



# JEWISH HERITAGE OF AMERICA

A Curriculum to Enhance  
Understanding of Jewish Americans:  
Their History and Contributions  
to the United States



COMBAT  
ANTISEMITISM  
MOVEMENT

TIKYAH

## WELCOME TO ROOTED IN HERITAGE: EXPLORING IOWA'S JEWISH AMERICAN HERITAGE

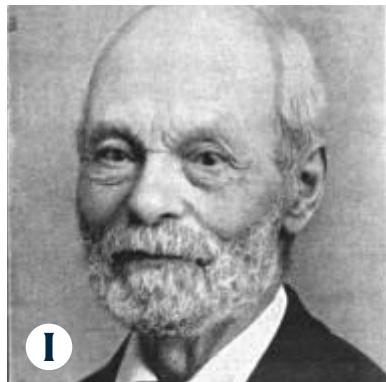
the inaugural course dedicated to celebrating the profound contributions of Jewish Americans to our nation and the state of Iowa. This curriculum provides a comprehensive overview spanning 400 years of history, with a special emphasis on the pivotal role Jewish Americans played in shaping the foundational principles of liberty, equality, and opportunity.

We will delve into how the Jewish community influenced America's core values, while examining the United States as a vital refuge for Jewish immigrants escaping global persecution.

### IOWA'S JEWISH PIONEERS: FORGING A LEGACY OF RESILIENCE AND LEADERSHIP IN THE HEARTLAND

Jewish settlement in Iowa traces back to the mid-19th century. Beginning as early as 1833, Alexander Levi, the state's first documented Jewish resident, arrived in Dubuque and established a grocery and mining business. By the 1840s, more pioneers ventured west, settling in bustling river towns such as Davenport, Dubuque, and Keokuk. These immigrants experienced a profound clash of cultures balancing ancient traditions with a rugged American frontier that demanded hard physical labor, self-reliance, and adaptation to harsh living conditions.

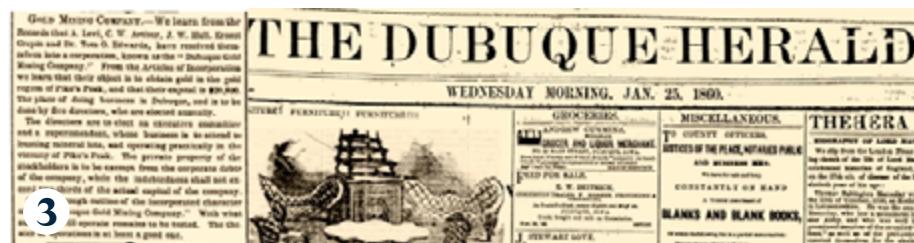
Early Jewish Iowans launched businesses, founded the state's inaugural synagogues like B'nai Israel in Keokuk (1855), and created charitable organizations to aid those in need.



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1. Alexander Levi, 1833

2. Photograph of Congregation B'nai Israel, Keokuk, Iowa, late 19th–early 20th century.

3. The January 25, 1860, edition of The Dubuque Herald included a short article about Levi's new Dubuque Gold Mining Company.

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## ENTREPRENEURIAL VISIONARIES: JEWISH INNOVATORS REVOLUTIONIZING IOWA'S COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY

Jewish business owners significantly shaped Iowa's economy by launching innovative ventures that supported both local growth and community development.

- **The Younker Brothers**: In 1856, Polish Jewish immigrant brothers Lipman, Samuel, and Marcus Younker launched their renowned department store in Keokuk, expanding it into a Midwestern empire. Relocating headquarters to Des Moines in 1874, Younkers became an iconic fixture in Iowa retail for over 150 years, employing thousands and symbolizing accessible luxury until its closure in 2018.
- **The Davidson Family**: Saul Davidson established the Davidson Furniture Company in Sioux City in 1887, transforming it into Iowa's premier furniture enterprise through steady growth and a commitment to quality craftsmanship. His daughter, Jennie Davidson Levitt, not only steered the business but also pioneered social reform, dedicating over five decades to advocating for women's rights, education, and aid for the underprivileged.



4. The Younkers building, November 16, 1988

5. State Legislator Minnette Doderer (left) at the Iowa State Capitol, circa late 1960s.

## JEWISH IOWANS LEADING IN PUBLIC SERVICE AND CIVIL RIGHTS ADVOCACY

Jewish Iowans have played significant roles in public leadership, championing policies and civil liberties that expanded rights for all and often breaking barriers along the way.

- **Moses Bloom**: Arriving from France in 1857, Bloom was elected mayor of Iowa City in 1873, becoming the first Jewish mayor in the city's history. He later became Iowa's first Jewish state senator, where he secured ongoing state funding for the University of Iowa, ensuring its growth into a major institution.
- **Gertrude Cohen**: In 1964 as the first Jewish woman in the Iowa Legislature, Cohen represented Waterloo in the House, focusing on education and social welfare reforms during a transformative era.
- **Minnette Doderer**: Serving multiple terms in the state legislature during the 1960's to 1980's, Doderer advocated for the equal rights amendment, women's health and civil rights. She was known as the "conscience of the legislature" for her principled stands.
- **Joan Miller Lipsky**: From Cedar Rapids, Lipsky served 12 years in the Iowa House starting in 1967. She advocated for women's rights and pushed for enhanced education funding and mental health services.

## IAWA RAISED JEWISH FIGURES IN MEDIA, LITERATURE, AND ACADEMIA

Coming from Jewish communities across Iowa, these individuals built influential careers with national and international reach, shaping public thought through media, writing, and scholarship, often informed by their Midwestern experiences.

- **Ann Landers and Dear Abby:** Twin sisters Esther "Eppie" Friedman Lederer and Pauline "Popo" Friedman Phillips were born in Sioux City in 1918. They transformed advice columns with sharp wit and a practical Midwestern sensibility, reaching more than 100 million readers worldwide and addressing topics ranging from relationships to ethics.
- **Edna Ferber:** She spent her childhood in Ottumwa from 1890 to 1897. This Pulitzer Prize winning novelist of *Show Boat* published in 1926 drew on experiences with local antisemitism in her writing and became a literary advocate for tolerance and a broad American identity through bestselling works later adapted for Broadway and film.
- **May Brodbeck:** A philosopher born in New York but raised in Iowa, Brodbeck built a distinguished academic career at the University of Iowa. In 1974, she became Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of Faculties, where she supported interdisciplinary studies and helped shape institutional leadership in higher education.



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6. A 1921 letter written by Edna Ferber to her editor, describing her experience of a blind reading to an audience in Chicago.

7. Seven of the twelve Jewish-American women in the first officer graduating class of WAACs. Pictured left to right: Ruth Ginz, Beatrice Berg, Carolyne Casper, Rose Ross, Ruth Spivak, Bee Rosenberg, and Jean Korn

## JEWISH IOWANS AND HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE DURING GLOBAL CRISES

During periods of international upheaval, Jews in Iowa helped provide refuge, assistance, and material support, working through local communities and organizations to aid those affected by global crises.

- **The Scattergood Hostel:** From 1939 to 1943, amid World War II, Jewish organizations partnered with Quakers in West Branch to run this former school as a hostel. This site sheltered 185 European refugees, mostly Jewish, fleeing Nazi persecution while providing English classes and job training to assist with their American integration.

- **The WAACs of Fort Des Moines:** In July 1942, Fort Des Moines hosted the inaugural officer training for the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC). Twelve Jewish women were among the 440 graduates who served in various ways, ranging from administration to intelligence, symbolizing Jewish patriotism.
- **Abraham Slimmer:** Known as the "Millionaire Recluse" of Waverly, this 19th-century merchant became successful through investments but lived frugally. He donated over \$1 million (equivalent to tens of millions today) to establish hospitals and nursing homes across Iowa, prioritizing care for the elderly regardless of religion or background.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS: 5 POINTS TO REMEMBER

- **Early Settlement:** Jewish immigrants arrived in Iowa as early as the 1830s, establishing businesses, synagogues, and charitable organizations that contributed to local economic and community life.
- **Business and Philanthropy:** Families such as the Younker Brothers and the Davidsons built successful enterprises while also supporting charitable and civic efforts within their communities.
- **Public Service and Civic Leadership:** Jewish leaders like Moses Bloom, Gertrude Cohen, and Minnette Doderer held influential public offices and civic roles. They dedicated their careers to advancing education, protecting civil liberties, and increasing community engagement in local government.
- **Cultural Contributions:** Iowans such as Ann Landers, Dear Abby, and Edna Ferber reached wide audiences through media and literature, shaping public conversation at the national level.
- **Humanitarian Efforts:** During periods such as World War II, Jews in Iowa helped provide refuge and assistance through efforts including the Scattergood Hostel and participation in national service initiatives.



8. Throughout the state, historical markers commemorate the sites and stories that shaped Iowa's history. From the founding of its first synagogues to the humanitarian efforts of its residents, these markers serve as permanent reminders of the Jewish community's deep and lasting roots in the Heartland."

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This overview curriculum of Jewish American Heritage consists of five parts, each interweaving historical stories together with accounts of Jewish Americans and others who have made significant contributions to the United States. At the conclusion of each segment, a set of questions is provided to facilitate class engagement or to assess the students' knowledge based on what they have learned in the course.

## **PART 1 / AMERICA. A LAND OF HOPE** ..... 6-23

This segment explores the initial migration of Jewish individuals to America, highlighting their early contributions and the role of the United States as a land of opportunity and freedom. It delves into the beginnings of Jewish life in America and how these early settlers helped lay the groundwork for a thriving Jewish community.

## **PART 2 / FROM THE DARKNESS OF THE HOLOCAUST** ..... 24-42 **TO THE SHINING LIGHT OF AMERICA**

This part focuses on the impact of the Holocaust on Jewish immigration and the role America played in providing refuge to survivors. It discusses how America served as a beacon of hope during and after this dark period in history, and the contributions of Holocaust survivors to American society.

## **PART 3 / JEWISH AMERICAN PIONEERS AND LEADERS** ..... 43-61

This segment highlights notable Jewish Americans who have been influential in various fields such as politics, science, and the arts. It covers their pioneering efforts and leadership roles, showcasing how they have shaped and enriched American culture and progress.

## **PART 4 / THE RISE OF ANTISEMITISM IN AMERICA** ..... 62-73

This part addresses the challenges faced by the Jewish community in the U.S., particularly the recent rise of antisemitism. It explores the social and political dynamics contributing to this issue and the responses from both the Jewish community and broader American society.

## **PART 5 / CONCLUSION** ..... 74-76

The concluding segment synthesizes the information presented throughout the course, reflecting on the profound impact Jewish Americans have had on the nation. It also encourages students to consider the lessons learned and how these insights can be applied to understand better and appreciate the diverse fabric of American society.

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# PART 1

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**AMERICA,  
A LAND OF HOPE**

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In this section, we will embark on a fascinating journey through the history of Jewish Americans, exploring the significant stages of their migration, settlement, and community development in the United States. We will examine these subjects:

- **The Arrival of Jews in America:** We begin with the early migration of Jewish settlers to America, tracing their initial steps on this new land and the motivations behind their journey.
- **Jewish Life in the Early Colonial and Revolutionary Days of America:** This part delves into the lives of Jewish Americans during the formative years of the nation, exploring their integration into the colonial societies and their contributions to the burgeoning United States during and after the Revolutionary War.
- **The Growth of the American Jewish Community:** We will then explore the expansion of the Jewish community in America, highlighting how they flourished and helped shape the cultural, economic, and social landscapes of the country.

Through these topics, we aim to understand the complexities of Jewish American experiences and their profound impact on American history, from the earliest days of the nation to the established community it is today.

## JEWISH PILGRIMS

The first Jews to arrive in America came with the arrival of Jewish artisans to the Roanoke Colony in 1585 and in 1621, when Elias Legarde became the first Jewish Virginian to arrive in Jamestown. In 1789, the first Virginia Jewish congregation was established in Richmond. Jewish history and Virginia history have always been closely intertwined.

The presence of Jews in America is often traced to another milestone in September 1654, when a small French warship named the *Sainte Catherine* landed in New Amsterdam (present-day New York City) with 23 Jewish immigrants seeking a new life. These immigrants fled persecution in Recife, Brazil, after the Portuguese recaptured the area from the Dutch. These Jews had previously been forced to leave Spain and Portugal during the Inquisition period when Jews were being forced to convert to Christianity, persecuted and murdered. The Jews in Brazil were forced again to flee worried again about their safety. These resilient and brave Jews who immigrated and made a new life in America are often referred to as the "Jewish Pilgrims."

The early settlement town of New Amsterdam stood out due to its mix of people. Despite the potential for conflict familiar in Europe, various Christian denominations including Catholics and Calvinists lived together peacefully.

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Manischewitz matza box cover issued in honor of the Tercentenary depicting 1654 arrival of the first Jews of New Amsterdam. (Courtesy: American Jewish Historical Society)



View of New Amsterdam ca. 1653, copy of a 17th Century painting for I.N. Stokes, *Iconography of Manhattan Island*, vol. IV plate 9, NYC Municipal Library.<sup>1</sup>

This small community of approximately 1,000 people communicated in eighteen different languages, showcasing an unusual level of cultural and linguistic diversity for the time.

Upon their arrival, the first Jewish settlers faced immediate legal challenges. The governor of New Amsterdam, Peter Stuyvesant, was initially reluctant to accept them, citing fears that their presence would be detrimental to the colony. However, the Dutch West India Company intervened, advocating for their right to settle due to the contributions of Jews to the company's interests in the Caribbean. The Dutch West India Company, which ran the colony, allowed "every one to have his own belief, as long as he behaved quietly and legally, gave no offense to his neighbor and did not oppose the government."<sup>1</sup>

The early Jewish settlers quickly established themselves as merchants and traders and by connecting New Amsterdam to other trading hubs across the Atlantic and played a significant role in the emerging local economy.

Despite their small numbers, the first Jewish settlers sought to maintain their religious practices. By 1730, they established Congregation Shearith Israel in New York City, which is the oldest Jewish congregation in the United States. This congregation became a cornerstone for Jewish religious life in America.

<sup>1</sup> Gottlieb Mittelberger, *Journey to Pennsylvania* (1750), excerpted by Prof. Bruce Doherty, Swarthmore College, course: The American Colonies, online syllabus at <http://www.swarthmore.edu/SocSci/bdorsey1/41sy199.html>; Mittelberger excerpt at <http://www.swarthmore.edu/SocSci/bdorsey1/41docs/40-mit.html>.

## FACTS to REMEMBER

- Arrival and Establishment: Among the first Jewish immigrants were those who arrived in America in 1654 aboard the *Sainte Catherine*, seeking refuge and freedom from religious persecution. Despite facing initial reluctance from the governor of New Amsterdam, they were eventually allowed to settle, contributing significantly to the colony's economy and establishing Congregation Shearith Israel, the oldest Jewish congregation in the United States.
- Challenges and Resilience: The early Jewish settlers faced immediate legal challenges and discrimination upon their arrival, but they persevered and established themselves as merchants and traders, playing a vital role in the growth of the colony despite being a small minority.
- Diversity and Acceptance: America, even in its early days, was a land of religious and linguistic diversity. The Jewish immigrants found a unique environment where various Christian sects coexisted, and the Dutch West India Company advocated for their right to settle, emphasizing the principle of religious tolerance and acceptance, as long as individuals behaved peacefully and legally.

## THE JEWISH BALANCING ACT IN AMERICA. CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS RESILIENCE

In colonial America, Jewish settlers faced the challenge of navigating "blue laws" which mandated that no work be done on Sundays. This posed a particular dilemma as the Jewish community also observed Shabbat, traditionally held from Friday evening through Saturday night. Operating within such restrictions was especially difficult for those in commerce, as many Jews were merchants who needed to sell their goods throughout the week. Despite these challenges, adherence to Jewish religious laws often took priority over business concerns.

A notable example was Aaron Lopez, a Jewish merchant from Newport, Rhode Island. Lopez strictly adhered to his faith's practices, ensuring that his ships did not set sail from Friday night until Monday morning, despite being crewed by non-Jews. This commitment to religious observance exemplified the dedication of and priority placed by the Jewish settlers to maintain their spiritual integrity amidst the pressures of life in a new land.

In the Jewish community, the sequence of holidays which conform to the lunar calendar orchestrates the rhythm of the year. These holidays not only mark the seasonal transitions but also provide a respite from daily labor, fostering community cohesion, family unity, and spiritual rejuvenation. Colonial America followed the Gregorian solar based calendar with a different set of annual rhythms coinciding with Christian observances.

Jews were required to take days off for their holidays knowing their Christian neighbors, employers, and competitors continued their routines without interruption.

The main Jewish "High Holidays" of Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New Year), Yom Kippur (the holiest day on the Jewish calendar) and Passover (the week-long spring festival commemorating when the ancient Israelites were freed from slavery in Egypt) held profound religious and social significance and were celebrated by all Jews. Jews would travel long distances to be with each other at this vital time to reaffirm religious bonds and refresh their faith.

