



JEWISH HERITAGE OF AMERICA

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



COMBAT
ANTISEMITISM
MOVEMENT

TIKVAH תִּקְוָה

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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 1-18

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 19-38
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.....39-60

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..... 61-73

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.

PART 1

**AMERICA,
A LAND OF HOPE**

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

Jewish presence in early America dates to the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Jewish artisans were recorded among the settlers of the Roanoke Colony in 1585, and in 1621 Elias Legarde became the first known Jew to settle in Jamestown, Virginia. 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



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.

denominations including Catholics and Calvinists lived together peacefully.

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 governed the colony, affirmed that "every one shall have his own belief, as long as he behaved quietly and legally, gave no offense to his neighbor and did not oppose the government."¹

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, Jewish settlers worked to maintain communal religious life. In 1730 they established Congregation Shearith Israel in New York City, the oldest Jewish congregation in the United States. This congregation became a cornerstone for Jewish religious life in America.

¹ 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/bdorse1/41sy199.html>; Mittelberger excerpt at <http://www.swarthmore.edu/SocSci/bdorse1/41docs/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 initial reluctance from colonial authorities, Jewish settlers established themselves as merchants and traders, contributing significantly to the colony's economy.
- **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 COLONIAL 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. These restrictions posed particular challenges for Jewish merchants, whose livelihoods depended on weekday trade. 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. His actions exemplified the priority Jewish settlers placed on maintaining religious observance and spiritual integrity in colonial America.

In Jewish life, holidays governed by the lunar calendar structured 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 society followed the Gregorian solar calendar, organized around Christian observances.

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

The main Jewish High Holidays—Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New Year), Yom Kippur (the holiest day on the Jewish calendar), and Passover (the spring festival commemorating the Israelites' liberation from slavery in Egypt)—held profound religious and social significance and were widely observed. Jews would travel long distances to be with each other at this vital time to reaffirm religious bonds and refresh their faith.

Historical records illustrate the lengths to which Jews went to observe these sacred times. Isaac Solomon, a Jewish merchant from Halifax, Nova Scotia, undertook 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 kashrut, many Jews performed ritual slaughter themselves, as kosher meat was otherwise unavailable.

Aaron Lopez, also, 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 religious practices, Jewish communities established benevolent societies and mutual aid organizations that played a crucial role in supporting members during times of hardship. These institutions provided financial assistance while reinforcing communal responsibility among dispersed Jewish populations. They were essential to sustaining Jewish life in colonial America and highlighted the communal values that were central to Jewish life, especially at a time when formal social welfare systems did not exist.

Jewish education was central to preserving religious identity and transmitting values across generations. Even in colonial America, where formal Jewish schooling was limited, families and communities made sustained efforts to teach Hebrew, religious texts, and the meaning of Jewish peoplehood. Through education, Jewish children developed a strong sense of heritage and faith within a predominantly Christian society.



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 appointed Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams to design a seal for the newly formed United States. Franklin and Jefferson proposed a design integrating the biblical image of the parting of the Red Sea with Jefferson’s vision of the “Children of Israel in the Wilderness, led by a Cloud by Day, and a Pillar of Fire by night...” Although the design was never adopted, it reflects the significant influence of Hebraic themes on the ideological imagination of America’s founders.



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 inspired Norris and other early American leaders, who drew on biblical language and imagery in shaping the nation's ideals. As it has for Jews over the centuries, faith in G-d and the teachings of the Bible have also shaped American identity. The Pledge of Allegiance echoes themes similar to those expressed 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 known Jew to die for the Revolutionary cause, killed 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 Jewish revolutionaries was Haym Salomon, a Polish-born immigrant 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 expressed this commitment 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."*

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 raised a large family of 21 children. After the British occupied New York City in 1776, Phillips moved to Philadelphia, where he served in the local militia under Colonel Bradford.

In 1787, during the Constitutional Convention, Phillips wrote a significant letter protesting a proposed requirement that public officeholders affirm the divine inspiration of the New Testament. He argued the requirement was against the religious principles and conscience of Jews.

Phillips advocated for a country in which “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, the first Jewish commodore of the U.S. Navy. Eight years after President Thomas Jefferson’s death, Levy used his own funds to preserve Jefferson’s Monticello estate for the American people.

See [Rabbi Meir Soloveichik’s explanation of Jonas Phillips’s life and its significance for American religious freedom.](#)²

² <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.
- **Religious Advocacy:** Jonas Phillips protested religious test requirements during the Revolutionary era, 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)

When Congress proclaimed the end of the Revolutionary War just before Passover in 1783, many Jews drew parallels between American independence and the biblical liberation from Egypt. A contemporary Jewish observer 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 that thanked G-d for America’s victory while also seeking redemption for the Jewish people: “As Thou hast granted these 13 states of America everlasting freedom, so may Thou bring us forth once again from bondage into freedom....”

The geographic distribution of Jews in the new nation also shifted. Newport, Rhode Island—formerly one of the four largest Jewish communities in America—saw its port destroyed during the war and its Jewish population dispersed. Jewish families in Savannah, Georgia, were overwhelmingly supporters of the patriot cause. Many had developed silk businesses in the colonial period but were forced to abandon them when the British captured the city in 1778. By contrast, Philadelphia and Charleston—both spared major destruction—emerged from the war with larger and more organized Jewish communities.

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.

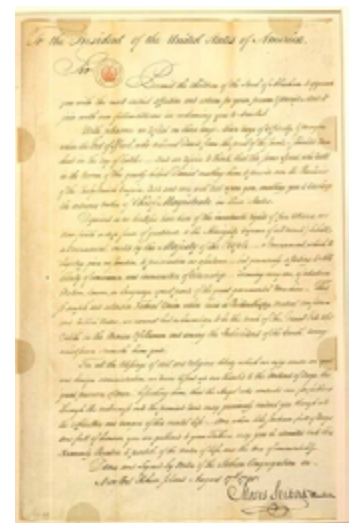
George Washington’s response to Seixas is equally famous and often cited for its eloquent support of religious liberty. Washington echoes the words of Seixas and goes further, stating, “It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people, that another 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



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.



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.

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, was descended on her Sephardi side from Jewish communal leader Moses Seixas. (Sephardi Jews originated in the Iberian Peninsula—Spain and Portugal—and represent one of the two major Jewish cultural branches. Ashkenazi Jews, the other major Jewish cultural branch, trace their origins to Central and Eastern 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 humanity but especially for Jews who had lived as strangers and faced persecution for centuries in other lands. She saw America as a beacon of hope for Yiddish-speaking Jewish immigrants fleeing persecution and hardship in Eastern Europe. She also envisioned a global renaissance of Jewish civilization, fueled by the vibrant interplay between Jews in America and emerging generations in the Holy Land. (As described further below, her vision materialized in 1948 with the re-establishment of the State of Israel, supported significantly by 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
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glowed 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:

-
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 that was ahead of its time, particularly in its 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 social standing to advocate for improved treatment and aid for these 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 what would later become the 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 exploring her Sephardi heritage and Jewish 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.

