful timeline, see "Timeline 1492-1695" from the Library of Congress's virtual exhibit titled *From Haven to Home: 350 Years of Jewish Life in America*, available at loc.gov/exhibits/haventohome/timeline/haven-timeline_0.html.

[12] W. Goetschel and A. Quayson, "Introduction: Jewish Studies and Postcolonialism," *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*, 3, no. 1 (2106): 1-9.

[13] G. C. Grassl, "Joachim Gans of Prague: The First Jew in English America," *American Jewish History*, 86, no. 2 (1998): 195-217.

[14] W. Klooster, "Communities of Port Jews and Their Contacts in the Dutch Atlantic World," *Jewish History*, 20, no. 2 (2006): 129-145.

1924

Congress passed the Johnson-Reed Act (also known as the Immigration Act of 1924), a federal law that limited the number of **immigrants** allowed into the United States based on nation of origin. By creating immigration **quotas**, this law dramatically reduced immigration numbers of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe. Jewish migration was reduced immediately by about 75%.

1939

When World War II began in Europe, the United States refused to admit a ship, the S.S. *St. Louis*, carrying over 900 Jewish refugees from Nazi atrocities. Also denied entry to Cuba, the ship returned to Europe, where many of the Jews on board were later murdered in the **Holocaust**.

1948

Israel was formally established as a Jewish State in 1948, ending the British Mandate control of Palestine and partitioning the land. After the state was declared, Israel was invaded by several Arab States, beginning the first Arab–Israeli War, which lasted nearly one year.

1965

The Immigration and Nationality Act (also known as the McCarran-Walter Act) is passed. The Johnson-Reed quota system was revised.

1967

Israel emerged victorious from the Six-Day War, and sparked a new and dramatic interest in the fledgling Jewish state within the American Jewish (and non-Jewish) imagination.[15]

1985–1990

Jewish migration from the Soviet Union increased as emigration restrictions under Mikhail Gorbachev's (the last leader of the Soviet Union) policies loosened, marking the start of a massive exodus that would continue throughout the 1990s.

2002

For the first time since the Colonial Era, census data indicated a decline in America's Jewish population.

2004

Jews celebrated 350 years of American Jewish history.

[15] For further reading on Israel in the American imagination, see Amy Kaplan's *Our American Israel*.

American Jewish History in a Global Context

HASIA DINER, PH.D., PROFESSOR EMERITA, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

The lives of Jews in American colonies before the United States declared independence in 1776 took place within a global context. Therefore, major developments in Jewish America, both past and present, need to be understood in relation to Jews across the globe as well as to world events.

First, and perhaps most important, it was not until 1930 that a majority of American Jews were born in the United States. Before then, most had immigrated from other places. In those places—the Netherlands and the Caribbean before the establishment of the United States, followed by the German-speaking lands of Central Europe, and later regions within the Austro-Hungarian, Czarist Russian, and Ottoman Empires—Jews endured significant political and social upheavals. Wars, economic disruptions, and, at times, brutal persecution forced millions to seek new homes. From the 1830s through the 1920s, over three million Jews migrated to the United States.[1]

Jews arrived in what would become the United States in 1654. From that time forward, they maintained deep and important ties with Jewish communities across the globe. In the early period, particularly through the 1820s, these connections were primarily economic. Jews in British North America (and later, the United States) engaged in trade with Jewish merchants in the Caribbean, England, the Netherlands, and beyond. In many cases, they formed business partnerships with other Jews across these regions. Known as **Sepharadim**, due to their roots in the Iberian Peninsula, they often married within their community, arranging matches for their children throughout the Sephardic **diaspora**. They also supported one another in times of need. For example, when New York's fledgling congregation, Shearith Israel, required **Torah** scrolls for religious worship in the 1680s, Jews in the British colony of Jamaica supplied them with the sacred texts.[2]

Like other **immigrants** to the United States, Jews left behind family and friends. About one-third of Jews from these regions emigrated to the United States, while the remaining two-thirds stayed behind. Despite the distance, they remained in contact. Advances in communication and transportation gradually made it easier for those in America to send messages and financial support to relatives facing economic hardship. Their letters often included news about life in America and, after the 1870s, steamship tickets to help family members reunite in their new homes.

[1] Hasia R. Diner, *The Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000* (University of California Press, 2004), 71-111.

[2] Eli Faber, *Volume I: A Time for Planting: The First Migration, 1654-1820* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

A photograph of young boys in New York City waiting for the Jewish paper, *Forwards*, to come off the press at 1:00 a.m. Library of Congress (2018677528).

A postcard with the text "A Happy New Year" written in English and Hebrew, published by the Hebrew Publishing Company between 1900 and 1920. Library of Congress (2004672480).

Jewish newspapers published in Europe and the Ottoman Empire contained information about America in general and about its Jews in particular. Jews living across the globe could read about the fate of the Jews who had **emigrated** to the United States. For the most part, those articles depicted America as a place with little **antisemitism** and where Jews were free to make a living and build communities as they wanted. This news, as it filtered to places around the globe, stimulated interest in and admiration of America, creating what was often referred to as "America fever," the burning desire of Jews in places with limited freedom and access to resources to immigrate.[3]

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

The following terms all describe people who move, but each highlights a different perspective or type of movement.

- **Emigrant:** someone who moves away from a country.
- **Immigrant:** someone arrives as a migrant to a different country. One must emigrate to immigrate, but the definitions distinguish who is in discussion in a particular nation and context.

[3] Tobias Brinkmann, *Between Borders: The Great Jewish Migration from Eastern Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2024).

The aid and communication that linked Jews in the United States with Jews abroad extended beyond family ties. Jewish immigrants from hundreds of towns in Eastern Europe—particularly in areas that became part of independent Poland after 1918—formed ***landsmanshaftn***, or hometown societies. Based in cities like New York and Chicago, these organizations provided support to immigrants from their communities while also regularly sending money to assist those who remained in their hometowns.[4]

The need to provide assistance became particularly acute with the outbreak of World War I, as Jews were trapped between warring armies. Many Jewish towns across the European continent were destroyed, and countless numbers of Jews found themselves homeless, fleeing one army or the other. In 1914, the *landsmanshaftn* in America, along with other American Jewish organizations, founded the American Jewish Joint Distribution Society (JDC). It collected millions of dollars to send back to assist fellow Jews in distant locations. This aid went not just to friends and family but to Jewish communities as a whole. Individual members of some *landsmanshaftn* traveled on fact-finding missions to assess the destruction and continuing needs of these communities. As an organization, it participated in the reconstruction of Jewish communities after the war.[5]

The JDC responded to crises throughout the interwar period. In the early 1920s, the newly established Soviet Union (USSR), under Communist rule, banned private business in an effort to promote collective enterprises. This was particularly disruptive for the millions of Jews who relied on trade for their livelihood. In response, Chicago-based philanthropist Julius Rosenwald, one of the JDC's founders, created a spinoff organization called the American

A photograph showing shopkeepers receiving aid from the Joint Distribution Committee, c.1920. Photograph from the Archives of the Joint Distribution Committee, held by the Library of Congress (2021670912).

[4] Daniel Soyer, *Jewish Immigrant Associations and American Identity in New York: 1880-1939* (Harvard University Press, 1997).

[5] To learn more about the scope of Jewish charity and philanthropy, see the article by Beth Wenger in this volume.

Jewish Joint Agricultural Corporation, or Agro-Joint. It sent millions of dollars to the Soviet Union to establish agricultural colonies for Jews in Ukraine and Crimea, both then part of the USSR.[6] In the decades from the 1930s through the end of World War II, the JDC sent money and material goods to suffering Jews in Europe, including those that had been confined in the ghettos of Nazi Germany and Nazi-occupied territory.

The JDC helped Jews leave Europe and escape the grip of Nazism, and worked in partnership with the United Jewish Appeal (UJA), that was founded in the United States to address the global Jewish crisis. Together, the JDC and the UJA expedited Jewish settlement to the United States, Canada, Great Britain, parts of Latin America, as well as to Shanghai, China, the Caribbean (particularly the Dominican Republic), British colonies in Africa, and wherever they could find sympathetic governments which might allow in Jewish refugees. After the war, the JDC helped run the Displaced Persons (DP) camps set up by the U.S. Army in occupied Germany to accommodate the million or so stateless and homeless Jews. The on-the-ground work of these global Jewish organizations was made possible by the charitable contributions of American Jews.[7]

Jewish newspapers and magazines in the United States were full of articles about the needs of Jews in distress all over the world. Jewish organizations in the United States, including the National Council of Jewish Women, Hadassah, the Women's American Organization for Rehabilitation through Training, and so many more, prodded their members to give to these Jews in need, and after 1948, to the Jews in the newly declared State of Israel.

Jewish organizations like the B'nai Brith (founded in 1843), the Board of Delegates of American Hebrews (1859), and the American Jewish Committee (1905) attempted to convince the United States government to use its diplomatic and economic clout to improve the conditions of Jews around the world. The leaders and members of these organizations were alerted to the many challenges Jews faced in one place after another, and beseeched presidents, secretaries of state, and members of Congress to help their co-religionists in other lands who confronted difficult circumstances. The political actions of American Jews, while always concerned with domestic matters, paid close attention to events affecting Jews around the world. By the end of World War II, as the United States was the leader of the free world, American Jewish notables and organizations pushed the United States government to use its global prowess to help global Jewish causes.

By the end of the Second World War, the American Jewish community was the largest, freest, and wealthiest Jewish community in the world. The Jews of the United States, through their organizations and publications, declared that the fate of world Jewry, whether in Israel, the Soviet Union, or elsewhere, was their particular responsibility.[8]

From their first arrival in the seventeenth century until the present, Jews in the United States have been bound to Jews around the world through religion and culture. New ideas about Judaism as a religion and Jewish political life circulated globally. Jews in America read books, saw plays, and heard sermons by Jews throughout Europe.

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[6] Avinoam Patt, Atina Grossman, Linda Levi, and Maud Mandel, eds. *The JDC at 100: A Century of Humanitarianism* (Wayne State University Press, 2019).

[7] Kaplan, *Hitler's Jewish Refugees: Hope and Anxiety in Portugal* (Yale University Press, 2020); Marion Kaplan, *Dominican Haven: The Jewish Refugee Settlement in Sosua, 1940-1945* (Museum of the Jewish Heritage, 2008).

[8] Gary Dean Best, *To Free a People: American Jewish Leaders and the Jewish Problem in Eastern Europe, 1890-1914* (Greenwood Press, 1982).

European **rabbis** came to lead American congregations, and they brought with them ideas about religious practice. Reciprocally, ideas that blossomed in the United States, particularly about women's equality within Judaism, rights of gay people, new forms of worship and rituals, migrated to Europe and Israel via American rabbis. Once Israel attained statehood, Jews (including rabbis) began migrating there, many from the United States, and imported new and distinctly American practices to a society in which only the strictest religious **orthodoxy** had previously prevailed.[9]

Likewise, an exchange of ideas between American Jewry and Jewish communities elsewhere created a shared global Jewish culture. Some American Jewish organizations established branches globally. For example, the B'nai B'rith appealed to various Jewish communities, leading to the founding of lodges in various German cities, across the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the Middle East, in places like Cairo and Jerusalem, following the American model. In 1897, Sigmund Freud, the founder of the field of psychology, gave his first public address on the subject to the B'nai B'rith in Vienna.[10]

Poster supporting Jews in the Soviet Union, created by the U.S. National Conference on Soviet Jewry, c.1967–1978. Library of Congress (2016648484).

Along with the global networks of institutions and changes to Jewish practice and life, major political movements also shook the foundations of the Jewish world into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Examples of these movements include Political **Zionism**, which advocated for a Jewish homeland in Palestine, and the Jewish labor movement. Political Zionism, first developed in Europe in the 1890s, had a mixed reception among American Jews. Many were hesitant to potentially forfeit their hard-won acceptance in American society by declaring allegiance to another foreign nation-state. At the same time, others saw the creation of a Jewish state as fully compatible with American life, as modelled by their non-Jewish American immigrant ethnic neighbors, who maintained ties to their own nations of origin (Irish-American, German-American, Polish-American, etc.).

The end of the nineteenth century also saw the beginnings of the Jewish labor movement, infused with Marxist ideas about class and the class struggle and again, while born in Europe, it moved to America via individual immigrants, books, pamphlets, magazines, and speakers who moved around the global Jewish world.[11]

This worldwide connection of Jewish people, ideas, texts, and traditions was multi-directional. These exchanges connect the Jewish world broadly, truly constituting a global Jewish community with the United States at the center.

[9] Oz Frankel, *Coca-Cola, Black Panthers, and Phantom Jets: Israel in the American Orbit, 1967-1973* (Stanford University Press, 2024), 194-294.

[10] Cornelia Wilhelm, *The Independent Order of B'nai B'rith and True Sisters: Pioneers of a New Jewish Identity, 1843-1914* (Wayne State University Press, 2011).

[11] Mark A. Raider, *The Emergence of American Zionism* (New York University Press, 1998).

Teaching About Jewish American History

What is Antisemitism?

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Despite its long and troubling history, **antisemitism** is a term that continues to defy consensus. Its definition is possibly more contested today than ever. This article will explore the history, the contradictions, and complications inherent in antisemitism, and suggest methods for both understanding this complex issue better and presenting it to your students.

In this article, we will explore the difficult and pressing question, "*What is antisemitism*?" while looking at another important question: "What and *whom* are we really studying when we study antisemitism?"

Examining this second question is a challenge that many people face. Jewish history and the history of antisemitism are deeply connected, but they are not the same, and it is important not to confuse them. From the start these are two different stories.

Studying or teaching the history of antisemitism is *not* the same as studying or teaching Jewish history. In fact, it is pointedly the opposite. Antisemitism is the study of how non-Jewish people have held and acted on prejudice against Jewish people over time. Jewish history is the complex and multifaceted story of the Jewish people, spanning over three millennia across diverse geographic regions, cultures, and experiences. It encompasses ancient origins in the Middle East, movements through Europe, Africa, and Asia, and more modern developments in the Americas, Israel, and around the globe. This history is not a single narrative, but a tapestry of varied voices, traditions, and identities shaped by resilience, adaptation, and cultural exchange.

When we teach Jewish history and contemplate antisemitism, we must recognize it in two parts: the ideology of antisemitism (a set of ideas that seeks to legitimize hate against Jewish people, the Jewish religion, Jewish institutions, and even the idea of Judaism itself) and the experiences of the Jews it directly affects (by those acting out the ideology).

Antisemitism, therefore, must be shown as *part* of the larger Jewish experience. If we focus too much on antisemitism we risk turning Jewish history into a story only about suffering. And if we swing too far in the opposite direction, we paint a lovely veneer over a complex human narrative. Neither approach tells the whole story. Like the history of any group of people, Jewish history includes a wide range of experiences: good and bad, celebrations and struggles, progress and setbacks, and yes, hatred, but also love.

Jewish suffering has held a special place in education over the past three quarters of a century since the events of the **Holocaust** and the murder of six million Jews in Nazi occupied Europe. More than half of U.S. states have mandatory Holocaust education legislation (some also mandate instruction on other genocides).[1] For many students, the curriculum addressing the Holocaust in their schools constitutes the entirety of the content presented on Jewish history.[2] The teaching of Jewish history is often skewed towards the tragic.

For that reason, throughout this volume, you will find vignettes of American Jewish history which offer diverse Jewish stories. Many contain instances of antisemitism, when reactions to it are a part of the Jewish narrative. For the most part, however, the focus is on Jewish life in its unique American manifestation. The quote from Ruth Bader Ginsburg used for the title of this volume references her own family's American transformation. She asked, "What is the difference between a bookkeeper in New York's garment district and a Supreme Court Justice?" And she answered, "Just one generation, my mother's life and mine bear witness. Where else but America could that happen?"

WHERE DOES ANTISEMITISM COME FROM?

Antisemitism, or prejudice against Jews and their ancestors, has existed for thousands of years and has taken different forms throughout history. It began before Christianity, during the Hellenistic period, when some Greek and Egyptian writers spread negative views of Jews. Under Roman rule, Jews were seen as different and resisted worshiping Roman gods, leading to further suspicion and hostility.

As Christianity became dominant in the Western Roman world in the third and fourth centuries CE, antisemitism took on a religious form. Although Jesus was Jewish, early Christians blamed Jews for his death. This idea became deeply rooted in Christian teachings, lasting for centuries, and antisemitism increased dramatically with the rise of Christianity in Europe. During the Middle Ages, Jews were forced into ghettos, denied membership in non-Jewish communities, made to wear visual identifiers, and restricted from many jobs. They were often pushed into moneylending, which led to harmful stereotypes about greed. The **Spanish Inquisition** forced Jews to convert, flee, or face execution. Even after conversion, however, they were often viewed with suspicion for their Jewish ancestry. In addition, **pogroms** (violent attacks on Jewish communities) occurred across Europe.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Enlightenment and revolutions in Europe gave Jews more rights. For example, the *French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* in 1789 declared universal suffrage for all men in France. French Jewish men were included eventually, though it was not written for their benefit.[3]

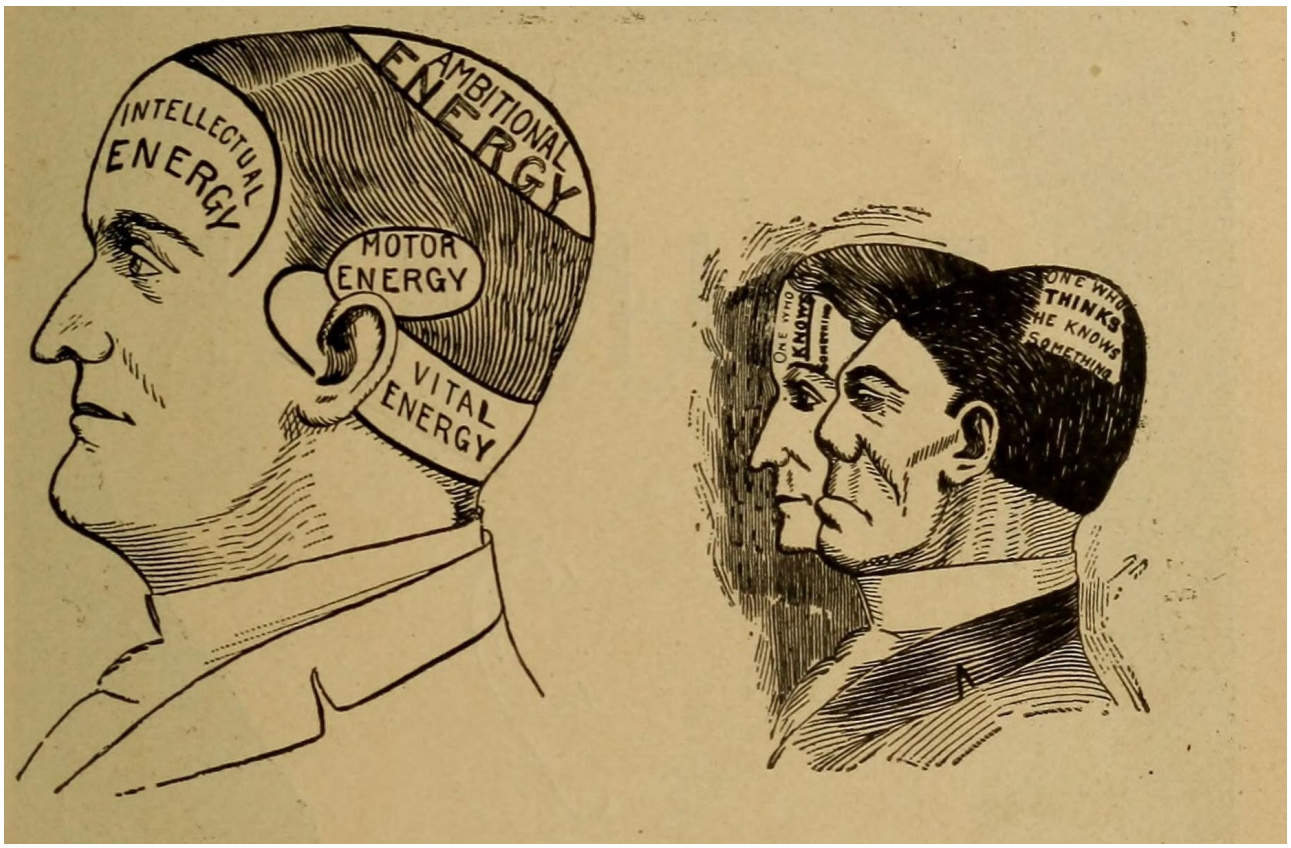
[1] For a helpful map and resource, visit echoesandreflections.org/interactive-map/.

[2] For a contemporary reflection that addresses the impact of Holocaust curriculum and antisemitism, see the article titled "Is Holocaust Education Making Anti-Semitism Worse?" by writer Dara Horn in the May 2023 issue *The Atlantic*; available at theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2023/05/holocaust-student-education-jewish-anti-semitism/673488/.

[3] For an example of a lesson from National History Day that addresses Enlightenment ideas and their impact on the American, French, and Haitian Revolutions, see *Revolutionary Ideals in Action: Comparing the American, French, and Haitian Revolutions*, available at: nhd.org/en/resources/revolutionary-ideals-in-action-comparing-the-american-french-and-haitian-revolutions/.

Many became successful in professions including medicine, law, and journalism, which sparked jealousy, suspicion, and new forms of antisemitism. Instead of focusing on religious difference as a way of marking Jewish people as different, people began to claim Jews were a separate and dangerous race, in accordance with new ideas of so-called **scientific racism**.[4] It was these ideas, based on the concept of innate qualities as opposed to learned ones, that helped fuel and justify the Holocaust in the twentieth century.

In the American colonies and later the United States, both Jewish and other European **immigrants** were given more rights and put on equal legal footing with one another. These immigrants carried much of European society to the U.S., including its systems of religion, prejudice, science, and oppression. Among European immigrants, for example, not all pale-skinned ethnicities were considered *white*, and were therefore treated as less desirable citizens. Jews in America still faced social discrimination in schools, clubs, and the military.



In the 1800s, a fake science called phrenology became popular. It claimed that you could learn about a person's character or intelligence by feeling the shape of their skull. People used this idea to justify racism, sexism, and other unfair treatment, pretending it was based on science. Phrenology led to many harmful beliefs and practices. Some books, like Vaught's *Practical Character Reader* (1902) even tried to teach regular people how to judge others based on the bumps on their heads or facial features. This illustration shows where different types of "energy" are located within the head. Today, we know that phrenology is not real science, but it caused a lot of damage. Library of Congress (03018663).

[4] For a helpful resource on "scientific" racism, see: ebsco.com/research-starters/science/scientific-racism.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Whiteness is a socially constructed racial category in the United States that has historically defined who is granted full social, political, and cultural belonging. Particularly during periods of mass migration, whiteness functioned as an aspirational and exclusionary ideal (closely tied to nationalism, class, and masculinity) selectively extended to certain immigrant groups to assert dominance and maintain social hierarchies.

During the mass migration period (1880s–1920s), the Jewish population in America grew tremendously. In response, people began to form uniquely American antisemitic fears about replacement and migration, closely tied to the American **Nativist** movement. For the most part, however, Jews in America found unprecedented freedom, safety, and access to the larger society.

WHAT IS ANTISEMITISM AND WHAT IS IT NOT?

Why is there not a universal, or even widely accepted definition of antisemitism? Like other terms where the meaning carries real-world consequences (such as accusing someone in the workplace of misogyny), accusations of antisemitism are rife with feeling and personal injury. In addition, as Miriam Sobre's chapter in this volume shows, Jewish identity is complex and made up of many different experiences. Because of that, the ways people understand prejudice against Jewish people are also varied and complicated.

There is some general agreement about what should be considered the basic level of antisemitism and antisemitic behavior, which we might call *essential* antisemitism.[5] Essential antisemitism would generally be recognized by all Jews as antisemitic, largely because it assumes (on the part of the perpetrator) that all Jews are essentially the same. For example, in 2018, a shooter entered the Tree of Life **synagogue** in Pittsburgh, shouting "All Jews must die," and fired indiscriminately at those in prayer. This is a clear example of essential antisemitism.

Still, much can fall into the category of essential antisemitism without the intensity of the Tree of Life shooting example. Many of the small, everyday events experienced by Jews in the United States would easily be categorized as antisemitic, even if the intention was not malicious. For example, upon meeting a Jewish person for the first time, a person might ask (as happened to this author personally), "I feel foolish asking, but where are your horns?" This was not intended to hurt me, but a result of being born into and raised in a modern society in which antisemitism is woven into the very fabric. There are many such falsehoods: that Jews have horns or discolored fingernails, that Jews are good with money or are inherently clever, or that Jews have certain noses, that people may believe without malice until they are taught (or have experienced) the reality that disproves them.

By contrast, actions and rhetoric that make clear distinctions between which Jews are "bad," and therefore on the receiving end of the hatred or violence, and which are acceptable or "good," are much more contentious.

[5] A similar concept of this division (between consensus and selective antisemitism) is clearly illustrated by Keith Kahn-Harris, *Strange Hate: Antisemitism, Racism and the Limits of Diversity* (Watkins Media Limited, 2019).

Jews are often split as to whether or not the aggression is indeed antisemitism. This is where the definition itself (and the question of what antisemitism is) becomes so contentious, as it is often Jews who are engaging in the arguments over these points of contention. Jews disagree internally about a great many topics. For example, they disagree over the ideology and political movement of **Zionism**, a movement to establish and support a Jewish national homeland in the historic region of Palestine, now known as Israel.

Zionism has been a point of contention across diverse Jewish communities, particularly in the United States, since its inception in the late nineteenth century. Many Jewish people supported this movement. Others, like **Rabbi** David Philipson (1862–1949, an early leader of the Reform Movement in Judaism), believed that a distinctive Jewish nationalism was a poor response to the challenges of the larger world, calling this response a "confession of surrender and defeat."[6] From the time of its inception, Jews in America were split on whether to support or reject the movement.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

The term antisemitism should be written without a hyphen. Adding a hyphen (anti-Semitism) falsely suggests that there is a defined thing called "Semitism" being opposed. In reality, "Semitism" refers to a group of languages, including Hebrew and Arabic.

Antisemitism specifically refers to a racialized hatred toward Jewish people, not all speakers of Semitic languages. The hyphen also implies that "Semitic peoples" form a single racial group based on science, which is inaccurate. The word was first coined in 1879 by Wilhelm Marr, who openly identified as antisemitic. He used it to describe anti-Jewish movements happening in central Europe at the time. As with many terms, use and meaning changes over time and the word did not carry the same negative weight it does today.