Historical records illuminate the lengths to which some Jews went to observe these sacred times. Isaac Solomon, a Jewish merchant from Halifax, Nova Scotia, made an arduous journey by boat and carriage to Congregation Shearith Israel in New York to celebrate the High Holidays.

Colonial Jews forged friendships with their Christian neighbors, but continued to adhere to their important religious customs, including kashrut, the Jewish dietary laws. To comply with these laws, many Jews took on the role of meat slaughterers themselves since kosher meat would not be available otherwise.

Aaron Lopez, the Jewish merchant previously mentioned, emphasized the significance of ritual circumcision in maintaining Jewish identity, describing it as continuing "the covenant which happily characterizes us as a particular flock." Moreover, Jews were notably dedicated to Jewish burial rites and mourning practices, further underscoring their commitment to their faith and cultural traditions.

In addition to the religious practices, the Jewish community often established benevolent societies and mutual aid organizations, which played a crucial role in supporting members in times of hardship. These societies not only provided financial assistance but also helped maintain a sense of community and mutual responsibility among the scattered Jewish populations. This network of support was vital in a time when social welfare systems were non-existent, and it highlighted the communal values that were central to Jewish life.

Jewish education was a cornerstone of maintaining religious identity and transmitting values to future generations. Even in the challenging environment of Colonial America, where formal Jewish education resources were sparse, families and communities went to great lengths to teach Hebrew, religious texts, and the meaning of Jewish peoplehood. Through education, the Jewish community ensured that in a predominantly Christian society, Jewish children grew up with a strong sense of their heritage and faith.



Cenotaph at the Colonial Jewish Cemetery, Newport. (July 31, 2013).

## FACTS to REMEMBER

- **Blue Laws vs. Shabbat:** Colonial “blue laws” mandated no work on Sundays, conflicting with Jewish observance of Shabbat from Friday to Saturday night.
- **Aaron Lopez’s Commitment:** Aaron Lopez, a notable Jewish merchant, prioritized Shabbat observance over commerce, exemplifying the dedication to religious principles in business practices.
- **Spiritual Integrity:** Despite economic pressures, Jewish settlers upheld religious observance, showcasing resilience and determination in maintaining their faith and identity in colonial America.
- **Jewish Holidays vs. Colonial Rhythms:** In colonial America, Jewish holidays marked a departure from the annual rhythms based on Christian observances. While Jews celebrated their holidays, their Christian neighbors and colleagues continued their routines, highlighting the cultural differences within the colonial society.
- **High Holidays:** High Holidays such as Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, along with Passover, held profound religious and social importance for Colonial Jews. Despite cultural disparities, these holidays were widely observed, serving as occasions for community cohesion and spiritual renewal.
- **Community Support and Education:** Jewish communities established benevolent societies and mutual aid organizations to support members, fostering a sense of community. Education was prioritized to preserve religious identity, ensuring future generations retained a strong sense of heritage and faith.

## PROPOSED GREAT SEAL OF THE UNITED STATES

On July 4, 1776, the Continental Congress, which was the legislative body of the American revolutionaries, appointed Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams to create a seal for the newly formed United States of America. Working together, Jefferson and Franklin devised a design that integrated Franklin’s concept of depicting the biblical story of the parting of the Red Sea with Jefferson’s vision of illustrating the “Children of Israel in the Wilderness, led by a Cloud by Day, and a Pillar of Fire by night...” Although this proposal was ultimately not accepted, it underscores the significant influence of Hebraic themes in the ideological foundation of America during its founding period.



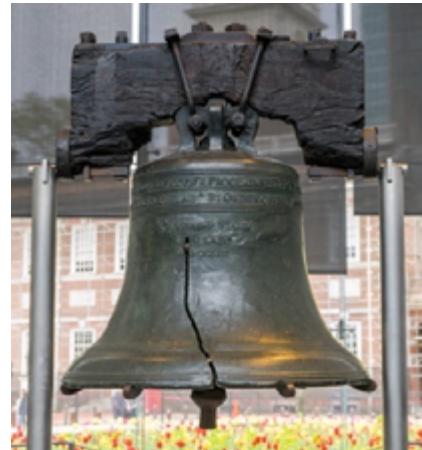
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## THE LIBERTY BELL AND THE ECHOES OF FREEDOM

The Liberty Bell in Philadelphia, was originally commissioned in 1751 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Pennsylvania's Charter of Rights. The bell carries a powerful inscription from the book of Leviticus (25:10) in the Hebrew Bible: *"Proclaim Liberty Throughout All the Land Unto All the Inhabitants Thereof."*

This iconic verse was chosen by Isaac Norris, a Quaker and the Speaker of the Pennsylvania Assembly. The Hebrew bible was an inspiration to Mr. Norris and the early American pioneers who drew on their faith for inspiration and as driving forces in their lives. As it has for Jews over the centuries, faith in G-d and the teachings of the bible are also at the core of America whose pledge of allegiance includes words similar to those on the Liberty bell: *"One Nation Under G-d, indivisible, with Liberty and Justice for all."*

Although commonly associated with American independence from British rule and its ringing on July 8, 1776, the Liberty Bell actually predates the American Revolution.



## PATRIOTIC PARTNERS: JEWS IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

During the American Revolution, many Jews actively supported the struggle for independence. Francis Salvador was the first Jew to die for the Revolutionary cause, falling in battle in South Carolina in August 1776. Of the estimated 3,000 Jews living in the colonies at the time, Salvador was one of the 160 Jews who bravely served under General George Washington in the Continental Army. The Jewish community was devoted and committed to the cause of American liberty.

Prominent among these early Jewish revolutionaries was Haym Salomon, a Polish-born Jew living in New York City, who joined the Sons of Liberty. This secret underground group played a key role by fighting British taxation, opposing the Stamp Act in 1765 and fighting other causes throughout the Revolution. After escaping British imprisonment, Salomon worked closely with Robert Morris, the Superintendent of Finance, to raise crucial funds for the war effort. His fundraising and personal loans contributed more than \$650,000 to the government, an amount equivalent to tens of millions of dollars today. Salomon's determination was clear when he stated in 1784, *"I am a Jew, it is my own nation. I do not despair that we shall obtain every other privilege that we aspire to enjoy along with our fellow-citizens."*

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Jonas Phillips was a German immigrant who fought in the Revolutionary war and paid for his passage to America as an indentured servant in Charleston, South Carolina. He and his wife had 21 children. After the British occupied New York City in 1776, Phillips bravely moved to Philadelphia to join the army serving in the Philadelphia militia under Colonel Bradford.

In 1787, during the Constitutional Convention, Phillips penned a significant letter to the Convention protesting a requirement that public office holders affirm that the New Testament was divinely inspired. He argued the requirement was against the religious principles and conscience of Jews.

Phillips advocated for a country where "all religious societies are on an equal footing," and underscored that Jews had "been true and faithful and foremost in aiding and assisting the States with their lives and fortunes. They have supported the cause, have bravely fought and bled for liberty which they cannot enjoy."

Phillips' advocacy efforts were instrumental in fostering religious freedom in the emerging nation, earning him recognition as a "Jewish founding father." His legacy continued



Painting by Howard Chandler Christy of the signing of the Constitution. Image Source: Wikipedia.



A bronze sculpture that stands in Chicago, Illinois, showing George Washington (centre), Robert Morris (left), and Haym Salomon (right)

through his family, notably his grandson Uriah P. Levy, who served as the first Jewish Commodore of the U.S. Navy and who eight years after President Thomas Jefferson's death, used his own money to preserve for the American people the Monticello estate where Jefferson is buried.

Watch [here](#) as Rabbi Meir Soloveichik explains how Jonas Phillips was a religious Jew and an American patriot, and how his life is a testament to the Jewish significance of the uniquely American tradition of religious freedom.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.wsj.com/video/opinion-jonas-phillips-the-first-truly-american-jew/FB248162-995A-47BA-879B-79577605269D>

## FACTS to REMEMBER

- Military Service: Francis Salvador was the first Jew to die for the Revolutionary cause, representing over 100 Jews who served under General George Washington, demonstrating their commitment to American liberty.
- Financial Contributions: Haym Salomon, a member of the Sons of Liberty, raised over \$650,000 for the war effort, showcasing his dedication to independence and equal rights for all citizens.
- during the Revolutionary era, protesting against religious requirements conflicting with Jewish principles and contributing to the establishment of religious equality in the emerging nation.

## JEWISH LIFE IN POST-REVOLUTIONARY AMERICA



Jewish Synagogue, Newport, Rhode Island, built 1763, Peter Harrison (1716-75)

freedom, so may Thou bring us forth once again from bondage into freedom...."

The distribution of Jews in the colonies also changed. Newport, Rhode Island, formerly one of the four largest Jewish communities in America, had its port destroyed in the war and its Jews scattered. Jewish families in Savannah, Georgia, were almost uniformly supporters of the patriot cause. Many of these families had developed silk businesses in Colonial times and were forced to abandon them when the British captured the city in 1778. On the other hand, two cities that were spared destruction, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Charleston, South Carolina, emerged from the war with even larger and better organized Jewish communities.

When Congress proclaimed the end of the Revolutionary War just before Passover in 1783, many Jews drew parallels between themselves and the deliverance of their ancestors who were freed from bondage in Egypt. One wrote to his son, "Thanks to the Almighty, [the war] has come to an end... we have the world to begin again." Congregation Shearith Israel in New York composed a prayer for the occasion, which thanked G-d for America's victory but asked for their own redemption: "As Thou hast granted these 13 states of America everlasting

In 1790, Moses Seixas engaged in a notable correspondence with George Washington, which has become a significant historical document expressing the Jewish community's hopes for religious freedom and equality in the newly established United States. Seixas, serving as the warden of the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island, penned a letter as part of a welcoming address to President Washington during his visit to the town.

In this letter, Seixas praises the U.S. government for ensuring liberty and freedom of worship, and, in what has become a famous quote in American history, wrote that the government "gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance." He speaks of the appreciation felt by the Jewish community for their newfound ability to live securely under a government that offers its protection to all, regardless of religious beliefs.

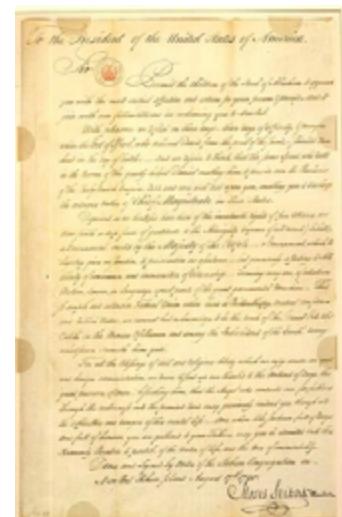
George Washington's response to Seixas is equally famous and often cited for its eloquent support of religious liberty. Washington echoes the words of Seixas and goes further, stating, "It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people, that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights." He affirms that all citizens should be free to profess and support their religious beliefs without fear of reprisal or discrimination, reflecting the principles of freedom and equality that are foundational to American democracy.

This exchange is celebrated as a pivotal moment in the history of religious freedom in the United States, demonstrating the commitment of the country's leadership to maintain and protect these ideals.

## EXCERPTS FROM THE LETTER OF MOSES SEIXAS TO GEORGE WASHINGTON, AUGUST 17, 1790:

*"Deprived as we heretofore have been of the invaluable rights of free Citizens, we now (with a deep sense of gratitude to the Almighty Disposer of all events) behold a Government, erected by the Majesty of the People—a Government, which to bigotry gives no sanction, to persecution no assistance."*

*"We rejoice in the belief that the present day would be hailed by posterity as the great epoch, when*



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*the compassionate Ruler of the universe would establish on the most lasting foundations, civil and religious liberty in the western world."*

*"For all these Blessings of civil and religious liberty which we enjoy under an equal benign administration, we desire to send up our thanks to the Ancient of Days, the great preserver of Men – beseeching him, that the Angel who conducted [guided] our forefathers through the wilderness into the promised Land, may graciously conduct [guide] you through all the difficulties and dangers of this mortal life: – And, when, like Joshua full of days and full of honor, you are gathered to your Fathers, may you be admitted into the Heavenly Paradise to partake of the water of life, and the tree of immortality."*

## **EXCERPTS FROM THE RESPONSE OF GEORGE WASHINGTON TO MOSES SEIXAS, AUGUST 18, 1790:**

*"The Citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy: a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people, that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support."*

*" May the Children of the Stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other Inhabitants; while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid. May the father of all mercies scatter light and not darkness in our paths, and make us all in our several vocations useful here, and in his own due time and way everlastingly happy."*

These excerpts illustrate the mutual respect and the commitment to principles of freedom and equality that both men shared, setting a precedent for the future of religious freedom in America. Washington's response, in particular, has been lauded for its declaration of religious tolerance and its vision of a country where everyone could live free from fear and persecution.

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## FACTS to REMEMBER

- **Parallel to Biblical Redemption:** The end of the Revolutionary War near Passover 1783 drew parallels between Jewish liberation and American victory, inspiring prayers for both personal and national freedom.
- **Wartime Migrations:** Post-war migrations mixed Jewish populations from various regions, enhancing community bonds through marriages and new encounters. Some communities were disrupted by the war, while others like Philadelphia and Charleston flourished.
- **Economic Impact:** The war's outcome varied for Jewish communities. In Savannah, Jewish patriots abandoned their silk businesses, while Philadelphia and Charleston saw economic and population growth due to being spared from major destruction.
- **Historical Significance of the Correspondence:** The 1790 letters between Moses Seixas and George Washington highlight Jewish aspirations for religious freedom in America. Seixas thanked the government for protecting religious liberty.
- **Washington's Support for Religious Liberty:** Washington's reply to Seixas is noted for its strong endorsement of religious liberty, stating that all citizens should freely support their religious beliefs without discrimination.
- **Mutual Respect and Commitment to Principles:** The exchange between Seixas and Washington underscores their mutual respect and commitment to the principles of freedom and equality, with Washington's response emphasizing religious tolerance and a vision of a secure, happy nation for all.

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# JEWISH AMERICA IN THE LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY.

## EMMA LAZARUS: THE JEWISH POET OF AMERICAN LIBERTY

Emma Lazarus, born in 1849 into a prominent New York family, descended on her Sephardi side from Jewish communal leader Moses Seixas. (Sephardi Jews originated from the Iberian Peninsula, including Spain and Portugal and represent one of the two largest sects within Judaism. Ashkenazi Jews are the other large sect who trace their origins to Europe) By the 1880s, Lazarus had established herself as a widely acclaimed poet, essayist, political activist, and translator of renowned European writers into English.

Emma Lazarus saw America as a beacon of liberty not only for the world but particularly for Jews around the world who had been strangers and persecuted over the Centuries in other foreign lands. She saw America as a beacon of hope for Yiddish-speaking Jewish immigrants fleeing persecution and hardship in Eastern Europe. Furthermore, she foresaw a global renaissance of Jewish civilization, fueled by the vibrant interplay between the Jews in America and the emerging generations in the Holy Land. (Described further below, her vision materialized in 1948 with the re-establishment of the State of Israel with significant support from the United States).

Amidst America's "melting pot" ethos of the time, many Jews felt compelled to forsake their distinct identity to become solely Americans. Others, wary of the assimilative pressures of American society, chose to insulate themselves, fearful that broader cultural engagement might sever their ties to Jewish traditions and community. Some of the bravest Jews challenged the notion that they had to choose between their American and Jewish identities. They argued that these identities were not only compatible but also mutually enriching. Emma Lazarus embodied this belief vividly. Her iconic poem, "The New Colossus," inscribed at the base of the Statue of Liberty.

It was only fitting that the famous Lazarus poem below appears on the Statue of Liberty as Ellis Island, often referred to as the 'Gateway to America,' as it played a pivotal role in the history of Jewish immigration to the United States. From 1892 to 1954, the island served as the nation's busiest immigration inspection station. For millions of Jewish immigrants, mostly fleeing persecution and seeking a new life in America, Ellis Island was the threshold between their past hardships and future hopes.



Emma Lazarus:  
The Jewish Poet of American Liberty

Upon arrival, they were subjected to rigorous health inspections and interrogations. Those who passed were allowed entry into the United States, a country that promised freedom and opportunity. It is estimated that nearly 40 percent of current U.S. citizens can trace at least one ancestor to this iconic portal, which for many Jewish families, was the beginning of a new chapter in a land where they could live, worship, and prosper freely.

## “THE NEW COLOSSUS”

*Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,  
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;  
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand,  
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame  
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name  
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name.  
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand Glows world-wide welcome;  
her mild eyes command  
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.  
“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!” cries she With silent lips.  
“Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”*

This poem is a powerful declaration of Lazarus' vision, illustrating how the American dream extends its promise to all those seeking refuge, embodying a profound connection between her Jewish heritage and American identity.