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 for Jewish communities, which lost their livelihoods, homes, and educational opportunities. From 1880 to 1924, America opened its doors to about 2.5 million Jews seeking refuge in the United States.

Manhattan's Lower East Side absorbed many of these immigrants and became a vibrant hub of American Jewish life, with Yiddish-speaking theaters, newspapers, labor unions, and political movements that reshaped Jewish identity and influenced broader American culture. Today, New York City has the second-largest Jewish population 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 major developments across American society. 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.

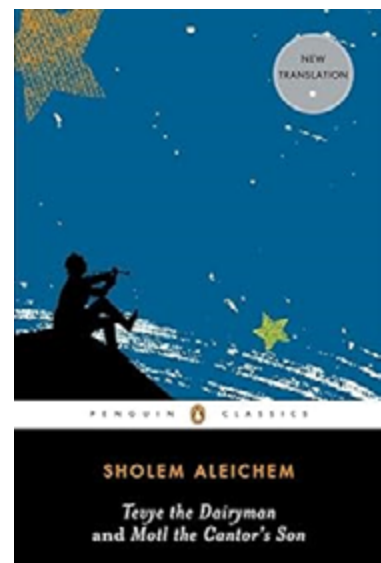
Solomon Naumovich Rabinovich, who achieved literary fame under the pen name Sholem Aleichem, is regarded as an iconic Jewish author. His works offer both humor and heartfelt portrayals of Jewish life in Eastern Europe. He wrote *Motl, Peysi the Cantor's Son*. The novel, crafted in the innocent yet insightful 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 (small Jewish market towns of Eastern Europe with distinctive religious and cultural life) 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 steel 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 offers a vivid literary portrayal of the aspirations and apprehensions of Eastern European Jewish immigrants in the early 20th century. The novel remains a cherished work, 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 depicts 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, contributing significantly to American cultural and intellectual life.. 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 immigrants helped shape 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 the city’s identity.

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

As we explore the early stages of Jewish American history, these questions are designed to deepen understanding of the challenges and contributions of early Jewish settlers. We will examine their motivations, the obstacles they faced, and their impact on 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 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 maintained its religious practices and established 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

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

Discrimination and persecution have affected the Jewish people across much of their three-thousand-year history. 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 historical experiences that shape Jewish life and identity 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 1930s 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 at dehumanizing and scapegoating Jews for Germany's economic troubles. Hitler portrayed 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 genocide of Europe's Jews.



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

Hitler's ultimate goal was the elimination of all Jews from Europe and the creation of a racially pure "Third Reich." This genocidal ambition led to the construction of concentration camps and extermination centers, where six million of Europe's approximately 9.5 million Jews—along with other targeted groups—were murdered through gas chambers, shootings, 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, where nearly 80,000 Jews were murdered, although the total number of victims remains 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 operated by Nazi Germany in occupied Poland from 1940–1945. Photo Credit: Wikimedia Commons (German Federal Archive).

The Nazi propaganda machine played a central role in indoctrinating the German population and mobilizing support for persecution and mass murder. It fueled hatred, fear, and prejudice, creating an environment in which violence against Jews was not only tolerated but encouraged. The Holocaust stands as a stark reminder of the devastating consequences of unchecked propaganda, bigotry, and authoritarian rule.

To learn more about the Holocaust, visit: [AboutHolocaust.org](https://aboutholocaust.org) ⁴



FACTS to
REMEMBER

- **Sophisticated propaganda:** The Nazis used newspapers, films, posters, and radio to spread harmful stereotypes about Jews, portraying them as subhuman and dangerous to society.
- **Scapegoating:** Hitler blamed Jews for Germany's economic problems and societal ills, fueling widespread antisemitism.
- **Nuremberg Laws (1935):** Discriminatory laws stripped Jews of civil rights and legal protections, paving the way for further persecution.
- **Final Solution:** Nazi propaganda helped justify and enable the systematic extermination of European Jewry, culminating in the murder of six million Jews.
- **Indoctrination and support:** Nazi propaganda and messaging were crucial in indoctrinating the German population, mobilizing public support for genocidal policies, and normalizing discrimination and violence against Jews across
- **Legacy:** The Holocaust remains a warning about the lethal consequences of unchecked hatred, bigotry, and authoritarian ideology, and the dark dangers of political movements that target Jews—underscoring the importance of vigilance, tolerance, and resistance against such ideologies.

⁴ <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 invasion was followed by rapid German conquests across Europe and widespread violence and mass murder against civilian populations, including Jews. Initially, many governments and observers did not fully grasp the extent of Hitler's ambitions for world domination seriously and were 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 the entry of the United States into the war. After the deaths of more than 70 million people, the war ended with the Allied victory on September 2, 1945.

The Holocaust was a devastating catastrophe for the world and for the Jewish people in particular. Entire families and communities were destroyed. Many have since asked how such atrocities could occur and why both Jewish and non-Jewish individuals and governments did not do more to prevent the mass murder. During the war, an activist named Hillel Kook (known as Peter Bergson) urged the United States to do more to rescue the Jews of Europe from annihilation.

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

In order to raise awareness about 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 leaders..



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

First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt described the show as “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 with 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 the War Refugee Board, which played a significant role in rescuing more than 200,000 Jews.

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.

THE RABBI OF BUCHENWALD: RABBI HERSCHEL SCHACTER'S JOURNEY ON THE FRONTLINES IN WORLD WAR II

While many American Jews supported their brethren in Europe through activism and lobbying, others sought to contribute directly to the war effort. More than 500,000 American Jews served in the U.S. Armed Forces during World War II, among them Jewish-American chaplain 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 knitted socks for soldiers. "Those who could entered the armed forces," the synagogue's institutional history reports. Few, however, expected their new rabbi to join the army.

Hired just over a year earlier, even before completing rabbinical school, Herschel Schacter had quickly established himself in his new pulpit. As a full-time clergyman, he 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) requesting an application.

He later recalled that when he told his parents of his decision, he received a lengthy letter from his father pleading with him to remain in Stamford. Schacter's heartfelt response, written in Hebrew, reflects both his parents' fears and his own sense of duty.

First, he argued, the plight of the Jewish



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.

people under the Nazis constituted an emergency that made it incumbent upon Jews in the free world to act. Invoking a biblical verse, he asked, "How can we sit with folded hands and not listen to the voice of the blood of our brothers crying out to us?" He then cited another injunction: "It is a time to act for the Lord, for they have violated Your teachings."

