

Historical Reflections on 350 Years of American Jewish History

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In September of 2004, North American Jewry will commence a year-long celebration marking the 350th anniversary of Jewish communal settlement in North America. This anniversary memorializes the arrival, in 1654, of approximately two dozen bedraggled Jews who disembarked from the *St. Catrina*, a modest sea vessel that carried them to New Amsterdam, a Dutch colony that later became Manhattan Island. Most of these Jewish refugees came to New Amsterdam from Recife, another Dutch colony on the east coast of Brazil. Dutch-Jewish colonists began settling in Recife shortly after that small fortified town had been captured by the Netherlands in 1630. After Portuguese and Brazilian forces recaptured the colony in January of 1654, Recife's Jews had no choice but to find a new home lest they be subjected to the perils of the Inquisition by the Portuguese authorities.¹

The specific historical details pertaining to the Jewish departure from Recife and the subsequent peregrinations of its exiles remain somewhat obscure. Most scholars agree that many of the Jewish exiles from Recife ultimately made their way to New Amsterdam on board the *St. Catrina*, though Recife emigrés may have had their numbers swelled by another band of refugee Jews who joined them at some point along their twisted route to New Amsterdam. We do know, however, that when the *St. Catrina* arrived in New Amsterdam and shed its passengers into the New World, the sea-weary Jewish refugees were met by a handful of Jewish colonists who were already sojourners in New Amsterdam. These Jews had come to the Dutch colony earlier that same year with the permission (and possi-

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bly even the encouragement) of the directors of the Dutch West India Company.²

This event—the coming of a few dozen Jewish refugees to the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam in the fall of 1654—may not seem like a momentous historical event in and of itself. However, American Jews have been commemorating this episode for a century. This custom developed at the dawn of the twentieth century, when a number of American Jews began to take an interest in the history of Jewish life in America. It was at this time that throngs of East European Jewish immigrants were swelling the Jewish population in the United States. The dramatic upsurge in the number of Jewish inhabitants worried many German and central European Jews, who arrived in the United States during the last half of the nineteenth century. Many of these German Jews feared that the masses of East European Jewish greenhorns would reflect negatively on the status of the American Jew. One way of addressing this concern was to show the world that Jewish life in America had deep roots.

To do so, a group of prominent New York Jews organized a celebration marking the anniversary of Jewish communal settlement on these shores. The occasion highlighted the fact that 250 years had passed since Jews first received official permission to reside in the New Netherlands. Documentary evidence relating to the arrival of Jews in the New World proved to be a very useful discovery. America's role as the great haven for Jewry served as a focal point of this first national commemoration.³

A year-long American Jewish Tercentenary was commemorated fifty years later (1954–1955) with a nationwide series of events and observances focusing on an overall theme: "Man's Opportunities and Responsibilities Under Freedom." This universalistic motif clearly expressed U. S. Jewry's sense of being at home in America in the post-World War II era. At that time, academic study of American Jewry was still in its infancy, but the tercentenary successfully underscored the importance of preserving and reconstructing the history of Jewish life in the American nation.⁴

Another half-century has now passed, and from the fall of 2004 through the fall of 2005 the United States will observe the 350th anniversary of Jewish communal life in North America. Years from now, historians will undoubtedly compare and contrast the evolving character and content of these three historical commemorations. For the present time, however, this milestone occasion challenges students of the American Jewish experience to reflect thoughtfully

on the significance of this anniversary. What broad lessons can be drawn from the study of 350 years of Jewish life in America? At the same time, we consider an equally important question: What do these past 350 years teach us about the character of this nation? In an attempt to respond to these milestone considerations, this essay will touch briefly upon three broad motifs that exemplify the uniqueness of the American Jewish experience.