Many considered it a necessity for Jews living in Europe, but not for themselves. They believed that American Jews had attained equality and religious freedom and were unwilling to risk that.[7] The Second World War and the Holocaust represented a turning point for Jews around the world, and most American Jews came to support the idea of a homeland and safe place for Jews abroad, even if they never intended to relocate themselves. But it has never been unanimous. Even now, the Jewish community is split over Zionism and over the existing State of Israel (according to recent survey data, about 80% of American Jews consider Israel closely connected to their Jewish identity).[8]

Zionism can become an example of a distinctive or selective accusation of antisemitism. When Zionism is criticized or attacked, many non-Zionist or even anti-Zionist Jews defend the criticism as not being antisemitic. Zionism, they contend, is a political ideology, and many Zionists are not Jewish, making it political discrimination rather than ethno-religious discrimination. Many Zionist Jews (and just as importantly, non-Jewish Zionists), however, believe that Zionism and Judaism are inextricably linked, pointing to Jewish indigeneity in Biblical Israel and two thousand years of Jewish identification with the Land of Israel. They therefore see criticism of Zionism as antisemitic.[9]

[6] Correspondence with Jacob Schiff, box 1, folder 1, MS-35, David Philipson Papers, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[7] For more information, see Miriam Eve Mora, *Carrying a Big Schtick: Jewish Acculturation and Masculinity in the Twentieth Century* (Wayne State University Press, 2024).

[8] For more information, see: pewresearch.org/religion/2021/05/11/u-s-jews-connections-with-and-attitudes-toward-israel/.

[9] For more information on the debate over the definition of antisemitism and Zionism, see: nexusproject.us/nexus-resources/the-nexus-document/.

There are other criticisms that divide "good" Jews from "bad," and these deepen divides within the Jewish community about whether or not the criticism is antisemitic, since it does not condemn all Jews, and is a matter of contention among Jews.[10]

Even assumptions that seem positive, like saying Jews are naturally good with money or especially intelligent, can still be harmful stereotypes. This kind of thinking, known as **philosemitism**, might appear complimentary on the surface, but it still reduces Jewish people to a set of stereotypical traits and ignores diversity within the Jewish community. It also reinforces the idea that there are "good" Jews who fit certain expectations, and "bad" Jews who do not, which can deepen divisions and still reflect antisemitic thinking, even if it sounds like praise.

Understanding antisemitism requires more than just definitions. It demands strong historical thinking skills and media literacy. To recognize how ideas take shape, shift over time, and influence societies, we must critically evaluate sources, question assumptions, and set sources in historical context. These tools help us better understand the past and navigate present-day narratives with clarity and care. By sharpening these skills, educators and students are better equipped to identify, discuss, and respond to antisemitism when it arises, including in classroom settings where it often goes unrecognized or unaddressed.

ANTISEMITISM AND THE CLASSROOM

Regardless of whether there are Jewish students in your classroom, it is essential to actively address and correct antisemitic language, ideas, or assumptions among our students, just as we would with any form of prejudice or misinformation. Creating a safe and respectful learning environment means helping all students feel seen and heard, even when they express ideas that may be based on misinformation.

When there are Jewish students in the class, keep in mind that it is not the job of Jewish students to define antisemitism or speak for all Jews. Calling on them based on their identity not only places an unfair burden but also ignores the rich diversity within Jewish communities. Even when students are eager to share, it is important to remind the class that one perspective does not speak for a whole group.

It is important to begin by acknowledging that antisemitism is one of the oldest and most persistent forms of prejudice. It is deeply woven into both American and European history and culture. Because of this, students may come into the classroom having absorbed harmful stereotypes or ideas—often without even realizing it. In fact, it is likely that you are also bringing conceptions of Jewish people, culture, religion, or history into the classroom that you may not have ever had reason to question.

There are many high-quality teaching resources available on antisemitism and how to address it in the classroom, so we will not duplicate that work here. Instead, we want to focus on a challenge that often arises—especially for non-Jewish educators—when teaching Jewish history: how to navigate the discomfort that can come up when the topic of antisemitism enters the conversation. And it will come up.

[10] For more information on the debate over the definition of antisemitism and Israel/Zionism, see the Nexus Document: nexusproject.us/nexus-resources/the-nexus-document/.

Throughout this volume, antisemitism surfaces in various contexts—from stories of Jewish soldiers to Jewish artists and writers, from migration to philanthropy and gender politics. These moments are essential to understanding Jewish history, though they hint at and draw out elements of hatred and prejudice that can be uncomfortable to teach and discuss.

Plan ahead by preparing your students. Set clear expectations about the topics you will cover, including the long and painful history of antisemitism. Acknowledge its presence and create a classroom culture that encourages respectful questions and thoughtful discussion. Doing this not only helps your students engage more meaningfully, it also helps you feel more confident and supported in guiding the conversation. Sitting with this discomfort—and learning not in spite of it, but through it—is the work of doing history.

Like white nationalism and anti-Black racism, antisemitism is part of the broader system of oppression in American history. It is in the culture around us, so much so that it can feel invisible. It is important to remember that none of us, educators or students, are at fault for having internalized messages that have been passed down for generations.

One way to support students in this learning is to clearly say: *When we talk about antisemitism, we are talking about a set of ideas—not about individuals*. This helps students understand that being influenced by a harmful idea does not make them a bad person. It opens space for honest conversation, critical thinking, and real growth.

Be gentle with yourself and your students. Rather than placing blame, we can create an environment where students are open to learning and unlearning. By naming the prevalence of these beliefs, we give students permission to reflect, ask questions, and grow. These moments can become valuable opportunities for discussion and deeper understanding.

Teaching about antisemitism is not just an academic exercise. As educators, we are asked to confront ideas that may feel uncomfortable for us and for our students. But sitting with that discomfort is how growth happens. We are not just teaching history. We are helping students recognize the ways harmful ideas can persist, often unnoticed, in their own lives and communities. This work is not about having all the answers—it is about being willing to ask the right questions, listen deeply, and stay open. When we teach tough topics with honesty and care, we give students tools to think critically, act with empathy, and engage more responsibly with the world.

Teaching the Jewish Experience in a Secular Classroom: Its Challenges and Solutions

Rabbi Yehudah Potok

At its core, teaching history in the classroom goes beyond the recounting of names, dates, and events. It seeks to impart empathy and create a deeper understanding of ourselves and those around us, within and beyond the classroom. It also provides perhaps the greatest venue to foster civic agency and instill moral and ethical lessons that resonate with students, encouraging them to reflect on the consequences of human choices and actions. This depth of understanding is especially important when it comes to teaching about minoritized communities, whose histories and identities are often misunderstood, if not overlooked entirely. The narratives and histories of these communities are often constructed by those in power rather than by the members of those communities.

Teaching Jewish and Jewish American history in the secular classroom embodies this challenge, as it requires educators to carefully balance the separation of church and state with the need to educate students about the complexities of Jewish identity and Jewish people's historical contributions to our world. If not careful, schools can create a culture that discourages expressions of faith and religious identity, thereby establishing an unwelcome or alienating environment for students.[1]

Another difficulty when including Jewish history in the classroom is the tendency to teach about and then view Jewish identity only through the lens of the **Holocaust**. When presented in this way, Jewish historical subjects often become the embodiment of victimhood, rather than a complex group of diverse peoples with a long history that has continued to evolve and exist.[2] Just as educators now acknowledge that teaching African American culture only through the Atlantic slave trade is insufficient to address that complex history, we should similarly refrain from minimizing Jewish historical context to one single and traumatic series of events.

This article explores the challenges inherent in teaching about Judaism and Jewish identity within secular classrooms. It offers insights into the complexities of Jewish identity, discusses how an inclusive understanding of what it means to be Jewish can serve as an essential tool in integrating Jewish religious and historical topics, and presents strategies for educators to foster an inclusive, nuanced approach to teaching Jewish history.

[1] For more information about religious diversity in the public education setting, see the brief by David R. Brockman titled "Keep Religious Diversity in Public Education" from Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy: bakerinstitute.org/research/keep-religious-diversity-public-education.

[2] For more information, see the opinion piece written by Rabbi Yehudah Potok titled "How Jewish Identity is Formed Matters"; and Dara Horn, "Is Holocaust Education Making Anti-Semitism Worse?" from the April 2023 issue of *The Atlantic*.

TEACHING THE HISTORY OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN SECULAR CLASSROOMS

It is a complex task to teach the history of a religious group within a secular classroom. Educators must foster an understanding of religious diversity (an important component of teaching about history and culture) while also avoiding any impression of promoting specific beliefs. The principle of separation of church and state, enshrined in the First Amendment, has shaped how religion is approached in public education.[3] While this constitutional protection is meant to prevent religious bias and the establishment of a state-sponsored religion, it offers no guidance on how to treat the history of a religious group within the classroom and places that burden on the educator, leaving the door open for various interpretations and practices.

Educators need to emphasize the need for neutrality when discussing religion in classroom settings.[4] One of the motivations for keeping religious historical topics out of the classroom has been the fear of indoctrination, or the notion that the mere teaching of such topics might lead to religious practices in schools being imposed on students. In teaching historically about religious groups, educators need to prioritize understanding, not advocacy.[5] When teaching about religious identity is ignored or intentionally avoided, it can leave a void of ignorance. With ignorance comes stereotyping, which often leads to othering people who are different from us.

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) wrote, "religious literacy is essential for understanding the role of religion in public life, negotiating differences in the public square, and forging public policies that serve the common good . . . Only through learning about religions and beliefs will young people be adequately prepared for citizenship in a religiously diverse society and world." NCSS emphasizes that there is an essential difference between the teaching *of* religion and teaching *about* religion, and "preparation for citizenship in a religiously diverse country and world requires religious literacy."[6]

Teaching about Judaism and Jewish identity presents unique challenges but is critical. Jewish identity encompasses religious, ethnic, and cultural dimensions, making it difficult to classify Judaism as strictly a religion in the same way as Christianity or Islam. Understanding what it means to be Jewish requires more than simply studying religious beliefs and practices. It involves examining a broader civilization, shaped by shared language, customs, values, and a deep historical connection to Jewish communities worldwide.[7] This understanding is crucial for students to grasp the nuances of Jewish identity. Reducing Jewish history to a purely religious narrative risks reinforcing potentially harmful stereotypes. Failing to capture the multidimensional nature of Jewish identity does a disservice to Jewish Americans and the purpose of a well-rounded historical education.[8]

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[3] The National Park Service provides a helpful article on the history of separation of church and state at nps.gov/articles/000/church_state_historical.htm.

[4] Helen Rose Ebaugh, Ed., *Handbook of Religion and Social Institutions*, ed. (Springer US, 2006).

[5] Diane L. Moore, *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy: A Cultural Studies Approach to the Study of Religion in Secondary Education* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

[6] "Study about Religions in the Social Studies Curriculum," *Social Education* 78 (no.4): 202-204. https://www.socialstudies.org/system/files/publications/articles/se_7804202.pdf.

[7] Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (Yale University Press, 2019).

[8] For an example of work to expand what was once a one-dimensional narrative of Jewish history, see the opinion piece written by David Rhodes in *eJewishPhilanthropy* from March 12, 2025, titled "The History We Tell: Raising Up Silenced Voices in Historical Narratives."

As a result, teaching Jewish and Jewish American history in a classroom requires a nuanced approach. Jews are an ethnoreligious group, meaning they share common cultural and ethnic backgrounds as well as religious beliefs and practices. Jewish identity can vary greatly from person to person, depending on factors such as ancestry, religious observance, cultural practices, and geographic origin. For some, being Jewish is primarily about practicing a religion; for others, it is about belonging to a cultural and historical community.

EXPANSIVE TEACHING STRATEGIES

The profound diversity within and across Jewish communities can create misunderstandings among non-Jews and sometimes even among Jews themselves, leading to overly-simplified views of what it means to be Jewish. This has been the cause of not only misunderstanding but perpetuation of **antisemitic** tropes and myths.[9] Educators can address and combat this and teach about Jewish religion, history, and culture by analyzing primary sources, prioritizing first person narratives, incorporating interdisciplinary approaches, and getting comfortable with discomfort.

ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES

Historians are acutely aware of the power of letting history speak from primary sources. Using primary sources allows students to engage directly with Jewish individuals, institutions, and culture across different time periods, fostering a deeper and more personal understanding of history. Sources such as letters, institutional records, photographs, newspaper articles, and objects help students analyze historical events in context, develop critical thinking skills, and recognize the agency of Jewish communities. By incorporating primary sources, educators can highlight not only struggles but also joy, resilience, and cultural contributions. This ensures that Jewish American history is not framed solely through narratives of persecution but as a rich story of perseverance and achievement.

This World War I poster, published by the United States Food Administration, appeals in Yiddish to the patriotic spirit and gratitude of the new arrivals to America. Its message reads, "Food Will Win the War! You came here seeking freedom, now you must help to preserve it. We must provide the Allies with wheat. Let Nothing Go To Waste!" Versions of this poster were also published in English and Italian. Library of Congress (2002720472).

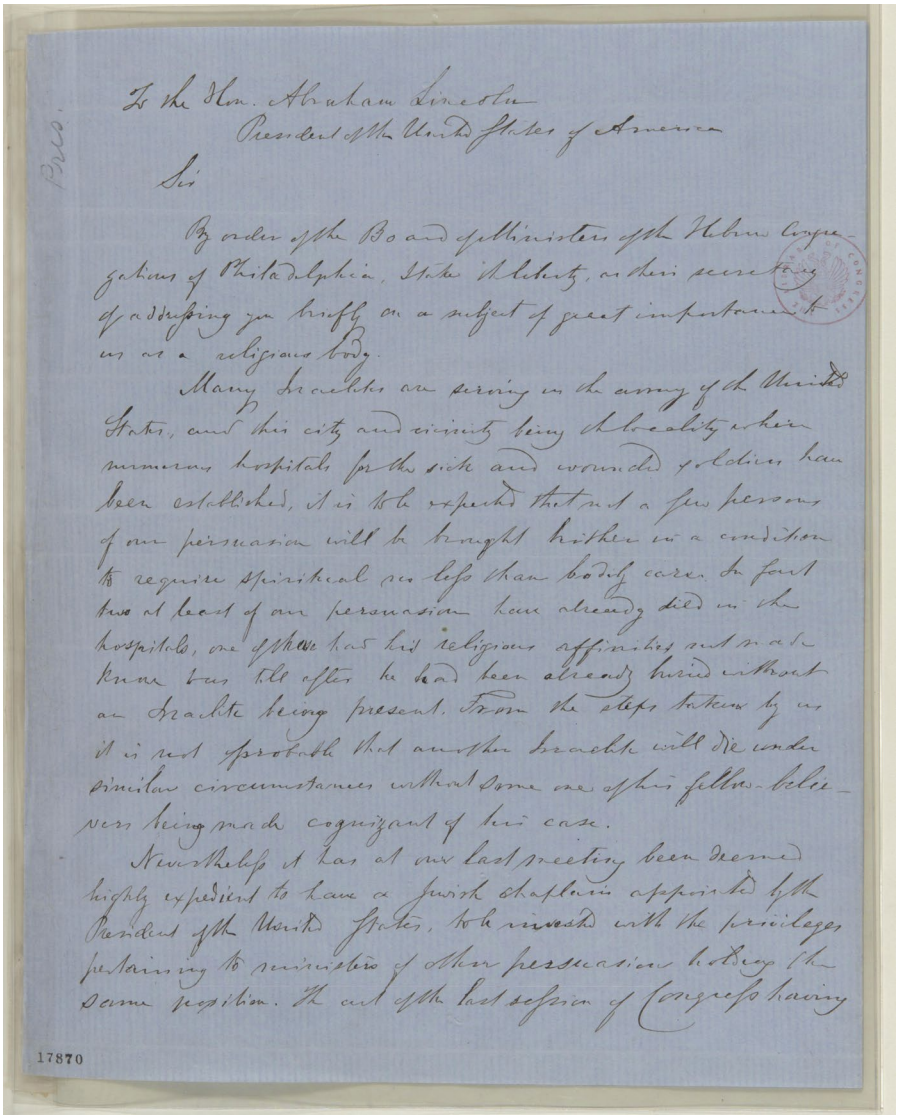
[9] See the article on antisemitism by Miriam Eve Mora in this volume.

PRIORITIZING FIRST-PERSON NARRATIVES

Another effective strategy for promoting this expansive approach is the use of first-person narratives. Focused on individuals and communities, first-person narratives provide insight into lived experience and engage students with emotional connections. These sources allow students to engage with history on a more personal level, fostering empathy, learning about Jewish experiences in an authentic and nuanced way, and aiding in challenging stereotypes.[10]

IMPLEMENTING INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

In addition to first-person narratives and other primary sources, educators can use interdisciplinary approaches that integrate food, art, literature, music, and film to convey the breadth and depth of Jewish culture. Studying Jewish American writers, artists, or filmmakers can help students appreciate the contributions of Jewish Americans to U.S. cultural life while highlighting the diversity within Jewish communities.



To the Hon. Abraham Lincoln
President of the United States of America

Sir

By order of the Board of Ministers of the Hebrew Congregations of Philadelphia, I take the liberty, as their secretary, of addressing you briefly on a subject of great importance to us as a religious body.

Many Israelites are serving in the army of the United States, and this city and vicinity being the locality where numerous hospitals for the sick and wounded soldiers have been established, it is to be expected that not a few persons of our persuasion will be brought hither in a condition to require spiritual ere less than bodily care. In fact two at least of our persuasion have already died in the hospitals, one of whose has his religious affinities not made known but the other he had been already buried without an Israelite being present. From the steps taken by us it is not probable that another Israelite will die under similar circumstances without some one of his fellow-believers being made cognizant of his case.

Nevertheless it has at our last meeting been deemed highly expedient to have a Jewish chaplain appointed by the President of the United States, to be invested with the privileges pertaining to ministers of other persuasion holding the same position. It is out of the last session of Congress having

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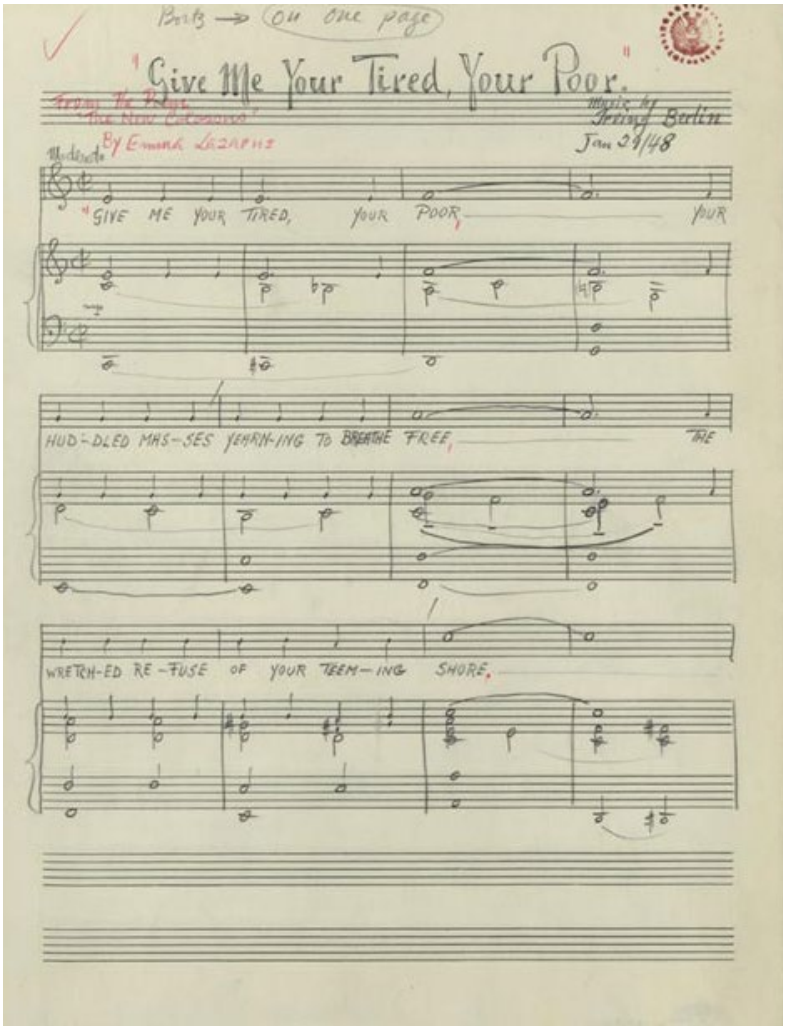
In his capacity as Secretary of the Board of Ministers of the Hebrew Congregations of Philadelphia, Isaac Leeser wrote to President Lincoln on August 21, 1862, asking that a Jewish chaplain be appointed to minister to the spiritual needs of sick or wounded Jewish soldiers in military hospitals in Philadelphia and its vicinity. The letter was referred by the president to the surgeon general who advised that, "it is both legal and proper that Chaplains of the Hebrew faith be appointed in the Army." Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress (Series 1, General Correspondence, 1833-1916).

[10] Linda K. Werthheimer, *Faith Ed: Teaching About Religion in an Age of Intolerance* (Beacon Press, 2015).

Similarly, teaching about Jewish holidays and customs allows students to see Jewish identity as multifaceted, extending beyond religious beliefs to include cultural traditions, histories, and lived experiences.[11]

GETTING COMFORTABLE WITH DISCOMFORT

Teaching Jewish history may require educators to step outside their comfort zones, especially if they have limited background knowledge on the topic. Just as students are encouraged to ask questions and explore new perspectives, educators can model intellectual curiosity by embracing the role of learners alongside their students. Recognizing gaps in content knowledge is not a weakness, but an opportunity to foster open inquiry, encourage critical thinking, and create a classroom environment where questions about Jewish history, religious and cultural practices, and identity are welcomed. Resources such as professional development workshops, educator guides, and collaborations with Jewish studies scholars can provide valuable support for teachers navigating unfamiliar material.



Set in 1885, Irving Berlin's Broadway musical *Miss Liberty* centers on the dedication ceremonies of the Statue of Liberty and the hero's search for the model that posed for Bertholdi's statue. Berlin, an immigrant from Russia, set music to Emma Lazarus's iconic poem, "Give Me Your Tired, Your Poor." It is the only song in the Irving Berlin canon for which he used someone else's words. Irving Berlin (1888–1989) and Emma Lazarus (1849–1887) "Give Me Your Tired, Your Poor," from Miss Liberty, 1949. Irving Berlin Collection. Music Division, Library of Congress (48).

As you teach Jewish history, you will likely have questions. When searching for answers online through Jewish organizations and sources, you will encounter a wide range of opinions, perspectives, and definitions—some of which may directly contradict one another. This diversity reflects the broad spectrum of religious, political, and scholarly viewpoints within Jewish communities. To navigate these differences, practice strong information literacy by considering the source: *does the organization presenting this information identify as religious, political, scholarly, or advocacy-based*? Understanding the perspective of a source can help you contextualize the information and present a more nuanced view to your students.

[11] Liz Kleinrock and Caroline Kusin Pritchard, *What Jewish Looks Like* (HarperCollins, 2024).

Encouraging them to employ skills of historical analysis and ask questions about sources fosters critical thinking and helps them engage with history, more generally, in a thoughtful and informed way.

Finally, creating an inclusive classroom environment also requires respectful dialogue along with a strong dose of earnest curiosity. Teachers should create spaces where students can openly ask questions, discuss sensitive topics, and engage in critical thinking. This requires a lot of intentional work on developing a classroom community and providing skills to engage in difficult conversations. Classrooms provided with these tools produce civically minded students who value inclusive communities that celebrate difference.

CONCLUSION

Teaching Jewish history in a secular classroom is challenging but contributes an indispensable piece of American history. This task requires a careful approach that respects the separation of church and state and also takes care to maintain the complexity of Jewish history and identities. By presenting Jewish history as an intersection of religion, culture, ethnicity, and lived experience, educators can help students appreciate the complexity of Jewish identity and the importance of combating antisemitism.

The strategies outlined here, from using primary sources to acknowledging discomfort, provide practical tools for educators seeking to create an expansive classroom. Ultimately, teaching Jewish history is not just about learning facts; it is about encouraging students to see beyond stereotypes, embrace diversity, and develop as thoughtful, informed, engaged citizens. As educators, we have a responsibility to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of history that includes all voices and experiences, ensuring that they are prepared to contribute to a more just and equitable society.

"From a Camp, Somewhere in the Woods": Choosing Jewish American History Topics for NHD Projects

Katie Clark, Education Coordinator, Historical Society of Pennsylvania

When choosing a topic for National History Day® (NHD), students are encouraged to find compelling stories that connect personal voices to larger historical events. Jewish American history offers a wide range of such stories that are rich in detail, diverse in perspective, and deeply woven into the fabric of national and global histories. One such example comes from the Civil War letters of Myer Levy, a Jewish Union soldier whose words capture both the intensity of wartime and the lived experience of Jewish Americans in the nineteenth century.

"It is my candid opinion," wrote Myer Levy to his father in June 1865, "that if I am not home on or before the fourth of July, I'll be home for the fall hollidays [*sic*]. Give my love to all the family."[1] Myer's hopeful (if not harried; he signed his letter, "Your busy son,") letter is evocative of a sigh of relief, an exhale after a long service in the Union Army during the Civil War, and a marked change in tone from letters sent previously.