Moreover, Schacter continued, Judaism prohibits standing aside while others are suffering. He cited the biblical requirement that if an unidentified homicide victim is discovered, the leaders of the nearest city must bring a sacrifice and declare publicly, "Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it done"—not because they were suspected of murder, but to atone for failing to aid the victim while he was still alive.

An additional religious obligation, Schacter contended, was to reciprocate the hospitality America had shown 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?"

Buchenwald stands as a harrowing testament to the brutality of the Holocaust. Located in Nazi Germany, the Buchenwald concentration camp imprisoned tens of thousands of Jews and others deemed undesirable by the regime. Thousands of Jewish prisoners were murdered there, alongside countless others targeted by Nazi persecution. Prisoners endured forced labor, starvation, brutality, and medical experimentation, resulting in unimaginable suffering. While not the largest Nazi concentration camp, more than 56,000 people died at Buchenwald, including Jews, political prisoners, resistance fighters, homosexuals, and others persecuted by the Nazi regime.

When the U.S. Third Army's Sixth Armored Division, which included Rabbi Schacter, arrived at Buchenwald on April 11, 1945, approximately 21,000 prisoners were still alive, including 4,000–5,000 Jews and about 800 children.

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

Goldinger described the prisoners' collective pride at seeing a rabbi in American military uniform. As they spoke with Rabbi Schacter, they eagerly sought confirmation that the war had ended, pouring out their harrowing stories and uncertainties to "the American rabbi."



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

Moving from barrack to barrack, Rabbi Schacter reassured them with the proclamation, “Sholom Aleichem Yidden, ihr zent frei! (Jews, you are free!),” offering hope in their dire circumstances.

Watch Murray Goldinger’s Survival Testimony [here](#).⁵

On his third day in the camp, Rabbi Schacter learned of a 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, normally used to show films for camp guards and administrators, 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 began, Rabbi Schacter led the gathered prisoners in prayer, relying on his voice and their shared memory of familiar Sabbath melodies. Despite the absence of prayer books, the survivors found comfort in the ritual, discovering hope and solace amid the darkness of their circumstances.

DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER

Dwight D. Eisenhower was the Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe during World War II and a five-star general in the U.S. Army. He planned and supervised two of the most consequential Allied campaigns of the war: Operation Torch in North Africa and the Normandy invasion in 1944. He later served as the 34th President of the United States and remains one of the most influential military leaders in modern history. His presidential library and museum are located in Abilene, Kansas, where he grew up.

Toward the end of the war, in April 1945, General Eisenhower visited the Ohrdruf concentration camp and was shocked by what he saw: bodies piled like wood and emaciated prisoners struggling to survive. Recognizing that the horrors of the Holocaust might one day be denied, he insisted on extensive documentation. He ordered film crews to record the scenes and urged journalists and members of Congress to visit and witness the atrocities firsthand. His actions aimed to create an indisputable record of Nazi crimes,

⁵ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8yY__8sxcXs

ensuring that the truth of the Holocaust would be preserved against future denial.

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

Despite the profound historical impact of the Nazi murder of six million Jews during the Holocaust, public awareness and understanding of this catastrophe remain alarmingly low in many parts of the world. Surveys reveal significant gaps in knowledge, with many people, especially young people, underestimating the scale of the atrocities or lacking awareness of key facts. This lack of understanding underscores the critical need for comprehensive Holocaust education. We encourage students around the world to learn about the Holocaust not only to commemorate the victims and honor the survivors, but also to understand the mechanisms of prejudice and state-sponsored genocide. The Holocaust remains a stark reminder of the dangers of unchecked hatred and the importance of vigilance against such ideologies.



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

⁶ 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, reflecting a significant contribution to the war effort.
- Rabbi Herschel Schacter's decision to enlist despite his exemption as a clergyman underscores his commitment to action in the face of Nazi atrocities.
- Schacter's religious convictions shaped his sense of duty to serve the Jewish people and recognize America's role in providing sanctuary to the oppressed.
- The arrival at Buchenwald concentration camp marked a pivotal moment, as Rabbi Schacter, serving with the U.S. Third Army's Sixth Armored Division, encountered survivors and offered 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, the Land of Israel (Eretz Yisrael), which has remained central to Jewish identity 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 around the world face Jerusalem during prayer, reflecting their enduring spiritual connection to the city.
- **Beacon of Resilience:** Established in 1948, the State of 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. Israel is regarded by Jews as their biblical homeland, the Land of Israel (Eretz Yisrael), It attracts Jews from around the world, strengthening community ties and fostering solidarity across the global Jewish diaspora.

THE COLD WAR AND THE SOVIET JEWRY MOVEMENT

As described above, the American Jewish community has experienced a level of acceptance and opportunity in the United States unmatched in Jewish history. Although Jews have faced discrimination and challenges as a minority, they have been able to prosper and live freely in America. The Jewish community is also grateful that the United States has stood up to dictatorships and oppression around the world. Since Jews are a small minority worldwide, they have often been scapegoated for societal problems; Nazi Germany represents the most extreme, but not the only, example.

Antisemitism has often functioned as an early warning sign of broader threats to freedom, leading Jews to be described as “canaries in the coal mine” for dangers that may later affect wider society. The late Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, former Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom, 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” descended across Eastern Europe, subjugating millions of Jews and others under the repressive Soviet regime. Jews living in the Soviet Union faced severe restrictions on religious practice, cultural expression, higher education, and professional advancement, and were largely prohibited from emigrating—especially to Israel and, to a lesser extent, the United States. 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, led prominently by American Jews, launched major advocacy efforts on behalf of Soviet Jewry. 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 freedom of emigration for 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, mindful of persecution and committed to human rights, their advocacy for Soviet Jews carried 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 leaders in attendance, including Vice President George H.W. Bush, and broad bipartisan support that helped exert substantial pressure on the Soviet government.

Among the speakers at the rally, Natan Sharansky stood out as a powerful symbol of resilience and the struggle for Soviet Jewry, having only recently been released from the gulag. A former Soviet prisoner and prominent refusenik (a Russian term for individuals

denied permission to emigrate by the Soviet regime), Sharansky had been convicted on false charges of espionage and treason and sentenced to thirteen years in prison, of which he served nine. His steadfast defiance of Soviet authorities and refusal to abandon his demand for emigration rights made him an international human-rights icon. His release in 1986, as part of an East–West prisoner exchange, was widely seen as a triumph of the human spirit over totalitarianism and a victory for Jewish leaders and activists worldwide who had long advocated for his and others’ freedom.



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 broader foreign-policy initiatives by President Reagan, contributed to the shift in Soviet policies under Mikhail Gorbachev toward *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring), as well as to the eventual weakening of the Soviet system and the thawing of the Cold War.