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First, the American Jew has played a pivotal role in actualizing the democratic experiment that continues to unfold in the New World. In the United States of America, the Jewish community has been an active participant in the incessant dialectic that has defined and refined the nation's understanding of the core values that are expressed in phrases like "inalienable rights," "land of liberty," and "equal justice under the law." Many assume erroneously that the political and civil rights that are the birthright of U.S. Jewry at the dawn of the twenty-first century were foreordained with the ratification of the Federal Constitution (1787) and Bill of Rights (1789). In a sense, those great charters constituted a metaphoric promissory note that future generations of Americans would need to indemnify. From the dawn of this republic, Jews have been vocal participants in the debate over how the nation should interpret the free exercise clause of the First Amendment to the Constitution. As the dean of American Jewish historians, Jacob Rader Marcus (1896–1995) emphasized, the Jew in the New World has consistently compelled the general community to make good on the Constitution's avowal that this republic guarantees liberty and justice to all citizens.⁵

An early pioneer of American civil liberties was a Jew named Asser Levy (d. 1681). Levy came to New Amsterdam just a few months prior to the arrival of the Jewish refugees from Recife in 1654.⁶ The colony's governor, Peter Stuyvesant, and its ruling council did not want these tattered Jewish refugees from Recife to remain. Stuyvesant complained to the directors of the Dutch West India Company back home in Amsterdam. He argued that the Jews were "anti-Christ," and he assured his superiors that these impoverished Jews undoubtedly would be a financial burden to the already struggling colony. By initially refusing them permission to acquire property, to trade with other Dutch colonies, or to serve in the local militia (and thereby avoid paying the colony a tax for

homeland security), Stuyvesant made remaining in New Amsterdam a very unappealing option for the first Jewish minyon in North America.

However, New Amsterdam's Jewry resisted Stuyvesant's plan. Anticipating the New World Jew's characteristic determination to secure equal footing under the law, these pioneering Jews contacted influential Jews back home in Amsterdam (many of whom were prominent stockholders in the Dutch West India Company).⁷ They urged their coreligionists in the Netherlands to appeal Stuyvesant's decision to the trustees of the Dutch West India Company. Evidently, the character of New World capitalism trumped Mr. Stuyvesant's Old World prejudices; the directors of the Dutch West India Company told Stuyvesant that he must allow the Jews to "travel and trade... live and remain [in New Netherlands] provided the poor among them shall not become a burden to the company or the community, but be supported by their own nation."⁸ Since that time, as Jacob Rader Marcus emphasized, American Jewry has never failed to meet its own communal needs. In doing so, American Jewry has founded and sustained a diverse array of social welfare organizations that render services to Americans in need.⁹

Above all, the Jews in New Amsterdam were dogged in pursuit of equal footing under the law. Asser Levy and a coreligionist, Jacob Barsimson, requested the right to stand guard along with the colony's other burghers in 1655. A few years later, in 1660, Mr. Levy, working as a butcher, asked for and received permission "to be excused from killing hogs, as his religion does not allow him to do it."¹⁰

In addition to Asser Levy, there were other Jewish colonists in New Amsterdam who advocated for civil liberties during this opening chapter of the American Jewish experience. In 1655, Abraham de Lucena, Jacob Cohen Henriques, Salvador Dandrada, Joseph d'Acosta, and David Frera petitioned the director general and the Council of New Netherlands for permission to travel, trade with neighboring colonies, and own real estate. It appears that these particular petitions were not granted. Asser Levy remained in New Amsterdam until the British took control in 1664, and he continued fighting for civil rights in New York. In 1678, he was given permission to build a slaughterhouse and acquire a butcher's license. He became a burgher in the colony, and this entitled him to serve on a jury. As a jury member in the English colony of New York, he proved

the adage that every dog has its day for he served on a jury for a case in which none other than Peter Stuyvesant was the defendant.¹¹

Early American history is replete with examples of Jews who objected vigorously to those who sought to perpetuate Old World political and civil disabilities in the New World. Jews like Asser Levy and his contemporaries wanted more than toleration. They conceived of themselves as full-fledged citizens, and they conducted themselves as such. These impulses intensified during the decades that led up to the Revolutionary War when colonial Jews listened with keen interest to the enlightenment rhetoric that characterized the discourse of the intellectuals who advocated American independence from the British Empire. These colonial Jews believed that the expressions of liberty ushering forth from the lips of those who founded the American republic were sincere. Their faith was rewarded when these progressive and noble sentiments became enshrined in the nation's founding documents. Once the War of Independence had been won, American Jews became even more determined to vanquish political and civil disabilities that lingered on despite the adoption of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.¹²