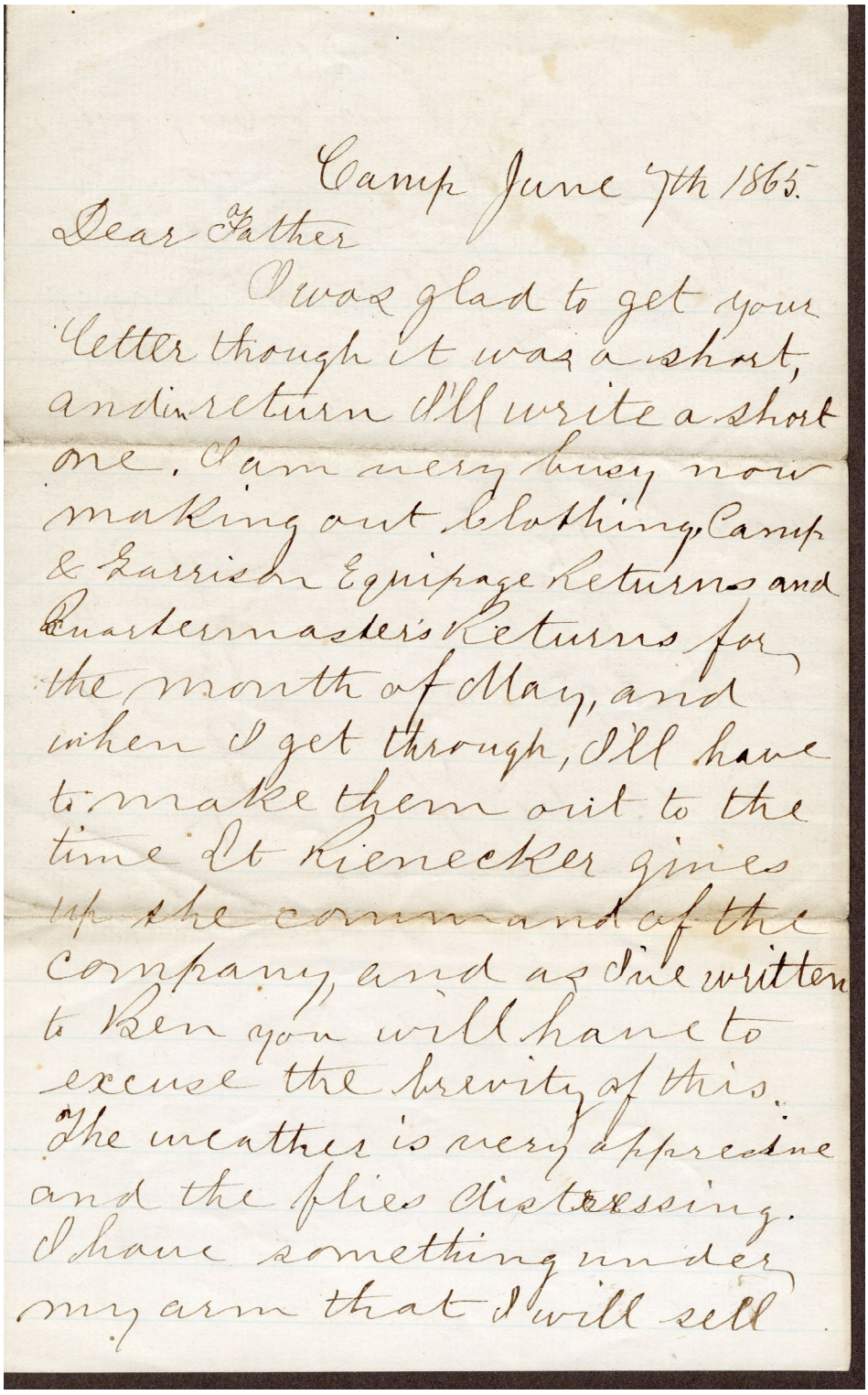
Prior communications to his family described his experiences–from harrowing close calls with bullets to mundane regimental inspections–along with an undercurrent of worry and anger over the capture of his friend, Elias "Ely" Hyneman. In a letter dated almost one year before the letter to his father, Myer wrote to his brother:

> It will be a sad blow to Mrs. Beckie Hyneman, after losing Bart to hear of Ely being a prisoner, or what is more probable, dead, and maybe shot in cold blood . . . I do not hate any living mortal, but if they [the Hynemans] still hope that the south may conquer, may they know no peace on earth, and damnation in the world to come, although it will not give me back my friend.[2]

These moments of vitriol and high drama are familiar threads to pull when studying or learning about the American Civil War. But Myer Levy's letters also reveal something less often explored: the Jewish experience during this era. His mention of returning home in time for the fall Jewish holidays reminds us that even amid the chaos of war, religious identity and tradition remained an important part of life for Jewish soldiers.

[1] Levy Family Papers (Collection No. 1645), Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA. Read more about the Levy family papers at discover.hsp.org/Record/ead-1645.

[2] Unbeknownst to Myer at the time, Elias Hyneman died during his imprisonment by the Confederate Army in Andersonville Prison.



Camp June 7th 1865.

Dear Father

I was glad to get your letter though it was a short, and in return I'll write a short one. I am very busy now making out Clothing Camp & Garrison Equipage Returns and Quartermaster's Returns for the month of May, and when I get through, I'll have to make them out to the time Lt Kienecker gives up the command of the Company, and as I've written to Ken you will have to excuse the brevity of this. The weather is very oppressive and the flies distressing. I have something under my arm that I will sell

Letter from Myer Levy to his father, June 1865. Levy Family Papers (Collection 1645, Historical Society of Pennsylvania).

In the face of the sprawling breadth and depth of history, there is a tendency to compartmentalize its study. This inclination can be born of the best intentions and can serve true pedagogical purpose: when addressed as discreet boxes of event or era, history can be more approachable and digestible. The pitfalls of this approach, however, are often most keenly observed in minoritized groups, whose vital and substantive roles in history can be subsumed by a larger narrative.

Jewish stories are often packaged in the classroom through studies of the **Holocaust** and **immigration**. These are pivotal subjects for educators and students alike to learn, and should absolutely inform the study of history as a whole, including tracing issues of violence and **antisemitism** as they erupt throughout history. To relegate Jewish stories to those discrete "boxes," however, is a disservice.[3] Myer Levy's letters are both familiar anecdotes of the Civil War and anathema to its largely understood narrative as not a "Jewish" story because, to Myer Levy, it was. Levy's quiet hopes for spending **Rosh Hashanah**, **Yom Kippur**, and **Sukkot** with his family, his references to "the World to Come" (an English translation of the **Hebrew** phrase ***olam ha-ba***) and more in his writings speak to the importance of finding, embracing, and elevating Jewish voices and stories throughout history.

Centering diversity in historical inquiry is essential to understanding the past as it truly was, which can in turn allow us to better understand the diversity and complexity of our own time. An NHD project offers teachers and students alike the perfect opportunity to grapple with this important work.

THE CHOICE TO EXPLORE

Student choice is an integral and enticing aspect of an NHD project. The ability to pursue a topic that is a personal interest (not to mention the ability to share their findings in a variety of creative ways) encourages student participation and inquiry-based learning. Students are given the ability to delve deeper into a subject they may have covered only briefly in the classroom or embark down a path paved from personal interests and outside inspiration. Along the way, from topic inception to research to project completion, students use the annual theme as their guide. The theme itself is broad, and students should have little difficulty aligning their chosen topics to its guideposts.

As students consider a topic for their NHD project, it is okay to start big! Students should be encouraged to refine their topics during initial phases of research, and think critically about the sources they find. Primary sources are the foundation of historical research and NHD projects by extension, but secondary sources and scholarship from which to draw are also necessary to an NHD student. Topics less than 20 to 25 years old will suffer this lack of sources and so will subsequent analysis; students with more contemporary interests should be encouraged to find analogous figures, events, or movements from earlier in history.

"GOOD TO THINK WITH"

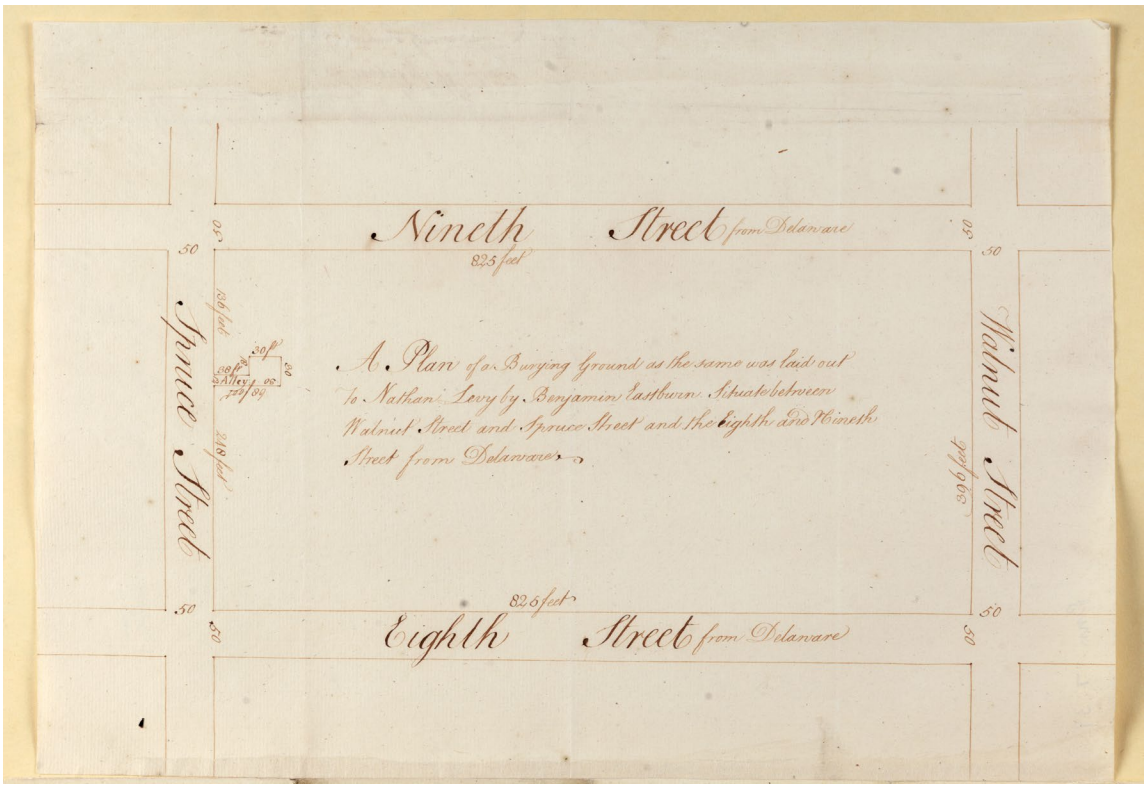
No single qualification elevates a person or community to the level of "worthy of consideration" in the grand scheme of history, because all are! Of Jewish history in particular, author Jason Lustig offers the following: "The history of the Jews shows that a group need not be large to be important or worthy of examination. This is in itself a powerful lesson. What is more, Jewish history is 'good to think with,' a useful case study in which we can apply a whole range of important questions and issues."[4]

[3] For an expanded discussion on this point, see the article addressing antisemitism by Miriam Eve Mora, also in this volume.

[4] Jason Lustig, "Explaining Why Jewish History Matters: Drawing Big Lessons from a Small People." Center for Religion and the Human, Indiana University, accessed November 21, 2024. https://crh.indiana.edu/teaching-religion-in-public/trip-engaging-religion/essays/lustig-essay.html.

This is a helpful framework to consider, and can offer guidance in navigating historical inquiry with the explicit intention of integrating Jewish voices. Encouraging students to think outside traditional narratives, and specifically through a Jewish lens, can illuminate the past in a way that is otherwise lost. When considering the Colonial Era in a place like Pennsylvania, for example, Quakers often take center stage. William Penn, founder of Pennsylvania, was a Quaker, and his religious and personal values informed the formation and management of the colony. When left unexamined, however, this narrative contributes to an overly sanitized version of colonial history and does not speak to the diversity present and supported by the historical record. Consider the following for examples of ways to explore the same place and time from different perspectives.

In 1740, Nathan Levy applied to Thomas Penn, son of William Penn and Royal Proprietor of Pennsylvania at the time, for a plot of land to serve as a place to bury his son in accordance with his Jewish faith. The application was approved, and the plot of land expanded and eventually served the broader Jewish community of Philadelphia as the beginning of Congregation Mikveh Israel, the oldest continuous **synagogue** in the United States.[5]



Deed granting Nathan Levy land to be used as a burial place given by Thomas Penn (1740) and a sketch of the site. From the Penn Family Papers (Collection 0485A) at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Volume 7, page 39.

Years later, as revolutionary fervor fermented in the wake of the Stamp Act, you can observe the growth of the Jewish community in the city through some of the names affixed to the six pages of signatures on the *Resolution of Non-Importation Made by the Citizens of Philadelphia*, outlining their opposition to British taxes they deemed unfair and the decision to cease imports in protest.[6]

[5] Nathan Levy's application to Thomas Penn is a part of the Penn Family Papers at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Learn more at hsp.org/collections/manuscripts/p/Penn0485A.html.

A helpful exercise is to consider these moments in the context of a past National History Day theme, like *Communication in History*. In both Nathan Levy's letter and the *Resolution of Non-Importation*, ink was put to paper to achieve a specific end. What can these communications tell us about the structure of colonial government, and the rights of its citizens? To what effectiveness was writing used as a catalyst for change? And what does the Jewish presence in these documents add to our understanding of this time and place?

ETHNIC, RELIGIOUS, AND SOURCE DIVERSITY

Jewish history does not comprise one simple narrative, nor are its people or practices monolithic. The inclusion of multiple perspectives is essential to a nuanced discussion of history and is, unsurprisingly, key to a successful NHD project. Exploring the diversity of Jewish experiences can enhance both.

Students interested in the Women's Suffrage Movement, for example, can deepen their understanding of the topic by investigating beyond more well-known names to find figures like Caroline Katzenstein. Katzenstein's tireless efforts for women's rights illuminate the complexities and tensions of the suffrage movement. She served on the national membership committee of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, which advocated for a state-level approach to securing suffrage but saw its failure firsthand in a Pennsylvania referendum on the issue in 1915. Katzenstein rededicated her efforts to the National Woman's Party, and the fight to pass an amendment at the federal level.[7]

Portrait of Caroline Katzenstein, 1911. Caroline Katzenstein Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (Collection Am.8996).

The Labor Movement in the United States is another popular area of inquiry for students to explore for an NHD project, and is one that will benefit from investigating organizations such as the Workmen's Circle, a national Jewish fraternal organization founded by Russian Jewish immigrants in 1892. The Philadelphia branch records of the Workmen's Circle outline the issues facing and concerning this specific group, and illuminate the community-building and advocacy undertaken to provide for its members.

Workmen's Circle members were active in advocating for fair labor practices, including increased safety and better wages, but also spent considerable time and resources on preserving and developing the **Yiddish** language and Jewish traditions in the United States, through special schools and educational initiatives.[8]

[7] Caroline Katzenstein's papers are archived at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. You can read more about her efforts for women's suffrage and continued advocacy at hsp.org/collections/manuscripts/k/KatzensteinAm8996.html.

[8] The Philadelphia District Records of the Workmen's Circle are archived at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Learn more at discover.hsp.org/Record/ead-MSS045/Description#tabnav.

Starting from the "Big Idea" phase of the Labor Movement, students can begin to connect the dots of other important facets that contributed to solidarity and activism, including a Jewish identity. This, in turn, can encourage students to apply analytical tools they already know, such as examining the various positive and negative factors that drive migration, and how these influences shape immigration and community building. What does the multitude of organizational efforts tell us about the needs of this particular community? What can this tell us about the societal forces and prejudices that are necessitating these efforts?

Exploring topics that relate to or incorporate Jewish history will also enable students to widen their net when considering potential sources, including those in a variety of languages. Primary sources from organizational records to letters to newspapers may be written in Yiddish, **Hebrew**, Russian, Italian, Portuguese, and many, many more! Students with knowledge of languages other than English should absolutely explore what records and stories they might find within a different alphabet. Jewish history is not limited to the history of **migration**, but it can be enhanced by its consideration, including the addition of non-English sources.

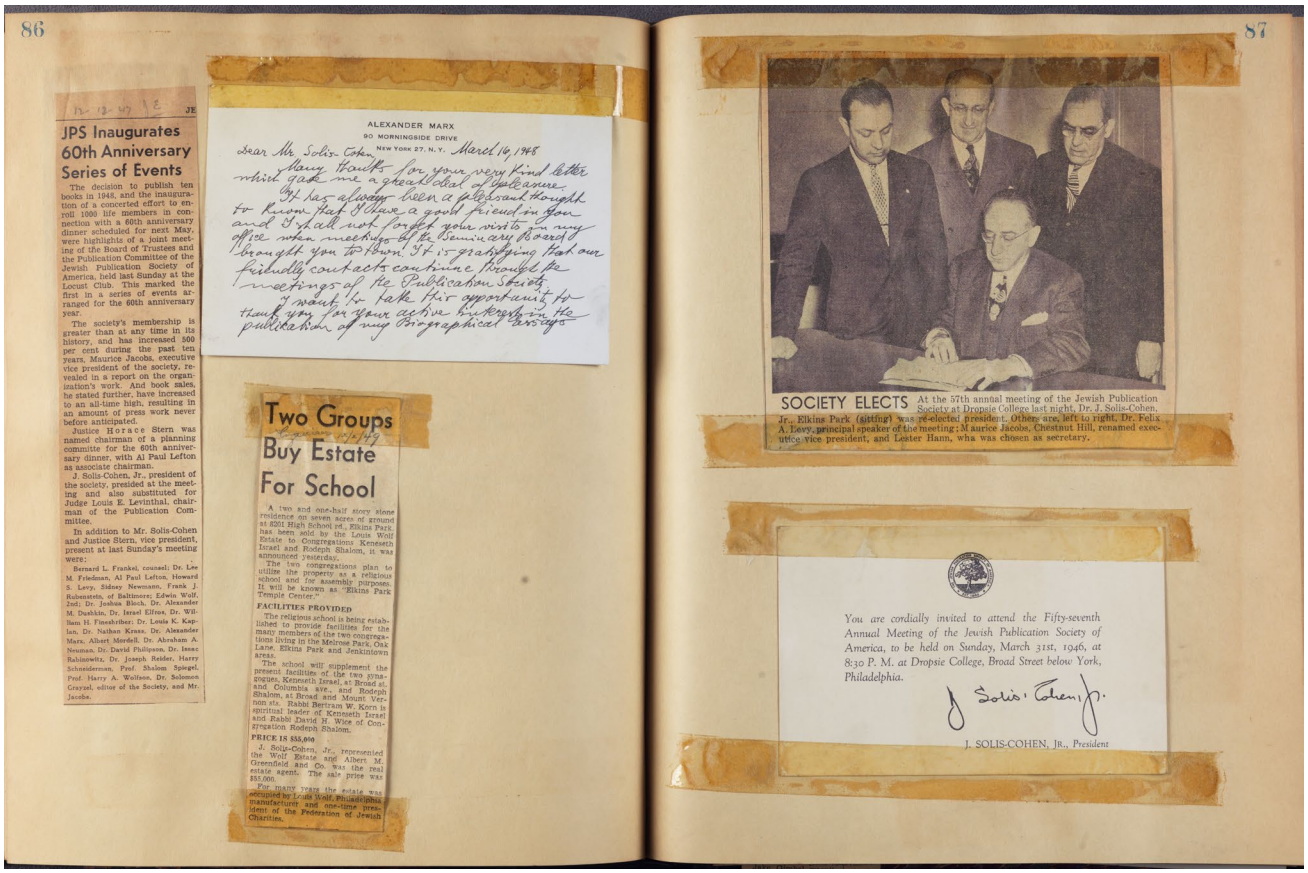
Rosh Hashanah postcard with New Years greetings in both Hebrew and English, unused and undated. From the Workmen's Circle (Philadelphia District) Photographs at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (Collection PG127).

TOPICS BIG...AND SMALL!

Just as it is okay for a student to start big and narrow their NHD topic down, it is okay to start small! Family history, local history, and genealogy can be great platforms on which to build a project. After all, these topics may be a part of the everyday for students, and examining the community and history of which you are a part is a vital step to creating thoughtful, engaged citizens.

The personal scrapbook of Jacob Solis-Cohen, Jr. is an example to this end. Within its pages are newspaper clippings related to his career in real estate, but also community events and wedding invitations.[9] These breadcrumbs invite us to dig deeper into local history and provide avenues through which to do so. Local newspapers, community bulletins or publications, and more are excellent snapshots into issues that impacted a specific person or community, while encouraging students to consider how personal narratives contribute to our understanding of history. Personal family records or photographs are an excellent starting point for such investigations, and local historical societies, libraries, and houses of worship are fantastic places to find them. These repositories may house smaller collections, but an archive's size is not reflective of its strength, nor of a source's importance to the historical narrative.

[9] The Jacob Solis-Cohen, Jr. Papers are archived at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Learn more at discover.hsp.org/Record/ead-MSS014.



Jacob Solis-Cohen, Jr. Scrapbook. Jacob Solis-Cohen, Jr. Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (Collection MSS14).

Consideration of local sources also helps combat the idea that a person's importance to history is measurable only by their relative impact. There is no minimum requirement of contribution to history for a story to be important. In fact, judging people and communities by their contributions is a reductive line of thinking. A person need not be well-known or famous for their story to be meaningful to history; their existence is enough.

CONCLUSION

A National History Day project is an excellent opportunity for students to explore the many facets of Jewish history. The diversity of Jewish stories and sources is an incredible well from which to draw a deeper understanding of historical events from perspectives they may not have previously considered. This perspective is essential not only for deepening our understanding of history but also for dispelling dangerous misconceptions and disinformation in today's world.

Resources for Teaching Jewish American History

Ellie Gettinger, Director of Outreach, Jewish Theological Seminary, Independent Museum Consultant

Jewish history is intertwined with text. There is a pivotal moment in the **Torah**, when God gives the Torah to his people through Moses (my five-year-old daughter was amazed by this meta moment, the Torah is given in the Torah!), establishing the centrality of the written word in Jewish life and history. Jewish people are often called "the people of the book." While some feel this refers to the relationship between Jews and the Torah, there is also a sense that this means that the whole body of Jewish text that is written, compiled, and commented upon over millennia.[1]

Let's begin with the concept of the **Talmud**. The Talmud was compiled based on earlier texts from the second to fifth centuries CE. It evolved in the Jewish communities in Jerusalem and Babylon, after the destruction of the Second Temple and the dispersion of the Jewish people. The Talmud is built on the tradition that when Moses received the Torah at Mount Sinai, he also received the oral law along with the written law. After the destruction of the Second Temple, which fundamentally changed the practice of Jewish ritual life, study of the Torah became central to the Jewish people. The oral law was written down in what is called the **Mishnah**; the Talmud is an explanation, argument, and expansion of the Mishnah codified over centuries.

Looking at a page of the Talmud provides a framework for a resource guide. In the center of this page is the entire Talmud. The areas around the center include post-Talmudic commentaries by **rabbis**, explaining their sense of this particular law or story. It was compiled over centuries so in looking at a page of the Talmud, you are actually observing centuries of argument and evaluation. The textual tradition within Judaism is additive. People have called the Talmud the first hypertext book because of its construction with text referencing other text, pulling in tangential stories, and then providing "links" to broader conclusions.

A color-coded page of the Talmud shows the central text surrounded by layers of commentary. Each section is highlighted in a different color to help readers navigate the traditional layout and understand nearly 2,000 years of Jewish study and interpretation.[2]

[1] Be sure to reference the glossary of the volume to learn more about any bolded terms you are unfamiliar with; for more insight about teaching Jewish American History, especially as it pertains to Jewish religious practices, see the article by Yehudah Potok, also in this volume.

[2] To learn more about this image visit sas.upenn.edu/~jtreat/rs/002/Judaism/talmud.html.

National History Day® (NHD) projects have a lot in common with a page of Talmud. They start with a specific story or historical moment. Then, using primary and secondary sources, students provide the commentary to make this topic more relevant, understandable, or known. As a whole, each year students all over the world are part of a tradition of building arguments to create a narrative that puts sources at the center.

This resource guide is based on the following assumptions:

- History is additive, with new historians building on previous knowledge to create a more complex and nuanced narrative;
- Understanding any historical element requires considering multiple perspectives;
- The guide will emphasize changes across time and place; and
- History is a constantly evolving process, in which historians and educators share their interpretations of sources and students engage with those sources, uncovering new meanings and discovering fresh ways to connect with the past.

GENERAL RESOURCES

These repositories offer a variety of primary sources over a broader period of Jewish and Jewish American history and can be useful for almost any historical period.

American Jewish Archives | americanjewisharchives.org/

American Jewish Archives (AJA) is a division of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR). It was established to collect, preserve, and make available for research, materials on the history of Jews and Jewish communities in the Western Hemisphere.

Center for Jewish History | cjh.org/

The Center for Jewish History is a centrally located collection of reputable Jewish repositories and resources in New York City. Partners of the Center for Jewish History (CJH) include:

- American Jewish Historical Society (AJHS)
- American Sephardi Federation (ASF)
- Leo Baeck Institute (LBI)
- Yeshiva University Museum (YU Museum)
- YIVO Institute for Jewish Research (YIVO)

Find out more about the partner institutions and links to their resources by visiting cjh.org/about/our-partners#asf

Jewish Telegraphic Agency Archives | jta.org/archive

Since its founding in 1917, the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Archives (JTA) has earned a reputation for journalistic integrity, outstanding reporting, and insightful analysis. This searchable archive includes in-depth articles about important issues in Jewish history (like the **Holocaust**, the establishment of Israel, and the Civil Rights Movement) that have been covered by the Jewish press.

Jewish Women's Archive | jwa.org

The Jewish Women's Archive (JWA) is dedicated to expanding and transforming the historical narrative by restoring Jewish women and those assigned female at birth to their rightful place in the story. This online archive includes an encyclopedia, digital collections, lesson plans, and oral histories reflecting the roles that women play in Jewish life and history.

National Library of Israel | education-en.nli.org.il/teaching-resources?jewish-calendar=israel#cards

A collection of lesson plans about Israeli history through primary sources held by the National Library of Israel.

Weitzman National Museum of Jewish History (Core Exhibition and Virtual Tour) | theweitzman.org/coreexhibition/

Beginning in the 1600s when the first permanent Jewish settlers came to the New World from Brazil, the Weitzman National Museum of Jewish History's core exhibition flows chronologically as it highlights the diverse backgrounds, expectations, and experiences of Jews who first came to what became the United States and the generations that followed. The exhibition illustrates the choices they faced, the challenges they confronted, and the ways in which they shaped, and were shaped by, their American home.

JEWISH RELIGION AND LIFE

Judaism is rooted in thousands of years of history and practice. When it comes to understanding Jewish religious observance and cultural practices, the challenge in sharing resources is there is a spectrum of interpretation and practice.

My Jewish Learning | myjewishlearning.com

This resource is a great way to learn about Jewish holidays and ideas. While this website is written with a Jewish audience in mind, it provides helpful articles about many aspects of Jewish life, from holidays to dietary laws and lifecycle. Each section begins with an introductory article that provides background on a specific topic. The "Eat" section, in particular, features delicious recipes—a reflection of food's central role in Jewish life.

Expanding our Understanding of Jewish Identity, Facing History & Ourselves | facinghistory.org/ideas-week/expanding-our-understanding-jewish-identity

Facing History & Ourselves resources explore how expanding narratives of Jewish identity fights antisemitism and honors the vibrancy of Jewish life.

HUC-JIR Jewish Language Project | jewishlanguages.org

This digital humanities project works to promote research on, awareness about, and engagement surrounding the many languages spoken and written by Jews throughout history and around the world. It includes information about over 30 languages and provides curriculum ideas.