These changes led to a dramatic rise in Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union, from about 8,000 in 1987 to more than 71,000 in 1989, peaking at approximately 185,000 in 1990. Between 1989 and 1992, more than 400,000 Jews emigrated, profoundly shaping the demographics and cultural life of their new communities, especially in Israel, where Jews were granted immediate citizenship, and to a lesser extent in the United States under immigration quotas.

American political leaders demonstrated a willingness to defend human rights globally and, in this case, to advocate alongside the Jewish community. The Soviet Jewry movement also illustrated how antisemitism can serve as an early warning sign of broader repression within totalitarian regimes.



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:** Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union rose from about 8,000 in 1987 to more than 71,000 in 1989, peaking at approximately 185,000 in 1990; more than 400,000 Jews emigrated between 1989 and 1992.

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

One final example of America’s strength and its conviction in standing up for oppressed peoples around the world is the experience of Iranian Jews. Jews have lived in Persia (modern-day Iran) for more than 2,700 years, forming one of the oldest continuous Jewish communities outside the Land of Israel. Following the Muslim conquest in 642 CE, Jews often lived as a tolerated but subordinate minority, effectively treated as second-class citizens, and faced recurring restrictions and discrimination.

During Iran’s secular period in the twentieth century, Jewish life improved dramatically. The community, numbering around 100,000, prospered. Many Iranian Jews rose into the middle and upper classes and achieved significant economic, professional, and cultural influence.

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 marked a critical turning point for Iranian Jews. The overthrow of the Shah and the establishment of the Islamic Republic under Ayatollah Khomeini brought a dramatic and harsh reversal in their circumstances.

Under the new theocratic regime, hostility toward Jews intensified markedly. Iranian Jews were publicly denounced as infidels and alleged agents of Western influence, accused of collusion with the United States and Israel. This period saw a rise in antisemitic propaganda and policies that directly targeted the Jewish community. Many members

of the Jewish community were arrested on fabricated charges of spying for Israel or the United States, resulting in imprisonments and, in some cases, executions.

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

The implementation of Sharia law further marginalized Jewish Iranians. They faced discriminatory laws that reduced their legal rights and sought to humiliate and oppress them in their daily lives. For example, the testimony of a Jew in court was valued less than that of a Muslim, and Jews faced restrictions in professional and educational opportunities.



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

In the face of these harsh conditions, most Iranian Jews fled the country, primarily to the United States and Israel. This exodus was aided by established Jewish networks and newly formed organizations that helped Jews leave Iran and rebuild their lives in new host countries.

This migration marked a profound transition, as Iranian Jews rebuilt their lives in new lands while coping with the trauma of displacement and persecution. The United States, often seen as a land of hope and freedom, offered opportunities for a fresh start, allowing Iranian Jews 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 “Tehrangeles” (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 across the country.

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

In recent years, global news has been dominated by the Israel– Hamas conflict, part of a broader struggle between democratic societies and forces of terrorism and authoritarian extremism.

Iran is designated by the United States 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 linked to numerous international terrorist activities, including the 1994 bombing of the AMIA Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, Argentina, which killed 85 people. The regime also supports militant proxy groups, such as Hezbollah, which is accused of involvement in the 1994 AMIA attack. It conducts cyber attacks targeting U.S. institutions and continues to pursue nuclear capabilities with the goal of acquiring a nuclear weapon.



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

Hezbollah, based in Lebanon and supported by Iran, is designated a terrorist organization by the United States and is responsible for numerous attacks, including the 1983 Beirut barracks bombing and ongoing rocket and drone attacks into northern Israel. Hamas, which governs the Gaza Strip and is also designated a terrorist organization by the United States, has carried out attacks against Israeli civilians and has killed American citizens. With military, financial, and logistical support from Iran, Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza openly seek the destruction of the State of Israel. Hezbollah is estimated to possess more than 150,000 rockets and missiles positioned near Israel’s northern border. Hamas has launched more than 10,000 rockets toward Israel since October 7, 2023.

ISRAEL DEFENDS ITSELF: CONFRONTING THREATS

Israel serves as a frontline defender against persistent and evolving threats from Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas. These threats require Israel to continually adapt and advance its defensive capabilities and to work closely with the United States in developing and sharing advanced technologies.

The United States provides financial assistance to Israel that strengthens its ability to defend itself while also benefiting the American economy, as a substantial portion of this aid is spent on American-made defense equipment and technology. In addition, this partnership supports the joint development of advanced defense systems that enhance both U.S. national security and the broader defense of the Western world.

Israel has become a global leader in missile defense innovation and operational success,



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.

deploying a three-tiered defense network that includes Iron Dome for short-range threats, David's Sling for medium-range threats, and Arrow for long-range and ballistic threats. Israel is also developing advanced laser-based defense technology known as Iron Beam in close coordination with the United States. On April 14, 2024, these jointly developed defense systems faced a major test when Iran launched more than 300 drones and missiles toward Israel. The integrated U.S.–Israel defense network intercepted approximately 99 percent of the projectiles, demonstrating its effectiveness in protecting Israeli territory.

The United States and Israel also maintain a close partnership in intelligence sharing, strategic coordination, and military training, strengthening the security interests and defense capabilities of both nations. Many in the American Jewish community take pride in the strong alliance between Israel and the United States, recognizing Israel as one of America's closest allies. The American Jewish community watches developments in Israel very closely, as many Jewish Americans have family members and friends in both the United States and Israel serving on the front lines in defense of democracy and Western values.

HOLOCAUST REFLECTION AND CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

The Holocaust was not only a historical event but also a moral turning point that continues to shape our understanding of human rights and justice. Exploring its causes and consequences helps us recognize the dangers of hatred and the importance of standing against injustice. The questions below invite reflection on the Holocaust and its enduring lessons for today's world.

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?

FROM THE HOLOCAUST TO THE PRESENT: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

As students explore Jewish heritage through the major historical events of the twentieth century, they encounter a narrative shaped by adversity, resilience, and the pursuit of justice. The following questions encourage deeper analysis of the Holocaust, the formation of Israel, global Jewish advocacy movements, and the continuing challenges facing Jewish communities, inviting reflection on their historical significance and contemporary relevance.

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”?

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.

PART 3

JEWISH AMERICAN PIONEERS AND LEADERS

Throughout American history, Jewish Americans have helped shape the nation across many fields, including civic leadership, government, science, innovation, culture, and social justice, enriching nearly every facet of American life. From World Series champions and pioneers of the polio vaccine to leaders in nuclear physics, diplomacy in the Middle East, American music, civil rights, and the technology revolution, Jewish Americans have played vital roles in building a modern and dynamic United States. These individuals exemplify both achievement and public service while maintaining a strong sense of cultural and religious identity. This section highlights the breadth and depth of their impact through a representative—though not exhaustive—selection of Jewish American pioneers and leaders whose contributions have helped shape American society.