The Jewish Poet of American Liberty

Emma Lazarus was a fascinating figure with a rich legacy beyond just her famous poem, “The New Colossus.” Here are a few more facts that can be added to deepen the portrayal of her life and impact:

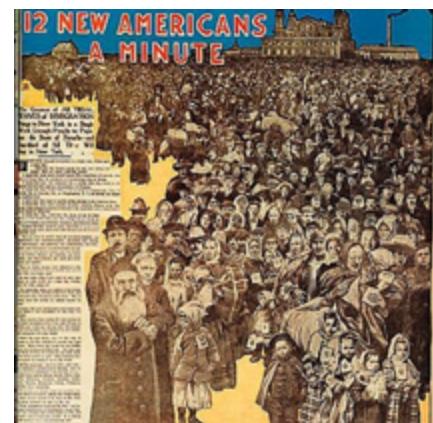
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1. Lazarus was influenced by the transcendentalist movement and the works of writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, whom she met personally. Her literary style and themes reflect a deep engagement with social issues and personal identity, which was somewhat ahead of her time, particularly in her expressions of Jewish identity and feminism.
2. In addition to her writing, Lazarus was actively involved in aiding Jewish refugees who were fleeing the pogroms in Eastern Europe in the 1880s. She worked with refugee organizations, wrote articles, and used her position in society to advocate for better treatment and aid for these new immigrants.
3. Lazarus was also an early feminist, advocating for the rights and education of women. She wrote essays and letters that discussed the role of women in society and argued for greater opportunities for women's education and economic independence.
4. Though she died before the movement began to reestablish the State of Israel in the Jewish homeland, Emma Lazarus is often seen as a precursor to this so called Zionist movement. Her writings on Jewish identity and nationhood, as well as her poems and essays, prefigured some of the themes that would later be central to Zionist ideology.
5. Lazarus also wrote significant essays and dramas that explored her Sephardi Jewish heritage and historical themes. She was deeply engaged with Jewish history and its implications for contemporary Jewish identity in America.

These facets of her life illustrate her multi-dimensional persona as a writer, activist, and thinker, deeply involved in the major social and cultural debates of her time.

## FACTS to REMEMBER

- Cultural Convergence: Ellis Island served as a cultural melting pot, where Jewish immigrants, alongside others, contributed to America's diverse heritage.
- Family Bonds: For many Jewish immigrants, Ellis Island was a place of family reunification, where they reunited with loved ones and received support as they embarked on a new life in America.
- Symbol of Resilience: Despite facing challenges, Jewish immigrants demonstrated resilience and perseverance as they passed through Ellis Island, symbolizing their pursuit of the American Dream.



A 1906 New York World cover page celebrating immigrants' arrival at Ellis Island.

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## MOTL, PEYSI THE CANTOR'S SON: AN IMMIGRANT TALE BY SHOLEM ALEICHEM

The turn of the 20th century heralded a new wave of Jewish immigration, prompted by widespread persecution and pogroms in Central and Eastern Europe. These Pogroms were devastating on the Jewish populations who lost their livelihoods, homes, and any educational opportunities. From 1880 to 1924, American opened her doors to about 2.5 million Jews who sought refuge in the U.S.

Manhattan's Lower East Side absorbed many of these new immigrants and became a vibrant hub of American Jewish life, with Yiddish speaking theaters, newspapers, labor unions, and political movements that reshaped the American Jewish identity and influenced broader American culture. Today, New York city comprises the second largest city of Jewish citizens in the World. This influx of Jewish immigrants also brought significant intellectual capital to the United States. Many became leading figures in science, the arts, academia, and business, contributing to an American renaissance in various sectors. The establishment of numerous synagogues, Jewish schools, and community organizations during this time laid the foundation for robust Jewish life that would endure and evolve through subsequent generations.

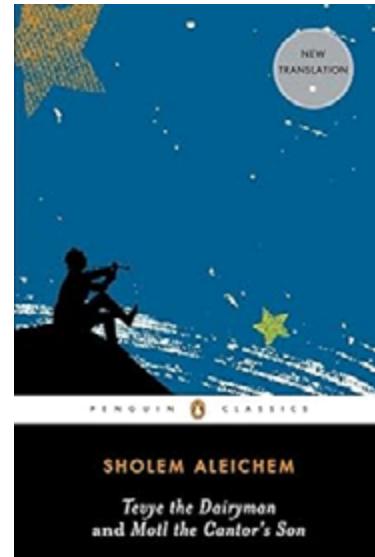
Solomon Naumovich Rabinovich, who achieved literary fame under the pen name Sholem Aleichem, stands as an iconic Jewish author. His works offer both humor and heartfelt portrayals of Jewish life in Eastern Europe. He penned "Motl, Peysi the Cantor's Son." The novel, crafted in the innocent yet insightful voice of an eight-year-old boy, explores a family's journey from the hardships in Russia to the hopeful shores of America. Through Motl's eyes, readers experience the poignant and often comical trials of immigration.

The following excerpt from the novel published in 1916 captures the awe and wonder of a young Jewish immigrant as he encounters the bustling life of New York City for the first time, a stark contrast to the shtetls (segregated and poor Jewish communities) of his motherland:

As the ship entered the harbor, little Motl pressed his face against the railing, his eyes widening at the sight of the towering buildings reaching for the sky. "Papa, are we in the giant's village?" he asked, his voice a mixture of excitement and nervousness.

His father laughed, ruffling Motl's curly hair. "No, my son, this is New York. It's the city where dreams are born," he said with a hopeful glint in his eye.

Motl gazed at the Statue of Liberty as they passed by, her raised torch like a welcoming beacon. He had heard tales of this seal lady, standing guard at the gateway to a new world. In her silent strength, he felt the promise of adventures yet to come.



As they disembarked, the cacophony of the docks—a symphony of foreign tongues, the clang of metal, and the bray of steamship horns—engulfed them. They were carried along by a river of people, each with their own stories etched in the lines of their tired faces.

*“This is America,”* his father declared, *“where every man is free to sing his own song, just like a cantor, but in a grander synagogue.”*

And so, with his small hand firmly in his father’s, Motl stepped onto the cobbled streets of New York, his heart beating to the rhythm of the bustling New World.

Sholem Aleichem’s “Motl, Peysi the Cantor’s Son” not only entertains but also serves as a vital historical document, reflecting the aspirations and apprehensions of Eastern European Jewish immigrants in the early 20th century. The novel remains a cherished narrative, illuminating the immigrant experience with warmth, wit, and an enduring sense of hope.

## FACTS to REMEMBER

- **Cultural Insight and Literary Impact:** Sholem Aleichem’s novel “Motl, Peysi the Cantor’s Son” humorously and poignantly reveals Jewish life in Eastern Europe and the immigrant journey to America. It encapsulates the challenges and achievements of Eastern European Jewish immigrants, blending humor with sharp social commentary. Aleichem’s work continues to resonate, illustrating the timeless nature of the immigrant experience.
- **Cultural and Intellectual Contributions:** Jewish immigrants significantly enriched the United States, bringing intellectual capital that contributed across science, the arts, academia, and business. They became prominent figures, catalyzing an American cultural and intellectual renaissance. This was particularly evident in urban transformations, such as Manhattan’s Lower East Side becoming a hub of American Jewish culture with its Yiddish theaters, newspapers, and political movements.
- **Community Building and Economic Impact:** The influx of Jewish immigrants led to the establishment of numerous synagogues, schools, and community organizations, which provided vital support networks and fostered cultural and religious expression. Philanthropic leaders like the Guggenheims and Schiffs helped shape New York’s cultural and financial landscape. Additionally, Jewish entrepreneurs imbued neighborhoods like the Lower East Side with a resilient entrepreneurial spirit, evident in bustling kosher delis, garment workshops, and other businesses that showcased their ingenuity and contributed to building the city’s identity.

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## INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

As we explore the early stages of Jewish American history, these questions are designed to deepen our understanding of the significant challenges and contributions of Jewish settlers. We will examine their motivations, the obstacles they faced, and their impact on the shaping of early American society:

### 1. Historical Context and Migration Patterns:

- What were the primary factors that motivated the early Jewish settlers to migrate to America?
- How did the diverse origins of these settlers influence the development of Jewish communities in different parts of America?

### 2. Challenges and Legal Obstacles:

- Discuss the initial legal challenges faced by the first Jewish settlers in New Amsterdam. How did these challenges impact their integration and economic activities?
- How did the intervention by the Dutch West India Company influence the future of Jewish settlement in New Amsterdam?

### 3. Community Development and Diversity:

- Analyze how the Jewish community managed to maintain their religious practices and establish Congregation Shearith Israel amidst the challenges of the early colonial period.
- In what ways did the early Jewish settlers contribute to the economic and cultural development of the colonies they settled in?

### 4. Cultural and Religious Resilience:

- Explore the significance of maintaining cultural and religious identity for Jewish settlers in a predominantly Christian colonial America. How did this affect their social integration and community bonds?
- Discuss the role of religion in fostering community cohesion among Jewish settlers. How did religious observances like Shabbat and the High Holidays enhance their sense of community?

### 5. Religious Freedom and Early American Values:

- Reflect on the correspondence between Moses Seixas and George Washington. What does this exchange tell us about the early American values regarding religious freedom and equality?
- How did the principles expressed by George Washington in his response to Seixas influence the Jewish community's perception of their place in American society?

# PART 2

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**FROM THE DARKNESS  
OF THE HOLOCAUST  
TO THE SHINING LIGHT  
OF AMERICA**

Discrimination and hardship have followed the Jewish people on and off for the last three thousand years. While not the main emphasis of this curriculum, students are encouraged to learn more about the treatment of Jews over time including during ancient Roman times, the Crusades, in Arab countries, the Inquisitions, and the Pogroms. Without understanding what the Jewish people have been forced to endure in their history, students will not have the perspective to know what lies behind many of the stories and psychology of Jewish Heritage in America. Despite all that had been done to the Jews in the past, nothing prepared the world for what would happen next.

Beginning in the 1930's and continuing until the end of world War II in 1945, the Nazi party in Germany, led by Adolf Hitler, constructed a sophisticated propaganda machine aimed to dehumanize and scapegoat Jews for Germany's economic troubles. Hitler portrayed the Jews as subhuman and responsible for all societal ills. The Nazi regime utilized various mediums such as newspapers, films, posters, and radio broadcasts to spread hateful stereotypes and falsehoods about Jewish people, portraying them as greedy, parasitic, and dangerous to society.

This propaganda campaign served to justify the implementation of discriminatory laws, such as the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, which deprived Jews of their civil rights and legal protections. It also laid the groundwork for more extreme measures, including segregation, confiscation of property, and ultimately, the implementation of the "Final Solution", the systematic extermination and genocide of all the Jews in Europe.



1935 Nuremberg Laws Racial Chart. The "Nuremberg Laws" established a basis for racial identification. Only people with four non-Jewish German grandparents (four white circles in top row left) were of "German blood". (November 14, 1935). Photo Credit: US Holocaust Memorial Museum

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Hitler's ultimate goal was the elimination of all Jews from Europe and the establishment of a racially pure "Third Reich." This genocidal ambition led to the construction of concentration camps and extermination centers, where six million out of the approximate 9.5 million Jews of Europe, and other targeted groups, were murdered in gas chambers, shot, or subjected to starvation, forced labor, and medical experimentation.

- **Auschwitz-Birkenau:** Located in occupied Poland, it was the largest of the Nazi death camps. Approximately 1.1 million Jews were murdered here.
- **Treblinka:** Also in occupied Poland, it operated primarily as an extermination camp. An estimated 800,000 Jews were killed.
- **Sobibor:** Around 250,000 Jews were murdered in this death camp, which was part of the Aktion Reinhard extermination program.
- **Belzec:** Part of the same program as Sobibor, it saw the deaths of about 600,000 Jews.
- **Majdanek:** This camp served dual purposes as a labor and extermination camp, with the deaths of nearly 80,000 Jews, although the total number of victims is subject to historical debate.
- **Chelmno:** The first extermination camp where mobile gas vans were used to kill at least 152,000 Jews.



Entrance to Auschwitz, a Nazi concentration and extermination camp that was run by Nazi Germany in Poland from 1940–1945 (1945). Photo Credit: Wikimedia Commons (German Federal Archive).

The Nazis' propaganda machine played a crucial role in indoctrinating the German population and rallying support for these atrocities. It fueled hatred, fear, and prejudice, creating an environment where violence and persecution against Jews were not only tolerated but encouraged. The Holocaust stands as a stark reminder of the devastating consequences of unchecked propaganda, bigotry, and authoritarianism.

To Learn More About the Holocaust visit: [AboutHolocaust.org](https://aboutholocaust.org)<sup>4</sup>

## FACTS to REMEMBER

- **Sophisticated Propaganda:** The Nazis used newspapers, films, posters, and radio to disseminate harmful stereotypes about Jews, portraying them as subhuman and societal threats.
- **Scapegoating:** Hitler blamed Jews for Germany's economic problems and societal ills, fostering widespread anti-Semitic sentiment.
- **Nuremberg Laws (1935):** Discriminatory laws were justified, stripping Jews of civil rights and legal protections, setting the stage for further persecution.
- **Final Solution:** The orchestrated campaign helped lay the groundwork for the systematic extermination of European Jewry, culminating in the murder of six million Jews.
- **Indoctrination and Support:** Nazi messages were crucial in indoctrinating the German population, rallying support for genocidal policies, and creating societal acceptance of violence against Jews.
- **Legacy:** The Holocaust serves as a dire warning of the lethal impact of unchecked bigotry and authoritarian rule—and the dark consequences of political movements that target the Jews—emphasizing the importance of vigilance and resistance against such ideologies.

<sup>4</sup> <https://aboutholocaust.org/en>

## THE BERGSON GROUP AND THE FIGHT FOR JEWISH SURVIVAL

With ambitions of world domination, Hitler launched World War II by invading Poland in September 1939. This initial invasion led to further successful German victories in its conquest of large parts of Europe and murder and violence against millions. Initially, the world did not take Hitler's ambition for world domination seriously and was skeptical of reports about death camps and the systematic extermination of Jews in Europe. The United States stayed on the sidelines

in the early days of the war. On December 7, 1941, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor led to entry of the US into the war and after the death of over 70 million people, the war came to an end with the successful victory of the allied forces on September 2, 1945.

The holocaust was a dark day for the world and for the Jewish people in particular. Many families were wiped out completely and Jews often wonder how this could have happened and why Jewish and non-Jewish people didn't do more to prevent the atrocity of mass murder to happen. During the war, an activist named Hillel Kook, alias Peter Bergson, insisted the United States do more to save the Jews of Europe from annihilation.

Bergson and his supporters argued that the United States should lift its restrictions on immigration, actively assist Jewish refugees fleeing Europe, and prioritize more military actions that would disrupt Hitler's "Final Solution."

In order to raise awareness about the what was happening, the "Bergson Group" organized a dramatic public pageant dedicated to the "two million civilian Jewish dead of Europe." The pageant, titled "We Will Never Die," was first performed in New York City on March 9, 1943, before an audience of 40,000 people. After its initial debut, the pageant toured around the country, attracting the attention, and sympathy, of prominent businessmen, journalists, and political figures.



Bergson Group leaders conferring with Congressional supporters in 1944. L to R; Sen. Guy Gillette, Rep. Will Rogers, Jr., Bergson, Eli Jabotinsky.



Rabbi Eliezer Silver (front row, second from left) leads a march of Orthodox rabbis to the Capitol to bring attention to the plight of European Jewry. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Lillian Silver

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First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt reported that the show was “one of the most impressive and moving pageants [she had] ever seen. No one who heard... the story of what had happened at the hands of a ruthless German military will ever forget those haunting words: ‘Remember us.’”

Following the success of “We Will Never Die,” on October 6, 1943, Bergson organized the “Rabbis’ March on Washington.” As part of the event, hundreds of traditionally-dressed rabbis arrived in Washington, D.C., to plead directly to the U.S. government on behalf of the Jews of Europe facing extermination by the Nazis. While they were not granted an audience with President Roosevelt, the rabbis were met on the steps of the U.S. Capitol by Vice President Henry Wallace.

The rabbis’ petition read, “In the name of G-d, Creator of the Universe, Blessed is He. ‘Thou shalt not stand idly by the blood of thy neighbor’ (“I am the Lord” Leviticus 19:16). Children, infants, and elderly men and women are crying out to us for help. Millions have already been slain, sentenced to fire and sword, and tens of thousands have died of starvation! As for us, how can we stand in prayer on the holy day of Yom Kippur, knowing that we haven’t fulfilled our responsibility? So, we have come, brokenhearted, on the eve of our holiest day to entreat you, our honorable President Franklin Roosevelt ... to form a special agency to rescue the remainder of the Jewish nation in Europe.” Eventually, President Roosevelt established the war Refugee Board which played an important role in saving more than 200,000 Jewish lives.