GLOBAL JEWISH HISTORY

Centropa | centropa.org/en/our-archive-library-rescued-memories

Centropa was founded in Vienna and Budapest in 2000 with the goal of preserving Jewish memory in Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans, the Baltics, and the former Soviet Union. The Centropa archive includes thousands of photographs and oral histories that can be sorted by tags and geographies.

Diarna (Mapping Jewish Life in the Middle East) | diarna.org/about/intro/

Diarna (אנראיד انراي‌د "our homes" in Judeo-Arabic), the Geo-Museum of North African and Middle Eastern Jewish Life, is digitally preserving the physical remnants of Jewish history throughout the region, capturing site data and recording place-based oral histories before the memories of these communities are lost.

Leo Baeck Institute | lbi.org/catalog/

The institute is a research library and archive focused on the history of German-speaking Jews. Its extensive library, archival, and art collections comprise one of the most significant repositories of primary source material and scholarship on the centuries of Jewish life in Central Europe before the Holocaust.

Light and Shadows: The History of Iranian Jews, Fowler Museum at UCLA |
fowler.ucla.edu/curriculum-resource-light-and-shadow-the-story-of-iranian-jews/

This curriculum offers an avenue for exploring the 3,000-year history of Iranian Jews. There is a PowerPoint that includes original objects and pictures to illustrate the lengthy history of Jews in Iran.

Mizrahi Stories | mizrahistories.com

Short articles and timelines detail the history of Jewish communities throughout the Middle East.

Sephardic Journeys, The American Sephardi Federation |
americansephardi.org/exhibitions/sephardic-journeys/

Sephardim were driven—sometimes by choice, too frequently by force—to transcend borders and barriers. The following rare books and artifacts, from the collection of The American Sephardi Federation, reflect a rich scholarly tradition and invite reflection upon the physical, emotional, and spiritual journeys of Jewish history.

The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe | encyclopedia.yivo.org

This encyclopedia provides the most complete picture of the history and culture of Jews in Eastern Europe from the beginnings of their settlement in the region to the present. The resource makes accurate, reliable, scholarly information about East European Jewish life accessible to everyone.

AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORY

American Foodways: The Jewish Contribution |
apps.lib.umich.edu/online-exhibits/exhibits/show/jewishfoodways

This exhibition highlights the Jewish contributions to and experience in American culinary history. Using material from the Janice Bluestein Longone Culinary Archive at the University of Michigan Library, Special Collections Library, it is a window into one experience of American foodways.

From Haven to Home: 350 Years of Jewish Life in America | loc.gov/exhibits/haventohome/

From Haven to Home is a Library of Congress online exhibition marking 350 years of Jewish life in America. The exhibition features more than 200 treasures from the collections of the Library of Congress. Organized chronologically, the exhibit offers an introduction to each time period and provides grounding narratives for primary sources.

EARLY AMERICAN LIFE

The first Jews arrived in New Amsterdam from Recife, Brazil in 1654. Recife had been a Dutch colony, but once the Portuguese government took over, the Jews of Recife were expelled. The Jewish community remained small in the colonies and after the creation of the United States and the majority of these early Jewish settlers were Sephardi.

A Portion of the People: Three Hundred Years of Southern Jewish Life | apop.library.cofc.edu/

This online exhibition is the tale of people who, in the beginning, had to cope with nearly unlimited freedom in a society where more than half the population was held in slavery. The story demonstrates the resilience of Jewish culture over the centuries and the intriguing mix of southern ways and Jewish traditions that characterizes a small but significant portion of the people.

Touro Synagogue | tourosynagogue.org

One of the earliest **synagogues** in the United States, the Touro Synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island, was founded by Sephardi Jews who were attracted to the religious tolerance of this colony.

THE CIVIL WAR

The Shapell Roster of Jewish Service in the American Civil War | shapell.org/roster/

The Shapell Roster is a research project and digital database that documents Jewish soldiers who served in the American Civil War, both Union and Confederate. It provides biographical details, military records, and historical context to highlight the contributions of Jewish Americans during the conflict. Within the website, you can browse digital exhibitions and explore educator resources.

Ulysses S. Grant and General Orders No. 11 |
nps.gov/articles/000/ulysses-s-grant-and-general-orders-no-11.htm

This article from the National Park Service offers insight into General Grant's Order Number 11, which expelled all Jews from his military district, blaming them for wartime trade violations. The order was quickly revoked by President Abraham Lincoln after public outcry.

MASS MIGRATION

Digital Public Library of America | dp.la

Compiling primary sources into both exhibits and sets, this site offers a portal into library collections throughout the U.S. For those seeking background on the immigration of Jews to the United States, the library offers primary source sets on immigration from 1880 to 1930 (dp.la/primary-source-sets/immigration-and-americanization-1880-1930) and a curated list of materials (dp.la/browse-by-topic/immigration-since-1840/immigration-quotas-1920-1939) related to immigration **quotas** in the 1920s and 30s.

The Statue of Liberty - Ellis Island Foundation |
statueofliberty.org/discover/passenger-ship-search/

During the largest human migration in modern history, Ellis Island processed more immigrants than all other North American ports combined. Today, tens of millions of Americans can trace at least one ancestor to Ellis. The Passenger Search database allows users to look for family members who arrived at the Port of New York from 1820 to 1957.

***America, Museum of Family History* |** museumoffamilyhistory.com/landsmanshaftn.htm

The Museum of Family History is a virtual, multimedia, and interactive creation that was designed to explore modern Jewish history. This particular exhibit highlights the history of ***landsmanshaft*** (plural: *landsmanshaftn*), the Jewish aid or benefit society, formed by immigrants who were from the same town or region. The society provided needed support for new Jewish immigrants in the U.S. during the major wave of Jewish immigration from the 1880s to 1920s.

Tenement Museum | tenement.org/digital-exhibits/

The Tenement Museum welcomes visitors into the homes of immigrant, **migrant**, and refugee families to inspire connections between past and present. The museum's digital exhibit and lesson plans sections provide insight into constructing historical stories using census data and primary sources to create microhistories.

WORLD WAR I

Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) Archives | archives.jdc.org/about-us/

With records of activity in over 90 countries dating from 1914 to the present, the JDC Archives is an extraordinary and unique treasure in the archival world. The archives are located in two centers, one at JDC's New York City headquarters and the second in Jerusalem.

WORLD WAR II AND THE HOLOCAUST

***Americans and the Holocaust*, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum |** exhibitions.ushmm.org/americans-and-the-holocaust/main

This online exhibit examines the motives, pressures, and fears that shaped Americans' responses to Nazism, war, and genocide.

History Unfolded: US Newspapers and the Holocaust | newspapers.ushmm.org

This database contains data drawn from over 50,000 newspaper articles published between 1933 and 1946. The resource sheds light on what information about the Holocaust was available to people throughout the United States during this time period.

National World War II Museum | nationalww2museum.org

This dynamic educational resource serves the needs of teachers and students from grade school through the post-graduate level. The museum also highlights educational resources for teachers and students that can be used to explore the tragedy of the Holocaust.

Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation | vha.usc.edu/home

This archive contains more than 55,000 video testimonies of survivors and witnesses of genocide, crimes against humanity, and related persecution.

Yad Vashem | yadvashem.org/

Yad Vashem is the Holocaust Memorial Museum of Israel. Its online database includes the Central Names Database of Victims of the Shoah, stories of rescuers, a photograph archive, and survivor testimony.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

A Sephardi & Mizrahi Education Toolkit | sepharditoolkit.org/

A collection of recommendations, strategies, and resources to help educators learn about Sephardi and Mizrahi heritage and shape inclusive school environments.

Antisemitism Resource Collection, Facing History & Ourselves | facinghistory.org/resource-library/antisemitism-resource-collection

These resources help educators establish a brave, inclusive, and reflective classroom community as they explore this challenging topic. The resources are organized thematically and include lesson plans, teaching strategies, videos, and webinars.

Echoes & Reflections | echoesandreflections.org/teach/

This resource offers guides and tools to prepare for classroom instruction about the Holocaust.

Jewish American Heritage Month Educator Resources | jewishamericanheritage.org/educator-resources/

This compilation of educational materials explores Jewish American history and provides resources from a variety of platforms, including museums and archives, curriculum developers, and nonprofit groups.

Teaching Materials on Antisemitism and Racism, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum | ushmm.org/teach/teaching-materials/antisemitism-racism

This lesson focuses on the history of antisemitism and its role in the Holocaust to better understand how prejudice and hate speech can contribute to violence, mass atrocity, and genocide.

***The Jewish Americans*, PBS |** pbs.org/jewishamericans/

This documentary explores 350 years of Jewish American history. It is about the struggle of a tiny minority who make their way into the American mainstream while, at the same time, maintaining a sense of their own identity as Jews. The “For Educators” section of the website offers lesson plans and resources.

Learning Module 1:

Exploring Jewish Diversity on America's Shores

Just To Get Here: American Arrivals, Immigration, Exclusion, Disability, and Legislation

Hannah Zaves-Greene, Ph.D., University of Pennsylvania

Jews have lived on the land now known as the United States for 370 years, alongside an ever-evolving cohort of cohabitants with changing ideas about who "belongs" and who should be excluded. Over time, successive iterations of mainstream Americans have sought to shape their "ideal" societies by deciding what kinds of people they want to join them, under what conditions, and for what reasons.

This theme recurs throughout American Jewish history, and indeed throughout much of the history of worldwide migration. As population groups faced the prospect of including new members, they contended with how they felt about new people joining. In the American context, that looked like deciding which "desirable" traits they would like to see in those newcomers, and which "undesirable" traits they would prefer to keep out. As later generations of Jewish **immigrants** attempted to enter the United States (and the colonies that predated it) they encountered an American society that defined "insiders" and "outsiders" based on factors like wealth and self-sufficiency; physical, mental, and "moral" qualities; place of origin; and the skills they had. Other factors, like an immigrant's gender, age, race, ethnicity, and even their job, also influenced these decisions.

NOTE TO EDUCATORS:

Students frequently worry about belonging: being included on a team, accepted by a social group, or even enrolled in a particular class. Immigration tells a story of belonging and power, and who gets to decide, as countries constantly change in size, character, and demographics. Students may not immediately connect with the concept of citizenship and immigration as the tools by which a country's leaders craft their imagined "ideal" society, but significant and formative elements of our daily lives mirror the same phenomenon on a more relatable scale.

JEWISH ARRIVALS BEFORE MASS MIGRATION

The first Jews to settle on America's eastern coast arrived in 1654 from Recife, Brazil. These women, men, and children—refugees from the recent Portuguese conquest of Brazil—fled because they feared that the Portuguese government would bring its Inquisition across the ocean, persecuting Jews by forcing them to choose between death and converting to Catholicism.[1]

[1] "350th Celebration: Fact Sheet on 1654," Jewish Women's Archive, https://jwa.org/350years/factsheet1654.

When these immigrants landed in New Amsterdam (present-day Manhattan) and asked Governor Peter **Stuyvesant** for permission to settle, Stuyvesant initially refused. However, after they appealed to the directors of the Dutch West India Company that ran the colony, the Jews received permission to stay, but had to promise never to become burdens, or public charges, on society and government, and to rely instead on their fellow Jews if they ever needed assistance.[2]

Over the next two centuries, more Jewish immigrants arrived, primarily from central Europe. They settled in Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, Georgia, and South Carolina, colonies whose founders had generally envisioned a culture of religious tolerance. In their new colonies, they actively contributed both socially and economically to their broader communities.[3] In August 1790, as the United States reflected on its new Constitutional principles and some states had yet to ratify the Bill of Rights, President George Washington declared the new country's commitment to religious freedom in a letter to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island. Washington's bold assertion that the United States "gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance" spoke to the government's commitment neither to establish a national religion, nor to prohibit any religious practice.[4]

SOCIAL MODEL OF DISABILITY

The concept of "disability" evolves with society. Bad eyesight is a minor health issue today, but without glasses, it presents a huge impediment to everyday life: a disability. Similarly, heart issues might impact an NBA player as a career-ending disability, but would likely have little impact on the routine of an author or artist. Why do we not call glasses-wearers disabled? Why does paralysis count as a disability, but not a pair of broken legs, when both require wheelchairs? Sometimes, society's norms depend solely on the life experiences of the majority.

Soon, America's demographic landscape began to change. Among other immigrant groups, Jews from German-speaking lands began migrating to the United States, eager to establish new lives there for themselves and their families.[5] This migration proceeded steadily between the 1820s and the 1880s, and the new immigrants created community structures that drew on their memories from their lives in Europe but reinvented in a uniquely American idiom.[6]

RESPONSES TO MASS MIGRATION

The 1880s marked the beginning of a massive surge of immigration from southern and eastern Europe. These **migrants**, including many Jews, left Europe seeking economic opportunity and political freedom in the United States. As Jews in Europe faced tough economic, professional, and social restrictions, new inventions like railroads and steam engines made transportation within Europe and across the Atlantic Ocean much faster and cheaper than before.

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[2] Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (Yale University Press, 2005).

[3] Jacob Rader Marcus, *Early American Jewry: The Jews of New York, New England, and Canada, 1649-1794* (The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1951).

[4] "George Washington Letter, 1790: Washington's Letter to the Jews of Newport," Touro Synagogue National Historic Site, https://tourosynagogue.org/history/george-washington-letter/.

[5] Hasia R. Diner, *A Time for Gathering: The Second Migration, 1820-1880* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

[6] Sarna, *American Judaism*; to learn more about this, see the articles by Hasia Diner and Beth Wenger in this volume.

Many ultimately settled on New York City's Lower East Side, and others spread out across the country to peddle goods, start businesses, and seek new lives for themselves and their families.[7]

Around the time that Jewish immigration from eastern Europe began to ramp up, the United States Congress passed the first of several laws regulating entry into the country. In 1882, Congress passed the first national laws limiting immigration from Europe. This reflected the widespread public concern that a large number of immigrants might change the nation's identity and upset the existing balance of power. From there, the government began to set up an elaborate and discriminatory system to receive and evaluate immigrants attempting to enter the country.[9] The Immigration Act of 1882 specifically prevented the entrance of "any convict, lunatic, idiot, or any person unable to take care of himself or herself without becoming a charge," along with anyone who needed help paying for their journey.[10] This law purported to protect the "health" of the "American race," while also excluding anybody who might allegedly come to depend on the government for food, shelter, or medical care.[11]

"EASTERN AND SOUTHERN EUROPE"

Political turmoil in Europe meant that borders changed constantly. Identifying the country in which an immigrant lived can therefore represent a challenge, even if the village and its location are known. Identifying the countries of origin for eastern and southern European immigrants presents a similar challenge. A humorous anecdote from one contested area "told of a man who was born in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was christened in Czechoslovakia, married in Hungary, had his first child in the USSR, and died in Ukraine, without ever leaving his village."[8]

Most of these immigrants landed in New York Harbor, entering through the Castle Garden immigration station at the southern tip of Manhattan before Ellis Island opened its massive immigrant processing facilities in 1892. Meanwhile, Congress passed another law in 1891 that further restricted immigration, reflecting growing **nativist** fears about racial purity, alongside broader societal anxieties about economic competition, national security, and the changing demographic makeup of the country's population. This new law, the Immigration Act of 1891, expanded the categories of individuals deemed "undesirable" to include "all idiots, insane persons, paupers or persons likely to become a public charge, persons suffering from a loathsome or a dangerous contagious disease, persons who have been convicted of a felony or other infamous crime or misdemeanor involving moral turpitude, polygamists, and also any person whose ticket or passage is paid for with the money of another."[12]

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[7] Hasia R. Diner, *Roads Taken: The Great Jewish Migrations to the New World and the Peddlers Who Forged the Way* (Yale University Press, 2015).

[8] Juliet Fall, *Drawing the Line: Nature, Hybridity and Politics in Transboundary Spaces* (Routledge, 2017), 270.

[9] In the Page Act of 1875, the United States government first codified restrictions on Chinese immigrants, allegedly to "end the danger of cheap Chinese labor and immoral Chinese women," as described by the law's sponsor, Horace F. Page of California. The Immigration Act of 1882 stands out as the first American legislation to impact European immigrants.

[10] "Immigration Act of 1882" (47 Statutes-at-Large 214); for classroom-ready information, summary, analysis, and discussion questions on the topic, see "Immigration Act of 1882," Immigration History, immigrationhistory.org/item/1882-immigration-act/.

[11] Douglas C. Baynton, *Defectives in the Land: Disability and Immigration in the Age of Eugenics* (University of Chicago Press, 2016).

Essentially, the United States used these rules to declare that it wanted only certain types of people to join the country, and that it could not allow in anybody who did not fit the narrow description that they set forth. No language in any U.S. law explicitly regulated Jewish immigration, but the law and its enforcement mechanisms included plenty of restrictions, like "insanity" and "poor physique," which in practice often applied to Jews.[13]

The 1891 law consolidated control under the Treasury Department and created a Superintendent of Immigration to establish more rigorous screening processes and oversee a new group of federal immigration inspectors at each port of entry. Before this, starting in 1882, the Treasury Department had overseen a complicated mix of state boards and commissions. However, the new federal apparatus could more easily centralize screening procedures and, at least in theory, enforce the law consistently across the different ports.[14]

The Dillingham Commission, established in 1907 under the leadership of Vermont Senator William P. Dillingham, played a crucial role in shaping public and legislative opinion about immigration.[15] The commission's report starkly illustrated their biases about immigration, contrasting the "old" immigrants from northern and western Europe with the "new" immigrants from southern and eastern Europe.

On temperate days at Ellis Island, debarred immigrants waiting to be deported could breathe some fresh air in the "detention pen," located atop the main building, 1902. Library of Congress (96506924).

WHY THE TREASURY DEPARTMENT?

Immigration control, with its discriminatory emphases on poverty and "defectiveness" as "moral failings," shows one reason behind the restrictions in federal immigration laws. By viewing poverty as a "disease" and treating health as a commodity, the laws depicted immigrants as economic assets or burdens, rather than as human beings. Immigration fell under the purview of the Treasury Department (1882), the Department of Commerce and Labor (1903), the Department of Labor (1913), the Department of Justice (1940), and the Department of Homeland Security (2003), reflecting the country's changing priorities.

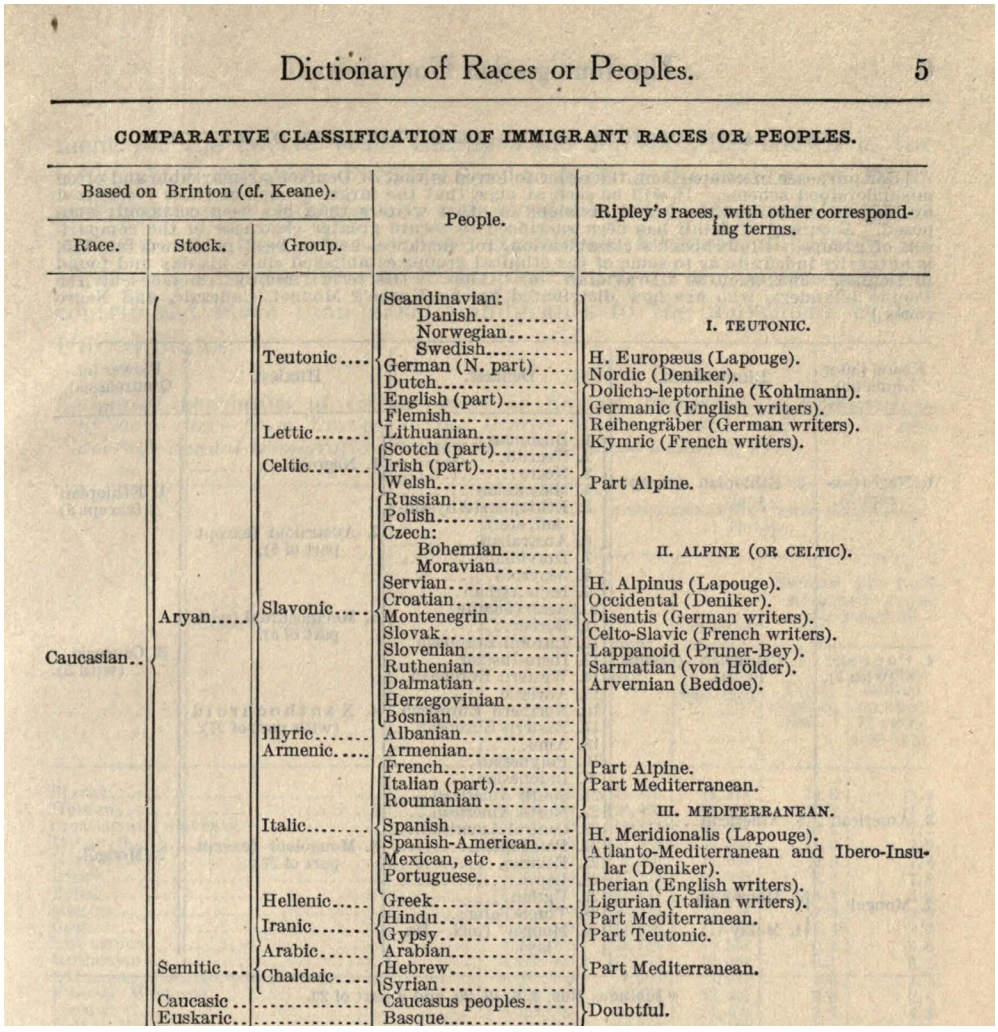
[13] Diner, *Time for Gathering;* Baynton, *Defectives in the Land*.

[14] Baynton, *Defectives in the Land*; "Early American Immigration Policies/Origins of the Federal Immigration Service," U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, updated July 30, 2020, accessed May 5, 2025. https://www.uscis.gov/about-us/our-history/explore-agency-history/overview-of-agency-history/early-american-immigration-policies.

[15] Leonard Schlup, "William Paul Dillingham: A Vermont Republican in National Politics," *Vermont History: The Proceedings of the Vermont Historical Society* 54, no. 1 (winter 1986): 20–36.

Dillingham declared these new immigrants less "desirable," due to what the report presented as inferior cultural and biological traits.

These findings reinforced the popular eugenic ideas of the time, promoted by the government, that Congress should limit immigration to protect the American gene pool from "degeneration." The commission's recommendations, released in 1911 as a 41-volume report, laid the groundwork for increasingly restrictive immigration laws.[16] The commission also invented the idea of immigration as a problem, making Americans worry about its potential for negative impacts. Building on the report's findings, Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1917, which established literacy tests for immigrants and further expanded the list of "defective" illnesses and conditions that would exclude immigrants, setting a precedent for future immigration restrictions.[17]



Dictionary of Races or Peoples. 5

COMPARATIVE CLASSIFICATION OF IMMIGRANT RACES OR PEOPLES.

Based on Brinton (cf. Keane).			People.	Ripley's races, with other corresponding terms.
Race.	Stock.	Group.		
Caucasian..	Aryan.....	Teutonic....	Scandinavian:	
			Danish.....	I. TEUTONIC.
			Norwegian.....	
			Swedish.....	
			German (N. part).....	H. Europæus (Lapouge).
			Dutch.....	Nordic (Deniker).
			English (part).....	Dolicho-leptorhine (Kohlmann).
			Flemish.....	Germanic (English writers).
		Lettic.....	Lithuanian.....	Reihengräber (German writers).
		Celtic.....	Scotch (part).....	Kymric (French writers).
			Irish (part).....	
			Welsh.....	Part Alpine.
		Slavonic.....	Russian.....	
			Polish.....	
			Czech:	
			Bohemian.....	II. ALPINE (OR CELTIC).
			Moravian.....	
			Servian.....	H. Alpinus (Lapouge).
			Croatian.....	Occidental (Deniker).
			Montenegrin.....	Disentis (German writers).
			Slovak.....	Celto-Slavic (French writers).
			Slovenian.....	Lappanoid (Pruner-Bey).
			Ruthenian.....	Sarmatian (von Hölder).
			Dalmatian.....	Arvernian (Beddoe).
			Herzegovinian.....	
			Bosnian.....	
		Illyric.....	Albanian.....	
		Armenic.....	Armenian.....	
		Italic.....	French.....	Part Alpine.
			Italian (part).....	Part Mediterranean.
			Roumanian.....	
				III. MEDITERRANEAN.
			Spanish.....	H. Meridionalis (Lapouge).
			Spanish-American.....	Atlanto-Mediterranean and Ibero-Insular (Deniker).
			Mexican, etc.....	
			Portuguese.....	Iberian (English writers).
		Hellenic.....	Greek.....	Ligurian (Italian writers).
		Iranic.....	Hindu.....	Part Mediterranean.
			Gypsy.....	Part Teutonic.
	Semitic...	Arabic.....	Arabian.....	
		Chaldaic....	Hebrew.....	Part Mediterranean.
			Syrian.....	
	Caucasic ..	.....	Caucasus peoples.....	Doubtful.
	Euskaric..	.....	Basque.....	

Detail of a chart from the *Dictionary of Races*, published in 1911 as part of the Dillingham Commission report. The chart illustrates ideas by three prominent "ethnologists" regarding prospective "taxonomies" of the world's races (as theorized at the time in the context of since-discredited eugenic beliefs). Report of the Dillingham Commission, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services History Library.

[16] Jay Dolmage, *Disabled Upon Arrival: Eugenics, Immigration, and the Construction of Race and Disability* (The Ohio State University Press, 2018).

[17] "Immigration Act of 1917" (64 Statutes-at-Large 875-876); Katherine Benton-Cohen, *Inventing the Immigration Problem* (Harvard University Press, 2018); for classroom-ready information, summary, analysis, and discussion questions on the topic, see "Immigration Act of 1917 (Barred Zone Act)," Immigration History, immigrationhistory.org/item/1917-barred-zone-act/.

The National Origins Act of 1924, also known as the Johnson-Reed Act, reshaped American immigration by imposing strict **quotas** based on country of birth.[18] These limits, based on the number of residents from each country at the time of the 1890 census, just before large waves of new immigrants settled, decidedly favored northern and western Europeans while severely limiting entry slots for southern and eastern Europeans, and excluding Asians and Africans nearly entirely. The Johnson-Reed Act formalized the racial, ethnic, and ableist hierarchies promoted by the Dillingham Commission, grounded in eugenic arguments that classified certain groups as inherently less capable of contributing positively to American society, thereby posing a threat to its cultural and genetic integrity. At the same time, the government strengthened immigration enforcement by creating the U.S. Border Patrol in 1924 to prevent illegal entry and expanding deportation efforts to remove people accused of breaking immigration rules. Scholars like Hasia Diner have noted that these policies fit into a broader nativist and xenophobic movement that sought to preserve a specific white, male, Anglo-Saxon vision of American identity.[19]

The increasingly restrictive immigration policies of this era applied not only at the point of entry but also extended to immigrants abroad as they sought **visas** to enter the United States. The National Origins Act codified this new requirement, which used the quota system to determine the number of visas available for each country.[20] People who wanted to immigrate first had to visit their local U.S. embassy or consulate, where a diplomat would conduct an extensive physical, cognitive, and "moral" evaluation.