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, Heschel fled Nazi persecution and emigrated to the United States in 1940. He later became a professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary, where he spoke out against racial discrimination. His theology emphasized the sanctity of life and the moral danger of indifference, ideas that deeply shaped 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 remained a powerful moral voice against segregation and inequality, which he viewed as affronts to God’s will. He advocated for civil rights legislation and greater social responsibility. His 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

Rabbi Meir Soloveichik:

In recent years, Rabbi Meir Soloveichik (born 1977) has emerged as a prominent Jewish voice on religious liberty in the United States. A member of a distinguished rabbinic family in modern Jewish history, he has written and spoken widely about America as a nation that has 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. He serves as the rabbi of Congregation Shearith Israel, the oldest Jewish congregation in the United States, and as a professor of Torah and Western Thought at Yeshiva University, combining scholarship with public advocacy.

Through essays, public lectures, and media engagement, Rabbi Soloveichik has explored and highlighted the historical and philosophical foundations of religious freedom in America. Drawing on biblical texts and the writings of the Founding Fathers, he has articulated a vision of religious liberty that resonates with a broad audience. His depth of knowledge, and sustained public engagement have made him both an influential voice in contemporary discussions of religious freedom and a key figure in shaping public opinion on this critical issue.

In addition to his educational and public advocacy, Rabbi Soloveichik has participated in legal and civic efforts related to religious freedom in the United States. He has testified before Congress on matters affecting the rights of religious individuals and institutions. He has also taken part in interfaith initiatives that promote mutual understanding and respect among faith communities, essential to defending religious liberty. Through his leadership at Congregation Shearith Israel, he continues to advance and inspire these principles within both his congregation and the broader public sphere.

Rabbi Soloveichik speaks widely in the United States and internationally at academic, religious, and civic forums, including in the halls of Congress, at presidential conventions, and at gatherings of Christian leaders and policy organizations in Washington. His work emphasizes the importance of safeguarding religious freedom and protecting the rights of all faith communities. His efforts have contributed to contemporary legal and public discussions on religious freedom, reinforcing the United States' longstanding commitment to freedom and tolerance.



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

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

From local government to the nation's highest offices, Jewish Americans have played significant roles in shaping political discourse and public policy in the United States. Leaders such as Joe Lieberman, the first Jewish candidate on a major party presidential ticket, Henry Kissinger, a key architect of American foreign policy, and Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin reflect the diverse participation of Jewish Americans in public life. Their careers demonstrate a longstanding commitment to public service and leadership.

Senator Joe Lieberman:

Joe Lieberman (1942–2024) was a prominent American political leader who served as a United States Senator from Connecticut from 1989 to 2013. Known for his centrist positions and willingness to work



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)

across party lines, he played an active role in national security and domestic policy debates. In 2000, he became the first Jewish candidate on a major party presidential ticket when he ran as the Democratic nominee for Vice President alongside Al Gore. His candidacy marked a historic milestone in American politics, reflecting the growing inclusion of religious minorities in national leadership.

Throughout his career, Lieberman was active in environmental policy, 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, helping advance legislation establishing the department through Congress. This effort strengthened federal coordination and national security in response to emerging terrorist threats and continues to help prevent attacks.

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



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

particularly volatile period of the Cold War.

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.

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 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



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

States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA). These agreements were intended to bolster U.S. economic interests and secure more favorable terms for American workers and businesses.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Mnuchin played a central role 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. The Treasury 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 support small businesses and maintain employment during widespread shutdowns. These actions helped mitigate the economic impact of the pandemic on households and businesses across the United States.

Eric Cantor:

Eric Cantor is an American politician and lawyer who served as the United States Representative for Virginia's 7th



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

congressional district from 2001 to 2014. A member of the Republican Party, Cantor served as House Majority Leader from 2010 to 2014, becoming the highest-ranking Jewish member in Congress. During his tenure, he helped shape fiscal policy, advocated for limited government, and promoted pro-business initiatives. He 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.

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)

In the toy industry, **Ruth Handler** co-founded Mattel and revolutionized children's consumer culture with the creation of Barbie, the first mass-market fashion doll designed to represent an adult woman. Introduced in 1959, Barbie became a global cultural icon and transformed the toy industry by expanding imaginative play and aspirational branding. Handler's vision helped establish Mattel as one of the world's leading toy companies and set new standards for innovation in children's products and marketing.



Ruth Handler, co-founder of Mattel and creator of Barbie, photographed in 1961 during the early global success of the iconic doll.

In the beauty industry, **Estée Lauder** built one of the world's most influential cosmetics companies through innovation in branding, marketing, and product development. Beginning with a small line of skincare products, she expanded Estée Lauder Companies into a global enterprise known for prestige beauty brands. Her emphasis on quality, customer experience, and strategic marketing transformed modern cosmetics retail and established new standards for brand-driven entrepreneurship in the consumer goods sector.



Estée Lauder

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.

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 equality and educational reform in the United States.



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

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 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.



Michael Bloomberg

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.

4. SCHOLARS AND INNOVATORS: JEWISH CONTRIBUTIONS TO AMERICAN ACADEMIA

Jewish Americans have long been integral to the advancement of academia 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 about 0.2% of the world's population, Jewish individuals have received approximately 22% of all Nobel Prizes awarded since 1901—214 of 965 prizes in total. Their contributions span numerous 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)

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.

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.

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.

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

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

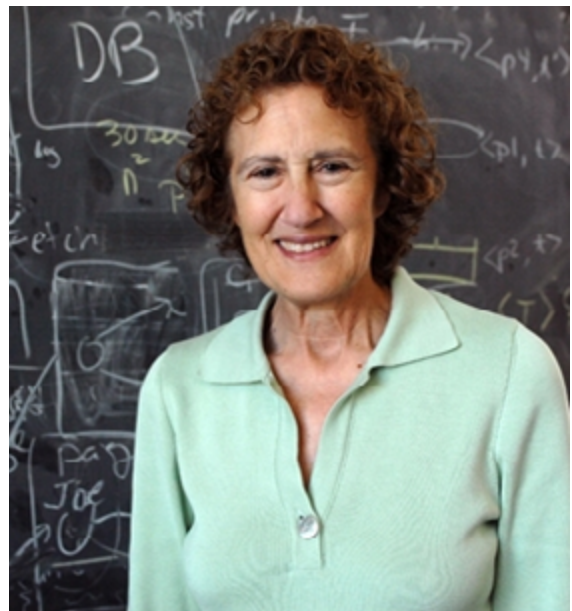
Is a pioneer in the design of computer programming languages, helping to make computer programs more reliable, secure, and easy to use. Her innovations can be found within almost all modern programming languages.