Students are encouraged to learn more about Adolf Hitler and World War II. *“Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.” Winston Churchill*

## FACTS to REMEMBER

- **International Advocacy:** The Bergson Group extended its advocacy efforts beyond the United States. They organized events and campaigns in various countries, including the United Kingdom, where they worked closely with British Jewish leaders to urge the British government to open Palestine to Jewish refugees.
- **Controversy and Opposition:** The Bergson Group faced opposition from some American Jewish organizations and leaders who preferred quieter diplomacy over the more confrontational tactics employed by Bergson. This internal division highlighted the complexity of Jewish responses to the Holocaust and the challenges of coordinating a unified effort.
- **Legacy of Activism:** The activism of the Bergson Group and other Jewish organizations during World War II laid the groundwork for future Jewish advocacy efforts, influencing strategies and approaches to humanitarian crises and human rights issues in the decades that followed.

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## THE RABBI OF BUCHENWALD: RABBI HERSCHEL SCHACTER'S JOURNEY ON THE FRONTLINES IN WWII

While many American Jews fought for their brethren in Europe through activism and lobbying, others hoped to contribute more directly to the war effort. More than 500,000 American Jews served in the U.S. Armed Forces during World War II, and one such Jewish-American hero was Rabbi Herschel Schacter.

Members of the Agudath Sholom synagogue in Stamford, Connecticut responded to the attack on Pearl Harbor with patriotic enthusiasm. They donated blood, collected scrap metal, purchased war bonds, and knit socks for soldiers. And "those who could, entered the armed forces," the synagogue's institutional history reports. Nobody, however, would have expected their new rabbi to join the army.

Hired just over a year earlier, even before he had completed rabbinical school, Herschel Schacter had quickly established himself in his new pulpit. As a full-time clergyman, Schacter was exempt from military service. "But after Pearl Harbor, I felt uncomfortable that all the other young men were enlisting, and I wasn't," he recalled. "I couldn't stand it." On July 24, 1942, Schacter wrote to the Jewish Welfare Board (JWB) to request an application.

He later recalled that when he told his parents of his decision, he received at least one lengthy letter from his father pleading with him to stay in Stamford. Schacter's heartfelt response, in Hebrew, refers to his parents' feelings and sheds light on his own thinking about his intentions.



Jewish soldiers of the 329th Infantry at Rosh Hashanah services, somewhere between Beaugency and Orleans, France, in 1944. (Courtesy of the National Museum of American Jewish Military History/via JTA)



Rabbi Schacter, just after liberation, in Buchenwald.



Rabbi Herschel Schacter (left) conducts the service of the first day of Shavuot for survivors of the Buchenwald concentration camp shortly after their liberation.

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First, he argued, the plight of the Jewish people under the Nazis constituted an emergency situation that made it incumbent upon Jews in the Free World to act. He asked, invoking a biblical verse, "how can we sit with folded hands... and not listen to the voice of the blood of our brothers who are crying out to us?" He then cited another biblical injunction: "It is a time to act for the Lord, for they have violated Your teachings."

Moreover, Schacter continued, Judaism prohibits standing aside while other people are suffering. He cited the biblical requirement that if an unidentified homicide victim is discovered, the Jewish leaders of a city must bring a sacrifice and declare publicly, "Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it done" – not because anyone would suspect them of having committed murder, but to atone for their failure to extend assistance to the victim while he was yet alive.

An additional religious obligation, Schacter contended, was to reciprocate the hospitality America had shown to the Jewish people. Jews were required "to dedicate our lives on behalf of this truly blessed country that has provided refuge and rest to our unfortunate and oppressed brethren. He reminded his father: "Where would you yourself be if America did not open her compassionate doors and gates to those who knocked?"

The massacre of Jews in Buchenwald stands as a harrowing testament to the brutality of the Holocaust. Located in Nazi-occupied Germany, Buchenwald concentration camp witnessed the systematic murder of thousands of Jewish prisoners, alongside countless others deemed undesirable by the regime. From forced labor to medical experiments, inmates endured unimaginable suffering and cruelty. While not the largest death camp, the massacre of an estimated 56,000 people occurred at Buchenwald, predominantly Jews but also political prisoners, resistance fighters, homosexuals, and others deemed "undesirable" by the Nazi regime, stands as a harrowing example of the brutality of the Holocaust.

Upon the arrival of the U.S. Third Army's Sixth Armored Division, which included Rabbi Schacter, at Buchenwald on April 11, 1945, approximately 21,000 prisoners remained alive, among them 4,000 to 5,000 Jews, including around 800 children.

Murray Goldinger, a teenage prisoner, vividly recalled being near the front gate when the rabbi's Jeep entered. He described how Rabbi Schacter approached them and began hugging the stunned prisoners. They crowded around him, examining the Jewish chaplain's insignia on his uniform in disbelief.



Young Buchenwald survivors at liberation. Courtesy of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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Goldinger expressed the collective pride felt by the prisoners at seeing a rabbi adorned in military attire. As they engaged with Rabbi Schacter, they eagerly sought confirmation that the war had indeed ended. They poured out their harrowing stories and uncertainties, seeking solace and guidance from "the American rabbi." Rabbi Schacter, in response, moved from barrack to barrack, reassuring them with the proclamation, "Sholom Aleichem Yidden, ihr zent frei! (Jews, you are free!)," offering a glimmer of hope in their dire circumstances.

Watch Murray Goldinger's Survival Testimony [here](#).<sup>5</sup>

On his third day in the camp, Rabbi Schacter became aware of a large public-address system that could reach the entire camp. Seeking to provide spiritual solace to the Jewish survivors, he approached the sergeant in charge and requested permission to hold a religious service. Surprisingly, the sergeant agreed, saying, "Okay, go ahead, Chappie."

In Yiddish, Rabbi Schacter announced, "Here is the American rabbi talking to you! I want you to know that tonight at seven o'clock, there will be a Shabbos evening service in the Kino Halle." The Kino Halle, a communal building typically used for showing films to the camp guards and administration, would now host a sacred gathering.

Entering the Kino Halle that Friday evening, Rabbi Schacter found it filled with at least 1,000 people, packed to capacity. Despite many being physically weakened or ill, they had gathered for the service. Standing on a small platform, Rabbi Schacter, adorned in his prayer shawl, began singing Sholom Aleichem, a traditional Sabbath song. Recognizing the song's familiarity, he adapted it for the survivors who had no homes to return to.

As the service commenced, Rabbi Schacter led the gathered prisoners in prayer, relying solely on his voice and their collective memory of familiar Sabbath melodies. Despite the absence of prayer books, the former prisoners found comfort in the shared ritual, finding hope and solace amidst the darkness of their circumstances.

## DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER

Dwight Eisenhower was the Supreme Commander of the allied forces in Europe during World War II and a five star General in the US army. He planned and supervised the two most consequential military campaigns of World War II: Operation Torch in North Africa and the famous invasion of Normandy in 1944. He was the 34th President of the United States and one of the most significant heroes in world history. His Presidential museum is in Abilene, Kansas where he grew up.

Towards the end of the war, in April, 1945, General Eisenhower visited the Ohrdruf concentration camp and was unprepared when he saw bodies piled like wood and living skeletons struggling to survive. With great foresight that the horrors of the holocaust

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<sup>5</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8yY\\_\\_8sxcXs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8yY__8sxcXs)

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might one day be denied, he insisted on extensive documentation and ordered film crews to record the devastating scenes they encountered and urged journalists and members of Congress to visit and witness the atrocities firsthand. His proactive measures aimed to create an indisputable record of the Nazi crimes, ensuring that the truth of the Holocaust would be preserved against any future claims of denial.

[Film](#) of General Dwight D. Eisenhower Visiting the Ohrdruf Camp.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the profound impact on history of the Holocaust of 6 million Jews by the Nazis, awareness and understanding by people of this catastrophic event are alarmingly low in many parts of the world. Surveys often reveal significant gaps in knowledge, with many people, especially young people, underestimating the scale of the atrocities or unaware of key facts. The lack of awareness of the holocaust underscores the critical need for comprehensive Holocaust education. We encourage those in this class, in Virginia and around the world to educate themselves about the Holocaust not only for commemorating the victims and honoring the survivors but also for understanding the mechanisms of prejudice and state-sponsored genocide. The holocaust serves as a stark reminder of the dangers of unchecked hatred and the importance of vigilance in protecting human rights.



Dwight D. Eisenhower (centre) in front of a grid fashioned from railway tracks that had been used to incinerate corpses of inmates from mass graves, April 1945. Photo: U.S. Army Signal Corps

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<sup>5</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8yY\\_\\_8sxcXs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8yY__8sxcXs)

## FACTS to REMEMBER

- Over 500,000 American Jews served in the U.S. Armed Forces during World War II, highlighting a significant contribution to the war effort.
- Rabbi Herschel Schacter's decision to enlist in the military despite being exempt as a clergyman underscores his commitment to action in the face of Nazi atrocities.
- Schacter's religious convictions drove him to advocate for Jewish refugees and recognize America's role in providing sanctuary to the oppressed.
- Arrival at Buchenwald Concentration Camp marked a pivotal moment as Rabbi Schacter, among the U.S. Third Army's Sixth Armored Division, encountered survivors, offering hope amid despair.
- Rabbi Schacter's Sabbath service at Buchenwald, held in the Kino Halle, provided spiritual solace to over 1,000 survivors, symbolizing resilience and faith amidst adversity.

## FACTS to REMEMBER

- **Ancestral Homeland:** Israel is regarded by Jews as their biblical homeland, promised to them as the Land of Israel or Eretz Yisrael, maintaining its centrality through millennia of exile and dispersion.
- **Spiritual Center:** Jerusalem, the capital of Israel, is the holiest city in Judaism, home to the Western Wall, which is a significant remnant of the ancient Jewish Temple. Jews globally face Jerusalem during prayer, highlighting their spiritual connection to the city.
- **Beacon of Resilience:** Established in 1948, Israel symbolizes Jewish resilience and self-determination. It provided a refuge for Jews fleeing post-World War II persecution and has been a place where Jewish culture and language (Hebrew) could be revitalized and preserved.
- **Cultural and Educational Hub:** Israel is a center for Jewish learning and innovation, playing a critical role in Jewish continuity. It attracts Jews from around the world, enhancing community building and fostering a sense of solidarity among the global Jewish diaspora.

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## THE COLD WAR AND THE SOVIET JEWRY MOVEMENT

As described above, the American Jewish community is grateful for and feels welcome in the United States unlike any other country in history. While not without suffering discrimination and other tribulations as a minority community in America, Jews in America have been allowed to prosper and live freely in America. The Jewish community is also grateful that America has stood up to dictators and oppression around the world. Because Jews are a tiny community, they have often been scapegoats for problems in the world and Nazi Germany is not the only, but the best example.

Jews are able to see negative trends before others and are often viewed as canaries in the coal mine for the ability to warn the world what might happen to harm the free world. The late Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, former chief Rabbi of England famously wrote: *"The hate that begins with Jews never ends with Jews. Antisemitism is the world's most reliable early warning sign of a major threat to freedom, humanity and the dignity of difference. It matters to all of us. Which is why we must fight it together."*

After World War II, the "Iron Curtain" enveloped Eastern Europe, subjugating millions of Jews and others under the repressive Soviet regime. The Jews living in the Soviet Union faced severe restrictions on religious practices, cultural expression, higher education, prestigious jobs, and were prohibited from emigrating, particularly to Israel and to a lesser extent America. The Jews of the Soviet Union were being scapegoated for many of the ills of society under communist rule.

In response, the global Jewish community, with strong leadership from American Jews, initiated substantial advocacy efforts against the Soviet Union. A landmark in these efforts was the Jackson–Vanik amendment to the 1974 Trade Act, which linked U.S. economic relations with the USSR to the free emigration of Jews and other minorities. This legislation became a pivotal aspect of U.S. foreign policy, highlighting the importance of human rights in international relations.

For many American Jews, who understood the sting of persecution and the importance of safeguarding human rights, their advocacy on behalf of Soviet Jews held a dual significance. Not only did it confront the injustices faced by their fellow Jews under Soviet oppression, but also served as a moral imperative to encourage their own nation to uphold and promote human rights universally. Their efforts not only aimed at liberating Soviet Jews but also at fortifying the global stance against all forms of tyranny and discrimination.

The "Freedom Sunday for Soviet Jews" rally on December 6, 1987, marked a significant point in the advocacy efforts for Jews in the Soviet Union. Over 200,000 people gathered on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., with notable American political figures in attendance, including Vice President George H.W. Bush and bipartisan support from many other politicians that helped to exert substantial pressure on the Soviet government.

Among the speakers at the rally invited by the American Jewish community, Natan Sharansky stood out as a symbol of resilience and the struggle for Soviet Jewry having recently been released from the gulag. A former Soviet prisoner and prominent refusenik

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(a Russian term for individuals who were denied permission to leave the country by the Soviet regime), Sharansky had been convicted on false charges of espionage and treason and sentenced to 13 years in prison, serving nine of those. His steadfast defiance of the Soviet communist leadership and refusal to recant his desire for emigration rights turned him into an international human rights icon. His release in 1986 as part of an East-West prisoner exchange was seen as a triumph of the human spirit over totalitarianism and a victory for those Jewish civic leaders around the world who had been advocating for his and other's release from prison.



Anatoly (Natan) Sharansky speaks at the Freedom Sunday rally, December 6, 1987, Washington, D.C. (Photo by Jacques Langevin/Sygma via Getty Images.)



Participants in the Soviet Jewry rally hold signs high as they march through a Washington street Sunday, December 6, 1987. The group is calling for Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to permit unrestricted emigration of Jews from the Soviet Union. (AP Photo/Ira Schwarz)

Sharansky's participation in the rally underscored the effectiveness of global advocacy efforts and together with other foreign policy moves by President Reagan played an important role in the subsequent shift in Soviet policies under Mikhail Gorbachev's to glasnost (openness), perestroika (restructuring), disintegration of the Soviet empire and thawing of the cold war.

These changes allowed for an increase in emigration rates for Soviet Jews from about 8,000 in 1987, to over 71,000 in 1989, and peaked at approximately 185,000 in 1990. Between 1989 and 1992, more than 400,000 Jews emigrated from the Soviet Union, profoundly affecting the demographics and cultural landscapes of their new communities, particularly in Israel where all Jews are allowed immediate citizenship and to a lesser extent America with immigration quotas.

The American political leaders were willing to fight for Justice around the world, for the Jewish community in this case, and worked together with the Jewish community who were their canary in the coal mine of how bad the totalitarian government of the Soviet Government had become.

## FACTS to REMEMBER

- **Jackson–Vanik Amendment (1974):** Linked U.S. economic relations with the USSR to the free emigration of Jews, becoming a pivotal part of U.S. human rights policy.
- **Freedom Sunday Rally (1987):** Over 200,000 people gathered on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., to support Soviet Jews, featuring key political figures like Vice President George H.W. Bush.
- **Natan Sharansky:** Former Soviet prisoner and refusenik, his presence at the rally symbolized the struggle and resilience of Soviet Jews.
- **Impact of Advocacy:** The rally and broader advocacy efforts were crucial in influencing Soviet policies, leading to increased Jewish emigration during the late 1980s and early 1990s.
- **Emigration Surge:** From about 8,000 Jews in 1987 to over 71,000 in 1989, peaking at 185,000 in 1990, with more than 400,000 Jews emigrating between 1989 and 1992.

## THE IRANIAN JEWISH DIASPORA IN AMERICA: A TALE OF RESILIENCE AND SUCCESS

One final example of the strength of America and its conviction to stand up for oppressed people around the world. Jews have resided in Persia, now Iran, for over 2,700 years, forming one of the oldest Jewish communities outside Israel. Following the Muslim conquest in 642 CE, Jews often faced second-class citizenship and numerous challenges. However, during Iran's secular period in the 20th century, the Jewish community, numbering around 100,000, prospered significantly. This era saw them flourishing in the middle and upper classes, gaining substantial economic, professional, and cultural influence.

The Islamic Revolution in 1979 marked a critical turning point for the Jewish community in Iran. The overthrow of the Shah and the establishment of the Islamic Republic led by Ayatollah Khomeini brought about a dramatic and harsh reversal in their fortunes.

With the new theocratic regime, the rhetoric against Jews intensified markedly. Iranian Jews were publicly denounced as infidels and imperial spies, accused of collusion with Western powers, particularly the United States and Israel. This period saw a surge in anti-Semitic propaganda and policies that directly targeted the Jewish community. Many members of the Jewish community were arrested on trumped-up charges of spying for Israel or America, leading to numerous imprisonments and, in some cases, executions.

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Prominent Jewish businessmen and community leaders were particularly vulnerable, often becoming targets for government persecution.

The implementation of Sharia law further marginalized Jewish Iranians. They faced discriminatory laws that not only reduced their legal rights but also sought to humiliate and oppress them in daily life. For example, the testimony of a Jew in court was valued less than that of a Muslim, and they faced restrictions in their professional and educational opportunities.

In the face of these harsh conditions, the majority of Iranian Jews managed to flee the country, escaping to various destinations but predominantly heading towards the United



Iranian Islamic Republic Army soldiers carry posters of the Ayatollah Khomeini during the revolution of 1979. (Keystone/Getty Images/via JTA)

States and Israel. This exodus was facilitated by both established Jewish networks and new organizations that arose in response to the crisis, which helped to smuggle Jews out of Iran and provide them with the necessary support to start anew in their host countries.