Jacob Henry's (1775?–1847) famous soliloquy before North Carolina's House of Commons in 1809 is emblematic of this trend. Henry insisted that he was entitled to occupy the congressional seat he won without professing an oath of office on the New Testament. Like many Jews in the early national period, Henry believed that the spirit of the Federal Constitution would ultimately overpower those state constitutions that preserved religious and civil disabilities for non-Christians:

Shall this free Country set an example of persecution which even the returning reason of enslaved Europe would not submit to?... Are you prepared to plunge at once from the sublime heights of moral legislation, into the dark and gloomy caverns of superstitious ignorance? Will you drive from your shores and from the shelter of your constitutions, all who do not lay their oblations on the same altar, observe the same ritual, and subscribe to the same dogmas? If so, which amongst the various sects into which we are divided, shall be the favored one...?¹³

Moreover, many people are stunned when they discover that American Jews were once expelled from American soil. In a thought-

less response to exaggerated and inaccurate complaints about Jews who were undermining the Union's war efforts by smuggling goods and provisions into the South, General Ulysses S. Grant expelled all the Jews living in the Military Department of Tennessee (which included the states of Kentucky and parts of Mississippi) under the authority of martial law. The reaction of American Jews to this development is as remarkable as was Grant's astonishing decree.¹⁴

Within hours of the promulgation of the general's order, outraged Jewish citizens launched a protest against what one of them called "the grossest violation of the Constitution and our rights as citizens under it."¹⁵ One Jew from Paducah, Kentucky, a man named Cesar J. Kaskel, rushed to Washington, D.C. to secure an audience with President Abraham Lincoln. Kaskel's recounting of that historic encounter constitutes one of the great moments of American Jewish history. After Kaskel told the president that General Grant had banished the Jews from the Military Department of Tennessee, "Honest Abe" smiled wryly and summarized all that he had heard with a question: "So, the children of Israel have been expelled from the happy land of Canaan?" "Yes," Kaskel rejoined, "and that is why we come unto Father Abraham's bosom, asking protection." "And that protection," Lincoln told him, "they shall have at once." And then, the sixteenth president sat down at his big table and canceled the major general's order.¹⁶

Was this a great victory for the few hundred Jews in the Department of Tennessee? Indeed, it was. Yet, it is possible to argue that the president's action was an even greater victory for the character of the American nation. The history of this country is replete with countless examples of American Jews who assumed that the Constitution's lofty ideals of equality and justice under the law were applicable to one and all. In laying claim to these rights and winning them for themselves, these Jewish citizens helped to define the meaning of political and civil liberty in this country.

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With the ideals of equal rights and equal opportunity continuously serving as a collective lodestar, American Jews always have inter-related with their fellow citizens as peers. Without question, there always have been (and there always will be) those who despised Jews and other minorities as unwanted aliens. Nevertheless, the Constitution of the United States established a *de jure* atmosphere in which American Judaism and the American Jew could lay claim to

a religious status that was authoritatively equal to that of any man or woman in America. This licit standing engendered another unique and remarkable feature of the American Jewish experience: the distinctive bond of friendship that overwhelmingly characterizes the relationship between the Jew and the non-Jew.¹⁷

One would search in vain throughout the annals of Jewish life in the Diaspora to find another setting in which the social, cultural, political, and economic bonds between Jew and non-Jew are so extensive and thoroughgoing as they have been consistently in the American nation. To be sure, one can cite numerous instances in which Jews, as individuals, had established personal relationships with non-Jews in many Old World Diaspora contexts. Generally speaking, Jewish corporate existence in the Old World Diaspora constituted a distinct entity that functioned as a body that stood apart from the rest of society.¹⁸