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.



Judith Resnik (1949–1986)

Was a Jewish American electrical engineer and NASA astronaut, recognized for her pioneering contributions to space science and engineering. Born in Akron, Ohio, Resnik demonstrated exceptional ability in mathematics and science from an early age. She earned a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from Carnegie Mellon University and later completed a Ph.D. in electrical engineering at the University of Maryland, where her research focused on biomedical engineering and the physiology of vision.

Before joining NASA, Resnik worked as a biomedical engineer and researcher, applying engineering principles to medical and visual systems. In 1978 she was selected by NASA as part of the first class of astronauts to include women, marking a historic step in the diversification of the American space program. Her technical expertise and precision quickly established her as a leader in mission operations and spacecraft systems.

Resnik first flew aboard the Space Shuttle Discovery in 1984, where she operated the shuttle's robotic arm and conducted experiments in microgravity. Her work contributed to advances in satellite deployment, space station assembly techniques, and the understanding of how materials and biological systems behave in space. She later served as a mission specialist on the Space Shuttle Challenger, continuing her work in orbital research and engineering operations.

On January 28, 1986, Resnik and her six crewmates were killed when Challenger broke apart shortly after launch. Her legacy endures in the continued

advancement of aerospace engineering and in the opportunities she helped open for women and minorities in STEM fields. Resnik remains an enduring symbol of scientific dedication, courage, and the pursuit of knowledge beyond Earth.



Judith Resnik

Rosalyn Yalow (1921–2011)

Was a Jewish American medical physicist whose pioneering research transformed the field of biomedical science. Working at the Bronx Veterans Administration Hospital, Yalow co-developed radioimmunoassay (RIA), a revolutionary technique that made it possible to measure extremely small concentrations of hormones and other biological substances in the human body. This innovation enabled major advances in endocrinology, blood screening, and disease diagnosis, including improved detection of conditions such as diabetes and thyroid disorders. For this groundbreaking contribution to medicine, Yalow received the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1977. Her work demonstrated how physics-based methods could reshape medical research and patient care, establishing new standards for precision in laboratory diagnostics.

5. DEFENDERS AND INNOVATORS: JEWISH AMERICANS IN THE MILITARY

Throughout United States history, Jewish Americans have rendered distinguished service in the armed forces, demonstrating exceptional valor and contributing significantly to military strategy and technological advancement. 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 had a profound impact on the U.S. military and have exemplified the spirit of patriotism and sacrifice that defines the American character.



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)

Major General Maurice Rose's

Military [career](#)⁷ 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.

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 August 1948, in a testament to his impact and to honor his memory,

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

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 reflected in the many decorations awarded 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; peers such as General J. Lawton Collins and commentator Andy Rooney acknowledged his tactical genius and leadership. His dedication and innovative military strategies remain influential in modern military doctrine.

William Sawelson

Was a Jewish American soldier who [was awarded](https://www.cmohs.org/recipients/william-sawelson)⁸ 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 of 78th Division.

At the Battle of Grand-Pré, France, on October 26, 1918, Sawelson heard a wounded man in a shell hole calling for water. On his own initiative, he left his shelter and crawled through heavy machine-gun fire to reach the man, giving him the water from 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.

Private First Class Leonard M. Kravitz:

Kravitz is [recognized](https://www.army.mil/medalofhonor/valor24/recipients/kravitz/?f=recipient_list)⁹ for his actions at Yangpyong, Korea, on March 6–7, 1951. While occupying defensive positions, his unit was overrun by enemy forces and forced to withdraw. Kravitz voluntarily remained at a machine-gun position to provide suppressive fire for the retreating troops, drawing the enemy's attack onto his own position. He was killed in the engagement, but his actions saved his entire platoon.

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

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

⁹ https://www.army.mil/medalofhonor/valor24/recipients/kravitz/?f=recipient_list

Corporal Tibor Rubin:

Tibor “Ted” Rubin knew what it was like to slowly starve to death, to feel lice crawling over his skin, and to face the temptation to give up on life rather than fight for it. Nazi guards ensured that he understood despair at the age of 13. He was an Hungarian-born Jew, deported to the Mauthausen concentration camp during World War II at age 13. He defied the odds and survived. After the war, he immigrated to the United States, settled in New York, and later enlisted in the same Army that had freed him.

Surviving Nazi horrors, he faced the brutality of war again as a prisoner of war (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. Fellow soldier Sgt. Leo Cormier later attested to his life-saving courage in front-line battles and to the strength that sustained both Rubin and others during harrowing years as a prisoner of war. His actions, recognized by multiple nominations for the Medal of Honor, were not confined to a single moment but reflected 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.

Colonel Jack H. Jacobs

Served in the Vietnam War. His remarkable heroism [was recognized](#)¹⁰ 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

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

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 that 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 again moved 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.

Sgt. 1st Class Christopher A. Celiz

From Summerville, South Carolina, [embarked on his military journey](#) in 2008, initially training as a combat engineer. His exemplary performance led to assignments of increasing responsibility, culminating in service 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.

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

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.

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 1965 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.

Stan Lee

A pioneering comic book writer and editor, helped create iconic superheroes such as Spider-Man, the X-Men, and the Avengers. Through Marvel Comics, he transformed modern storytelling and popular culture, inspiring generations of readers and reshaping American entertainment.

Jerry Seinfeld

An influential comedian and television creator, reshaped American humor through the landmark series Seinfeld, which became one of the most influential sitcoms in television history. His observational comedy captured everyday American life and left a lasting imprint on popular culture.



Jerry Seinfeld (right) with the cast of Seinfeld (1989–1998). Promotional photograph

Hedy Lamarr

A celebrated Hollywood actress and inventor, becoming one of the most recognizable stars of classic American cinema. Beyond film, she co-invented early frequency-hopping technology that later contributed to modern wireless communication, linking creativity and innovation in American culture.

Gene Wilder

A beloved actor, writer, and comedian, brought warmth, imagination, and humor to American film. Best known for his unforgettable roles in Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory, Blazing Saddles, and Young Frankenstein, Wilder helped shape modern screen comedy through performances that blended whimsy, vulnerability, and expressive timing. His characters, often portraying outsiders with depth and humanity, resonated across generations. Wilder's enduring work continues to influence actors and audiences alike, securing his place as one of the most cherished figures in American popular culture.

Stephen Sondheim

An influential composer and lyricist, transformed American musical theater through sophisticated storytelling and innovative music. His landmark works, including West Side Story, Sweeney Todd, and Into the Woods, redefined the possibilities of Broadway by blending complex characters, intricate lyrics, and dramatic depth. Sondheim's artistry elevated musical theater to a new level of literary and emotional richness. His enduring influence continues to shape American theater and the global stage.