This migration marked a significant moment of transition, as Iranian Jews had to rebuild their lives in a new land while coping with the trauma of their departure and the discrimination they had faced. The United States, often seen as a land of hope and freedom, offered them opportunities for a fresh start, allowing them to preserve their cultural identity while integrating into broader American society.

The Iranian Jewish community in the United States, which now numbers about 100,000, has achieved success and integration, particularly in Southern California which is sometimes referred to as "Tehraneles" (after the Iranian capital of Tehran). Many have become prominent figures in business, academia, politics, and the arts. According to one study, around 82% of Iranian Jews in the U.S. are self-employed, creating economic opportunities for themselves and the broader community. Thriving Iranian Jewish communities also exist in Miami, Houston and New York, as well as in smaller cities and towns from coast to coast.

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## DEFENDING DEMOCRACY TOGETHER: U.S. AND ISRAEL COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP

In recent months, the news has been filled with stories related to the Israel-Hamas war—the latest front in larger struggle between the democratic world and the forces of totalitarianism and terrorism.

Iran has been labeled by the U.S. as a state sponsor of terrorism, and the autocratic dictatorship of the Ayatollah in Iran has publicly called for “Death to Israel” and “Death to America”. Iran has been implicated in many international terrorist incidents, including the 1983 Beirut barracks bombing that killed 241 U.S. service personnel, and is considered the largest state sponsor of terrorism in the world. Iran’s reach has extended to South



Rescue workers search for survivors and victims in the rubble after a powerful car bomb destroyed the Buenos Aires headquarters of the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association (AMIA), in this July 18, 1994 file photo. REUTERS/Files/Enrique Marcarian

America, where it is widely believed to have orchestrated the 1994 AMIA bombing in Buenos Aires, Argentina, targeting the Jewish community and killing 85 people. Hezbollah, an Iran-backed organization, is also accused of involvement in this attack. Iran launches cyber attacks targeting US companies and government agencies and is actively seeking a nuclear bomb.

Hezbollah, based in Lebanon and supported by Iran, has been designated as a terrorist organization by the U.S. and is responsible for numerous attacks, including the aforementioned Beirut bombing, and most recently rocket and drone attacks into Northern Israel. Hamas, which governs the Gaza Strip, is also designated as a terrorist organization by the U.S. and is known for its attacks against Israeli civilians and the killing of American citizens. With the military, financial, media and other support from Iran, the Hezbollah military in Lebanon, and the Hamas terrorist group in Gaza are threatening to eliminate the State of Israel. Hezbollah is estimated to have 100,000 rockets stationed near the border of Israel ready to fire at Israel when given the command. Hamas has fired close to 9,500 rockets at Israel since October 7, 2023.

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## ISRAEL DEFENDS ITSELF: CONFRONTING THREATS

Israel is the first line of defense against persistent and evolving threats from Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas. These threats require Israel to constantly adapt and innovate its defensive capabilities and work closely with the United States to share and develop the latest technologies.

America provides financial aid to Israel that bolsters Israel's ability to defend itself but also directly benefits the United States as a substantial portion of the aid procures American-made munitions and military equipment, supporting American workers and the U.S. economy. Secondly, the aid contributes to Israel's development of cutting-edge defense technologies, enhancing both U.S. national security and the defense of the Western world.

Israel has emerged as a global leader in missile defense innovation and operational



Rocket fired from Gaza into southern Israel hits Ashkelon, October 7, 2023 (Edi Israel/Flash90)



The Israeli Iron Dome missile defense system (left) intercepts rockets fired by Hamas toward southern Israel from Beit Lahia in the northern Gaza Strip on May 14.

success, showcasing a robust three-tiered network encompassing the Iron Dome (for short-range threats), David's Sling (for mid-range threats), and Arrow (for long-range and ballistic threats) systems. Israel is in development of the world's most advanced Laser defense technology named Iron Beam and is in close coordination with the United States. On April 14, 2024, the modern defense systems, jointly developed in partnership between Israel and the United States, underwent a critical test when Iran orchestrated a coordinated attack against Israel, launching over 300 missiles, including ballistic missiles. Impressively, the system intercepted 99% of the projectiles, demonstrating its remarkable effectiveness in safeguarding Israeli territory.

The United States and Israel maintain also a close partnership in intelligence-sharing, strategic coordination, and military training, enhancing the security interests and defense capabilities of both nations. The American Jewish community feels proud of the close relationship of Israel and the United States and that Israel is one of the closest allies in the world for the United States. The American Jewish community watches the news very closely as many Jewish Americans have families and both American and Israel friends in danger fighting on the front lines for democracy and Western values every day.

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1. **Understanding the Past:** What were the key factors that contributed to the rise of anti-Semitic propaganda and policies in Nazi Germany? How did these factors enable the Holocaust?
2. **Moral Reflections:** Considering the systematic persecution and genocide of Jews during the Holocaust, what lessons can we learn about the dangers of unchecked bigotry and authoritarianism?
3. **Critical Analysis:** How effective were the efforts of individuals and groups like the Bergson Group in raising awareness and prompting action during the Holocaust? What challenges did they face?
4. **Connecting to Today:** How can the lessons of the Holocaust inform our understanding of current events where hate speech and propaganda are present? What role can individuals play in countering such ideologies?
5. **Personal Reflection:** How did learning about the atrocities of the Holocaust and the stories of survivors and responders affect your views on human rights and political liberty?
6. **Role of Propaganda:** Discuss the impact of Nazi propaganda on the German public and other Europeans. How did it shape public perception of Jews and other marginalized groups?
7. **Historical Significance:** Why is it important to preserve the memory of the Holocaust? How do museums and educational programs contribute to this goal?
8. **Analyzing Responses:** Evaluate the international response to the Holocaust at the time. What actions were taken, and what more could have been done?

## INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

In exploring the profound and complex history of Jewish heritage, particularly through the tumultuous events of the 20th century, we delve into a narrative marked by adversity, resilience, and the relentless pursuit of justice. As we engage with these topics, we seek to appreciate the enduring impact of these historical events and the lessons they impart for future generations.

### Holocaust and Its Mechanisms

- **Propaganda's Role:** How did Nazi propaganda dehumanize Jews and other marginalized groups, and what impact did this have on German society?
- **Legal Framework for Persecution:** Discuss the significance of the Nuremberg Laws in the escalation of anti-Semitic actions leading to the Holocaust.
- **Extermination and Labor Camps:** How did the operation and purpose of camps like Auschwitz and Treblinka support the Nazi regime's goal of the "Final Solution"?

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### Responses and Advocacy During the Holocaust

- **Bergson Group's Efforts:** Evaluate the effectiveness of the Bergson Group's advocacy in America. How did their approaches differ from other Jewish responses at the time?
- **Public and Political Impact:** What was the impact of public demonstrations like the Rabbis' March on Washington on American policy and public opinion regarding the Holocaust?

### Rabbi Herschel Schacter's Contributions

- **Religious and Ethical Leadership:** Explore the contributions of Rabbi Herschel Schacter at Buchenwald. How did his actions reflect the broader role of American Jews during and after the war?

### Establishment of Israel and American Support

- **Founding of Israel:** Discuss the historical and global factors that led to the establishment of Israel in 1948.
- **U.S.-Israel Relationship:** How has the relationship between the U.S. and Israel evolved since 1948, and what factors have influenced its dynamics?

### Soviet Jewry Movement

- **Cold War Dynamics:** Analyze how the plight of Soviet Jews became a focal point for international advocacy. What was the impact of the Jackson–Vanik Amendment?
- **Global Advocacy and Its Effects:** How did advocacy for Soviet Jews change U.S. foreign policy and the lives of Jews in the Soviet Union?

### The Iranian Jewish Diaspora

- **Challenges Faced by Iranian Jews:** Discuss the transformation in the lives of Iranian Jews before and after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. How did this affect their migration patterns, particularly towards the United States?

### Contemporary Implications

- **Modern Challenges and Resilience:** Considering current geopolitical tensions involving Israel and its neighbors, what can be learned from past Jewish resilience and advocacy?
- **Role of Education and Awareness:** How can understanding the historical struggles of Jewish communities help combat contemporary anti-Semitism and support democratic values?

These questions aim to provoke deep thinking and discussion among students about the multifaceted aspects of Jewish history, the Holocaust, the formation of Israel, and the subsequent impacts on Jewish communities worldwide, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the course material.

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# PART 3

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## JEWISH AMERICAN PIONEERS AND LEADERS

In the annals of American history, the contributions of Jewish Americans have illuminated the nation's tapestry across myriad domains such as civic leadership, governance, innovation, and culture, enriching nearly every facet of American life. From claiming victories in the World Series to spearheading the development of the polio vaccine, advancing nuclear physics, brokering peace treaties in the Middle East, composing quintessential American anthems, marching alongside Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and pioneering in the tech industry, Jewish Americans have played significant roles in shaping a modern, dynamic America. These individuals not only exemplify excellence and societal progress in America but also maintain a strong cultural identity. This comprehensive exploration aims to spotlight the breadth and depth of their impact, showcasing their pivotal roles and providing a longer, though not exhaustive, list of notable American Jews.

## 1. CHAMPIONS OF CHANGE: JEWISH AMERICANS AND THE STRUGGLE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS AND POLITICAL FREEDOM

### Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel:

(1907-1972) was a prominent Jewish theologian and civil rights advocate whose efforts against racism in America were deeply intertwined with his spiritual beliefs about justice and human dignity. Born in Poland and a survivor of Nazi persecution, Heschel emigrated to the United States in 1940. He soon became a professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and used his position to speak out against racial discrimination. His theological perspective emphasized the sanctity of life and the sinfulness of indifference, ideas that fueled his activism.

Heschel famously walked alongside Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in the 1965 Selma to Montgomery march, a seminal event in the American Civil Rights Movement. He described his participation as "praying with his feet," symbolizing his belief that faith must be active and engaged in the struggle for justice. Beyond just marching, Heschel was instrumental in rallying Jewish support for the civil rights movement, bridging religious and racial divides. His friendship and alliance with Dr. King highlighted the potential for cross-cultural solidarity in fights against oppression

Throughout the 1960s, Heschel continued to be a vocal critic of racism in America, often criticizing segregation and inequality as affronts to G-d's will. He advocated for civil rights legislation. Heschel's legacy in the fight against racism remains powerful, embodying the potential for religious faith to inspire social change and fostering ongoing dialogues about race, justice, and human rights in diverse communities.



Martin Luther King, Jr. (center) and Abraham Joshua Heschel (2nd from front right), march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, March 21, 1965

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### Rabbi Meir Soloveichik:

In recent years, Rabbi Meir Soloveichik (born 1977) has been a leading Jewish voice in the defense of religious liberty. Part of one of the great rabbinic families in modern history, Rabbi Soloveichik celebrates the uniqueness of America as a land that has always welcomed Jewish ideas and protected the right of every American—including Jews—to build religious communities, educate children in religious schools, and practice faith traditions with freedom of conscience. As the chief rabbi of Congregation Shearith Israel, the oldest Jewish congregation in America, and a professor of Torah and Western Thought at Yeshiva University, he has blended his scholarly background with passionate public advocacy.

Rabbi Soloveichik's public advocacy has made significant contributions to the discourse on religious liberty. His writings, which appear in major publications, and his participation in public debates have highlighted the historical and philosophical foundations of religious freedom. By drawing on biblical texts and the writings of the Founding Fathers, he has articulated a compelling vision of religious liberty that resonates with a broad audience. His eloquence and depth of knowledge have made him a key figure in shaping public opinion on this critical issue.

In addition to his educational and advocacy work, Rabbi Soloveichik has been actively involved in legal and political efforts to defend religious liberty. He has testified before Congress on issues related to religious freedom and participated in legal cases that impact the rights of religious individuals and institutions. His efforts in interfaith initiatives have also built bridges between different faith communities, promoting mutual understanding and respect essential for defending religious liberty. Through his leadership at Congregation Shearith Israel, Rabbi Soloveichik continues to inspire and guide his community in upholding these principles.

Leader of America's oldest Jewish congregation receives Becket's Canterbury Medal at gala in New York

Traveling the nation and the world, Rabbi Soloveichik defends these ideals in the halls of Congress, presidential conventions, and gatherings of Christian leaders and think tanks in Washington. He argues that religious freedom is the great civil rights issue of our time, and his work underscores the importance of safeguarding the rights of all religious communities. His contributions have significantly impacted the legal and public frameworks that protect the free exercise of religion, ensuring that the United States remains a beacon of freedom and tolerance.



Leader of America's oldest Jewish congregation receives Becket's Canterbury Medal at gala in New York

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## 2. PIONEERS IN POLITICS: THE POLITICAL STRIDES OF JEWISH AMERICANS

From local councils to the highest courts and offices of the nation, Jewish Americans have significantly shaped American political discourse and policy. Figures such as Joe Lieberman, the first Jewish candidate on a major American party presidential ticket, Henry Kissinger, a key architect of foreign policy, and Steve Mnuchin, who served as the Secretary of the Treasury, showcase the diverse political involvement of Jewish Americans. Their careers reflect a deep-seated commitment to public service and leadership.

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### **Senator Joe Lieberman:**

Joe Lieberman (1942–2024) was a prominent figure in American politics, making substantial contributions to both legislative development and national security policies. As the United States Senator from Connecticut from 1989 to 2013, Lieberman was known for his centrist

views and his ability to bridge bipartisan divides. Notably, he was the first Jewish candidate on a major American party's presidential ticket when he ran as the Democratic nominee for Vice President in 2000 alongside Al Gore. This historic candidacy not only broke religious barriers in national politics but also underscored his significant influence within his party and his appeal to a broad spectrum of American voters.

Throughout his career, Lieberman was particularly active in the areas of environmental protection, national security, and health care reform. He played a critical role in the development of the Department of Homeland Security following the September 11 attacks, ensuring the legislation to establish the department passed through Congress. This was a cornerstone of the nation's efforts to strengthen security and prevent future attacks.



Republican presidential candidate Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., is seen on stage with Sen. Joe Lieberman during a rally in Downingtown, Pa., Thursday, Oct. 16, 2008. (AP Photo/Matt Rourke)

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### **Henry Kissinger:**

Henry Kissinger, a towering figure in American foreign policy, served as National Security Advisor and later as Secretary of State under Presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford. One of Kissinger's most notable achievements was his role in the thawing of relations with the Soviet Union. This policy was marked by the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT), which helped curb the arms race and stabilized superpower relations during a particularly volatile period of the Cold War.



President Nixon walks with U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in 1972, during peace talks in Paris that were aimed at ending the Vietnam War. A year later, Kissinger was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his role in negotiating the ceasefire.

Another pivotal aspect of Kissinger's legacy is his orchestration of the opening of relations with the People's Republic of China. In 1971, Kissinger secretly traveled to China, setting the stage for Nixon's historic 1972 visit, which ended 25 years of no communication or diplomatic ties between the two nations. This strategic move not only realigned the balance of power during the Cold War but also fundamentally transformed international relations and trade for decades to come.

Furthermore, Kissinger played a crucial role in Middle East diplomacy, particularly through his policy of "shuttle diplomacy" after the Yom Kippur War of 1973. By flying between Israeli and Arab capitals, Kissinger was instrumental in negotiating ceasefires and fostering a dialogue that led to the disengagement agreements between Israel, Egypt, and Syria. Although his approaches have been critiqued for prioritizing stability over democratic values, Kissinger's efforts in the Middle East paved the way for future peace processes, including the Camp David Accords.

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### **Steve Mnuchin:**

Steve Mnuchin has made notable contributions to the United States, particularly in the realm of finance and government service. As the 77th Secretary of the Treasury, serving under President Donald Trump from 2017 to 2021, Mnuchin was a principal architect of the administration's economic policies. He played a pivotal role in crafting and promoting the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act

of 2017, which represented the most significant overhaul of the U.S. tax code in over three decades. The act aimed to stimulate economic growth by reducing tax rates for businesses and individuals, and Mnuchin was at the forefront of its passage, providing key testimony to Congress and engaging in public advocacy.

Mnuchin's tenure was also marked by his

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management of the U.S. government's finances during a period of substantial fiscal and monetary challenges. He was instrumental in negotiating the raising of the debt ceiling and played a central role in U.S. trade policy, contributing to the restructuring of the North American Free Trade Agreement into the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA).



Steven Mnuchin being sworn in as the United States Secretary of the Treasury

These agreements were intended to bolster U.S. economic interests and secure more favorable terms for American workers and businesses.

During the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, Mnuchin was a critical figure in the federal government's economic response. He was a key proponent of the CARES Act, which provided emergency financial assistance to individuals and businesses affected by the pandemic. His department oversaw the distribution of hundreds of billions of dollars in stimulus payments to American households, as well as the implementation of the Paycheck Protection Program, which aimed to keep small businesses afloat and maintain employment during the lockdowns. Mnuchin's actions during this crisis were vital in mitigating the economic fallout from the pandemic and provided a lifeline to countless American citizens and enterprises.