As a direct consequence of the Constitution's guarantee of religious freedom and, concomitantly, its outlawing the possibility of an established national religion, American Jews—individually and collectively—have achieved an unprecedented level of social integration and acceptance. As Isaac Harby (1788–1828) of Charleston, South Carolina, noted, American Jews were “a portion of the people” in every conceivable way.¹⁹ This distinctive feature of American life has made it possible for Jews, a tiny minority of the general population, to weave themselves as a major thread in the fabric of American culture. From the dawn of the Republic, America's Jews insisted that they were at home in this nation.²⁰

These sentiments were not lopsided. The words and deeds of non-Jewish neighbors nurtured this spirit of American Jewish “at-homeness.” For example, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, a man named Dr. Benjamin Rush (1745–1813), was on the streets of Philadelphia in 1787 when the citizenry celebrated the ratification of the new Federal Constitution with a street parade. In his reminiscences, Rush remarked that for him a most “agreeable” highpoint of that joyous procession was when the Roman Catholic father, the Protestant minister, and the Jewish “priest” walked together arm-in-arm down the boulevard. The Jewish priest to whom Dr. Rush referred was the Reverend Jacob R. Cohen (1738?–1811), minister of Philadelphia's Mickve Israel Congregation.²¹

Three decades later, a Jew from England settled in the pioneering town of Cincinnati, Ohio. His name was Joseph Jonas (1792–1869),

and he was one of the first Jews in the community. In his memoirs, Jonas remembers that when he first arrived on the banks of the Ohio, a Quaker woman traveled quite some distance to see a real Jew with her own eyes. She bid Jonas to turn about in a circle so she could examine him from every angle. Finally, she offered up her assessment of the man in one poignant declaration: 'Thou art a Jew, but I see that thou art different from no other man.' In many ways, this Quaker woman's remark has become the touchstone of Jewish life in America.²²

When Mickve Israel Congregation in Philadelphia began to solicit funds to erect a building of its own in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the list of contributors included several non-Jews—including the name of Benjamin Franklin. Examples of Christian financial contributions to synagogues and Jewish activities abound in American Jewish history. On countless occasions when churches burned down, the local synagogue invited the homeless Christians to use its facility on Sundays. From time to time, that courtesy was reciprocated when a Jewish congregation had lost its house of prayer. In the last half of the twentieth century, we find one or two instances wherein Jewish and Christian congregations co-own and share one building. Surely, this is a phenomenon that (as Senator Joseph Lieberman declared in accepting the vice-presidential nomination of the Democratic National Party in 2000) could happen only in America.²³

In his final Will and Testament, a wealthy New Orleans businessman named Judah Touro (1775–1854) left what was at the time one of this country's most impressive philanthropic bequests. He returned the favor of Mr. Franklin's modest contribution to Mickve Israel by bequeathing large donations to an array of Christian philanthropies along with money to benefit his own people. Touro was one of many Jews who had no hesitation identifying with the humanitarian efforts of non-Jewish philanthropies.²⁴

Nearly one hundred years after Touro's death, President Harry S Truman had a good friend named Edward (Eddie) Jacobson (1891–1955). Jacobson and Truman worked together long before the latter entered politics. This personal friendship was a camaraderie based on affection, and the bond may very well have affected the course of Jewish history in the twentieth century. It was Jacobson, the Jewish haberdasher, who prodded his old buddy and former business partner, the president of the United States, to agree to an important face-to-face meeting with Zionist leader Chaim Weiz-

mann (1874–1952) against the better judgment of many of Truman’s advisors. Evidently, Jacobson won the day by comparing Weizmann to one of the president’s personal heroes: Andrew Jackson! In any event, many have argued that this meeting proved to be an important factor in the political intrigue that led President Truman to recognize the newly declared State of Israel promptly.²⁵

This is not to say that anti-Semitism has never manifested itself on these shores. We have already noted that Peter Stuyvesant may very well have been the first of an endless array of North American bigots who have found Jews to be miserable blemishes on the nation’s winsome complexion.²⁶ Even the optimistically inclined Jacob Marcus observed that America’s anti-Semitic paroxysms—especially those that compounded (as it were) the Holocaust’s inhumanity—have deeply dishonored this country’s glory:

Poor Uncle Sam!...; in 1943 when he finally reached Central Europe, the good citizens of German cremated him. The Messiah did not die alone; Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln perished with him. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the Congress, the State Department held life and death in their hands; they chose death.²⁷

All this is true and valid. Nevertheless, no history of the American Jewish experience can possibly contain a litany of oppression and heartache, because the predominant features of Jewish life in the American nation have been social acceptance, equal footing, civil liberty, and religious freedom. American anti-Semitism—in its various manifestations—has essentially been an Old World curio. In contrast to Europe, the fundamental story of the Jew in the United States cannot be described by the phrase “a people apart (from the nation),” but rather “a people, a part (of the nation).” Some historians have even asserted that American society’s disposition to Jews has been characterized largely by philo-Semitism.²⁸ The depth and breadth of Jewish social integration and cultural influence in the United States literally have no parallel in any other Jewish community in the Diaspora.²⁹

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There is, however, a dark side to the benevolent political and social conditions that have been sketched above. Although Jews have flourished unquestionably under these favorable and unique

American circumstances, many have pointed out that the same cannot be said of American Judaism. In America, equality, pluralism, and unfettered familiarization seem inevitably to lead Jewry toward acculturation, assimilation and, ultimately, to complete dissipation. The consequences of Jewish assimilation in America threaten the corporate survival of Jewish life.

Gloomy prognostications about the survivability of American Judaism are as old as the American Republic. In a letter to family members still living in Posen, the best-known Jewish financier of the American Revolution, Haym Salomon (1740–1785), noted that there was “*wenig Yiddishkeit*” (very little Judaism) in America.³⁰ One hundred and fifty-three years ago, in 1846, a newly arrived immigrant named Isaac Mayer Wise (1819–1900) reflected on the prospects for Jewish life in America:

There were only three men in private life who possessed any Jewish or Talmudical learning... Otherwise, ignorance swayed the scepter [and] darkness ruled. And when I comprehended the real position of affairs, I understood why two physicians had advised me to have nothing to do with the Jews... and I began to waver in my intentions of pursuing a rabbinical career.³¹

Three decades later, in 1872, another pessimistic American Israelite named W. M. Rosenblatt wrote an article entitled “The Jews: What They Are Coming To?” Lamenting what he called “the [nonchalant] sentiments of the rising generation on the subject of intermarrying and circumcision,” Rosenblatt predicted that “within fifty years,” Jewish life in America would be defunct and the only remnant would be “the history of their perils.”³²

Even though the mass migration of East European Jewry to the United States in the last decades of the nineteenth century made Mr. Rosenblatt a false prophet, post-World War II assimilation has intensified levels of anxiety over the future viability of American Judaism. In 1964, Thomas B. Morgan’s now famous cover story in *Look* magazine suggested that, by the onset of the twenty-first century, American Jewry might very well become a guttering communal flame.³³ The title of Morgan’s article provoked widespread alarm, and American Jews have been worried about “The Vanishing American Jew” ever since. After 350 years of American Jewish history, we continue to pose American Jewry’s perennial question about its ultimate durability: can the American Jew

survive and thrive in a friendly Diaspora, in this land of equal rights and social integration?³⁴

The answer to this enduring concern brings us to a third noteworthy American Jewish legacy. American Judaism, with its seemingly open-door reception to voluntary annihilation, has managed for more than three and a half centuries to position itself in a remarkable state of suspended animation between the universal and the particular, between accommodation and resistance to acculturation, between being just like everyone else and being just different enough to ensure the continuation of a uniquely Jewish experience in the midst of a host environment that has been so overwhelmingly embracing. How has this come to be?