Lauren Bacall

A legendary film actress, became one of the defining stars of classic Hollywood cinema. She rose to fame in films such as To Have and Have Not, The Big Sleep, and Key Largo, known for her distinctive voice and poised screen presence. Her performances helped shape the image of the modern American film heroine and remain central to the legacy of twentieth-century American cinema.

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

The study of Jewish American contributions offers a rich exploration of 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 is crucial to reflect on the broader implications of their efforts. The following questions encourage critical thinking and deeper understanding of the material covered in this chapter.

1. Civil Right and Religious Freedom

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

2. Political Contributions

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

3. Economic Impact

- a. Analyze the entrepreneurial strategies of figures such as Sergey Brin and Michael Dell. How did their innovations transform their industries?

- b. Consider the ethical dimensions of Julius Rosenwald's philanthropy. How does his approach to social change through education compare with modern philanthropic strategies?

4. Academic and Scientific Achievements

- a. Evaluate the contributions of Jewish Nobel laureates to their fields. What might the disproportionate number of Jewish Nobel Prize recipients suggest about the role of minority communities in academia and science?
- b. How have Jewish intellectuals such as Elie Wiesel and Richard Feynman drawn on personal experience to shape their professional work and public influence?

5. Military Service:

- a. 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 Jewish identity shape their service?
- b. Discuss the role of Jewish American service members in U.S. military strategy and their contributions during key conflicts.

6. Cultural Contributions:

- a. How have Jewish American artists and entertainers drawn on Jewish heritage to influence American culture?
- b. In what ways have Jewish Americans in sports, entertainment, and media shaped public discourse or cultural expression in the United States?

PART 4

THE RISE OF ANTISEMITISM IN AMERICA

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

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.

Sources Used:

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

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

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

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](#).

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)

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.

Sources Used:

- ¹⁵ <https://combatantisemitism.org/studies-reports/amid-spread-of-anti-israel-encampment-movement-cam-data-reveals-815-rise-in-on-campus-antisemitic-incidents/>
- ¹⁶ <https://www.columbiaspectator.com/news/2024/04/17/dozens-of-protesters-occupy-south-lawn-call-for-divestment-from-israel-ahead-of-shafik-testimony/>
- ¹⁷ <https://www.foxnews.com/us/anti-israel-protesters-heard-shouting-we-hamas-long-live-hamas-columbia-university-demonstrations>
- ¹⁸ <https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/antisemitism/article-798049>
- ¹⁹ <https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/antisemitism/article-798160>
- ²⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/26/nyregion/columbia-student-protest-zionism.html>
- ²¹ <https://www.jns.org/jewish-yale-student-stabbed-in-eye-with-plo-flag/>
- ²² <https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local/columbia-university-protests-nypd-video-hamilton-hall/5371376/>
- ²³ <https://twitter.com/henmazzig/status/1783783513944154225?s=12&t=LMXebXbwXQ6y7VSq3G7x2w>
- ²⁴ <https://combatantisemitism.org/studies-reports/amid-spread-of-anti-israel-encampment-movement-cam-data-reveals-815-rise-in-on-campus-antisemitic-incidents/>
- ²⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bcxZIZrOfmY>

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](#).

-
- **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.

Sources Used:

²⁹ [https://combatantisemitism.org/studies-reports/amid-spread-of-anti-israel-encampment-movement-cam-data-reveals-815-rise-in-on-](https://combatantisemitism.org/studies-reports/amid-spread-of-anti-israel-encampment-movement-cam-data-reveals-815-rise-in-on-campus-antisemitic-incidents/)

[campus-antisemitic-incidents/](https://www.timesofisrael.com/jewish-students-barricade-in-nycs-cooper-union-as-protesters-chant-free-palestine/)

³¹ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/jewish-students-barricade-in-nycs-cooper-union-as-protesters-chant-free-palestine/>

³² <https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/cornell-student-violent-threats-jewish-students-pleads-guilty/530871/>

³³ <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-](https://www.fairfaxtimes.com/articles/fairfax_county/fairfax-county-public-schools-suspends-student-for-allegedly-blowing-whistle-on-swastika-flag/article_26c795f4-84a9-11ee-8c2e-d709babe6b5d.html)

[fairfax-county-public-schools-suspends-student-for-allegedly-blowing-whistle-](https://www.fairfaxtimes.com/articles/fairfax_county/fairfax-county-public-schools-suspends-student-for-allegedly-blowing-whistle-on-swastika-flag/article_26c795f4-84a9-11ee-8c2e-d709babe6b5d.html)

[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-on-swastika-flag/article_26c795f4-84a9-11ee-8c2e-d709babe6b5d.html)

³⁴ <https://zoa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/ZOAs-Title-VI-complaint-against-MCPS-4-18-24.pdf>

³⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2024/04/22/us/campus-protests-columbia-yale>

³⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2024/04/22/us/campus-protests-columbia-yale>

³⁷ <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2024-05-02/student-fears-triggered-by-israel-palestinian-tensions-skyrocket>

³⁸ [https://mynbc15.com/news/nation-world/university-of-virginia-uva-jewish-students-parents-antisemitism-islamophobia-divest-](https://mynbc15.com/news/nation-world/university-of-virginia-uva-jewish-students-parents-antisemitism-islamophobia-divest-students-protest-discrimination-october-7-us-department-of-education-pro-palestine-groups-israel-gaza-hamas-war)

[students-protest-discrimination-october-7-us-department-of-education-pro-palestine-groups-israel-gaza-hamas-war](https://mynbc15.com/news/nation-world/university-of-virginia-uva-jewish-students-parents-antisemitism-islamophobia-divest-students-protest-discrimination-october-7-us-department-of-education-pro-palestine-groups-israel-gaza-hamas-war)

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 often seen as modern-day moral leaders—“righteous people”—echoing the moral courage of those who stood against hatred and injustice in the past. These modern-day leaders come from diverse backgrounds and professions—including educators, faith leaders, policymakers, advocates, athletes, and cultural voices—who use their platforms to challenge prejudice and promote understanding. Their efforts are especially vital at a time when antisemitism is resurging in many parts of the world. Through public advocacy, interfaith cooperation, education, and community outreach, they work to dismantle stereotypes and foster a society grounded in dignity and mutual respect. Their example of unwavering commitment offers hope and reminds students that individuals from many walks of life can stand up against hate. We encourage students to ask what they might do to support their fellow Jewish classmates, neighbors, and communities.

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.