In 1930, President Herbert Hoover issued an executive order directing U.S. consulates in Europe to enforce the immigration laws as strongly as possible. These local diplomats conducted their examinations with such rigor that often, intending immigrants literally could not succeed.[21] Stories abound regarding consuls who humiliated visa-seekers by asking insulting and nonsensical questions, such as *How many feathers does a goose have? or How many drops of water are in the ocean?* Since questions like these could not have a clear, correct answer, an immigrant would automatically fail the test either by answering incorrectly or by choosing not to answer. Either response could result in them being labeled "feeble-minded," which would prevent their entry into the United States.[22]

IMMIGRATION ADVOCACY AND JEWISH MIGRANTS

During the 1930s, as German Jewish refugees tried to flee from Nazi persecution, Labor Secretary Frances Perkins, the first woman to serve in the U.S. cabinet, played an important role in issuing special visas for children. Perkins collaborated with organizations such as the U.S. Committee for the Care of European Children, which was founded by Eleanor Roosevelt and others, to help young Jewish refugees enter the United States. This effort included the 1938 Wagner-Rogers Bill, which aimed to allow the admission of 20,000 German Jewish children outside of the existing immigration quotas.

[18] "The Immigration Act of 1924 (The Johnson-Reed Act)," Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations - Office of the Historian of the U.S. Department of State, updated 2017, accessed May 5, 2025, https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/immigration-act; for classroom-ready information, summary, analysis, and discussion questions on the topic, see "Immigration Act of 1924 (Johnson-Reed Act)," Immigration History, immigrationhistory.org/item/1924-immigration-act-johnson-reed-act/.

[19] Hasia R. Diner, *The Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004).

[20] Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton University Press, 2014).

[21] Baynton, *Defectives in the Land*.

[22] Dolmage, *Disabled Upon Arrival*.

Cecilia Razovsky, an important Jewish immigration advocate, worked with Perkins as the executive secretary of the German-Jewish Children's Aid.[23] Although the Wagner-Rogers bill ultimately did not pass and become law, Perkins' efforts underscored the need for humane immigration policies.[24] Many Jewish children remained trapped in Europe during the Nazi era, hampered by restrictive U.S. immigration policies in their ability to find refuge.[25]

One of the most harrowing episodes of this period entailed the voyage of the SS *Saint Louis* in 1939. Carrying over 900 Jewish refugees, government officials turned the ship away from the United States after Cuba had refused to accept its own previously issued visas. Despite pleas from passengers and American Jewish organizations, President Franklin Roosevelt adhered to strict immigration quotas, and, under pressure from nativist and anti-Jewish factions, refused to admit the refugees. These decisions forced most of the passengers to return to Europe, where many later perished in the **Holocaust**.[26] The *Saint Louis* tragedy highlighted the deadly consequences of rigid immigration policies and the failure to provide asylum to those fleeing genocide.

This poster, created by artist Ray Morgan in 1940, featured two children wearing ID tags disembarking from a ship. Any parents are conspicuously absent. Hoover Institution Library and Archives (XX343.26475).

In the aftermath of World War II, the United States sought to address the plight of millions of displaced persons (DPs), many of whom were Holocaust survivors. The Displaced Persons Act of 1948 stands out as the first major U.S. legislation to admit refugees outside of the standard immigration quotas. Although initially limited in scope and favorable toward certain nationalities and religious groups, subsequent amendments broadened the scope of the act to include more Jewish refugees.[27] This legislation marked a significant shift in U.S. immigration policy, recognizing the specific needs of refugees and paving the way for future asylum policies.

[23] Bat-Ami Zucker, "Frances Perkins and the German-Jewish Refugees, 1933–1940," *American Jewish History* 89, no. 1 (2001).

[24] Diner, *Jews of the United States*.

[25] "Wagner-Rogers Bill," Holocaust Encyclopedia, updated September 30, 2024, accessed May 5, 2025, https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/wagner-rogers-bill.

[26] Sarah A. Ogilvie and Scott Miller, *Refuge Denied: The St. Louis Passengers and the Holocaust* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

[27] Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*.

U.S. refugee policy laid important groundwork for later efforts to assist persecuted individuals and communities abroad, such as Jews from the Soviet Union. The Soviet Jewry movement, which gained momentum in the 1960s and 1970s, represented a global campaign advocating for the right of Jews in the Soviet Union to emigrate, primarily to Israel and the United States. American Jewish communities played a significant role in this movement, organizing protests, lobbying U.S. politicians, and raising awareness about the plight of Soviet Jews. Many Jews in the Soviet Union faced severe restrictions on religious practices and discrimination in employment and education. They often received the label of "refuseniks" when they applied for exit visas, which the government routinely denied. The American Jewish community's advocacy crucially contributed to pressuring the U.S. government to implement policies like the Jackson-Vanik Amendment of 1974, which linked trade benefits with the Soviet Union to its emigration policies.

Successive generations of immigrants, originating across the globe, have sought to become part of American society—to belong. Some groups succeeded with greater ease, while others, hampered by complicating factors like religion, race or ethnicity, gender, or simply the appearance of difference, faced greater barriers. All, however, approached the country with wishes, intentions, and aspirations, ultimately pitting them against the pillars of American immigration policy. Through the formalization of these social, political, and legal requirements, the United States reveals in precise detail the country that it believes itself to be, the country that it truly is, and the country that it desires to become.[28]

[28] "Timelines of the American Soviet Jewry Movement," *American Jewish Historical Society*, accessed May 5, 2025, https://ajhs.org/holdings/timelines-of-the-american-soviet-jewry-movement/.

From the Old World to a New Beginning: Jewish Migration and Community in Colonial Georgia

GUIDING QUESTION: What global factors influenced Jewish immigration to and within British North America in the eighteenth century? How did Jewish immigrants adapt to their new communities while maintaining their religious practices and cultural identity?

AUTHORS: Shira Muroff and Ana Berman, Institute of Southern Jewish Life

OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will use primary and secondary sources from eighteenth-century Savannah, Georgia, to explore Jewish immigration to early America (1733–1791). Students will map immigrant families' journeys across the Atlantic and examine the global factors influencing Jewish migration to and experiences in colonial Georgia.

OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this activity, students will be able to

- Describe the factors that led Jews to migrate to and within British North America during the colonial era; and
- Compare and contrast how Jewish immigrants adapted to their new communities while maintaining their religious practices and cultural identities.

DOCUMENTS USED

PRIMARY SOURCES

Account, Johann Boltzius, March 20, 1734 (excerpt)
Printed in [*Detailed Reports on the Salzburger Emigrants Who Settled in America: Volume 1: 1733-1734*], University of Georgia Press
https://ugapress.manifoldapp.org/read/detailed-reports-on-the-salzburger-emigrants-who-settled-in-america-edited-by-samuel-urslperger-volume-one-1733-1734/section/c60719cd-bdb4-4765-b7ab-60ab52aa9977

Account, Johann Boltzius, July 3, 1739 (excerpt)
Printed in Leon Hühner, "The Jews of Georgia in Colonial Times," 1902 *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*
https://www.jstor.org/stable/43059664

Correspondence, James Oglethorpe, August 12, 1733 (excerpt)
Colonial Records of the State of Georgia
https://ugapress.manifoldapp.org/system/actioncallout/0/8/8/088b1b0f-2d34-4747-a4d0-078f3c8f72ca/attachment/7809c39b5a3073d7fb6c6e2c0e401bd3.pdf

Journal entry, John Wesley, April 4, 1737 (excerpt)
Evans Early American Imprint Collection, University of Michigan Library
https://name.umdl.umich.edu/N22587.0001.001

Land grant, John Reynolds, May 15, 1756 (excerpt)
Printed in [*Colonial Records of the State of Georgia: Volume 27: Original Papers of Governor John Reynolds, 1754-1756*], University of Georgia Press
https://ugapress.manifoldapp.org/projects/colonial-records-of-the-state-of-georgia

Proclamation, James Oglethorpe, "A Thanksgiving for Victory," 1742 (excerpt)
Publications of James Edward Oglethorpe
https://ugapress.manifoldapp.org/system/actioncallout/2/e/d/2ed96dc5-5822-4026-9e7e-0be5a8ec839c/attachment/8f5aadb999fe30973525e765535a090f.pdf

TEACHER-CREATED MATERIALS

- Mapping Immigration handout
- Nunes Family Source Collection
- Sheftall Family Source Collection

ACTIVITY PREPARATION

- Preview all materials and review unfamiliar vocabulary in the glossary.
- Make one copy of the Mapping Immigration handout for each student.
- Make copies of the Nunes Family Source Collection and Sheftall Family Source Collection so that each group has one collection.
- Organize students into groups of three to five students each.
- Arrange the classroom for group work.
- Read the article "American Jewish History in a Global Context" by Hasia Diner for background information.

PROCEDURE

ACTIVITY ONE: INTRODUCTION (15 MINUTES)

- Remind students that the vast majority of Americans are not indigenous to North America and that American immigration began with European colonization. Additionally, remind students that people of all different cultural, religious, ethnic, and racial backgrounds have come to the Americas (some by choice and others by force) since the seventeenth century.
- Summarize for students key facts about Jewish immigration to the Americas, including:
  - Jewish people arrived as immigrants in the colonial era
  - Many colonial-era settlers came from the Netherlands or the Caribbean
- Lead a brief discussion to solidify student understanding of the basic push and pull factors for seventeenth-century immigrants to British North America. Discuss how these factors could be different for Jewish immigrants depending on their cultural, ethnic, and geographic backgrounds.

ACTIVITY TWO: MAPPING JEWISH IMMIGRATION TO EIGHTEENTH CENTURY GEORGIA (30 MINUTES)

- Organize students into an even number of groups of three to five students each.
- Distribute one copy of the Mapping Immigration handout to each student.
- Distribute one source packet to each group. Half of the groups should receive the Nunes Family Source Collection and half, the Sheftall Family Source Collection.
- Explain to students they will be assigned to learn about a family of early Jewish immigrants to colonial Georgia and mapping the journey of their respective families using primary and secondary sources.
- Review the instructions and give students time to read and discuss the secondary source for each family.
  - **Teacher Tip:** Use a classroom map to help students identify the approximate locations of Prussia, Great Britain, Spain, Portugal in Europe, and Savannah, Charleston, and New York City in the American colonies.
- Direct students to divide the primary sources. They should read and analyze each primary source, and work together to summarize the source in one of the four boxes of the map. Once they summarize, they should draw lines and add labels as needed to show the location of where these events happened.
- Circulate and assist as needed.

ACTIVITY THREE: COMPARING IMMIGRATION STORIES (15 MINUTES)

- Pair up groups to speak with a group who studied the opposite family.
- Ask students to review their findings and share with the other group.
- Once students have finished presenting their maps, lead a brief concluding discussion:
  - *What do these sources tell us about the American Jewish immigration experience?*
  - *What similarities did you notice between the two families' experiences?*
  - *What differences did you notice between the two families' experiences?*
  - *How are these experiences similar or different from other groups of people who immigrated to the colonies in the colonial era?*
  - *What information is missing from these sources? What questions do these sources generate?*
- **Teacher Tip:** Use this discussion as an opportunity to practice new vocabulary and reinforce to students that Jewish identity is not a monolith—Jews come to North America from all over the world with unique cultures, religious traditions, and languages.

Students interested in this topic might be interested in researching the following for an NHD project:

- **The Spanish Inquisition or the Portuguese Inquisition**
- **James Oglethorpe and Colonial Georgia**
- **Jewish women in the Colonial Era**
- **The Naturalization Act of 1790**
- **George Washington's letters to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island (August 18, 1790)**

ASSESSMENT OPTIONS

- Teachers can assess the maps or listen as groups share with another group.
- Teachers can require each student to write a brief exit ticket about the family they traced or the one they heard about.
- Students can do the mapping activity about a different immigrant group and make comparisons between groups of people over time. Lead a brief discussion to solidify student understanding of the basic push and pull factors for seventeenth-century immigrants to British North America. Discuss how these factors could be different for Jewish immigrants depending on their cultural, ethnic, and geographic backgrounds.

To access a PDF containing all of the sources and materials to complete this lesson plan, go to nhd.org/expansivehistory.

Learning Module 2:

Culture, Religion, and Community

American Comics: A Jewish History

Jeremy Dauber, Ph.D., Atran Professor of Yiddish Language, Literature and Culture and Director Emeritus, Institute for Israel and Jewish Studies, Columbia University

Comics: a series of images put in sequence, usually mixing in some text, has a long history in the United States. Americans did not create this art form (scholars believe comics can be found in medieval European tapestries, Mayan codices, and even ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics), but the modern form of comics, ranging from superheroes to lengthy autobiographical stories, has been significantly influenced by their development in America. Throughout the different stages of comic history, Jews have been involved at every level, often playing crucial and foundational roles. This article will provide a brief overview of American comics, emphasizing the contributions of Jewish creators—one of the many influential roles American Jews have had in shaping American popular culture. And certainly one of the most fun.

Comics have been part of American culture since before the Revolutionary War. Benjamin Franklin even created a few, most famously the 1754 cartoon showing a snake cut into pieces to represent the colonies, with the caption "JOIN, or DIE." Comics grew in popularity around the turn of the twentieth century with the rise of affordable newspapers that carried national content.

***Join, or Die*, a 1754 political cartoon by Benjamin Franklin published in *The Pennsylvania Gazette* in Philadelphia, addresses the disunity of the thirteen colonies during the French and Indian War. Several decades later, the cartoon resurfaced as one of the most iconic symbols in support of the American Revolution. Wikimedia Commons.**

One of the leading publishers, Joseph Pulitzer (a Jewish **immigrant** from Hungary), understood the importance of comics. Before this, comics mostly appeared in expensive, high-status weekly magazines. Pulitzer used comics to attract more readers to his newspapers. He also liked sensationalistic journalism (the "if it bleeds, it leads" style), which is surprising since today his name is linked to a major prize for excellence in journalism.

Pulitzer's publishing rival, William Randolph Hearst, also embraced comics. In 1895, Pulitzer's newspaper *The World* introduced *The Yellow Kid* by Richard F. Outcault, one of the first great comic strips. In the early decades of the new century, when nearly everyone read newspapers, it was impossible to grasp American life without considering the cartoons that tens of millions of readers enjoyed each day.

Being a newspaper cartoonist was a high-status, high-income job, and Jewish people were mostly excluded from that world. There were, however, some exceptions. Cartoonists like Milt Gross, who brought ethnic dialect to the comics page with works like *Nize Baby*,[1] and Rube Goldberg, whose cartoons of ridiculously complex machines became legendary, managed to break through. But they were rare, and their success proved the rule.

On the other hand, a side business that grew out of newspaper comics—collecting old cartoons and reprinting them in books—was low-status work. In other words, comic books started as reprints. It was not until the mid- to late-1930s that people began creating new stories for them. And it was in one of those comics, focused on the theme of "action," that the world changed.

Joe Shuster (seated) and Jerry Siegel at work on *Superman*, in their studio, in 1942. Wikimedia Commons.

In 1938, *Action Comics #1* introduced the character Superman, created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, marking the birth of the superhero genre. This new style of storytelling, focused on larger-than-life heroes, shaped the future of comic books and popular culture. Siegel and Shuster, young Jewish men from Cleveland, Ohio, created a hero who mixed pulp fiction and science fiction—a guy from outer space who came to Earth to fight for truth, justice, and the American way. After their idea was rejected by newspapers, they moved to sell it to a comic book company.

Superman became a massive hit and the superhero an icon, and started a wave of superheroes. The overwhelming majority of the creators behind these modern comic book pioneers were Jewish. Batman, Robin, the Joker, Captain America—their creators, Bob Kane (born Robert Kahn), Bill Finger (born Milton Finger), Jerry Robinson (born Sherrill David Robinson), Joe Simon (born Hymie Simon), and Jack Kirby (born Jacob Kurtzberg), were all Jewish. Some people say these heroes' alter egos were intentionally un-Jewish, as the creators tried to distance themselves from their Jewish identities.

[1] *Nize Baby* is a 1926 book that collected humorous retellings of classic stories like "Elledin witt de Wanderful Lemp" and "Jack witt de Binn Stuck," using a playful mix of Yiddish and English that would define much of his later work. For a collection of Gross's work, see *Is Diss a System?: A Milt Gross Comic Reader*, edited by Ari Y. Kelman (2010).

Others believe these creators were simply trying to write stories that would appeal to a wide audience. However, one thing did seem more Jewish: many of their characters, including Superman and Captain America, opposed the Nazis early on, even before America entered the war, at a time when much of the country was still isolationist.

Another important Jewish creator from the time was Will Eisner, the son of a **Yiddish** theater set designer. Eisner played a key role in creating the "shop" system, which broke down comic book production into different assembly line steps, much like many immigrant-run shops in New York's garment district at the time. Along with his business perspective, Eisner viewed comics also as a medium for artistic expression. This led to his creation of innovative splash pages (one-panel covers) and new narrative techniques in his superhero comic, *The Spirit*.

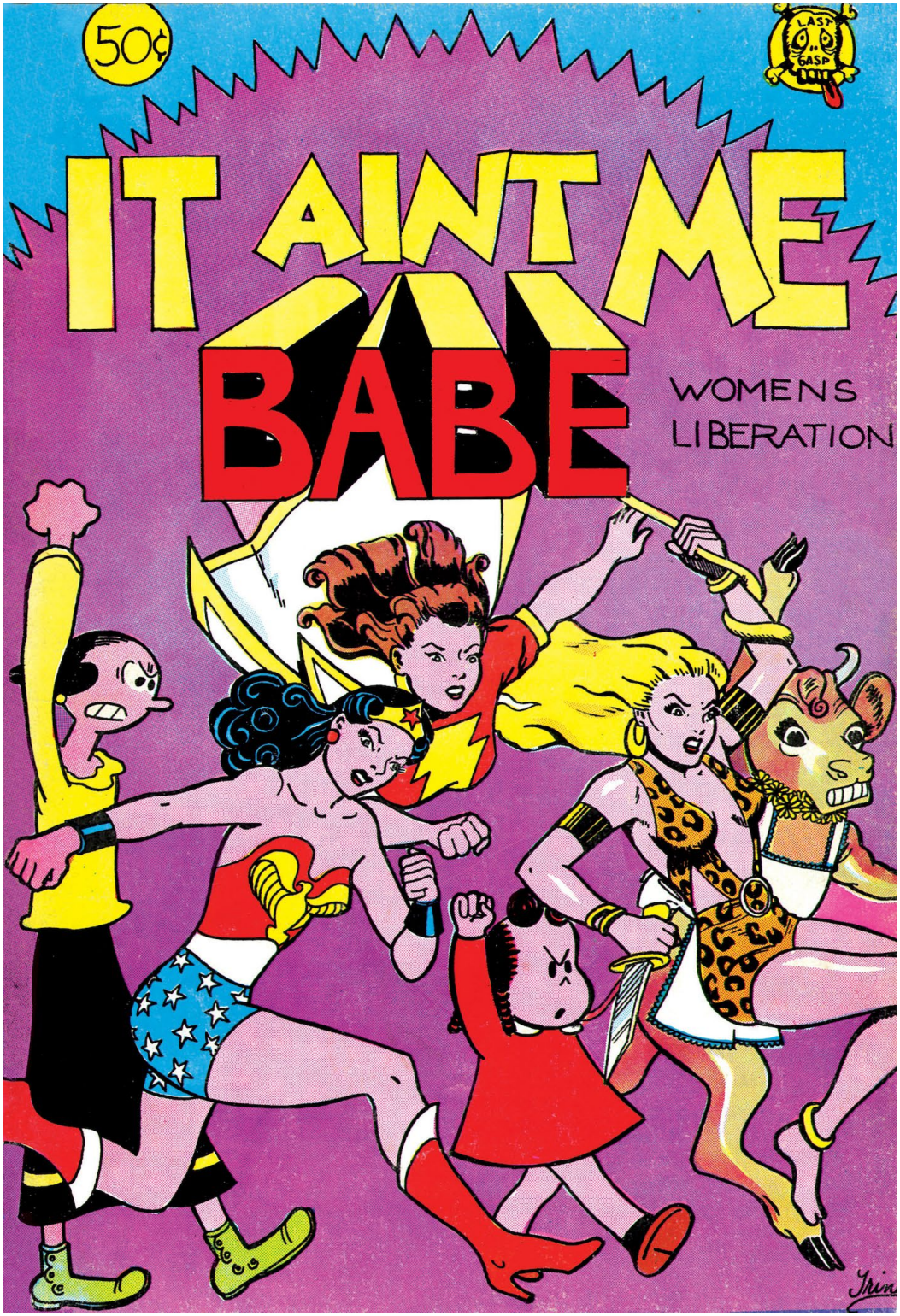
After World War II, one company produced the most important and influential comics in the country for a time. EC Comics was founded as Educational Comics by Jewish publisher M.C. Gaines (who passed on Superman). After M.C. died in a boating accident, his son Bill took over and changed the "E" to "Entertaining." And entertaining they were—though for adults, not just the kids who loved superheroes like Superman, Batman, and Captain America. EC's comics set the standard for several genres, including science fiction, war comics, and horror comics. Horror comics sparked a moral panic in the early 1950s. This led to a Senate subcommittee investigation into comic books and juvenile delinquency, where Gaines testified. He infamously noted that, for a comic book, a cover of theirs depicting a hand holding a severed human head was in "good taste"—after all, it could have had more blood dripping from it.

In use from 1954 until 2011, all comics that (voluntarily) carried this seal were approved by the Comics Code Authority. Under the code, almost all depictions of horror and violence were forbidden. The seal became a powerful symbol of the industry's self-censorship during a time of heightened concern over comic books' influence on youth. Toronto Metropolitan University.

The backlash nearly drove Gaines out of the comic book business, but he had the last laugh. The new industry rules did not apply to magazines, so he created *Mad*, a wildly successful magazine full of comics. *Mad* influenced a generation of counter-culturists, nonconformists, and even some conformists who appreciated a little silliness. The magazine also had a distinctly Jewish flavor, with Yiddish sounds and humor, like the "chicken fat" of Eastern European Jewish cuisine, as one artist described it.

Some of the kids who grew up reading *Mad*—about a generation later—helped change comics into *comix* (with an "x"). This small change in spelling highlights how different these new works were and the significant changes they brought to the medium. Comix were bold and challenged social norms. Jewish artists like a young Art Spiegelman, Aline Kominsky (later known as Aline Kominsky-Crumb), and Trina Robbins were at the forefront of this transformation. They expanded the possibilities of what comics could express. Often, their creations used strong language and addressed new themes. These themes included personal narratives (especially autobiographical ones) and political critiques, often directed at powerful institutions.

While Jews were not the only Baby Boomers involved in liberal movements within comix or elsewhere during the late 1960s, they played a significant role. This was especially true for Jewish women, who began to find ways to express themselves in a field that had long been closed off to them.



Cover of *It Aint [sic] Me Babe* Comix (1970), the first underground comic created entirely by women (and co-produced by Trina Robbins and Barbara "Willy" Mendes), featuring iconic female characters like Wonder Woman, Sheena, and Little Lulu raising their fists beneath the slogan "women's liberation." Grand Comics Database.

Even outside of underground comics, a new sense of adulthood (or at least maturity) was taking hold. College students were drawn to a new wave of superheroes who dealt with more adult issues, or at least very late teenage ones, compared to the science fiction adventures of the Justice League of America. Many of these characters came from the creative minds at Marvel Comics. Two of the most influential were Stan Lee (born Stanley Lieber) and Jack Kirby, who had co-created Captain America a generation earlier. Most of the superheroes that would later dominate movie theaters were created during this time, most by American Jews.

As the 1960s gave way to the 1970s, mainstream and independent comics began to converge more and more. Part of this shift was driven by the return of an old master—Will Eisner—who had spent years creating industrial comics for businesses. In 1978, Eisner released *A Contract With God*, a semi-autobiographical work that looked back on his youth in the Lower East Side. It showed the comics world that serious, artistic storytelling was not just for the younger countercultural crowd.

Eight years later, Art Spiegelman, who had long explored autobiography in his work, published the first volume of *Maus* in book form. The graphic memoir told the story of his father's experiences in the **Holocaust** and Spiegelman's own experience as the son of a survivor. *Maus* went on to win a special Pulitzer Prize. It remains one of the most powerful examples of how comics can address any subject—even the most serious.

In the two generations since *Maus* was published, the old anxieties about comics—that they are only for kids, socially harmful, or too slight to take seriously—have mostly faded. With the rise of the Internet and the increased diversity of creators across the country, comics have become more accessible to a wider range of people. As a result, Jews are no longer at the center of American comics in the way they once were. But that does not mean they have disappeared from the scene.

Jewish creators continue to play important roles in the field. Ben Katchor won a MacArthur "genius grant" for his surreal and nostalgic stories about Jewish life. Brian Michael Bendis, who was raised in a traditionally **Orthodox** Jewish home, has become one of the most prolific and respected superhero writers of the twenty-first century. J.T. Waldman reimagined the biblical Scroll of Esther in a style that recalls ancient illustrated manuscripts. And Barry Deutsch's *Hereville* series brings the folk traditions of Eastern European Jewish culture into the modern world, following a brave and clever girl named Mirka.[2]

The work of these creators, and many, many more, suggest that the story of American Jews and comics is far from over.

[2] Jeremy Dauber, *American Comics: A History* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2022).

Jewish Women in Social and Religious Movements

Joyce Antler, Ph.D., Professor Emerita of American Jewish History and Culture and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Brandeis University

Jewish women have been instrumental in the women's rights movements in the United States, advocating for greater opportunities and more equitable gender roles in society. From the mid-nineteenth century to the present, they have helped bring changes that give women (and other people) more opportunities and fairer treatment in society. Many of their most significant contributions were deeply influenced by Jewish traditions, values, and cultural heritage.