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### Eric Cantor:

Eric Cantor is a prominent American politician and lawyer who served as the United States Representative for Virginia's



House Majority Leader Eric Cantor at the Capitol in Washington, Wednesday, June 11, 2014. (AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite)2

7th congressional district from 2001 to 2014. A member of the Republican Party, Cantor was the House Majority Leader from 2010 to 2014, becoming the highest-ranking Jewish member in Congress. During his tenure, he was instrumental in shaping fiscal policy, advocating for limited government, and promoting pro-business initiatives. Cantor was known for his conservative stance on economic issues and played a key role in negotiations on budget and debt matters.

After his unexpected defeat in the 2014 primary, he transitioned to a career in investment banking and continues to be involved in political commentary and advocacy.

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### 3. ECONOMIC ARCHITECTS: JEWISH AMERICAN INNOVATORS AND ENTREPRENEURS

American Jewish entrepreneurs have played a pivotal role in the economic development of the United States, contributing significantly across various sectors and thereby shaping the nation's industrial and cultural landscapes. Their profound impact is marked by innovative leadership and strategic foresight, combined with a strong commitment to social responsibility and ethical practices. These individuals have not only driven technological and financial advancements but have also set new standards in corporate governance, influencing American business practices and policies extensively.

In technology, **Sergey Brin**, co-founder of Google, transformed the internet by developing a search engine that organized the world's information, making it universally accessible and useful. Google's innovation under Brin's leadership extended beyond search, pioneering in areas like Android smartphones, Google Maps, and various online services that have become integral to daily life.

**Michael Dell's** contributions to technology through Dell Technologies revolutionized the personal computer industry by implementing a unique direct-to-consumer sales model. This approach not only cut costs and passed savings onto consumers but also customized technology solutions for end-users, greatly enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty.

**Sheryl Sandberg**, through her role as COO of Facebook, drastically shaped the social

media landscape. She was instrumental in scaling Facebook's operations and developing its business model, which has fundamentally changed how businesses approach marketing and customer engagement globally.

In the entertainment and hospitality industry, **Sheldon Adelson** transformed Las Vegas by pioneering the concept of integrated resort-casinos that combine luxury hotel accommodations with expansive gaming floors and diverse entertainment options. This model has been replicated globally, reshaping tourism and leisure industries.

In fashion, **Ralph Lauren** has been synonymous with American style, creating an aspirational lifestyle brand that blends classic aesthetics with modern sensibility, which has significantly influenced both the fashion industry and popular culture.



As the room's new occupants stand by, Michael Dell revisits the University of Texas dorm room where he started his company in 1984. Dell's company became one of the world's largest sellers of personal computers. (AP Images)

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In the pharmaceutical sector, **Dr. Leonard Schleifer's** Regeneron

Pharmaceuticals has been at the forefront of biotechnological innovation, developing groundbreaking treatments for a range of diseases. Under his guidance, Regeneron quickly developed one of the first effective therapeutic treatments for COVID-19, showcasing the company's agility and the critical role of rapid innovation in responding to global health emergencies.



Dr. Leonard Schleifer '73, the 2019 Cornell Entrepreneur of the Year, talks with Lance Collins, the Joseph Silbert Dean of Engineering, April 11.

equality and educational reform in the United States.

**Michael Bloomberg**, a prominent business magnate and former Mayor of New York City, has significantly impacted various sectors through both his entrepreneurial and political endeavors. Founder of Bloomberg LP, a global financial services, software, and media company, he has also gained recognition for his extensive philanthropic work, particularly in public



Julius Rosenwald with students from a Rosenwald School. (Courtesy of Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library)

**Julius Rosenwald**, a distinguished businessman and philanthropist, significantly impacted American society through his leadership at Sears, Roebuck and Company and his philanthropic endeavors. Most notably, he established the Rosenwald Fund, which contributed millions in matching funds to support vocational and technical education. His profound commitment to advancing education extended particularly to the African American communities in the South, where his contributions helped build over 5,000 schools. This initiative not only fostered educational opportunities but also empowered generations, making Rosenwald a pivotal figure in the fight for

health, environmental sustainability, and gun control. These efforts reflect his commitment to leveraging his resources and influence to address some of the most pressing challenges of our time.

These Jewish American entrepreneurs exemplify how visionary leadership, coupled with a commitment to innovation and ethical practices, can lead to substantial economic growth and societal benefits. Their achievements have not only transformed their respective industries but have also played a significant role in advancing American economic and technological leadership on the global stage.

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## 4. SCHOLARS AND INNOVATORS: JEWISH CONTRIBUTIONS TO AMERICAN ACADEMIA

Jewish Americans have long been integral to the advancement of academics and research in the United States, making significant contributions across a spectrum of disciplines. From groundbreaking theoretical physics to influential economic theories and beyond, Jewish scholars have not only expanded the horizons of knowledge but have also played key roles in shaping educational and research policies. Their work has fostered innovation, challenged existing paradigms, and provided rich insights that continue to benefit society globally.

Despite comprising only 0.2% of the world's population, Jews have remarkably won 22% of all Nobel Prizes since the inception of the awards in 1901. Their contributions span various fields:



**Chemistry:**  
36 laureates  
(19% of total)



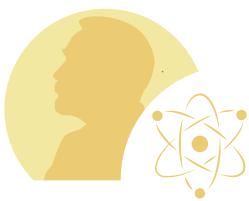
**Economics:**  
38 laureates  
(41% of total)



**Literature:**  
16 laureates  
(13% of total)



**Peace:**  
9 laureates  
(8% of total)



**Physics:**  
56 laureates  
(25% of total)



**Physiology or Medicine:**  
59 laureates  
(26% of total)

Overall, 214 out of 965 Nobel Prizes have been awarded to Jewish individuals (22%).

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### Elie Wiesel (1928 – 2016)

poignant voice of Holocaust survivors, endured the horrors of Auschwitz as a teenager. He dedicated his life to championing human rights and promoting Holocaust remembrance, earning him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986. His profound impact stems from both his literary work, including the seminal memoir *Night*, and his tireless activism. Through these efforts, Wiesel educated generations about the atrocities of genocide and the enduring resilience of the human spirit, ensuring that the lessons of the Holocaust continue to resonate worldwide.



Elie Wiesel (center), accepting the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986.

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### Richard Phillips Feynman (1918 – 1988)

Was a theoretical physicist renowned for his groundbreaking contributions to various fields. He is celebrated for his pioneering work in the path integral formulation of quantum mechanics, the theory of quantum electrodynamics, and the physics of superfluidity in supercooled liquid helium. Additionally, Feynman made significant strides in

particle physics, notably proposing the parton model. In recognition of his profound impact on the development of quantum electrodynamics, Feynman was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1965, sharing the honor with Julian Schwinger and Shin'ichirō Tomonaga.

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### Milton Friedman (1912-2006)

A towering figure in twentieth-century economics, championed the cause of free markets. Born in 1912 to Jewish immigrants in New York City, Friedman's academic journey took him from Rutgers University to the University of Chicago and Columbia University, culminating in a Nobel Prize in Economics in 1976.

Friedman's seminal works, such as "A Theory of the Consumption Function" and "Capitalism and Freedom," challenged prevailing Keynesian views and advocated for free-market principles. His ideas, articulated in books like "Free to Choose," resonated globally, influencing economic policy and inspiring generations of economists.

Central to Friedman's contributions was monetarism, which emphasized the role of the money supply in shaping economic outcomes. His research, notably "Monetary History of the United States, 1867–1960," reshaped the understanding of the Great Depression and the impact of monetary policy.

Friedman's critiques of Keynesian orthodoxy, particularly regarding the Phillips curve, gained traction amid the stagflation of the 1970s, reshaping economic thought and policy discourse.

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His enduring legacy lies in his advocacy for individual freedom, free markets, and the power of sound monetary policy to foster long-term prosperity.

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### **Jonas Salk (1914-1995)**

Was a Jewish American medical researcher and virologist, renowned for his discovery and development of the first successful polio vaccine. Born in 1914 in New York City, Salk attended New York University School of Medicine, choosing to focus on medical research rather than becoming a practicing physician. His work on the polio vaccine, introduced in 1955, marked a significant breakthrough in medical science, offering hope during a time when the disease caused widespread fear and paralysis among children worldwide. Salk's vaccine not only dramatically reduced incidences of polio but also showcased the potential of public health initiatives. He chose not to patent the vaccine, prioritizing its accessibility over personal profit. His dedication to scientific research for the public good established him as one of the most respected figures in modern medicine.



Dr. Jonas Salk (center) and his team of researchers saved countless lives around the world with the development of an effective vaccine for polio. (Allegheny Conference on Community Development Photographs, Detre Library & Archives.)

### **Neuroscientist Eric Kandel**

Devoted over five decades to unraveling the mysteries of memory, shedding light on how our brains encode and retrieve information. Inspired by a childhood marred by the rise of Nazi ideology, Kandel embarked on a scientific journey driven by a fundamental question: what prompts human behavior? His quest led him from psychiatry to the intricate workings of the brain itself, pioneering research that earned him global recognition and accolades, including the Nobel Prize.

Kandel's seminal investigations began in the hippocampus, delving into the electrical activity of neurons but soon pivoted to simpler organisms like the marine snail *Aplysia*. Through meticulous experiments, he uncovered the synaptic changes underpinning learning and memory formation. This groundbreaking work laid the foundation for understanding how memories are encoded and retained in the brain.

Expanding his focus, Kandel delved into the molecular and genetic mechanisms underlying memory formation, offering insights into conditions like Alzheimer's disease and schizophrenia. His interdisciplinary approach bridged psychiatry and biology, shaping our understanding of brain function and disease.

A founding figure in neuroscience, Kandel established pioneering institutions at Columbia University and authored seminal texts in the field. Beyond his scientific endeavors, he underscores the importance of life

beyond accolades and acknowledges the invaluable support of his wife, Denise Bystryn Kandel, in his journey. As he reflects on a lifetime of scientific inquiry, Kandel's legacy resonates as a testament to the enduring pursuit of knowledge and the transformative power of scientific curiosity.

## Barbara Liskov

Is a pioneer in the design of computer programming languages, helping to make computer programs more reliable, secure, and easy to use. Her innovations can be found within almost all modern programming languages.

Her work with data abstraction began in the 1970s, showing how software could be made easier to construct, modify, and maintain by focusing on data rather than process. Liskov is also known for designing CLU, an object-oriented programming language, and Argus, a distributed programming language. CLU and Argus would contribute to languages like Ada, Java, C++, and C#, which are in turn widely used to write software applications for personal computers, the Internet, and a wide range of financial, medical, consumer, and business applications. Liskov's recent work focuses on practical Byzantine fault tolerance, involving techniques that

allow a system to continue to operate even when some of its components fail.

An MIT Institute Professor, Liskov received her B.A. in mathematics from the University of California, Berkeley and her Ph.D. in computer science from Stanford. After working briefly at the Mitre Corporation, she joined MIT in 1972. Her awards include the 2008 A. M. Turing Award from the Association for Computing Machinery.

These scholars and their diverse achievements underscore the significant impact of Jewish intellectuals on American and global academia. Their enduring legacy continues to inspire new generations of researchers and educators, illustrating the rich tapestry of Jewish contribution to scientific and intellectual progress.



## 5. DEFENDERS AND INNOVATORS: JEWISH AMERICANS IN THE MILITARY

Throughout the history of the United States, Jewish Americans have rendered distinguished service in the armed forces, showcasing exceptional valor and contributing significantly to military strategy and technological advancements. Their dedication to duty and country has been evident in every conflict the nation has faced, from the trenches of World War I to modern-day engagements. The courage and leadership of these individuals have not only had a profound effect on the U.S. military but have also exemplified the spirit of patriotism and sacrifice that defines the American character.

### Major General Maurice Rose's

Military [career](#)<sup>7</sup> was characterized by exceptional valor and pioneering tactics. Enlisting as a private in the Colorado National Guard, he eventually became the highest-ranking Jewish officer in the U.S. Army. Rose's bold leadership in armored warfare was instrumental during World War II, where he commanded the Third Armored Division—known as the "Spearhead" division. His strategic acumen led to rapid advances against enemy forces, notably being the first to penetrate the Siegfried Line.



Gen. Courtney Hodges, CG, 1st Army, Lt. Gen. J. Lawton Collins, CG, VII Corps, and Maj. Gen. Maurice Rose, CG, 3rd Armored Division, at a Presidential Unit Citation Ceremony, March 1945 (photo Univ of Illinois 3rd AD Archives)

Rose's service in World War I, where he was wounded at St. Mihiel and fought in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, laid the foundation for his distinguished career. After a brief post-war period as a salesman, he returned to the Army and honed his expertise in armored warfare. In World War II, he saw action in North Africa and was notably the first officer to accept the surrender of a large German unit in Tunisia.

Tragically, his life ended in an ambush in Germany in 1945, marking him as the highest-ranking American killed by enemy fire in the European Theater of Operations. In a testament to his impact and to honor his memory, in August 1948,

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.jww.org/major-general-maurice-rose-one-of-world-war-iis-greatest-combat-generals/>

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General Dwight D. Eisenhower dedicated the cornerstone of the General Rose Memorial Hospital in Denver, paying tribute to a valued comrade-in-arms.

General Rose's legacy is further evidenced by the multiple decorations for his bravery, including the Distinguished Service Cross and the Silver Star. He is celebrated as a tactician and a soldier who led by example, often from the very front lines. Though he shunned the spotlight, his contributions have not been forgotten, with his peers like General J. Lawton Collins and commentator Andy Rooney acknowledging his tactical genius and leadership. Major General Maurice Rose's dedication and innovative military strategies remain influential in modern military doctrine.

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### William Sawelson

Was a Jewish American soldier who was awarded<sup>8</sup> the Congressional Medal of Honor for valor during World War I. Sawelson was born on August 5, 1895, in Newark, New Jersey, and entered service in the U.S. Army, where he was assigned to the 312th Infantry or 78th Division.

At the Battle of Grand-Pre, France, on October 26, 1918, Sawelson heard a wounded man in a shell hole calling for water, and upon his own initiative, Sawelson left his shelter and crawled through heavy machine gun fire to

where the man lay, giving what water he had in his canteen. Sawelson then went back to his own shell hole, obtained more water and was returning to the wounded man when he was killed by a machine gun bullet. For this display of heroism, the United States posthumously awarded Sawelson the Medal of Honor, America's highest military decoration, and presented the award to his father Jacob. Sawelson is buried at the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery and Memorial east of the village of Romagne-sous-Montfaucon.

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### Private First Class Leonard M. Kravitz:

Kravitz is being recognized<sup>9</sup> for his actions in Yangpyong, Korea, March 6-7, 1951. While occupying defensive positions, Kravitz's unit was overrun by enemy combatants and forced to withdraw. Kravitz voluntarily remained at a machine-gun position to provide suppressive fire for the retreating troops. This forced the enemy to concentrate their attack on his own position. Kravitz ultimately did not survive the attack, but his actions saved his entire platoon.

Kravitz received the Medal of Honor, March 18, 2014; Purple Heart, National Defense Service Medal, Korean Service Medal with one Bronze Service Star, United Nations Service Medal, Combat Infantryman Badge, Republic of Korea Korean War Service Medal, and Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.cmohs.org/recipients/william-sawelson>

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.army.mil/medalofhonor/valor24/recipients/kravitz/?f=recipient\\_list](https://www.army.mil/medalofhonor/valor24/recipients/kravitz/?f=recipient_list)

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### **Corporal Tibor Rubin:**

"Ted" Rubin knows what it's like to slowly starve to death, how lice itch when crawling over skin and how giving up on life can seem easier than fighting for it. Nazi guards made sure Rubin understood despair at the age of 13. A Hungarian Jew, he was forced into the Mauthausen Concentration Camp toward the end of World War II. But Rubin defied odds: He survived. After the war, he moved to New York, and eventually joined the same Army that liberated him from hell on earth.

Surviving Nazi horrors, he faced the brutality of war again as a POW in Korea. Despite the stark contrast between his captors, with the Chinese showing relative leniency, nothing dimmed the memory of the Nazis' cruelty. Liberated by American soldiers, Rubin's gratitude was boundless, inspiring him to join the U.S. Army as a tribute.

In Korea with the 1st Cavalry Division, Rubin's heroism was relentless. His fellow soldier Sgt. Leo Cormier attested to Rubin's life-saving courage, which saw him through front-line battles and sustained him and others during harrowing years as a POW. Rubin's actions, recognized by multiple nominations for the Medal of Honor, were not just for a moment but a testament to enduring bravery.

Becoming a U.S. citizen was a proud milestone for Rubin, affirming his freedom and gratitude to America. His military honors, including the Prisoner of War Medal and two Purple Hearts, barely encapsulate his deep commitment and

the remarkable spirit that drove him to give back to the country that offered him refuge and opportunity.