Government and Policy Leaders

- **Deborah Lipstadt:** Historian and former U.S. Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism, known for global policy leadership against antisemitism. She won a landmark libel case brought against her by Holocaust denier David Irving in 2000.
- **Congressman Ritchie Torres:** U.S. Representative from New York and prominent bipartisan advocate against antisemitism and for the U.S.–Israel relationship on Capitol Hill.
- **Senator John Fetterman:** U.S. Senator from Pennsylvania who has emerged as a leading advocate condemning antisemitism and supporting the U.S.–Israel relationship following the October 7 attacks.
- **David M. Friedman:** Lawyer and former U.S. Ambassador to Israel during the Trump administration, involved in the Abraham Accords and the relocation of the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem from Tel Aviv.

Advocates, Educators, and Public Intellectuals

- **Bari Weiss:** Journalist, author of *How to Fight Anti-Semitism*, and founder of The Free Press, focusing on antisemitism and threats to Jewish life.
- **Professor Shai Davidai:** Columbia Business School professor and leading public voice addressing campus antisemitism in the United States.
- **Noa Tishby:** U.S. based Israeli–American actress, author, and activist; a leading online advocate for Israel and former Israeli Special Envoy for Combating Antisemitism and Delegitimization of Israel.

Interfaith and Cross-Community Leaders

- **Anila Ali:** Pakistani–American interfaith leader and president of the American Muslim & Multifaith Women’s Empowerment Council (AMMWEC), advocating for Muslim–Jewish relations. She spoke at the “March for Israel” rally in Washington, D.C. in November 2023.
- **Loay Alshareef:** Saudi Arabian educator and Abraham Accords peace activist who promotes Arab–Jewish understanding and confronts antisemitism in the Arab world through educational outreach and dialogue.
- **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. Founder and national chairman of Christians United for Israel (CUFI), a major American Christian Zionist organization advocating support for Israel and opposition to antisemitism.

Community and Survivor Voices

- **Rabbi Jeffrey Myers:** Rabbi of Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh and national voice against antisemitic violence following the 2018 attack, in which 11 Jewish worshippers were murdered by a neo-Nazi gunman during Shabbat services.
- **Natalie Sanandaji:** American-Jewish survivor of the October 7 Nova music festival massacre and public affairs officer and speaker for the Combat Antisemitism Movement (CAM).

Public Figures and Cultural Voices

- **Mayim Bialik:** Jewish actress, author, and host (Jeopardy!), and a leading public advocate against antisemitism and in support of Jewish identity.
- **Debra Messing:** Jewish actress, known for playing Grace Adler on Will & Grace, and a public voice advocating against antisemitism and supporting Jewish communities.
- **Jerry Seinfeld:** Jewish comedian and cultural figure, creator and star of Seinfeld, and a prominent supporter of Israel.
- **Montana Tucker:** Jewish educator, social media activist, and public speaker promoting Holocaust remembrance and combating antisemitism through digital educational campaigns.
- **Jonah Platt:** Jewish actor, writer, and public advocate speaking out against antisemitism and anti-Jewish narratives in media and public discourse.

Athletes and Sports Leaders

- **Julian Edelman:** Jewish former NFL wide receiver for the New England Patriots, three-time Super Bowl champion, and a leader for using his public platform to speak out against antisemitism and promote Jewish pride.
- **Alex Bregman:** Jewish Major League Baseball third baseman for the Houston Astros who publicly embraces Jewish identity, including wearing a Star of David on his belt during games, and has spoken against antisemitism.
- **Max Fried:** Jewish Major League Baseball pitcher for the New York Yankees and Team Israel World Baseball Classic player who has spoken about Jewish identity and pride.
- **Adam Jeremy “A.J.” Edelman:** American-born Orthodox Jewish Olympic bobsled athlete competing for Israel’s Olympic bobsled team, promoting Jewish representation in sport.

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 2026, more than 1,300 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.

THE UNITED STATES RESPONSE TO ANTISEMITISM

In recent years, rising antisemitism in the United States, particularly on college campuses and in public life, has prompted increased federal attention and policy responses. National leaders and institutions have recognized that combating antisemitism requires both education and government action.



U.S. President Donald Trump signs an Executive Order, in the Oval Office of the White House, Washington, D.C., Jan. 20, 2025. Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

FEDERAL ACTION AND EXECUTIVE MEASURES

The United States government has taken steps to strengthen protections against antisemitism, including enforcement of federal civil rights laws in educational settings. Executive actions have affirmed that antisemitism can constitute discrimination under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, particularly when Jewish students face harassment, exclusion, or intimidation in schools or universities.

These measures have reinforced the use of the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism as a guiding framework for identifying antisemitic discrimination in federally funded institutions.

ADDRESSING ANTISEMITISM ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

Concerns about antisemitism in higher education have led to increased federal oversight and review of campus environments. Government agencies have emphasized that universities receiving federal funding have a responsibility to ensure Jewish students can participate fully and safely in campus life without facing antisemitic harassment or exclusion.

These efforts reflect broader national recognition that antisemitism is not only a historical issue, but also a contemporary civil rights concern.

THE ANTISEMITISM AWARENESS ACT

Congress has also considered legislation such as the Antisemitism Awareness Act, which seeks to strengthen federal efforts to identify and address antisemitism in education by formally recognizing the IHRA definition in civil rights enforcement.

The Act reflects growing bipartisan recognition that clear definitions and consistent policy tools are essential to combating modern antisemitism effectively.

Information in this section reflects public policy developments and educational resources compiled by the Combat Antisemitism Movement (CAM) and related government sources.

Combat Antisemitism Movement. U.S. Federal Actions to Combat Antisemitism. <https://combatantisemitism.org/press-release/cam-strongly-welcomes-president-trumps-bold-and-decisive-executive-order-to-deploy-us-federal-power-against-rising-antisemitism/>

Combat Antisemitism Movement. Antisemitism Awareness Act Background. <https://combatantisemitism.org/government-and-policy/cam-welcomes-reintroduction-of-antisemitism-awareness-act/>

PART 5

CONCLUSION

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—championed by Senator Arlen Specter and Representative Debbie Wasserman Schultz—urging the President to proclaim an annual observance recognizing the contributions of Jewish Americans to the nation’s history and culture. May was chosen to reflect the early history of Jewish life in America, including the arrival of Jewish settlers in New Amsterdam in 1654. Responding to this call, as 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 Jewish American Heritage Month. These jurisdictions have implemented programs, ceremonies, and educational initiatives to honor Jewish heritage and contributions.

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; and most recently, in 2025, more than 200 U.S. municipalities proclaimed May as Jewish American Heritage Month.

- We thank our students for engaging with Jewish heritage through this curriculum and for exploring the enduring impact of Jewish Americans on the nation’s history and culture.
- 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 such as arts, science, politics, or business were most surprising or inspiring to you? Why?

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?

JEWISH
HERITAGE
OF AMERICA



COMBAT
ANTISEMITISM
MOVEMENT

TIKVAH תִּקְוָה