PIONEERING VOICES

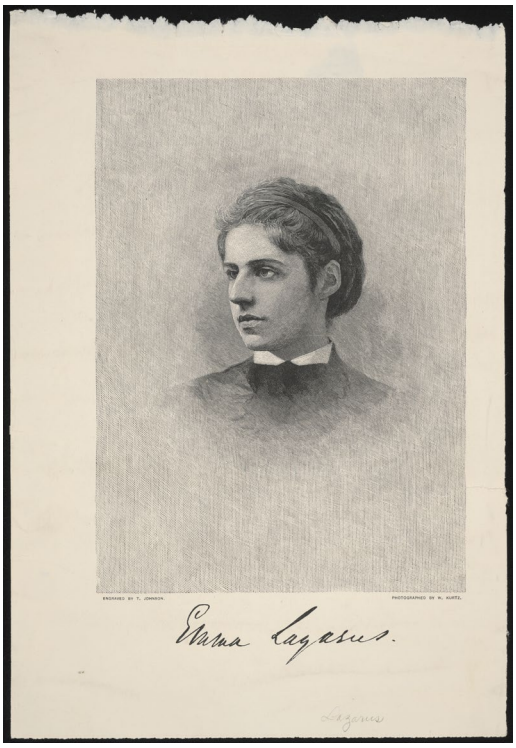
Ernestine Rose, a **rabbi's** daughter born in Poland in 1810, became one of the most prominent figures in the early women's movement. Rose's father taught her to read the **Torah**, which was unusual for girls at the time. However, he rejected the criticisms that she made of religion, arguing that young women should not question such matters. Rose recalled this as the moment she became a feminist, advocating for equality between men and women.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Readers may wonder why this particular American minority group played such a role in the women and feminist movements of the last two centuries. Among the Jews of Europe (who comprised the bulk of Jewish **immigrants** in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), religious teachings linked men to scholarly pursuit. Women often worked in breadwinning roles, running family stores or business, while men were responsible for their studies and for religious education in the family. After arriving as new **migrants** to America, Jewish women continued to work and in many cases to branch out even further in pursuit of independence and self-sufficiency.

In London, Rose was influenced by the British radical socialist Robert Owen. With his support, she began speaking at public meetings (an unusual practice for women at the time). She immigrated to the United States in 1836, settling in New York, where she became widely known for her speeches on free thought, abolition, and women's equality. Dubbed the "Queen of the Platform," she delivered a groundbreaking speech at the 1851 National Women's Rights Convention, advocating for "political, legal, and social equality with man," a key moment in the early women's movement.[1] Rose was a pacifist who argued that women had a special stake in crusades for peace. As both an immigrant and a Jew, she also faced **antisemitism**, even among her circle of freethinkers.

[1] "Speech at the National Woman's Rights Convention - Oct. 15, 1851," Iowa State University Archives of Women's Political Communication, https://awpc.cattcenter.iastate.edu/2017/03/21/speech-at-the-national-womans-rights-convention-oct-15-1851/.



Left: Portrait of Ernestine Rose, c.1870–1890. Library of Congress (006681152).

Right: Engraved portrait of Emma Lazarus, c.1888. Library of Congress (99402695).

Emma Lazarus, best known for her poem "The New Colossus," engraved on the Statue of Liberty, was a prominent Jewish literary figure of the nineteenth century. Born in 1849 into a leading **Sephardic** Jewish family, she was raised in an upper-class New York City household and received private tutoring in European languages and literature. At 17, she published her first volume of poetry, which earned praise from prominent literary figures. Her identity as a Jewish writer became more pronounced when she translated the works of medieval Jewish poets, and later, in her publications responding to the **pogroms** that targeted Eastern European Jews in the 1880s. Deeply moved by the struggles of Jewish refugees arriving in New York, Lazarus wrote essays and poems advocating for immigrant rights and took a strong stance against antisemitism. She also encouraged Jews to establish a homeland in Palestine.[2]

THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

The first U.S. Jewish women's movement began in the early 1880s with the formation of **synagogue** sisterhoods and the establishment of the Jewish Women's Congress at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. Jewish women worked to improve the lives of Eastern European immigrants, especially women and children. Beginning in the 1880s, they established sisterhoods devoted to social welfare activities. Sisterhood reform activities opened the public space of the synagogue to female benevolence, demonstrating that despite continuing **assimilation** to American life, Jewish women valued their connections to Judaism and to the Jewish people.

Jewish women established schools, clubs, camps, clinics, and settlement houses. Lillian Wald, a former nurse, created the influential Henry Street Settlement in New York City, and played a leading role in developing the federal Children's Bureau.

[2] See the term "Zionism" in the glossary.

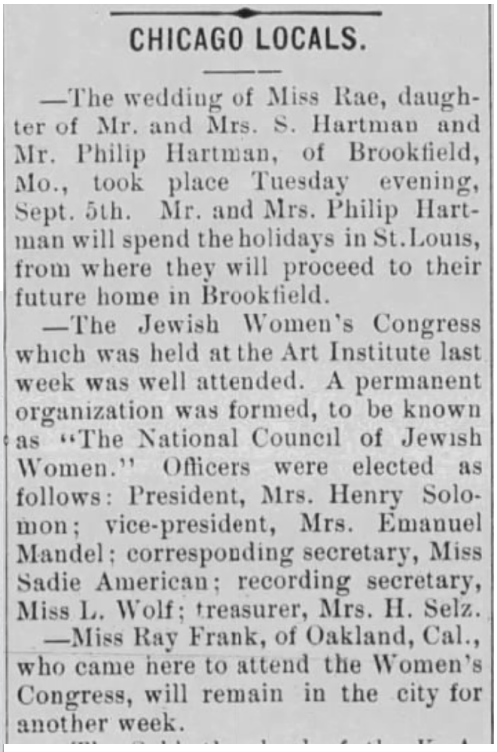
The National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) and other Jewish women's groups also campaigned against child labor, prostitution, and the harms caused by poverty. The establishment of Hadassah (The Women's Zionist Organization of America) in 1912, led by Henrietta Szold, became another milestone for Jewish women.[3] Providing health, education, and welfare services to women and children in Palestine, Hadassah helped foster the nascent Jewish women's movement.

In the early twentieth century, Jewish women in the garment trades, including Rose Schneiderman, Clara Lemlich, and Pauline Newman, sparked protests that led to the founding of the American labor movement. Schneiderman, the Vice President of the New York Women's Trade Union League, helped build momentum for the garment workers' strike of 1909-1910, the "Uprising of the 20,000," inspired by the passionate speech of 17-year-old Clara Lemlich.[4]

JEWISH RADICALISM AND JEWISH WOMEN

Jewish women flocked to myriad radical movements, including socialism, anarchism, and communism. Emma Goldman, a Russian immigrant who had been a midwife, nurse, then radical agitator, became a strong voice protesting the injustices of industrial capitalism and the subordination of women. Jewish women were at the forefront of the birth control movement.

Left: Group of striking shirtwaist workers in New York City, c.1909, Jewish Women's Archive.



CHICAGO LOCALS.

—The wedding of Miss Rae, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. S. Hartman and Mr. Philip Hartman, of Brookfield, Mo., took place Tuesday evening, Sept. 5th. Mr. and Mrs. Philip Hartman will spend the holidays in St. Louis, from where they will proceed to their future home in Brookfield.

—The Jewish Women's Congress which was held at the Art Institute last week was well attended. A permanent organization was formed, to be known as "The National Council of Jewish Women." Officers were elected as follows: President, Mrs. Henry Solomon; vice-president, Mrs. Emanuel Mandel; corresponding secretary, Miss Sadie American; recording secretary, Miss L. Wolf; treasurer, Mrs. H. Selz.

—Miss Ray Frank, of Oakland, Cal., who came here to attend the Women's Congress, will remain in the city for another week.

Right: From a section titled "Chicago Locals" in a Jewish newspaper from St. Louis, Missouri. *The Jewish Voice*, September 15, 1893.

[3] Mira Katzburg-Yungman, "Hadassah in the United States," The Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish Women, Jewish Women's Archive, https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/hadassah-in-united-states.

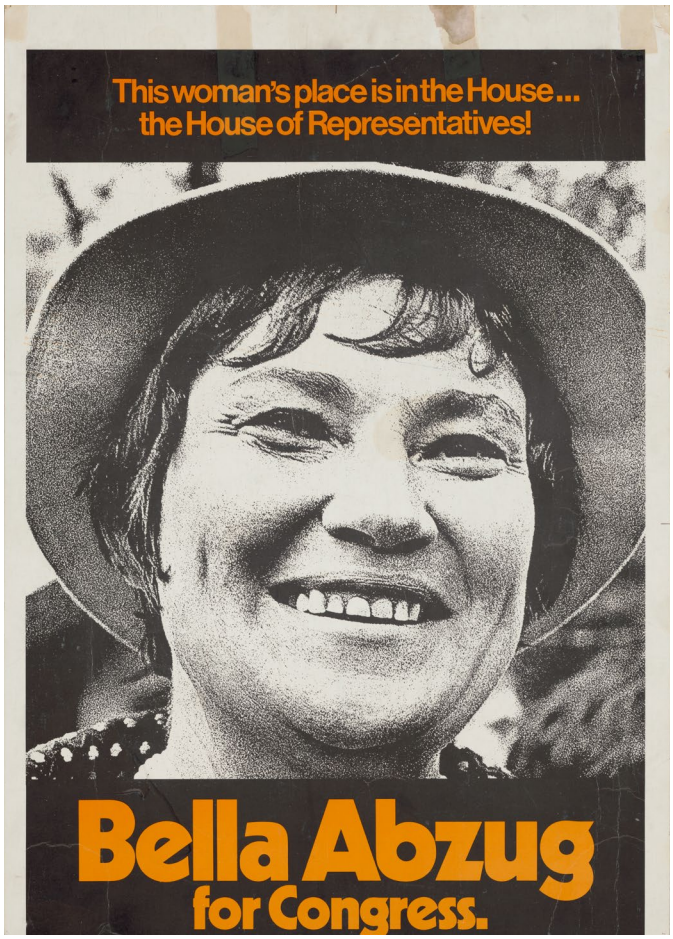
[4] Tony Michels, "Uprising of 20,000 (1909)," The Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish Women, Jewish Women's Archive, https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/uprising-of-20000-1909.

Additionally, Jewish women played a major role in the movement for women's suffrage. Maud Nathan, a wealthy **Orthodox** Jewish woman from a prominent New York family, became one of the suffrage movement's most significant advocates. After passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, Susan Brandeis, the daughter of Supreme Court Justice Louis Dembitz Brandeis, became the first woman to argue a case before the U.S. Supreme Court (*Johnson v. New York and New Jersey*, 1925).

Badge (paper, plastic, metal, round, paper) produced by the Jewish League for Woman Suffrage (JLWS), c.1912–1918. Jewish Women's Archive (TWL.2004.613).

During the 1930s and 1940s, Jewish women joined women's groups in record numbers. Involved in campaigns against immigration restriction, rescuing refugees from Nazism, and the creation of a Jewish homeland, they strengthened Jewish communities throughout the world. In 1945, Bess Myerson became the first Jewish woman to be crowned Miss America. She served as a spokesperson for and director of the Anti-Defamation League. Later, she helped found the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York.

Jewish women continued their activism in the 1950s and beyond. They were deeply involved in campaigns for civil rights, nuclear disarmament, and peace, providing them with organizational skills that were useful in developing the feminist movement. In 1961, Bella Abzug of New York co-founded Women Strike for Peace, which campaigned for a ban on nuclear testing and an end to the Vietnam War. Abzug was elected to Congress in 1971, where she had a distinguished career as a lawmaker. She went on to serve as Chairwoman of President Jimmy Carter's National Women's Advisory Council, chaired the first National Conference on Women in Houston in 1977, and co-founded the Women's Environment & Development Organization (WEDO).



Campaign poster for Bella Abzug. c.1971–1976. Library of Congress (2016648584).

The women's liberation movement of the late 1960s was strongly shaped by Jewish leaders. Betty Friedan, a Jewish journalist and author from Peoria, Illinois, helped launch the movement with her bestselling book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), which challenged the myth of women's domestic fulfillment. She also organized the Women's Strike for Equality on August 26, 1970—the fiftieth anniversary of the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment—where over 50,000 women marched for equal rights. In 1971, Friedan co-founded the Women's Political Caucus with Congresswoman Bella Abzug and journalist Gloria Steinem, also Jewish.

Jewish activists played key roles in pioneering feminist organizations of this same time period. The Chicago Women's Liberation Group, recognized as the first women's liberation group in the U.S., was founded by four Jewish women: Heather Booth, Amy Kesselman, Vivian Rothstein, and Naomi Weisstein.[5] Other Jewish leaders, including Shulamith Firestone, Alix Kates Shulman, Susan Brownmiller, Ellen Willis, and Robin Morgan, were instrumental in collectives like Redstockings and New York Radical Feminists. Morgan later became a contributing editor of *Ms.* magazine alongside Letty Cottin Pogrebin and Gloria Steinem when it was founded in 1972.

FEMINISM AND THE RELIGIOUS LIVES OF JEWISH WOMEN

Inspired by secular feminism's attacks against male superiority, other Jewish women recognized themselves explicitly as Jews and carried on the fight against sexism within Jewish religion and community life. In 1971, a dozen women in New York City, including Martha Acklesberg, Arlene Agus, and Paula Hyman, founded Ezrat Nashim to fight patriarchy within Jewish religion. In March 1972, the group invaded the **Conservative** movement's Rabbinical Assembly in Kiamesha, New York, demanding more equitable treatment of women within synagogues.[6]

Women's liberation also influenced figures in Jewish religious leadership, such as feminist theologian Judith Plaskow, rabbis Laura Geller and Rebecca Alpert, and Orthodox feminist leader, Blu Greenberg. Greenberg organized the First and Second International Conferences on Feminism and Orthodoxy in 1997 and 1998 and founded the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance (JOFA) in 1997.[7]

The Jewish feminist magazine, *Lilith*, launched in 1976 to explore the changing roles and opportunities of Jewish women. *B'not Esh* ("daughters of fire" in **Hebrew**), a Jewish feminist spirituality collective, was founded in 1981. In 1990, feminist theologian Judith Plaskow published her influential book, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective*.

Leaders in these efforts developed new rituals, liturgy, and midrash (a Hebrew term that refers to the textual interpretation of religious texts) focused on women's experiences. In 1976, several prominent New York Jewish feminists, including Esther Broner, Phyllis Chesler, Gloria Steinem, and Letty Cottin Pogrebin, organized a Jewish women's **seder** that became a model for women's seders throughout the country.

[5] To learn more about the Chicago Women's Liberation Union and its ongoing curriculum and archive initiatives, visit cwluherstory.org/.

[6] For more information about this historical event, access "Episode 72: Ezrat Nashim Confronts the Rabbis" from the podcast *Can We Talk? The JWA Podcast*, available at: jwa.org/podcasts/canwetalk/episode-72-ezrat-nashim-confronts-rabbis.

[7] Moira Ran Ben Hai, "Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance," The Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish Women, Jewish Women's Archive, jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/jewish-orthodox-feminist-alliance.

Women constitute a major component of the modern Jewish clergy and have innovated Jewish prayers and programs based on women's experiences and perspectives. On March 18, 1922, 12-year-old Judith Kaplan Eisenstein, the daughter of the founder of **Reconstructionist Judaism**, became the first American girl to celebrate her **bat mitzvah**. In 1972, the **Reform** movement ordained Sally Priesand as its first woman rabbi. Two years later, Sandy Eisenberg Sasso became the Reconstructionist movement's first woman rabbi. The Conservative movement ordained Amy Eilberg as its first female rabbi in 1985. Sara Hurwitz became the first Orthodox woman rabbi in 2009 with the titles *maharat* or *rabba*.

MODERN JEWISH FEMINISM

Entirely new organizations have focused on gathering stories of Jewish women, including more diverse representation, and created new sources of information and connection, which are rich sources for historical research and analysis in the present day. The Jewish Women's Archive (JWA), founded in 1995, pioneered the use of digital archives in collecting material about Jewish women and developed innovative oral history projects and public programs. The creation of this archive is, in itself, an example of activism in action.[8]

Jewish women's activism in and around the new millennium took multiple forms. Jewish feminists served as leaders in the anti-violence movement, immigration reform, the promotion of human rights, environmental justice, and labor activism, and in campaigns against poverty and racial injustice. Coalitions of Jewish women of color emerged as prominent voices of Jewish feminism.

Issues of racism, sexism, antisemitism, and anti-**Zionism** continue to be the topics of important conversations being held across diverse communities, both within the Jewish world and working in cooperation with those outside of it. These conversations have enabled Jewish women to increasingly bring their voices to bear within larger feminist movements.

[8] Access the Jewish Women's Archive at jwa.org/.

Jewish Artists and the Power of Social Realism

GUIDING QUESTION: How did Jewish American artists in the Social Realism movement (1930s–1940s) use their art to respond to and influence social issues in the United States?

AUTHOR: Meghan Thomas, Von Steuben Metropolitan Science Center, Chicago, Illinois

OVERVIEW

Students will explore the artwork of Jewish American artists associated with the American Social Realism tradition, along with selected primary and secondary source readings. They will analyze and discuss the societal issues highlighted by these artists. Each student will be assigned a specific work of art to research, focusing on both the artist and the Social Realism genre, and will create a presentation to share with the class.

OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this activity, students will be able to

- Explain how art, religious belief, and tradition connected for Jewish American artists in the 1930s and 1940s through the American Social Realism tradition;
- Use secondary and primary sources to prepare a presentation about a work of art; and
- Lead a discussion about a work of art with an audience.

DOCUMENTS USED

PRIMARY SOURCES

Painting, Abraham Rattner, *Place of Darkness*, 1943
Sidney and Lois Eskenazi Museum of Art, Indiana University (58.42)
https://collections.artmuseum.indiana.edu/browse/object.php?number=58.42

Painting, Ben Shahn, *Miner's Wives*, 1948
Philadelphia Museum of Art (1951-3-1)
https://www.philamuseum.org/collection/object/52275

Painting, Mitchell Siporin, *Let America Be America Again*, c.1936
Modernism in the New City
https://www.chicagomodern.org/art/let-america-be-america-again

Painting, Raphael Sawyer, *Dancing Lesson*, 1926
The Jewish Museum (2008-225)
https://collections.thejewishmuseum.org/collection/27833-dancing-lesson

Painting, Theresa Bernstein, *The Immigrants*, 1923
Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art
https://crystalbridges.org/blog/theresa-bernsteins-the-immigrants-paints-a-picture-of-twentieth-century-us-immigration-at-sea/

Painting, Todros Geller, *Strange Worlds*, 1928
Art Institute of Chicago (1949.27)
https://www.artic.edu/artworks/64385/strange-worlds

SECONDARY SOURCES

Article, "Social Realism"
The Art Story
https://www.theartstory.org/movement/social-realism/

Article, Matthew Baigell, "Social Concern and *Tikkun Olam* in Jewish American Art" (excerpt)
Ars Judaica: The Bar-Ilan Journal of Jewish Art, 2012

Book, Matthew Baigell, *Social Concern and Left Politics in Jewish American Art* (excerpt)

Video clip, *America after the Fall: Paintings from the 1930s* [2:27]
The Art Institute of Chicago
https://youtu.be/CrE5K5sS-Vo?feature=shared

Video clip, *A Mine Disaster and Those Left Behind: Ben Shahn's Miners' Wives* [5:08]
Smarthistory
https://youtu.be/PEmpUQzkvMc?feature=shared

TEACHER-CREATED MATERIALS

- SEEI Activity: Introduction to Social Realism
- First Look Worksheet
- Social Realism and Jewish Artists Presentation

ACTIVITY PREPARATION

- Make one copy of the SEEI Activity: Introduction to Social Realism for each student.
- Make two copies of the First Look Worksheet for each student.
- Print one copy of the Social Realism and Jewish Artists Presentation for each group (duplicate in larger classes if needed).
- Organize students into groups of three to five students each.

PROCEDURE

ACTIVITY ONE: INTRODUCING SOCIAL REALISM AND ART IN THE 1930S (30 MINUTES)

- Show the video clip, *America after the Fall: Paintings from the 1930s* [2:27].
- Help students place the topic in historical context by asking:
  - *Why does the curator argue that the 1930s were the most important decade of the twentieth century?*
  - *How were artists affected by the Great Depression?*
- Distribute one copy of the Introduction to Social Realism handout to each student. Ask students to read the introduction and work with a partner to complete the SEEI Activity.
- Finally, have students read the excerpts from art historian Matthew Baigell and answer the questions.

ACTIVITY TWO: MODELING ART ANALYSIS (20 MINUTES)

- Distribute one copy of the First Look Worksheet to each student.
- Project Ben Shahn's painting, *Miner's Wives* to the class.
- Instruct students to fill out a First Look Worksheet quietly for four or five minutes. They should work on their own for the first few minutes, then share observations with a partner.
  - **Teacher Tip:** The First Look Worksheet is designed to be straightforward and encourages students to write down everything they see, NOT to engage in analysis. The extended "look" time might seem like a long time, but the extended period of time spent just looking helps them to engage in deeper observation and thinking.
- Show the video clip, *A Mine Disaster and Those Left Behind: Ben Shahn's Miners' Wives* [5:08].
- Lead a short discussion:
  - *Did you see some or most of the details of the painting that are pointed out in the film when you took your first look at the painting?*
  - *Did the film change the way you looked at the painting? Why or why not?*
  - *What effect might Shahn's painting have had on a viewer at the time?*

ACTIVITY THREE: COMPARING IMMIGRATION STORIES (15 MINUTES)

- Organize students into groups of three to five students each and assign each student a painting:
  - *Dancing Lesson* by Raphael Soyer, 1926
  - *Strange Worlds* by Todros Geller, 1928
  - *Back of the Yards* by Mitchell Siporin, 1938
  - *The Immigrants* by Theresa Bernstein, 1938
  - *Place of Darkness* by Abraham Rattner, 1942

- Distribute one First Look Worksheet to each group and ask students to complete the task based on their piece of art.
- Explain that each group of students will present their piece of art to the class.
- Distribute one copy of the Social Realism and Jewish Artists Presentation handout to each group (there is one page for each artist).
- Instruct students to select a role within each group:
  - The biographer will research the artists and summarize their story.
  - The historian will research and present on the social issue that is being addressed.
  - The curator will prepare a set of questions to lead other students to analyze the piece of art.
- Give students time to research and prepare their segments. Circulate and assist as needed.

Students interested in this topic might be interested in researching the following for an NHD project:

- **The Federal Arts Project (1935–1943)**
- **The Harlem Renaissance (1920s–1930s)**
- **Diego Rivera and the American Labor Movement**
- **Jacob Lawrence**
- **Dorthea Lange**
- **Elizabeth Catlett**

ASSESSMENT OPTIONS

- Students can present their work to the whole class or to another group.
- Teachers can lead a class discussion with the following questions:
  - *Which of the works of art that were presented do you think had the strongest elements of social commentary? Explain why you chose the work of art and what elements of the painting made it strong.*
  - *Based on what you have learned in the presentations, what do you think were the main issues facing Jewish Americans in the 1930s and 1940s? Explain why you chose these issues. Use examples from the sources you looked at as examples.*
  - *Do you think art is an effective way to learn about historical events and eras? Why or why not?*

To access a PDF containing all of the sources and materials to complete this lesson plan, go to nhd.org/expansivehistory.

Learning Module 3:

What do Jews Make of America?

American Jews in Uniform: Stories of Valor and Resilience

Michael Rugel, Director of Programs and Content, National Museum of American Jewish Military History

Jewish Americans have been part of the military since the Colonial Era, challenging stereotypes and fighting against **antisemitic** ideas. They have often enlisted at rates higher than their representation in the general population. Many have shown extraordinary courage, with at least 18 receiving the highest military honor, the Medal of Honor. Their service counters long-standing myths that labeled Jews as unfit or unwilling to serve. Their military contributions demonstrate how individuals can change societal perceptions through service and sacrifices, provide insight into the complex identities of those who served, and highlight how Jews have played a significant role in American history.

REVOLUTIONARY WAR

When the colonies sought freedom from the British monarchy, a small percentage of the American population was Jewish. Nevertheless, Jews played important roles in George Washington's Continental Army. Men like Solomon Bush and Mordecai Sheftall served as high-ranking officers at a time when prohibitions in European armies kept Jews at lower ranks.[1] Other Jewish men and women served on the homefront or worked in hospitals healing the wounded. Jewish financiers like Hyam Salomon worked to obtain loans for the cause and made personal loans to the new American leaders.

Jewish women made financial and supporting contributions. They led fundraising campaigns and supported the patriots' cause by sustaining morale and community at a time of hardships. Grace Seixas Nathan was a member of an influential patriotic family. Her brother, Gershom Mendes Seixas, was known as the "**Rabbi** of the Revolution." During the war, she documented her strong support for the Revolution and her commitment to the ideals of liberty in correspondence that remains a valuable historical record. Like many, she traveled from occupied New York to Philadelphia, a hub of Revolutionary activity, where she inspired others to contribute to the cause. In the South, women like Abigail Minis and Frances Hart Sheftall made similar contributions.

As an officer in the Continental Army and then as a diplomat, David Salisbury Franks overcame many challenges to contribute to his new country. The Philadelphia-born Franks lived in Montreal in 1776. He joined the Army following the Battle of Montreal, leading to a complex career. Franks served in the Northern Campaign and distinguished himself at the pivotal Battle of Saratoga. In recognition of his accomplishments he was promoted and given a new

[1] Derek J. Penslar, *Jews and the Military: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

assignment as an aide-de-camp to an important general. Unfortunately for Franks, his new direct superior officer turned out to be the most famous traitor in American history: Benedict Arnold.

When Arnold's treachery was revealed, Franks was implicated by association. Eager to continue serving, Franks asked General George Washington for a trial to clear his name. He wrote, "I requested to be indulged with a Court of Enquiry on my Conduct, not only to investigate what Knowledge or Share I might have had in the late General Arnold's Perfidy, but also to take in a retrospective View of my Conduct whilst serving in his Family at Philadelphia."[2]

Franks' efforts were successful. He was exonerated in a court martial and continued to serve as an Army officer. But he still faced suspicion, likely compounded by his sharing a name with his uncle, David Franks, a Loyalist and British contractor. His Jewish identity may have further intensified doubts about his loyalty. However, none of this stopped him from continuing to serve his country.

Franks later served as a diplomat, entrusted with carrying important dispatches to Europe. His diplomatic career may have been limited by personal characteristics that Thomas Jefferson noted. In a letter to James Madison, Jefferson wrote that Franks had "an understanding somewhat better than common but too little guard over his lips" and that "in the company of women . . . he loses all power over himself and becomes almost frenzied."[3] Though Jefferson pointed out Franks' all-too-human flaws, his career shows that Jews were accepted in early American society, albeit with some suspicion. Franks died in Philadelphia in the yellow fever epidemic of 1793. Despite his flaws, he was remembered as a good soldier and devoted patriot.