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### **Colonel Jack H. Jacobs**

Served in the Vietnam War. His remarkable heroism was recognized<sup>10</sup> when he was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions. Jacobs (then 1st Lt.), Infantry, distinguished himself while serving as assistant battalion adviser, 2d Battalion, 16th Infantry, 9th



A picture of Col. Jack H. Jacobs Medal of Honor recipient at a USO event in Bahrain

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.cmohs.org/recipients/jack-h-jacobs>

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Infantry Division, Army of the Republic of Vietnam. The 2d Battalion was advancing to contact when it came under intense heavy machine-gun and mortar fire from a Viet Cong battalion positioned in well-fortified bunkers. As the 2d Battalion deployed into attack formation, its advance was halted by devastating fire. Capt. Jacobs, with the command element of the lead company, called for and directed air strikes on the enemy positions to facilitate a renewed attack. Due to the intensity of the enemy fire and heavy casualties to the command group, including the company commander, the attack stopped and the friendly troops became disorganized. Although wounded by mortar fragments, Jacobs assumed command of the allied company, ordered a withdrawal from the exposed position, and established a defensive perimeter.

Despite profuse bleeding from head wounds which impaired his vision, Capt. Jacobs, with complete disregard for his safety, returned under intense fire to evacuate a seriously wounded adviser to the safety of a wooded area where he administered lifesaving first aid. He then returned through heavy automatic weapons fire to evacuate the wounded company commander.

Capt. Jacobs made repeated trips across the fire-swept open rice paddies evacuating wounded and their weapons. On 3 separate

occasions, Capt. Jacobs contacted and drove off Viet Cong squads who were searching for allied wounded and weapons, single-handedly killing 3 and wounding several others.

His gallant actions and extraordinary heroism saved the lives of 1 U.S. adviser and 13 allied soldiers. Through his effort and bravery, the allied company was restored to an effective fighting unit and prevented defeat of the friendly forces by a strong and determined enemy. Capt. Jacobs, by his gallantry in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty, has reflected great credit upon himself, his unit, and the U.S. Army.

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#### **Sgt. 1st Class Christopher A. Celiz**

From Summerville, South Carolina, [embarked on his military journey](#)<sup>11</sup> in 2008, initially training as a combat engineer. His exemplary performance saw him rise through various significant assignments, ultimately leading him to serve with the elite 75th Ranger Regiment. Known for his valor and leadership, Celiz was deeply involved in critical operations across Iraq and Afghanistan, demonstrating unwavering commitment to his duties and his team.

On a fateful mission in Afghanistan, as

the leader of a special purpose unit, Sgt. Celiz orchestrated an operation aimed at disrupting enemy activities and protecting allied forces. The mission escalated quickly when his team, after reaching their objective, came under severe enemy attack. Displaying remarkable courage, Celiz exposed himself to intense fire to retrieve and employ a heavy weapon system, effectively turning the tide of the battle and allowing his team to secure a critically wounded ally.

The situation intensified as a medical evacuation helicopter arrived and came under enemy fire. With extraordinary bravery, Celiz directed the evacuation, using his body as a shield to protect his team and the aircraft crew as they loaded the injured soldier. Remaining exposed, he delivered suppressive fire to cover the helicopter's departure. In his final act of heroism, Celiz was struck by enemy fire. Despite his injuries, he insisted the helicopter depart to save others, sacrificing his life for the mission and his comrades.

Sgt. Celiz's actions during this engagement exemplify the highest ideals of military service. His selflessness and tactical acumen not only saved lives but significantly altered the course of the battle. His bravery earned him the Medal of Honor, marking him as the first Jewish recipient of this honor in the Global War on Terrorism. Celiz's legacy of dedication and sacrifice continues to inspire soldiers and citizens alike, reflecting his profound



commitment to his country and fellow service members.

These individuals are emblematic of the many Jewish Americans who have served with distinction. Their stories of valor and duty are a testament to the essential role that Jewish servicemen and women have played in the defense of the United States and its values. Their sacrifices and strategic insights have left an indelible impact on U.S. military history and continue to shape its legacy of honor and courage.

Jewish Americans have been integral to the development and enrichment of American culture, making indelible marks in fields as varied as literature, music, film, science, law, sports, and social activism. Their contributions are not only a testament to the rich cultural heritage they bring but also to their resilience and adaptability in integrating deeply into the fabric of American society. This diverse community has leveraged its unique experiences and perspectives to foster innovation, champion social justice, and bridge cultural divides.

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## 6. CONTRIBUTIONS OF JEWISH AMERICANS TO THE FABRIC OF AMERICAN CULTURE

In every arena of culture—art and music, sport and literature, film and television—American Jews have profoundly influenced the American experience. Here are some of the great figures in recent American history:

### **Isaac Asimov**

A biochemist turned writer, penned over 500 books. His works, particularly in science fiction and popular science, have inspired generations to explore the realms of science and technology, sparking curiosity and innovation.

### **Irving Berlin**

Arrived in America fleeing Russian persecution and rose to become one of the greatest songwriters in American history. His song "God Bless America" became an unofficial national anthem, deeply influencing American patriotic music during challenging times.

### **Leonard Bernstein**

A legendary composer and conductor, left an indelible mark on American music through his dynamic leadership of the New York Philharmonic and innovative compositions like "West Side Story," which melded classical music with contemporary themes.

### **George and Ira Gershwin**

Creatively infused jazz into classical compositions, creating groundbreaking music that remains a cornerstone of American music, influencing genres and artists around the world.

### **Sandy Koufax**

Became an iconic figure not just in baseball but in all of sports when he chose to observe Yom Kippur instead of playing in the World Series, embodying the values of faith and commitment to a global audience.



Before pitching in games 2, 5 & 7 of the 1965 World Series, Sandy Koufax famously chose to sit out the opener on observance of the Jewish High Holy Day of Yom Kippur. Photograph: Focus On Sport/Getty Images

### **Rabbi Menachem Schneerson**

Revered as "the Rebbe," significantly influenced Jewish education and spirituality around the globe through his leadership of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement, emphasizing the importance of community and education.

### **Steven Spielberg**

Has not only entertained millions worldwide with his films but also educated them about significant historical events, most notably through "Schindler's List," which provided a profound insight into the Holocaust.

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## INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

The study of Jewish American contributions offers a rich exploration into how individuals can influence and mold a nation's culture, politics, and social fabric. As we delve into the varied domains where Jewish Americans have left their mark, from civil rights advocacy to technological innovation and political engagement, it's crucial to reflect on the broader implications of their efforts. Here are some guiding questions to encourage critical thinking and deeper understanding of the material covered in this chapter:

### **Civil Right and Religious Freedom**

- How do leaders like Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel and Rabbi Meir Soloveichik draw upon Jewish ideas to defend civil rights and religious freedom?
- What impact do Jewish American leaders have on the broader civil rights and religious freedom movements in the United States

### **Political Contributions:**

- Discuss the significance of Joe Lieberman's vice-presidential candidacy in the context of American political history.
- How did political figures like Henry Kissinger and Steve Mnuchin shape U.S. foreign and domestic policies? What were the long-term effects of their actions?

### **Economic Impact:**

- Analyze the entrepreneurial strategies of figures like Sergey Brin and Michael Dell. How did their innovations transform their respective industries?
- Consider the ethical dimensions of Julius Rosenwald's philanthropy. How does his approach to social change through education compare to modern philanthropic strategies?

### **Academic and Scientific Achievements:**

- Evaluate the contributions of Jewish Nobel laureates to their fields. What does the disproportionate number of Jewish Nobel Prize winners suggest about the role of minority communities in academia and sciences?
- How have Jewish intellectuals like Elie Wiesel and Richard Feynman used their personal experiences to influence their professional work and public messages?

### **Military Service:**

- Reflect on the military careers of Jewish Americans such as Major General Maurice Rose and William Sawelson. What challenges did they face, and how did their Jewish heritage impact their service?
- Discuss the role of Jewish American soldiers in shaping U.S. military strategies and their contributions during key conflicts.

### **Cultural Contributions:**

- How have great artists and entertainers used their Jewish heritage to influence American culture?
- In what ways have Jewish Americans used their platform in sports, entertainment, and media to address social issues and influence public opinion?

# PART 4

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## THE RISE OF ANTISEMITISM IN AMERICA

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The Jewish people have suffered discrimination and antisemitism for centuries. However, in America, for the most part, the Jewish community has enjoyed the freedom to practice its faith freely and enjoyed opportunities to pursue their dreams more than any other country in history. In America, with their freedoms, the Jewish community has made positive contributions to the birth and evolution of America over the last years.

Unfortunately, the safety of openly identifying as Jewish in America has recently become more difficult in certain cities. The recent surfacing of hatred and discrimination can be exemplified by the tragic Tree of Life Synagogue shooting in Pittsburgh, the disturbing increase in anti-Semitic incidents across the country on college and high school campuses, including violent attacks and intimidation, and the explosion of Jewish hate on social media.

Like it has over the centuries, the Jewish community is determined to fight back against the recent rise in antisemitism. With solidarity in its community and with old and new friends in the non Jewish community, Jews in America are resolved to combat all forms of antisemitism.



People hold anti-Semitic symbols and signs, Tampa, Florida, July 23, 2022. REUTERS/Marco Bello



Palestinian-Americans and their supporters march in Oct. 8, 2023, in downtown Chicago. Eric Cox / Reuters

## SURGE IN ANTISEMITISM: ALARMING TRENDS

Recent years have seen significant antisemitic violence, highlighted by major incidents such as the 2018 Tree of Life Synagogue shooting in Pittsburgh, which resulted in the deaths of eleven Jewish worshippers; the 2019 Chabad of Poway Synagogue shooting in California, which left one person dead and three injured; the 2022 hostage-taking at Congregation Beth Israel in Colleyville, Texas; and a 2025 antisemitic firebombing attack in Boulder, Colorado, which injured more than a dozen people and resulted in one death. These incidents were all investigated by authorities as a hate-motivated act targeting membership of the Jewish community. In addition to these attacks, Jewish students on

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college and high school campuses have increasingly faced harassment, intimidation, and threats related to their Jewish identity, with some reporting fear of attending classes in person due to concerns about physical safety.

Data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) [show](#) that American Jews continue to be disproportionately targeted in religiously motivated hate crimes in the United States. According to FBI's 2024 hate crime statistics, there were 1,938 anti-Jewish hate crime incidents, representing about 69% of all religion-based hate crimes, even though Jewish Americans make up approximately 2% of the population. Reflecting on this long-standing pattern, FBI Director Christopher Wray noted in 2023 that, despite representing a small percentage of the population, Jews account for a disproportionately high share of religiously motivated hate crime victims and that "the Jewish community is targeted by terrorists really across the spectrum."

Data from the Combat Antisemitism Movement's Research Center (ARC) [indicate](#) that antisemitic incidents originate from multiple ideological sources. ARC's 2025 global data recorded 6,819 antisemitic incidents worldwide, marking a 7.8% increase from 2024 and confirming the persistence of increased antisemitism linked to far-right, far-left, and Islamist-motivated actors. The majority of incidents documented in 2025 involved harassment, intimidation, and hate speech across digital platforms, as well as physical incidents and demonstrations in public spaces. ARC data demonstrate that modern antisemitism is frequently expressed through political, social, and ideological frameworks, both online and offline.

The rise in antisemitic attacks in the U.S. has occurred over the last 5 to 10 years, but intensified notably after the October 7, 2023, massacre, rape, torture, and kidnapping by Hamas terrorists of innocent Jewish civilians in Israel. The Combat Antisemitism Movement (CAM), an international organization with Natan Sharansky as its chairman of the Advisory Board, reported a sharp increase in global antisemitic incidents in its monitoring of English language online media publications. In the months and years following October 7, 2023, CAM's ARC documented a substantial global increase in antisemitism activity. Between October 7, 2023 and the end of 2025, ARC recorded more than 14,000 antisemitic incidents globally, including 1,785 incidents in the final three months of 2023, a record 6,326 incidents in 2024, and 6,819 incidents in 2025. ARC data indicate that the primary increase in antisemitic incidents has involved harassment, intimidation, vandalism, physical assaults, and public demonstrations featuring antisemitic rhetoric, including expressions of support for terrorism. Based on ARC's 2024 and 2025 monitoring, antisemitic incidents occur at persistently high daily rates worldwide, reflecting sustained and historically elevated levels.

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Sources Used:

<sup>12</sup> FBI Hate Crime Statistics (2024) <https://www.justice.gov/hatecrimes/hate-crime-statistics>

<sup>13</sup> Combat Antisemitism Movement (ARC) <https://combatantisemitism.org/research/>

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Department of Justice <https://www.justice.gov/hatecrimes/hate-crime-statistics>

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## ON-CAMPUS ANTISEMITIC INCIDENTS

The United States has experienced a marked increase in antisemitic incidents in recent years, as anti-Israel demonstrations have swept across colleges and universities nationwide. Jewish students and, in some cases, faculty have reported assaults, harassment, vilification, intimidation, and social isolation. Monitoring and media reports describe protest encampments that have featured rhetoric glorifying violence and calling to “remove Zionists” from campuses. In many documented cases, Jewish individuals have been targeted because of their Jewish identity or perceived connections to Israel, including their deep historical, cultural, and religious connections to Jerusalem and Israel.

College campuses have become hotspots for this hostility. According to monitoring by the Combat Antisemitism Movement’s Antisemitism Research Center (ARC), on-campus antisemitic incidents in the United States nearly tripled between 2022 and 2024, rising from 249 incidents in 2022 to 742 incidents in 2024, reflecting a sharp escalation in antisemitic activity at colleges and universities.

While ARC recorded a decline to 531 on-campus incidents in 2025, campus antisemitism remained substantially elevated compared to pre-October 7 levels, with pronounced spikes during key periods, partially around the anniversary of the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack. ARC further notes that a true number of on-campus antisemitism is likely higher, as many incidents go unreported and each recorded incident is counted as a single event, even when multiple individuals are affected.



Anti-Israel supporters demonstrate at Columbia University on Thursday, Oct. 12.

In a 2024 roundtable forum hosted by the U.S. House Education and Workforce Committee, Jewish students from nine universities—including Harvard, University of Pennsylvania, MIT, Columbia, UC Berkeley, Rutgers, Stanford, Tulane, and Cooper Union—shared distressing accounts of antisemitism on their campuses. These testimonies were frightening and extremely troubling as the students had experienced both verbal and physical threats and were being silenced on their campuses, afraid to leave their dorm rooms to go to classes, the library, and other spaces on campus. Watch the Round Table [here](#).

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While the Antisemitism Research Center (ARC) provides ongoing monitoring and calendar-year analysis of antisemitic incidents, some organizations track campus antisemitism by academic year to reflect the student experience across fall and spring semesters. For example, Hillel International [reported](#) 2,334 antisemitic incidents on U.S. and Canadian college campuses during the 2024–2025 academic year, the highest total recorded since it began systematic tracking. Although these datasets use different methodologies and reporting periods, together they illustrate the sustained and elevated levels of antisemitism affecting Jewish students throughout the academic year, both on campus and in surrounding communities.

Examples of the overt and violent antisemitism on dozens of American campuses are deeply troubling. From vandalism targeting Jewish spaces to physical attacks on Jewish students, these incidents demonstrate the urgent need for concrete measures to address and combat antisemitism in all its contemporary forms. Instances of blatant antisemitism associated with “liberated zones” or encampments first surfaced at Columbia University before spreading throughout the country. During a protest on Columbia’s South Lawn, students chanted, “Say it loud, say it clear, we don’t want no Zionists here.” Additionally, [one protester shouted](#), “We are all Hamas,” while another [proclaimed](#), “October th is about to be every day.” Shockingly, Jewish counter-demonstrators were met with a [sign reading](#), “Al-Qasam’s Next Targets,” with an arrow pointing toward them. A leader of the encampment at Columbia University was also [expelled](#) from school after stating that “Zionists Don’t Deserve to Live.”

Similar “liberated zones” were carved out at other American higher education institutions. At Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, a Jewish student was allegedly [stabbed](#) in the eye with a Palestinian flag pole after Yale students established their own “Liberated Zone,” similar to the one at Columbia. These encampments, and the antisemitism they foment, also arose at dozens of colleges and universities including Miami University (Ohio), the University Of Michigan, the University of Texas at Austin, the New School, UC Berkeley, California State Polytechnic University, Brown University, the University of Pittsburgh, the University of California Los Angeles, Harvard University, and MIT, among other universities.



Demonstrators sit in an encampment as they protest in solidarity with anti-Israel organizers on the Columbia University campus, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas, in New York City, US. April 19, 2024.



UCLA student Eli Tsives was seen on video getting blocked from going to class by what looked like a group of anti-Israel protesters. (Credit: Eli Tsives / Facebook)

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At Columbia University, more than 100 students were arrested by police after they violently took over Hamilton Hall. At UCLA, a Jewish student holding a "Rape is not resistance" placard was attacked by anti-Israel demonstrators and checkpoints were set up to prevent Jewish students from entering certain campus facilities. At Stanford University, an anti-Israel student was filmed wearing a Hamas headband.