At least a partial answer to this question may be traced to the fact that, in every generation of this nation's history, there arose a cadre of Jewish individuals who were ardently, even fanatically committed to sustaining Jewish life amidst the most challenging conditions. When the *St. Catrina* landed in New Amsterdam, the Jews on board must have been surprised and pleased to learn that one of the Amsterdam Jews who had arrived in the colony a few weeks earlier had actually carried a *Sefer Torah* with him to the Dutch colony. Common sense dictates that the Jew who carried this Torah across the Atlantic to a remote and roughhewn colony did so for a reason. It seems logical to assume that this man wanted to pray as a Jew and to preserve his Jewish heritage in New Amsterdam.³⁵

In the early decades of the eighteenth century, a Jewish congregation was founded in New York. It was called Shearith Israel, "The remnant of Israel." Nearly forty years before the American Revolution, Shearith Israel established the very first Jewish day school on these shores. Even in the boondocks, an ocean away from the security and convenience of a major center of Jewish life, we find American Jews striving to provide their children with a Jewish education.³⁶

In 1838, a quintessentially American approach to Jewish education was launched by a Philadelphian named Rebecca Gratz (1781–1869). This pioneering female educator was a pious and dedicated Jew. She surmised that the novel Sunday School concept that Christians were using with dawning success could be refitted for effectual use by American Jewry. Shortly thereafter, a highly regarded poet, Penina Moïse (1797–1880), replicated Gratz's Sunday School innovations at Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim in Charleston. At the same time, Gratz, Moïse, and many other American Jews lamented the

complete absence of educational texts that could be used to instruct Jewish learners. Isaac Leeser (1806–1868), this nation’s most outstanding proponent of traditional Judaism during the nineteenth century, provided American Jewry with its first English translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. He also founded the Jewish Publication Society (JPS) in 1845, and though the JPS would have two abortive starts before it would be permanently established in America, Leeser understood that the Jewish community needed access to suitable pedagogic resources in order for meaningful Jewish learning to occur in this country.³⁷

Early in the twentieth century, Samson Benderly (1876–1944) and a circle of his distinguished disciples applied the modern educational strategies of the Progressive Era—what was at the time called “new psychology”—to the needs of Jewish learning in America. These modern Jewish educators opened a new chapter in the history of Jewish education in this country. Their efforts resulted in the creation of a nationwide network of educational bureaus, camps, innovative curricula, teacher training, and so forth. This host of educational innovations provided American Jewry with trail-blazing forms of Jewish learning that, eventually, were exported to Jewish communities around the globe.³⁸

Isaac Mayer Wise stands out as the most vocal nineteenth-century advocate of an indigenous strategy for American Jewish education. From his first days in America, Wise began to agitate for the establishment of a school by which American-born men (and women!) could prepare themselves to teach Judaism. Wise invested a lifetime of energy into this vision, which was realized in the creation of the Hebrew Union College (HUC) in 1875.³⁹

Along the way, Wise encountered many critics. Some insisted that American Jewry lacked the intellectual resources needed to produce qualified rabbis. How could a small, ill-equipped religious school in Cincinnati compete with the great rabbinical schools of Europe? What American congregation, they asked, would select an HUC ordinee if it could have an ordinee who studied at one of the great talmudic centers in Lithuania or Belorussia? What congregation would want to engage a graduate of such a fledgling school when men trained in Eishishok, Minsk, Vilna Volozhin, Slobodka, Telz, Lomza, Radzyn, Novogrudok, Slutsk, Malch, and Bryansk were available? Yet Wise never wavered in his primary conviction: if American Jewry was to flourish, it would need to produce its own

indigenous supply of American rabbis, educators, and communal workers.⁴⁰

Had Wise given up on his idea and had the Hebrew Union College never come into existence, consider how that decision would have affected the subsequent history of American Jewish life. American Jewry never would have known the school's first four rabbinical graduates—Israel Aaron (1860–1912), the founder of Buffalo's Zion House, a pioneering center for the settlement of East European immigrants; Henry Berkowitz (1857–1924), the founder of the Jewish Chautauqua Society in 1893; Joseph Krauskopf (1858–1923), the founder of the National Jewish Farm School (today known as the Delaware Valley College); and David Philipson (1862–1949), pioneering historian and author.⁴¹