THE CIVIL WAR

Thousands of Jews fought on both sides of the Civil War. The loyalties within Jewish communities reflected the diversity of thought across the rest of America. Jews often shared the political views of their neighbors, rather than following a unified Jewish perspective.[4] Some were slaveholders; others were abolitionists. Some were deeply devoted to the causes of the day, and others remained unmotivated by ideological concerns around slavery. Jews contributed to both the Union and Confederate causes.[5] Their varied experiences and choices during the war highlight both the complexity and individuality of Jewish identity in nineteenth-century America.

[2] To George Washington from Major David S. Franks, 16 October 1780," letter, October 16, 1780, Founders Online, National Archives and Records Administration. https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-28-02-0192-0017.

[3] "From Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 14 February 1783," letter, February 14, 1783, Founders Online, National Archives and Records Administration. https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-06-02-0225.

[4] Adam D. Mendelssohn, *Jewish Soldiers in the Civil War: The Union Army* (NYU Press, 2022).

[5] To search for soldiers by name, visit "The Shapell Roster of Jewish Service in the American Civil War" at shapell.org/roster/.

Portrait photograph of Colonel Marcus M. Spiegel, 1863. National Museum of American Jewish Military History (P984.014.003).

For many Central European Jewish **immigrants**, the Civil War offered an economic opportunity: a steady paycheck. Marcus Spiegel, a Union officer from Ohio, enlisted for economic reasons, but developed abolitionist ideals. After initially supporting slavery, Spiegel came to oppose the institution, stating his "deep conviction" against it.[6] Spiegel's story illustrates how firsthand experiences in war shaped soldiers' beliefs, making the ideals of freedom a personal commitment.

Jewish soldiers in the Civil War faced institutionalized as well as personal antisemitism. The most prominent example of institutional antisemitic discrimination was General Ulysses S. Grant's General Orders No. 11, which expelled Jews from parts of the Union-occupied South.[7] It claimed that Jews were, "as a class, violating every regulation of trade established by the Treasury Department, and also Department orders, are hereby expelled from the Department." The American Jewish community responded with outrage, and politicians from Grant to President Abraham Lincoln were bombarded with complaints from Jewish community members and active Jewish American soldiers.

In addition to actively fighting against the idea that Jews are dishonest in trade, as suggested by General Grant's infamous order, Jewish Americans also challenged the belief that they could not serve effectively in the military. Many had successful military careers that proved these assumptions wrong. Leopold Karpeles was one of at least four Jewish recipients of the Medal of Honor during the Civil War, the nation's highest military honor. His bravery in leading Union troops during the Wilderness Campaign served as a strong example of courage and valor.

WORLD WAR I

From the Civil War to World War I, the American Jewish population increased significantly. In 1860, about 150,000 Jews lived in the United States, and by 1920, that number grew to around 3.5 million. Just as they had done in all previous American armed conflicts, American Jews enlisted in large numbers. When the U.S. entered the war in 1917, approximately 225,000 Jewish men and women served in all branches of the military.

For the first time, women officially participated as uniformed members of the military. They worked in clerical jobs, drove trucks, and served as mechanics, radio operators, telephone operators, translators, and camouflage artists. Minnie Goldman and Hortense Levy, both Jewish women, served as "Hello Girls," women who worked operating telephones near the front lines to provide important communications.

The Office of Jewish War Records was created to document the reality that Jews "did their bit" in the war. The first report was prepared immediately after the end of the war using data gathered by December 31, 1918. It listed the branches in which Jews served, awards and honors received, casualties, and other statistics.

[6] Marcus M. Spiegel, *A Jewish Colonel in the Civil War: Marcus M. Spiegel of the Ohio Volunteers*, ed. Frank Loyola Byrne, Jean Powers Soman (University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 316.

[7] Jonathan D. Sarna, *When General Grant Expelled the Jews* (Nextbook, 2012).

Though acknowledging incomplete data and the challenges of identifying who was Jewish, the report noted that Jews made up about three percent of the U.S. population but constituted four to five percent of the total military force.[8] During the First World War, four Jewish Americans received the Medal of Honor.

A line of American telephone exchange operators seated at their stations in the Elysees Palace Hotel in Paris, France. National Archives and Records Administration (NAID: 86703177).

Many American Jews in service were foreign-born. These Jewish immigrants experienced a shift in identity as the U.S. military provided a rapid Americanization process. Many had come to America fleeing persecution, including from **pogroms** in Eastern Europe. In the Russian Empire, Jews faced forced conscription (forced enrollment in a country's armed forces), were barred from advancing in rank or holding officer positions, and were often mistreated. Because military service was unequal and discriminatory, Jews frequently sought to avoid it. In the U.S., however, the call to serve was more often embraced, and even seen as a means to **acculturate** and earn respect in the American milieu.

Jews served alongside hundreds of thousands of foreign-born soldiers from 46 nations, many with limited English skills. The U.S. Army responded by creating the Camp Gordon Plan, which established a Foreign Soldiers Subsection that provided military instruction in the native languages of the recruits, including **Yiddish**, the language of Jewish Eastern Europe. The program was a success and instituted in Army camps across the country.[9]

World War I soldier Benjamin Lichter. National Museum of American Jewish Military History.

Abraham Krotoshinsky came to America specifically to avoid military service under the repressive regime of the Russian Empire. He wrote, "As I look back at it now, it all seems strange. I ran away from Russia and came to America to escape military service. I hated Russia, its people, its government, in particular its cruel and inhuman treatment of Jews. Such a Government I refused to serve." In his new homeland, his attitude changed.[10]

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[8] American Jewish Committee, *The War Record of American Jews: First Report of the Office of War Records* (American Jewish Committee, 1919).

[9] "Primary Sources - Camp Gordon Plan Part I," The United States World War I Centennial Commission, accessed November 6, 2024. https://www.worldwar1centennial.org/index.php?view=article&id=6092:primary-sources-camp-gordon-plan&catid=345:americans-all.

[10] Abraham Krotoshinsky, "How the Lost Battalion was Saved: A Jewish Hero Relives The Argonne," *The Jewish Veteran*, April 1937, 5.

Krotoshinsky enlisted in the U.S. Army and joined the 77th Division, known as the "Melting Pot" division; around 25 percent of its members were Jewish.[11] In the Argonne Forest, he volunteered to break through German lines and succeeded in delivering a critical message to headquarters, earning him the Distinguished Service Cross, the military's second-highest honor.[12] Krotoshinsky's story illustrates how immigrants embraced their new identity and contributed to their adopted country.

WORLD WAR II

World War II marked the most significant chapter in American Jewish military service, both in the unprecedented number of Jews who served and in the deeply personal stake they had in the conflict. Just as in other conflicts, Jewish women served in many capacities.[13] The Army and Navy Nurse Corps expanded, offering the closest opportunity for women to access combat zones. Each branch of the military established women's units.

Frances Slanger, a native of Łódź, Poland, immigrated to the United States as a child and grew up in Roxbury, Massachusetts. She was one of the first four military nurses to land in Normandy after D-Day. On October 21, 1944, she penned a heartfelt letter to *Stars and Stripes*, the American military newspaper, and reflected on the sacrifices of soldiers and the work of nurses in the European Theater. In her letter, she expressed profound admiration for the resilience and courage of the GIs, and expressed the necessity of the work of the field hospitals. She compared the work of the overseas nurses to keeping alive a burning fire, writing:

> [W]ith the slow feeding of wood and finally coal, a roaring fire is started . . . how similar to a human being a fire is. If it is not allowed to run down too low, and if there is a spark of life left in it, it can be nursed back. So can a human being. It is slow. It is gradual. It is done all the time in these field hospitals and other hospitals at the ETO.[14]

Tragically, the same day her letter was published, Slanger was killed in a German artillery attack.[15]

As in World War I, an organization was established to document the contributions of Jewish women and men in service for public recognition and historical record. The Bureau of War Records of the National Jewish Welfare Board estimated that 550,000 Jewish Americans served across all branches of the U.S. armed forces.[16] Jews in service held various roles, and fought in the Pacific and across Europe. The war in Europe held special resonance for American Jews. For many Jews, fighting in Europe was deeply personal; it meant taking a stand against the persecution being carried out by the Nazis. Often Jewish American servicemembers had personal connections with those being oppressed by and even murdered at the hands of the occupying Nazi forces.

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[11] *The War Record of American Jews.*

[12] "Abraham Krotoshinsky," Hall of Valor, *Military Times*, https://valor.militarytimes.com/hero/13001/.

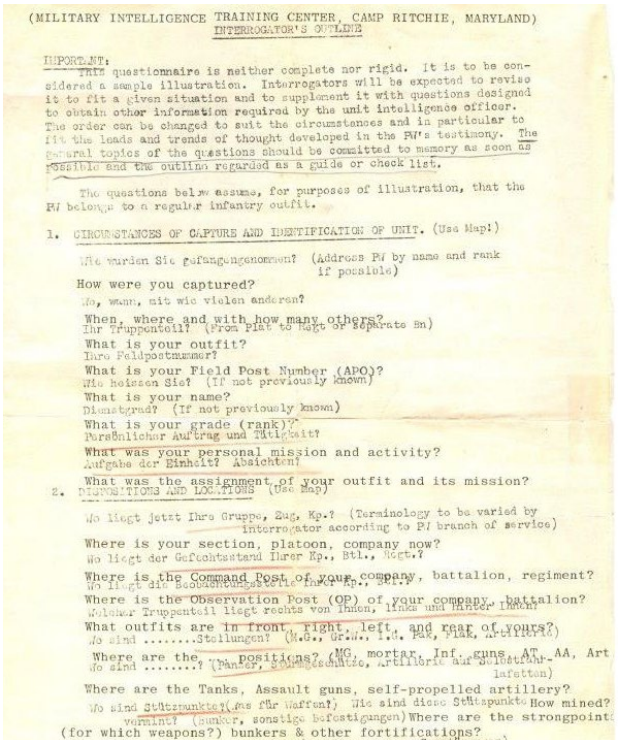
[13] To learn more about women's participation in World War II, visit this helpful resource from the National World War II Museum: nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers/student-resources/research-starters/research-starters-women-world-war-ii.

[14] For more information about Slanger and her letter to *Stars and Stripes*, see nmajmh.org/education/individual-profiles/frances-slanger/.

[15] Bob Welch, *American Nightingale: The Story of Frances Slanger, Forgotten Heroine of Normandy* (Atria Books, 2005).

[16] Isadore Kaufman, *American Jews in World War II, Volume One* (The Dial Press, 1947).

Again, Jewish immigrants played an important role in the war. Some recent immigrants had escaped the Nazis and later returned to Europe as American service members. Some were "Ritchie Boys" who trained at the Military Intelligence Training Center at Camp Ritchie, Maryland, where they used their language skills and knowledge of Europe to gather intelligence and interrogate Prisoners of War (POWs).[17] Returning to Europe as Americans, some Ritchie Boys found themselves in the jarring position of interrogating their former friends and neighbors.



(MILITARY INTELLIGENCE TRAINING CENTER, CAMP RITCHIE, MARYLAND)
INTERROGATOR'S OUTLINE

IMPORTANT:
This questionnaire is neither complete nor rigid. It is to be considered a sample illustration. Interrogators will be expected to revise it to fit a given situation and to supplement it with questions designed to obtain other information required by the unit intelligence officer. The order can be changed to suit the circumstances and in particular to fit the leads and trends of thought developed in the PW's testimony. The general topics of the questions should be committed to memory as soon as possible and the outline regarded as a guide or check list.

The questions below assume, for purposes of illustration, that the PW belongs to a regular infantry outfit.

1. CIRCUMSTANCES OF CAPTURE AND IDENTIFICATION OF UNIT. (Use Map!)

Wie wurden Sie gefangengenommen? (Address PW by name and rank if possible)
How were you captured?
Wo, wann, mit wie vielen anderen?
When, where and with how many others?
Ihr Truppenteil? (From Plat to regt or separate Bn)
What is your outfit?
Ihre Feldpostnummer?
What is your Field Post Number (APO)?
Wie heissen Sie? (If not previously known)
What is your name?
Dienstgrad? (If not previously known)
What is your grade (rank)?
Persönlicher Auftrag und Tätigkeit?
What was your personal mission and activity?
Aufgabe der Einheit? Absichten?
What was the assignment of your outfit and its mission?

2. DISPOSITIONS AND LOCATIONS (Use Map)

Wo liegt jetzt Ihre Gruppe, Zug, Kp.? (Terminology to be varied by interrogator according to PW branch of service)
Where is your section, platoon, company now?
Wo liegt der Gefechtsstand Ihrer Kp., Btl., Regt.?
Where is the Command Post of your company, battalion, regiment?
Wo liegt die Beobachtungsstelle Ihrer Kp., Btl.?
Where is the Observation Post (OP) of your company, battalion?
Welcher Truppenteil liegt rechts von Ihnen, links und hinter Ihnen?
What outfits are in front, right, left, and rear of yours?
Wo sind .....Stellungen? (M.G., Gr.W., l.I., Pak, Flak, Artillerie?)
Where are the ..... positions? (MG, mortar, Inf. guns, AT, AA, Art
Wo sind .....? (Panzer, Sturmgeschütze, Artillerie zur Unterstützung-
lafetten)
Where are the Tanks, Assault guns, self-propelled artillery?
Wo sind Stützpunkte? (Aus für Waffen?) Wie sind diese Stützpunkte How mined?
vermint? (Bunker, sonstige befestigungen) Where are the strongpoints
(for which weapons?) bunkers & other fortifications?

Left: Sample questionnaire from Camp Ritchie for interrogation of German prisoners. Leon Mendel Collection, National Museum of American Jewish Military History (A988.313.006).

Right: An American soldier and a Holocaust survivor, Eli Heimberg Collection, National Museum of American Jewish Military History (P993.087.125).

When the U.S. Army began liberating Nazi concentration camps in the spring of 1945, Jewish soldiers played a particularly important role. They aided survivors and bore witness to atrocities. These acts underscored the unique stakes for Jewish American soldiers: they were fighting for their country, their heritage, and the survival of their people. Some spoke Yiddish and could communicate with survivors in the camps. Variations on the phrase "Ich bin an Amerikaner Yid" appear in the accounts of many Jewish liberators identifying themselves as an American and offering Jewish community where the Nazis had tried to destroy it.

[17] Beverly Eddy, *Ritchie Boy Secrets: How a Force of Immigrants and Refugees Helped Win World War II* (Stackpole Books, 2021).

Morris Eisenstein served with the 42nd Infantry Division at the liberation of Dachau. He described his encounter with a young survivor in the camp:

> . . . I saw that little Jewish fellow in a corner, weeping and wailing. And the idea was you go over and try to get him straightened out which I think I did.
>
> I told him 'Ich bin American Yid,' so he looked around, he was amazed . . . Then he started weeping . . . I didn't know what to do . . . We had had a firefight with some SS two days before. I had a pile of money in my pocket, about 15-20,000 dollars in a big wad, big enough to choke a horse. I pulled it out, and I put it in the pocket of his jacket. He said in Yiddish, 'I can't take this, it's not proper. I have nothing to give you in exchange.' I was so overwhelmed, I almost cried right then and there. And then I saw the badge on his uniform. You know . . . the tin with the name "Jude" on it. That's one of the best deals I ever made. $15,000 for a piece of tin. It was, of course, financially no deal. But morally and emotionally it was the best deal I ever made in my life.[18]

Eisenstein received two Silver Stars and three Bronze Stars for his service in World War II. His experience at Dachau deeply impacted his life, leading him to devote himself to philanthropic causes.

Though the Jewish contribution to the war helped many Jews to become accepted as "full Americans," the fight against antisemitism was far from over both within the military and in larger American culture.

KOREAN WAR

Just five years after the end of World War II, Americans were once again called to serve—this time in the Korean War. For some Jewish refugees who had survived concentration camps as children or teenagers and resettled in the U.S., this conflict became their first opportunity to serve their new country in uniform. Hungarian-born Tibor Rubin lost much of his family in the Holocaust. He was imprisoned at Mauthausen concentration camp when it was liberated on May 5, 1945. Inspired by the American soldiers he saw that day, he swore he would come to the U.S. and "become a G.I. Joe."[19]

Rubin joined the U.S. Army in 1950. Despite his exceptional service, he faced persistent discrimination from his antisemitic first sergeant. This sergeant withheld recommendations for Rubin's commendations, deliberately preventing him from receiving recognition for his bravery during and after combat. Even in the face of this injustice, Rubin's dedication to courageous service remained unwavering. When his unit was ordered to retreat under heavy attack, Rubin remained behind to hold a strategic hill, delaying the enemy for 24 hours. After being captured, he drew on his experience as a Holocaust survivor to help fellow prisoners endure the hardships of the POW camp—quietly sharing what little he had, caring for the sick, and offering support where he could.

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[18] *GIs Remember: Liberating the Concentration Camps* (National Museum of American Jewish Military History, 1994).

[19] Tibor Rubin Collection, oral history, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress (AFC/2001/001/89865). https://www.loc.gov/item/afc2001001.89865/.

Rubin's personal experiences with discrimination highlight the challenges that Jewish service members sometimes faced within the military, even as they fought for their country and the values it represented. His Medal of Honor, awarded in 2005 by President George W. Bush, recognized his valor and sacrifice. Rubin's story reflects themes of courage, perseverance, and facing discrimination. His actions, despite the prejudice he encountered, reflect quiet moral strength and the need to remember and address past injustices.[20]

CONCLUSION

Jews have continued to serve in the U.S. military through the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and into the present day. In 2021, Christopher Celiz became the only Jewish servicemember posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor in the War on Terror, for his heroism in Afghanistan.[21]

The history of Jewish participation in the American military highlights the nuanced relationship between identity, patriotism, and belonging. It is a powerful reflection of the vital roles that immigrants and members of minoritized communities have played in shaping the nation. Their service and sacrifice are a reminder that American strength and values are upheld by people of all backgrounds, including Jewish Americans who have stood alongside their fellow citizens in defense of the country.

[20] Daniel Cohen, *Single Handed: The Inspiring True Story of Tibor "Teddy" Rubin–Holocaust Survivor, Korean War Hero, and Medal of Honor Recipient* (Dutton Caliber, 2016).

[21] "Christopher Andrew Celiz," Congressional Medal of Honor Society, accessed May 12, 2025. www.cmohs.org/recipients/christopher-a-celiz.

The Evolution of American Jewish Philanthropy

Beth S. Wenger, Ph.D., Moritz and Josephine Berg Professor of History, Associate Dean for Graduate Studies, School of Arts and Sciences, University of Pennsylvania

Jewish philanthropy in the United States defies neat categorization and reflects the diversity of religious, cultural, and ideological concerns that have motivated American Jews over the centuries. Best understood as a broad umbrella of distinct efforts rather than a singular phenomenon, Jewish philanthropy has touched virtually every aspect of American Jewish life. Secular and religiously based organizations have raised money, offered assistance, and engaged in advocacy to further their missions. In addition to funding particular causes, Jewish philanthropic activities have included support for **immigrants** arriving in the United States and aid supplied to Jews abroad. Jewish philanthropy has never been monolithic or free from the internal differences that have divided American Jews. Yet, it has remained a constant part of community life, even as its goals and approaches have changed over time.

Jewish philanthropy in the United States started with local efforts to support **synagogues** and religious needs in early communities. By the early twentieth century, these efforts grew into city-wide and national initiatives. As immigration swelled and Jewish communities abroad faced devastating crises, new organizations emerged with far-reaching philanthropic portfolios. By the last quarter of the twentieth century, changes in tax policies and growing pockets of wealth influenced philanthropy across the United States. The American Jewish community followed this trend, focusing on organizational endowments and foundations that shaped communal priorities.[1]

Some scholars have argued that Jewish philanthropy can be traced directly back to the biblical era. They claim that ***tsedakah*** (the **Hebrew** term for charity or righteousness) has been a continuous thread throughout Jewish history, and that ancient precepts connected seamlessly to modern Jewish philanthropy. But such assessments often ignore the particular historical circumstances that led Jews to create philanthropic institutions over time. For example, in the medieval and early modern periods, rulers generally required Jews to assume responsibility for their own poor as a condition of their residency in a given place. As a result, Jewish communities developed structured systems of charity to meet these obligations, balancing religious duty with practical necessity. Jewish philanthropy evolved in response to specific historical conditions, creating a rich network of societies, organizations, and institutions long before Jews arrived in the United States.[2]

[1] Lila Corwin Berman, *The American Jewish Philanthropic Complex: The History of a Multibillion-Dollar Institution* (Princeton University Press, 2021).

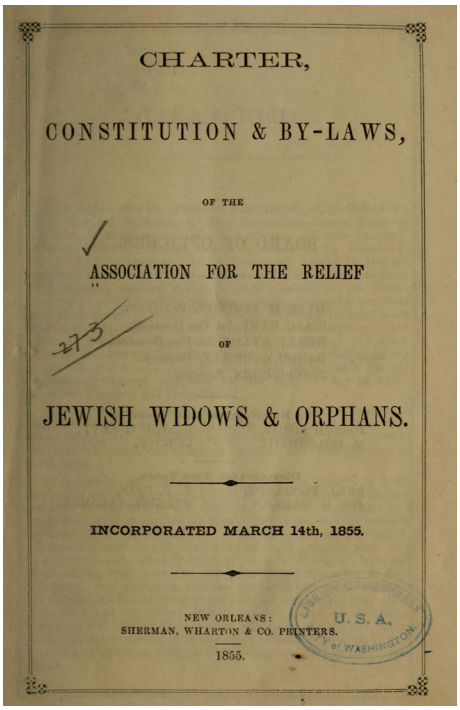
[2] Derek J. Penslar, *Shylock's Children: Economics and Jewish Identity in Modern Europe* (University of California Press, 2001), 90—107.

THE BEGINNINGS OF JEWISH PHILANTHROPY IN THE UNITED STATES

The first recorded instance of Jewish charitable activity in the North American colonies came, ironically, after New Amsterdam Governor Peter Stuyvesant failed in his effort to prohibit Jews (whom he called "the deceitful race") from settling in the colony. His Dutch superiors permitted Jews to remain in New Amsterdam on the condition that "the poor among them, shall not become a burden to the company or to the community, but be supported by their own nation."[3] In all likelihood, Jews would have undertaken this task without the imposed stipulation. However, the notion that "Jews take care of their own" referred to by later generations of Jewish social workers as the "**Stuyvesant Promise**," endured as a guiding principle of communal life in the United States.[4]

GENDER AND JEWISH PHILANTHROPY

The Jewish population in the United States began to increase in the mid-nineteenth century, reaching about 50,000 by 1850. Jewish charitable associations, often associated with synagogues, sprang up to meet the charitable needs of the Jewish community. In this respect, Jews followed the patterns described by French traveler Alexis de Tocqueville, who visited the United States and authored his famous *Democracy in America* in the 1830s. His observation about the proliferation of voluntary societies in the United States aptly characterized Jewish communal behavior in early America. Jews joined non-Jewish Americans in constructing what historians call the Benevolent Empire.[5]


CHARTER,

CONSTITUTION & BY-LAWS,

OF THE

ASSOCIATION FOR THE RELIEF

OF

JEWISH WIDOWS & ORPHANS.

INCORPORATED MARCH 14th, 1855.

NEW ORLEANS:
SHERMAN, WHARTON & CO. PRINTERS.
1855.

U. S. A.

Printed cover page for the Association For The Relief Of Jewish Widows & Orphans, *Charter, Constitution & By-laws, of the Association for the Relief of Jewish Widows & Orphans*, 1855, Library of Congress (ca10001843).

In the nineteenth century, in both Jewish and non-Jewish circles, charity increasingly became identified as the province of women, because women were considered to possess an innate nurturing character.[6] Often associated with synagogues, Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Societies, sewing circles, and scores of other Jewish women's organizations emerged across the United States to help the needy. Jewish women often personally delivered assistance, goods, and funds to families in distress.[7] This was so common that it is virtually impossible to find a synagogue report or communal address that fails to thank "the ladies" for their good works.

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[3] Reply of the Amsterdam Chamber of the West Indian Company to Peter Stuyvesant, in Samuel Oppenheim, "The Early History of the Jews in New York, 1654-1664," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 18 (1909), 8.

[4] Beth S. Wenger, *New York Jews and the Great Depression* (Yale University Press, 1996), 139-42.

[5] Alexis de Tocqueville and Henry Reeve, *Democracy in America*, 128-133. Library of Congress (09021576). https://www.loc.gov/item/09021576/.

[6] To learn more about "The Cult of True Womanhood" or the "Cult of True Domesticity" see the following video resource from PBS Learning Media: wisconsin.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/ush22-soc-domesticitycult/the-cult-of-domesticity/.

[7] Karla Goldman, *Beyond the Synagogue Gallery: Finding a Place for Women in American Judaism* (Harvard University Press, 2000), 140-41; Annie Polland and Daniel Soyer, *Emerging Metropolis: New York Jews in the Age of Immigration, 1840-1920* (New York University Press, 2012), 45-46.

A few of these efforts expanded into more far-reaching endeavors that extended beyond the boundaries of the synagogue community. Philadelphia's Rebecca Gratz founded the city's Female Hebrew Benevolent Society and the nation's first Jewish foster home and Hebrew Sunday School. For Gratz, these institutions served the needs of the growing Jewish community but equally important, they comprised part of a far-reaching effort to preserve and promote Judaism in Christian society.[8]

In nineteenth-century America, Jews combined both philanthropic and religious concerns. The first Jewish fraternal lodge, B'nai B'rith, was founded by Jewish men in 1843. It was created to offer a space for male sociability outside the synagogue. In addition, the lodge included a mission to provide aid to members facing illness or other "untoward events," and to support widows and orphans.[9] As the Jewish American population grew, individual synagogues and societies could not shoulder charitable burdens alone and began reaching across congregational and associational lines. By the late 1800s, this resulted in the creation of everything from Jewish hospitals to orphan asylums to organizations that gave **matzah** to the poor on **Passover**. A few Jewish charitable efforts were grand affairs, such as the lavish balls held during the Jewish holiday of **Purim**. These events served not only as elegant social gatherings but also as opportunities to raise funds for communal needs.[10]

The Hebrew Purim Ball at the Academy of Music, March 14, 1865. Library of Congress (96505276).

[8] Dianne Ashton, *Rebecca Gratz: Women and Judaism in Antebellum America* (Wayne State University Press, 2015).

[9] Deborah Dash Moore, *B'nai B'rith and the Challenge of Ethnic Leadership* (SUNY Press, 1981), 11.

[10] Polland and Soyer, *Emerging Metropolis*, 45-57.

CONSOLIDATING JEWISH PHILANTHROPY

Even as the number of Jewish charitable associations grew, a growing chorus of Jewish communal leaders began to decry the duplication of efforts and to advocate for more systematic approaches to Jewish philanthropy. In 1860, Chicago's Jews created a United Hebrew Relief Association, bringing together several charitable associations. Philadelphia did the same with a United Hebrew Charities in 1869, and New York followed suit in 1874. For a time, these joint ventures succeeded, but even they could not keep up with the constant creation of new charitable organizations within the Jewish community. As the Jewish population grew, so did the demand for support and the number of organizations working to meet those needs.