The October 7th massacre and Israel's military response in the Gaza Strip have significantly influenced the frequency and severity of antisemitic incidents on U.S. campuses. According to the CAM Antisemitism Research Center, on-campus antisemitic incidents surged sharply following October 7, with incidents nearly tripling between 2022 and 2024, rising from 249 incidents in 2022 to 742 incidents in 2024. Although ARC data shows a decline in on-campus incidents in 2025, campus antisemitism remained historically elevated compared to pre-October 7 levels, with pronounced spikes during key periods, underscoring the lasting impact of the post-October 7 environment on Jewish students.

During the peak of campus protest encampments in 2024, demonstrations often feature chants and display signs advocating for both an "immediate ceasefire" and the "globalization of the Intifada." The protestors seek for Israel, a nation that endured the deadliest massacre of Jews since the Holocaust at the hands of Hamas, a U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization, to halt its military operations against the terrorist soldiers in Gaza. Meanwhile, they encourage people to escalate "armed uprisings" against Jews, Israel, and even America. Having experienced the systematic murder of 6 million Jews in the holocaust, the Jewish community and Israel also reject the chants with the accusation of genocide being conducted by Israeli soldiers in Gaza. The Israeli army tries to avoid any civilian casualties in its operations in Gaza. As of the time of this writing, Hamas retains the body of one Israeli hostage.

Whether the protestors are motivated by devout antisemitism or ignorance, administrators and policymakers must be made aware of the increasingly precarious positions Jewish students and faculty find themselves in. The failure to address and condemn such blatant antisemitism not only threatens the safety and well-being of individuals on campus but also undermines the fundamental principles of diversity and tolerance that universities should uphold. Educational institutions must take decisive action to combat antisemitism and ensure campus environments where all members are safe, respected, and valued.

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Sources Used:

- <sup>15</sup> <https://combatantisemitism.org/studies-reports/amid-spread-of-anti-israel-encampment-movement-cam-data-reveals-815-rise-in-on-campus-antisemitic-incidents/>
- <sup>16</sup> <https://www.columbiaspectator.com/news/2024/04/17/dozens-of-protesters-occupy-south-lawn-call-for-divestment-from-israel-ahead-of-shafik-testimony/>
- <sup>17</sup> <https://www.foxnews.com/us/anti-israel-protesters-heard-shouting-we-hamas-long-live-hamas-columbia-university-demonstrations>
- <sup>20</sup> <https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/antisemitism/article-798049>
- <sup>21</sup> <https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/antisemitism/article-798160>
- <sup>22</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/26/nyregion/columbia-student-protest-zionism.html>
- <sup>23</sup> <https://www.jns.org/jewish-yale-student-stabbed-in-eye-with-plo-flag/>
- <sup>24</sup> <https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local/columbia-university-protests-nypd-video-hamilton-hall/5371376/>
- <sup>25</sup> <https://twitter.com/henmazzig/status/1783783513944154225?s=12&t=LMXebXbwXQ6y7VSq3G7x2w>
- <sup>26</sup> <https://combatantisemitism.org/studies-reports/amid-spread-of-anti-israel-encampment-movement-cam-data-reveals-815-rise-in-on-campus-antisemitic-incidents/>
- <sup>28</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bcxZlZr0fmY>

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Below is a short list sample of additional recent Antisemitic Incidents on University and High School Campuses, primarily during 2023 and 2024. You can click this link for a much more comprehensive display of all the antisemitic incidents tracked by CAM:

- **Cooper Union:** Jewish students [were locked](#) in their school's library for 20 minutes on October 25, 2023 as pro-Palestinian demonstrators pounded on the doors and shouted anti-Israel and antisemitic slogans. Police were unable to help them at the time.
- **Columbia University:** Jewish students have been repeatedly subjected to verbal abuses and, at times, physical attacks by pro-Hamas protestors. Pro Hamas demonstrators set up an encampment on the campus that has created a hostile environment for Jewish and other students.
- **Cornell University:** In November, 2023, Patrick Dai [was arrested](#) after posting antisemitic messages online targeting Jews, including threats to kill and injure Jewish people on campus and "shoot up" the university's predominantly kosher dining hall.
- **Harvard University:** 34 student groups and professors issued a letter in support of the Hamas killing of Jews in Israel. Several pro Hamas rallies occurred and one led to physical attacks on a Jewish student. A pro Hamas rally occurred in the main library which prevented Jewish and other students from going. A pro Hamas encampment was erected in the middle of Harvard Yard.
- **University of Wisconsin-Madison:** A student's dorm room door was defaced with antisemitic graffiti, including a swastika. This act of vandalism was part of a concerning trend at the university, where Jewish students reported feeling increasingly targeted based on their identity.
- **Indiana University:** During a cultural fair, a booth set up by Jewish students was vandalized, and the materials displayed were destroyed. This incident was reported amidst a series of other troubling actions on campus that were deemed antisemitic by the student body and faculty.
- **Langley High School, Fairfax County, Virginia:** A Student draws an American flag with swastikas as the stars and "Free Palestine" on the stripes while at a Muslim Student Association meeting. Pro Palestinian students also staged a walkout carrying another sign with swastikas and changing "From the River to the Sea, Palestine Will be Free" which is a call for the elimination of the Jewish State of Israel.
- **Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS):** A lawsuit was recently filed against MCPS for not protecting Jewish students from harassment and intimidation. One of the many complaints included a middle school student at Odessa Shannon Middle School who was called a "Jewish F\_k". In 9th grade, at the John F. Kennedy high school, the same student was called "jew boy", and "Hey, Jew", and in 10th grade, heil hitler salutes were made at him in the halls and at a student assembly during the national anthem. Readers are encouraged to read the full complaint [here](#).

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- **New York University (NYU):** Pro-Palestinian and Hamas groups staged several [protests](#) targeting Jewish students and exacerbated tensions on campus.
- **University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA):** Flyers containing antisemitic language and threats were found on campus. [Recent rallies](#) had chants of "From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be Free", a call for the elimination of the Jewish State of Israel and the annihilation of the Jewish citizens of Israel.
- **University of Michigan:** A professor refused to provide a letter of recommendation for a student wishing to study abroad in Israel, citing a personal boycott of Israeli institutions, which sparked widespread debate about academic freedom and discrimination.
- **University of Virginia:** Jewish students have been spat on, shoved and called horrible names. One student was forced to move off campus due to intimidation in the dorms. 70 faculty signed a letter calling for the events of October 7 to be taken in context, implying the death of innocent civilians in Israel was justified. An art history professor canceled her class in solidarity with a walkout on campus held two days before students voted overwhelmingly to call on the school to divest from companies with ties to Israel.

These few examples highlight the challenges faced by Jewish students on campuses across the United States and Jewish students are calling for universities to protect them from harassment and intimidation.

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#### Sources Used:

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- <sup>30</sup> <https://www.timesofisrael.com/jewish-students-barricade-in-nycs-cooper-union-as-protesters-chant-free-palestine/>
- <sup>31</sup> <https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/cornell-student-violent-threats-jewish-students-pleads-guilty/530871/>
- <sup>32</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/swastika-projected-university-wisconsin-whitewater-dorm-group-chanting-rcna135090> [https://www.fairfaxtimes.com/articles/fairfax\\_county/fairfax-county-public-schools-suspends-student-for-allegedly-blowing-whistle-34-on-swastika-flag/article\\_26c795f4-84a9-11ee-8c2e-d709babe6b5d.html](https://www.fairfaxtimes.com/articles/fairfax_county/fairfax-county-public-schools-suspends-student-for-allegedly-blowing-whistle-34-on-swastika-flag/article_26c795f4-84a9-11ee-8c2e-d709babe6b5d.html)
- <sup>33</sup> <https://zoa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/ZOAs-Title-VI-complaint-against-MCPS-4-18-24.pdf>
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## GLOBAL SOLIDARITY: A UNIFIED RESPONSE TO ANTISEMITISM

On November 14, 2023, nearly 300,000 mainly Jewish Americans gathered to support Israel and combat antisemitism in America. A quarter million more people connected through a live-stream, illustrating a global commitment to solidarity. The rally was the largest American Jewish gathering in history and the most critical since the Free Soviet Jewry rally in 1987.

Many Jewish, Christian, Muslim and political speakers expressed their solidarity with the Jewish people and also recognize the importance of combating antisemitism as part of broader efforts to promote human rights and prevent discrimination in America. The diverse support was a widespread acknowledgment that antisemitism is not only as a Jewish issue Combat Antisemitism Movement (CAM) Advisory Board, encapsulated the sentiment of the event: "As long as we stand together and fight together, we will win." The Jewish community in America hope Americans will support their desires to continue to live freely and safely in America.



The "March for Israel", November 2023

## LEADING FIGURES STANDING UP TO JEW HATRED:

Today, individuals and groups committed to fighting antisemitism are recognized as the new "righteous people," echoing the moral courage of those who stood against oppression in the past. These modern-day heroes come from diverse backgrounds and professions, including educators who incorporate lessons on tolerance and history in their curricula, activists who mobilize against hate speech and discrimination, and lawmakers who work to enact policies that protect religious and ethnic minorities. Their efforts are critical in a time when antisemitism is unfortunately resurging in many parts of the world. Through public campaigns, community outreach, and educational

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programs, they strive to dismantle prejudices and foster a society that values diversity and mutual respect. Their unwavering commitment is a beacon of hope and a testament to the ongoing struggle for justice and equality. We encourage students to ask what they might do to help their fellow Jewish students and friends.

- **Anila Ali:** Leading Pakistani-American advocate for Muslim-Jewish relations, Spoke at "March for Israel" in Washington, D.C. in November 2023, President of American Muslim and Multifaith Women's Empowerment Council (AMMWEC).
- **Mayim Bialik:** Jewish actress, author, and host of Jeopardy, Leading advocate for Israel and against antisemitism.
- **Professor Shai Davidai:** An Assistant Professor in the Management Division of Columbia Business School and a leading online voice against rising antisemitism on college campuses in the U.S.
- **Julian Edelman:** A Jewish former NFL wide receiver for the New England Patriots, a three-time Super Bowl champion, and a leading advocate for Israel and against antisemitism.
- **Senator John Fetterman:** Senator from Pennsylvania, Emerged as leading advocate for U.S.-Israel relations on Capitol Hill following October 7th.
- **David Friedman:** Former U.S. Ambassador to Israel in Trump administration, Played role in move of U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and the signing of the Abraham Accords.
- **Pastor John Hagee:** Prominent American evangelical pastor, author, and televangelist. He is the founder and senior pastor of Cornerstone Church, a non-denominational evangelical church in San Antonio, Texas, which boasts a large congregation. Hagee is also the founder and national chairman of Christians United for Israel, an American pro- Israel advocacy organization.
- **Tiffany Haddish:** Jewish comedian and actress, visited Israel on solidarity trip after October 7th.
- **Deborah Lipstadt:** Historian and Current U.S. State Department Ambassador and Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism, Won libel suit filed against her by Holocaust denier David Irving in 1996.
- **Debra Messing:** Jewish actress, known for playing Grace Adler on Will and Grace, Leading advocate for Israel and against antisemitism
- **Rabbi Jeffrey Myers:** Rabbi at Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania where 11 Jewish worshippers were massacred in October 2018 by a neo-Nazi gunman during Shabbat services.

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- **Natalie Sanandaji:** American Jewish survivor of October 7th Nova music festival massacre, Public Affairs Officer and Speaker for Combat Antisemitism Movement (CAM)
- **Jerry Seinfeld:** Jewish comedian famous for Seinfeld sitcom, Prominent supporter of Israel
- **Noa Tishby:** U.S.-based Israeli actress, model, and activist, Leading Pro-Israel Advocate Online, Former Israeli Special Envoy for Combating Antisemitism and the Delegitimization of Israel.
- **Congressman Ritchie Torres:** Strong young progressive advocate on Capitol Hill for U.S.-Israel relationship and against antisemitism.
- **Bari Weiss:** A journalist, writer, and editor, founder of The Free Press, and author of the book "How to Fight Anti-Semitism."

## THE IHRA DEFINITION OF ANTISEMITISM

One of the main initiatives of CAM and the Jewish communities in the United States and around the world is to foster a deeper understanding of antisemitism and to advance policies that effectively address and combat it.

One of the main efforts has been to advocate for adoption of the [International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance \(IHRA\) Working Definition of Antisemitism](#), which clarifies the nuances of antisemitism in contemporary contexts. The international body of 35 member countries, including the United States, adopted the working definition of antisemitism in 2016, with 11 specific examples of antisemitic actions and statements, encompassing both traditional forms of antisemitism and its modern manifestations.

By outlining specific behaviors and language that qualify as antisemitic, the definition aims to help policymakers, educators, and the general public recognize and combat these prejudices effectively. We encourage our students to learn more about modern day antisemitism by understanding the IHRA definition.

As of 2025, more than 1,200 international institutions and organizations, national and local governments, NGOs, universities, athletic clubs, and corporations across the globe had adopted or endorsed the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism, according to data compiled by CAM and Tel Aviv University's Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry.

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Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds delivers virtual remarks at the Combat Antisemitism Movement's State Leadership Summit on Antisemitism and Support for Israel, where she announced Executive Order 13 condemning antisemitism. June 30, 2025.



Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds delivers virtual remarks at the Combat Antisemitism Movement's State Leadership Summit on Antisemitism and Support for Israel, where she announced Executive Order 13 condemning antisemitism. June 30, 2025.

Iowa adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism in March 2022, joining a growing number of U.S. states that have taken formal steps to address antisemitism through education and policy. Iowa's adoption reflects a broader recognition of the importance of clearly defining antisemitism in order to identify, prevent, and respond to hate and discrimination in schools, universities, and public institutions.

Building on this commitment, in June 2025, Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds [issued](#) Executive Order 13, which condemned antisemitism and directed state education leaders and institutions to work with federal civil rights authorities to protect Jewish students and address antisemitic harassment and discrimination. The executive order reaffirmed Iowa's responsibility to ensure that schools and universities provide safe and inclusive learning environments for all students.

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Sources Used:

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# PART 5

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## CONCLUSION

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## JEWISH AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

Jewish American Heritage Month (JAHM) traces its origins back to 1980 and more recently to 2006 when the U.S. Congress passed a bipartisan resolution urging the President to proclaim an annual observance recognizing the contributions of Jewish Americans to the nation's history and culture.

Responding to this call, like Presidents had done before, President George W. Bush designated May as Jewish American Heritage Month. Since then, successive presidents from both parties have continued this tradition, issuing annual proclamations that underscore the significant and diverse role Jewish Americans have played in shaping America's narrative for over three centuries. This recognition has extended beyond the federal level, with many local governments at the state, county, and municipal levels joining in the observance of JAHM. These jurisdictions have implemented various programs, ceremonies, and activities to honor Jewish heritage.

On April 27, 2023, Governor Reynolds led a joint statement with 26 other Republican governors recognizing May as Jewish American Heritage Month, and on May 1, 2024, she issued a separate proclamation recognizing May as Jewish American Heritage Month in Iowa.

The Combat Antisemitism Movement (CAM) and partner organizations have actively encouraged the celebration of Jewish American Heritage Month (JAHM), advocating for increased participation across the country. In May 2023, 135 city mayors and 38 state governors formally recognized JAHM; in 2024, 172 cities and 37 states issued official recognitions, including a joint statement from 27 Republican governors; and in 2025, more than 200 U.S. municipalities have proclaimed May as JAHM. We want to thank our students for learning about Jewish heritage through this curriculum.

- **Reflection on Personal Impact:** How has learning about Jewish American heritage changed your perception of American history and culture? Can you identify any personal beliefs or perspectives that have shifted as a result of this course?
- **Significant Contributions:** Which contributions of Jewish Americans to fields like arts, science, politics, or business were most surprising or inspiring to you? Why?

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## INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

As we wrap up our exploration of Jewish American heritage, we will delve into a series of questions designed to deepen our understanding and provoke discussion. These questions will help us reflect on the impacts, challenges, and contributions we've studied. Let's engage in thoughtful dialogue and share our perspectives as we conclude our course.

- **Challenges and Triumphs:** Discuss some of the major challenges Jewish Americans have faced throughout history. How have these challenges shaped their community and their role within the broader American society?
- **Cultural Preservation:** In what ways do Jewish Americans maintain their cultural heritage while also integrating into wider American culture? How do you see this balance playing out in your own community or in prominent public figures?
- **Contemporary Issues:** What are some current issues facing the Jewish American community? How can understanding of historical context help address these issues today?
- **Future Directions:** What future developments or changes do you anticipate for the Jewish American community in the next decades? How might they continue to influence American culture and society at large?
- **Personal Connections and Actions:** Based on what you've learned, what actions might you personally take to promote a deeper understanding of Jewish American heritage in your community or circle?
- **Course Feedback and Suggestions:** What topics or stories within this course did you find most engaging or important? Are there any aspects of Jewish American heritage that you think should be explored more deeply in future courses?

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JEWISH  
HERITAGE  
OF AMERICA

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COMBAT  
ANTISEMITISM  
MOVEMENT

תִּקְוָה  
TIKYAH