Between 1880 and 1924, approximately three million Jews, mostly from Eastern Europe, immigrated to the United States. This surge in immigration led to the rapid growth of aid societies. Addressing the needs of these new arrivals became a key communal priority, prompting efforts to merge various charitable organizations into more efficient, unified institutions. The notion of Federated Jewish Charities was conceived to coordinate a wide range of Jewish associations. Jewish Federations (as they are now known) were based on the principle of creating an umbrella structure "to bring together the various agencies engaged in separate fund-raising and to concentrate on a single, annual, combined subscription appeal on their behalf."[11] This approach sought to centralize an annual campaign and distribute the funds to constituent groups. The first Jewish Federation was established in Boston in 1895, followed by Cincinnati a year later. By the early twentieth century, Federations had been founded in Baltimore, San Francisco, Pittsburgh, and many others cities across the country. New York, due to its large Jewish community and numerous organizations, took longer to organize, finally creating a Federation for the Support of Jewish Philanthropic Societies in 1917. Despite this delay, the trend was clear: by the time World War I began, 23 cities had established Jewish Federations.[12]

The coordination of fundraising and disbursement proved advantageous in avoiding duplication of efforts, but had ripple effects, impacting the professional development and gendered practices of Jewish philanthropy. Faced with the challenge of serving millions of East European Jewish immigrants, American Jews searched for more productive ways of caring for the poor, meeting their employment needs, and searching for the root causes of poverty, delinquency, and other social problems. As efficiency and scientific methods became the watchwords of the day, men began to take center stage in American Jewish philanthropy.[13]

Women remained active in charitable activities, but their efforts were increasingly deemed quaint and unscientific by men who assumed professional leadership positions. Some independent Jewish women's associations remained, and a few became large-scale organizations. The National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), for example, was founded in 1893 by middle-class women who arrived in the United States in the mid-nineteenth century.

[11] Harry L. Lurie, *A Heritage Affirmed: The Jewish Federation Movement in America* (Jewish Publication Society, 1961), 38.

[12] Boris D. Bogen, *Jewish Philanthropy: An Exposition of Principles and Methods of Jewish Social Service in the United States* (Patterson Smith, 1969), 43-58.

[13] Daniel J. Walkowitz, *Working with Class: Social Workers and the Politics of Middle-Class Identity* (University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 32.

The organization's original goal was to promote Judaism and advocate for social justice, but it soon focused on immigrant aid, specifically assisting women and children. During the peak years of immigration to the United States, the NCJW regularly dispatched delegates to the docks to assist young Jewish women, preventing them from falling into the hands of men who preyed on immigrant women traveling alone.[14] While the NCJW and other women's organizations remained prominent players, community-wide Federations generally excluded women from leadership positions as a professional class of men increasingly adopted corporate models of philanthropy.[15]

ASSISTING MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

Jewish immigrants mobilized to help one another. The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), founded by East European Jews who had recently arrived in the U.S., sent representatives to Ellis Island and other major ports to negotiate with authorities who might attempt to detain or deport Jewish immigrants. *The Jewish Immigrant*, a bilingual HIAS publication, circulated widely in Eastern Europe to prepare immigrants for what to expect when they arrived.[16] HIAS workers also advised newcomers how to navigate the maze of American bureaucracies.

At the same time, immigrants initiated their own grassroots and mutual aid organizations, most notably ***landsmanshaftn*** (Jewish hometown societies). More than 3,000 of these societies were created in New York alone. Groups of Jews from the same European hometown pooled their resources to provide unemployment insurance, sick and death benefits, low-interest loans, and other services. Later, these organizations sent funds back to Europe during times of crisis.[17]

***The Jewish Immigrant*, January 1909. New York: Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, 1909. Library of Congress (045.00.00).**

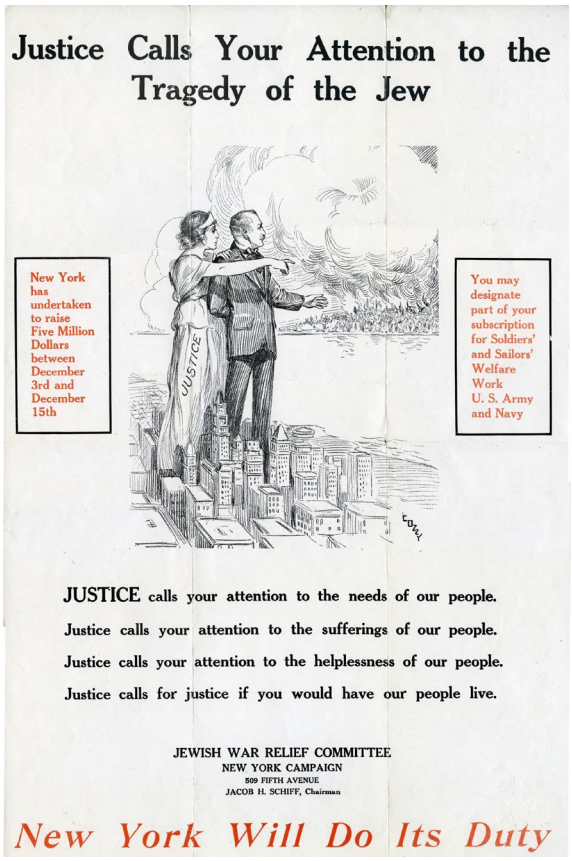
[14] Faith Rogow, *Gone to Another Meeting: The National Council of Jewish Women, 1893-1993* (University of Alabama Press, 1993), 136-66.

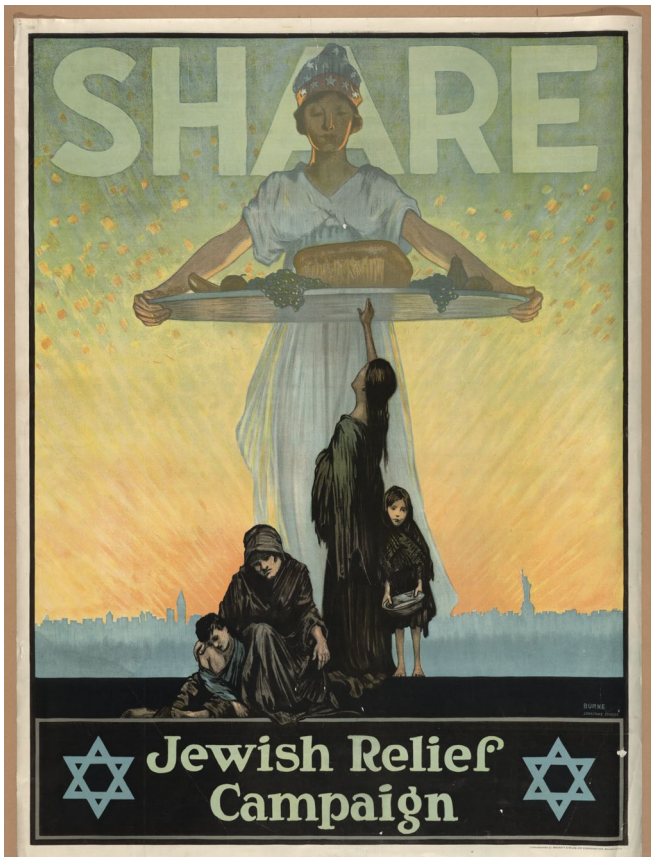
[15] Beth S. Wenger, "Federation Men: The Masculine World of New York Jewish Philanthropy, 1880-1945," *American Jewish History* 101:3 (July 2017), 377-99.

[16] Gerald Sorin, *A Time for Building: The Third Migration, 1880-1920* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 49-50.

[17] Daniel Soyer, *Jewish Immigrant Associations and American Identity in New York, 1880-1939* (Harvard University Press, 1997), 1, 81-112.

During the First World War, American Jews from a variety of backgrounds rallied to help their coreligionists abroad, as war ravaged Russia's Pale of Settlement, where millions of Jews lived. Several different Jewish war relief organizations sprang up, each representing a different constituency.[18] The most enduring organization, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), was initially founded to assist Jews in Palestine. However, it quickly became the leading organization providing aid to European Jews after World War I. Later, the JDC also supported Jews threatened by the Nazis and provided care for survivors of the **Holocaust**. The JDC emerged as a leading American non-governmental organization.[19]





Left: This poster was produced by the American Jewish War Relief Committee, one of the JDC's constituent organizations, and was directed at residents of New York City, 1917. Library of Congress (2021670901).

Right: This poster depicts America/Justice as a female figure who offers her abundant bounty to widows, orphans, and refugees, 1917. Library of Congress (2002708880).

American Jewish philanthropic organizations, like their religious and nonsectarian counterparts, could not sustain communal self-sufficiency in the wake of the Great Depression. Jewish communal leaders and social workers supported the New Deal and embraced the idea that the government should care for those in need. They distributed state funds while also focusing on Jewish religious, cultural, and educational projects.[20]

[18] Polland and Soyer, *Emerging Metropolis*, 166-67.

[19] Oscar Handlin, *A Continuing Task: The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1914–1964* (Random House, 1964); Yehuda Bauer, *American Jewry and the Holocaust: The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1939–1945* (Wayne State University Press, 1981).

[20] Wenger, *New York Jews and the Great Depression*, 139-65.

In the second half of the twentieth century, Jewish philanthropy expanded significantly. Organizations grew larger and reflected the community's changing concerns. Jewish groups mobilized to support Jews during and after the Holocaust and provided assistance to survivors. **Zionism**, once a relatively small movement in the United States, steadily gained followers during the 1920s and 1930s, bolstered by an array of organizations like the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) and Hadassah, which became one of America's largest women's organizations. A merger of existing organizations, the United Jewish Appeal (UJA) disbursed funds to Jews in Palestine and around the globe. American Jews contributed a staggering $150 million dollars to Israel in its first year of existence, and those figures increased in later years, spiking during Israel's wars in 1967 and 1973.[21] Even as Jews have become more divided in their opinions toward Israel, support for the state remains a key aspect of American Jewish philanthropy.

CONCLUSION

The landscape of Jewish philanthropy has followed broader American patterns. In the late twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century, Jewish organizations have continued to respond to moments of crisis. However, with a more secure and affluent community, their focus shifted from addressing immediate material needs to promoting Jewish identity and supporting educational and cultural projects. The financial structures that characterize Jewish philanthropy have also changed substantially. Jewish Federations have built large endowments, taking advantage of changing tax policies to accumulate capital in their organizations. Jewish philanthropy also increasingly relies on private foundations. These developments are hardly unique to American Jews; they reflect overall trends in American philanthropy and evolving government policies and regulations.[22] The meanings and methods of Jewish philanthropy have changed significantly over the years, but contributing to Jewish causes and concerns remains a vital part of American Jewish identity.

[21] Merle Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad* (Rutgers University Press, 1963), 524; Melvin I. Urofsky, *We Are One! American Jewry and Israel* (Anchor, 1978), 225-27.

[22] Berman, *The American Jewish Philanthropic Complex*.

New Lives, New Challenges: Jewish Immigration and the Aid That Answered

Guiding Question: Why did Jewish Americans create organizations to support new immigrants in the late 1800s and early 1900s? How did these organizations work to meet the needs of new immigrants? How did they reflect larger trends in society during the Progressive Era?

OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will consider three examples of Jewish organizations that attempted to assist recent Jewish immigrants (or people desiring to **immigrate**).

OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this activity, students will be able to

- Research and analyze the work of three Jewish American organizations;
- Explore how Jewish American organizations addressed social, political, and humanitarian issues in their communities; and
- Discuss how these organizations reflected larger trends of their era.

DOCUMENTS USED

PRIMARY SOURCES

Newspaper article, "German Refugees Cannot Discover Welcome Abroad"
The Jackson Sun, May 30, 1939
https://newspapers.ushmm.org/historical-article/1939-german-refugees-cannot-discover-welcome-abroad-46926

Newspaper article, "Maids and Matrons"
The Milwaukee Journal, January 7, 1897

Newspaper article, "To Jerusalem by Way of American Farms"
The San Francisco Call, August 25, 1907
https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85066387/1907-08-25/ed-1/seq-16/

SECONDARY SOURCES

Article, Jane McMaster, "The Galveston Movement: A Historical Overview of Jewish Immigration (1907–1914)"
Texas State Historical Association
https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/galveston-movement

Article, "Jews in Wisconsin"
Wisconsin Historical Society
https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS1872

Article, "Roots of Milwaukee's Settlement House"
Wisconsin 101, University of Wisconsin
https://wi101.wisc.edu/roots-of-the-settlement-house/

Article, "Voyage of the *St. Louis*"
Holocaust Encyclopedia, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/voyage-of-the-st-louis

TEACHER-CREATED MATERIALS

- Research Assignments One through Three

ACTIVITY PREPARATION

- Organize the class into groups of three to four students each.
- Make copies of the Research Assignments so that each student has an assignment.
- Preview all materials for appropriateness for your students.

PROCEDURE

ACTIVITY ONE: REVIEWING IMMIGRATION PATTERNS (10 MINUTES)

- Lead a class discussion about Jewish immigration to the United States in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Ask the students:
  - *What do you know about the history of Jewish people immigrating to the United States?*
  - *What are some reasons why Jewish people left Southern and Eastern Europe in the late 1800s and early 1900s to come to the United States? What did these immigrants seek in the United States?*
  - *What were some of the challenges Jewish immigrants faced upon arriving in the U.S.?*

ACTIVITY TWO: PROVIDING AID TO IMMIGRANTS (45 MINUTES)

- Organize students into groups of three or four students each.
- Assign each group one of three research topics (repeat topics as needed for larger classes).
- Explain that each group will explore one historical moment when a group of Jewish people came (or attempted to come) to the United States. They will also research an organization that sought to address the needs of immigrants.
- Distribute copies of the Research Assignments so that all students in the group have a copy.
  - Ask students to read the article in section A for historical context. When more than one article is available, students should split their group and share what they learned.
- Give students time to share what they have learned and ask any relevant questions.

TEACHER NOTE

The following articles in this volume will provide additional context:

- Hasia Diner, **"Jewish American History in Global Context"** offers a helpful overview.
- Hannah Zaves-Greene, **"Just to Get Here: American Arrivals, Immigration, Exclusion, Disability, and Legislation"** can help frame discussions about the challenges that newly arrived Jews (and Jews living in the United States) faced.
- Beth Wenger, "**The Evolution of American Jewish Philanthropy"** can help provide context about the establishment of aid societies.

- Move students to Section B, the primary source newspaper articles. When more than one article is available, students should split their group and share what they learned.
  - **Teacher Tip:** The newspaper articles vary in length and complexity and can be used to differentiate the classroom.
- Explain that newspaper articles show one moment in time. In Section C, we are asking students to research and learn more about an organization created by Jewish Americans to help immigrants (or those who desire to immigrate). Direct students to use the starter sources provided, but not to be limited to them.
- Circulate and assist students as they research and complete their organizers.
- Ask students to share what they have learned by presenting to the whole class or small groups.

ACTIVITY THREE: CONCLUSION (10 MINUTES)

- Lead a discussion (as a whole class or in small groups). Questions may include:
  - *How did these organizations work to meet the needs of people who needed help?*
  - *How do organizations today try to assist people in need?*
  - *How did these organizations reflect broader trends in what was happening in their communities?*
  - *How did Jewish organizations respond to issues of immigration, antisemitism, and discrimination?*
  - *Why are these organizations important to Jewish American history?*

ASSESSMENT OPTIONS

- Teachers can collect and assess the Research Assignments or assess oral presentations.
- Students can choose one of the discussion questions and leave a written or verbal exit ticket.

Students interested in this topic might be interested in researching the following for an NHD project:

- **Founding of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) (1881)**
- **The Settlement Movement (1890s–1920s)**
- **Jane Addams and Chicago's Hull House**
- **Lizzie Black Kander**
- **The Settlement Cookbook**
- **The Galveston Movement (1907–1914)**
- **Rabbi Henry Cohen of Galveston, Texas**

To access a PDF containing all of the sources and materials to complete this lesson plan, go to nhd.org/expansivehistory.

Glossary

Glossary

In this volume, the first time key terms appear in articles or lessons, they are highlighted in bold text with a gold background, like this: **glossary term**. To support readers, we provide a glossary with basic definitions of these terms. While not exhaustive of all terminology relevant to Jewish American history, the glossary includes many of the most frequently used terms found throughout the articles and lessons in this collection.

Acculturation: The process by which a person or group integrates their cultural identity with a new environment while still retaining unique cultural markers; see also: *Assimilation*.

Antisemitism: Hostility to or prejudice against Jewish people.

Ashkenazi (Ashkenazim, plural) Jews: A population of Jews who settled along the Rhine River and France during the medieval period, extended to Jews of Central and Eastern European origin; descendants of Jews who tended to live in Christian lands in Northern, Central, and Eastern Europe (areas that include present-day France, Germany, Poland, and Russia).

Ashkenormativity: A form of ethnocentrism that assumes that all Jews are Ashkenazic and White. This is particularly reinforced in the United States by the dominance of Ashkenazi culture in representations of Jews presented in literature, film, and television.

Assimilation: A generally outdated term for the process of adjusting to a new land after migration. The term *assimilation* assumes the loss of a person or group's cultural identity, adopting that of their new host country. Scholars of immigration prefer the term *acculturation*, which better acknowledges the process by which a person or group integrates their cultural identity with a new environment while still retaining unique cultural markers.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Language is always evolving. The words we use to describe people, events, and experiences can shift over time as societies change and as communities express their own identities. In this volume, we have chosen terms that reflect current historical scholarship and respectful usage. Be aware that you may also encounter older or different terms in primary sources or historical accounts. To better understand how and why these changes happen and why they matter, refer to historian Renee Romano's article "What's in a Word? Being Thoughtful about Terminology in Historical Writing" in the National History Day publication *Teaching African American History*. Her essay offers insight into how language shapes the way we remember and teach the past and encourages us to think carefully and critically about the way we use terms in the present.[1]

[1] Find Romano's article here: nhd.org/en/resources/whats-in-a-word-being-thoughtful-about-terminology-in-historical-writing/.

Bar/bat mitzvah: Literally meaning "Sons/Daughters of the Covenant," this term refers to an event celebrating a person's thirteenth birthday. A ceremony and a celebration take place as a rite of passage to adulthood.

Blood Libel Myth: A false and harmful belief that Jewish people murder non-Jewish children to use their blood in religious rituals. This myth has been used for centuries to justify antisemitic violence, discrimination, and persecution.

Conservative Judaism: One of the three major denominations of American Judaism, Conservative Judaism seeks a middle path between Reform and Orthodox, viewing Jewish law as binding but subject to historical change.

Conversos: Jewish converts to Catholicism during the Spanish Inquisition.

Crypto-Jews: Those who converted to Catholicism to escape the Spanish Inquisition, but continued to practice Judaism in secret.

Diaspora: Refers to the scattering of Jewish people from their ancestral homeland, Israel, to other parts of the world, primarily through exile or persecution. More broadly, the term *diaspora* refers to a mass, forced mass migration of people from their homeland.

Emigrant: Someone who moves away from a country.

Hasidic Judaism: A movement within Judaism focusing on joyful worship, spiritual connection, and strict religious observance. Hasidic communities often follow a spiritual leader called a *Rebbe* and live in close-knit, religiously guided groups.

Hebrew: A Semitic language spoken by ancient Israelites, used as the liturgical language of Judaism, and revived as a spoken language in the nineteenth century. Hebrew is the official language of Israel.

Holocaust: The systematic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jews by Nazi Germany and its collaborators during World War II, between 1941 and 1945.

Immigrant: Someone who moves to a different country.

***Kashrut*:** (Hebrew) Refers to the set of Jewish dietary laws that govern what can and cannot be eaten, how food should be prepared, and how it should be consumed. Foods that meet these standards are considered "kosher."

Kosher: A term used to describe food that meets the dietary laws of *kashrut*, the traditional Jewish system of laws pertaining to food preparation and consumption. For example, kosher practices include not eating pork or shellfish, separating meat and dairy, and eating meat that comes from animals slaughtered only in a specific way.

Ladino: Otherwise known as Judeo-Spanish, Ladino is a Romance language spoken primarily by Sephardi Jews. It is derived from Castilian Spanish and incorporates elements of Hebrew, Turkish, and Aramaic.

***Landsmanshaftn*:** (German) Mutual aid societies, or hometown societies, of Jewish immigrants from the same European town or region.

Matzah: Unleavened flatbread traditionally eaten by Jewish people during Passover to commemorate the haste with which the Israelites left Egypt, not having time to let their bread rise.

Migrant: Someone who moves from one place to another (can be temporary or even back and forth, such as in the case of migrant workers).

Mishnah: A written collection of Jewish laws and teachings that were passed down orally for many generations. It was compiled around the year 200 CE and is one of the earliest and most important texts in Judaism. Written in Hebrew, the Mishnah covers topics like religious practices, ethical behavior, and everyday life. It serves as the foundation for later discussions in the Talmud.

Mizrahi Jews: Middle Eastern and North African Jews who lived in these locations before the arrival of Sephardic Jews after their exile from Spain and Portugal in 1492.

Nativist/Nativism: Favoring the interests of native-born citizens over those of immigrants, often supporting policies that restrict immigration. Nativism is usually driven by fears of cultural, economic, or political change.

***Olam ha-ba*:** (Hebrew) A phrase that means "the world to come," referring either to the world after the arrival of the Messiah and the Messianic Age (as it is traditionally interpreted) or an afterlife.

Orthodox: A traditionalist branch of Judaism that strictly adheres to the the Talmud. Orthodox Jews believe the Torah is the Word of God. **Modern Orthodoxy** is a variation of Jewish Orthodoxy that believes that it is possible to embrace modernity while still following God's laws and commandments (particularly around gender issues).

Passover: Jewish holiday commemorating the Israelites' liberation from slavery in Egypt, marked by a special service and meal called the ***Seder*** and the removal of leavened bread from the home.

Philosemitism: The admiration, support, or positive bias toward Jewish people, their culture, and their traditions.

Pogrom: A violent attack against a specific group of people, often with the goal of harming or killing them. The term is most commonly used to describe violent attacks against Jewish communities in eastern Europe, particularly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but it can apply to any group that is targeted because of their identity, beliefs, or ethnicity. During a pogrom, homes, businesses, and places of worship may be destroyed, and people may be injured or killed. Pogroms are typically fueled by prejudice, hatred, or political motives.

Purim: Jewish holiday celebrating the survival of the Jewish people from persecution in ancient Persia, marked by reading the Book of Esther.

Quota: A fixed number or limit set on how much of something is allowed, such as goods, people, or actions. Quotas are often used in trade, immigration, or hiring to control or ensure certain outcomes.

Rabbi: Teacher and leader in the Jewish community who is trained in Jewish law, tradition, and texts. Rabbis often lead religious services, offer guidance, and help people understand and practice Judaism.

Reconstructionist Judaism: Very religiously progressive, the Reconstructionist movement maintains that Judaism is the evolving civilization of the Jewish people. As such, adherents hold varied opinions about the extent to which Jewish laws are obligatory.

Reform Judaism: The largest Jewish denomination in the United States, the Reform movement emphasizes ethical values, social justice, and personal choice over strict adherence to Jewish law. Reform Judaism seeks to adapt tradition to modern life and progressive ideals.

Rosh Hashanah: The Jewish New Year, a holiday that marks the beginning of the High Holy Days. It is a time for reflection, prayer, and the sounding of the shofar (ram's horn), and it usually occurs in early fall.

Scientific Racism: The false belief that science can be used to prove that some races are better or worse than others. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, some scientists used biased methods and incorrect data to try to show that White people were superior. These ideas were used to justify slavery, colonialism, and discrimination, even though they have been completely discredited by modern science.

Secular Humanist Judaism: A practice of Judaism that focuses on human knowledge, power, and responsibility in place of the divine, but maintains elements of Jewish culture, practice, and tradition.

Sephardic Jews: Jews of Spanish or Portuguese descent, cast out of Europe during the Spanish Inquisition, who tended to live in Western and Southern Europe, the Americas, as well as primarily in Muslim lands in North Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Far East.

Shabbat: The Jewish day of rest and spiritual reflection, observed from Friday evening to Saturday evening with prayers, meals, and refraining from work.

Spanish Inquisition: A religious court established by the Catholic monarchy in Spain in 1478. Its goal was to find and punish people who were not practicing Christianity in the "correct" way, including Jews and Muslims who had converted to Christianity but were suspected of secretly keeping their old beliefs. The Inquisition used harsh methods, including torture, and lasted until 1834.

Stuyvesant Promise: A colonial contract dating to 1654, when Jews arrived in New Amsterdam. The governor and the West India Company permitted Jews to settle on the condition that they take responsibility for caring for the poor within their community. This contract influenced the trajectory of Jewish American charity, as over the following centuries, Jews in the United States grew their charitable actions and traditions from a requirement of American entry to a source of pride.

Sukkot: A weeklong Jewish festival that functions as a harvest festival and commemorates the Israelites' journey through the desert after leaving Egypt. During biblical times, the holiday signified a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Families build and eat meals in temporary outdoor shelters called sukkahs to remember this time.

Synagogue: Jewish house of worship where people gather for prayer, learning, and community events. It often includes a space for reading from the Torah and is led by a rabbi or other community leaders.

Talmud: The central text of Judaism, consisting primarily of law and theology, was written and compiled between the first and sixth centuries.

Tikkun Olam: (Hebrew) The act of "repairing the world" that became a central aspect of religious engagement for many Jews. While perspectives are diverse on how one can repair the world, many American Jews see Tikkun Olam as an opportunity to engage with justice initiatives.

Torah: The scroll containing the first five books of the of the Jewish Bible, including Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy

***Tsedakah*:** (Hebrew) The term for charity or righteousness. Its use is rooted in biblical teachings and reinforced by Jewish law and tradition; historically, it has led Jews to create philanthropic institutions over time.

Visa: An official document or stamp in a passport that allows a person to enter, stay in, or leave a country for a specific purpose and period of time, such as for travel, work, or study.

Yiddish: A language spoken primarily by Ashkenazi Jews, Yiddish is a Germanic hybrid language with Hebrew, French, Aramaic, and Slavic elements.

Yom Kippur: The Jewish Day of Atonement, considered the holiest day of the year. It is a time for fasting, prayer, and seeking forgiveness, focused on personal reflection and making amends.

Zionism: A movement to establish and support a Jewish national homeland in the territory of the historical Land of Israel.