It is also vitally important to note that when HUC opened in 1875, a young woman named Julia Ettlinger studied together with the school's male students. Though she did not complete the course of study (she left after the first year), she did play a role in blazing a trail that ultimately led to the ordination of women rabbis. It is beyond the scope of this essay to describe the extraordinarily important role that women rabbis are playing in revitalizing and advancing Jewish life and learning in America. Their story, too, is uniquely American, and the remarkably important contributions that American Jewish women have made over the course of 350 years of American Jewish history constitute a story that we have only just begun to recover.⁴²

American Jewry's relentless determination to provide indigenous institutions of learning that are uniquely suited to educate another generation in Jewish letters is a third significant theme that reverberates through the annals of American Jewish history.

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In Hebrew, the number 350 may be written with the letters ΓPSY . In English, the trilateral root of the Hebrew ΓPSY ($\Gamma\text{-P-S}$) can mean "to tell" or "to count." The lesson in this happenstance is that, in and of themselves, dates and historical anniversaries have no intrinsic or self-evident significance. They acquire significance when they prompt us to engage in historical analysis. This is precisely what Dr. Marcus meant when he wrote: "Interpretation of facts is imperative, for history is the precipitate of interpretation."⁴³

The 350th anniversary of the establishment of Jewish communal life in North America becomes significant when it motivates us to examine the past and gain perspective from it. An interpretive *retell-*

ing or recounting of events past inevitably leads to a greater appreciation of those who occupied our space in years gone by. They were people with dreams and hopes and visions. Some of these forebears dedicated their lives to the advancement of Jewish life in the American nation. Today, we are inheritors of all that has been bequeathed to us. However, it is important to bear in mind Goethe's familiar admonition: "What you have inherited from your forebears, you must earn for yourself before you can really call it yours."⁴⁴

"Jews glory in their survival," Marcus often observed, "they refuse to disappear." Undoubtedly, his views on this subject were influenced by the Jewish historians he studied—men such as Nachman Krochmal (1785–1840), Isaac Marcus Jost (1793–1860), Heinrich Graetz (1817–1891), and Simon Dubnow (1860–1941)—all of whom believed in the Jewish people's immortality. Marcus was dogged in his insistence that the study of the past maximized the likelihood that Jews would become "proud exponents of the best in our Jewish heritage." Historical cognizance would kindle a spark of pride that, in turn, would ignite a renaissance in American Jewish life: "Oh, that we could realize... our debt to the past; the debt we owe of continuing the great work that has been going on for the past three thousand years."⁴⁵

This, then, is a transcendent motivation for using the 350th anniversary of Jewish communal settlement in North America to examine critically the character of the American Jewish experience. If we successfully preserve the past and convey its meaning to our peers, we will ultimately succeed in safeguarding our future.

Notes

1. On the history of the Jewish community in New Amsterdam, see Jacob Rader Marcus, *The Colonial American Jew, 1492–1776* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970), 215–16, and passim; Samuel Oppenheim, "The Early History of the Jews in New York, 1654–1664," in *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, vol. 32 (1909), 37–43; Arnold Wiznitzer, "The Exodus from Brazil to New Amsterdam of the Jewish Pilgrim Fathers 1654," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, vol. 44 (1954), 88, 90.
2. Egon and Frieda Wolff, "The Problem of the First Jewish Settlers in New Amsterdam 1654," *Studia Rosenthaliana*, vol. 15 (August 1981), 176–77; and Leo Hershkowitz, "New Amsterdam's Twenty-Three Jews – Myth or Reality," in Shalom Goldman, ed., *Hebrew and the Bible*

- in America* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1993), 172–73. See idem, *By Chance or Choice: Jews in New Amsterdam 1654*, located in The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.
3. On the beginnings of American Jewish history, see Robert Liberles, “Postemancipation Historiography and the Jewish Historical Societies of America and England,” in *Reshaping the Past: Jewish History and the Historians* (Studies in Contemporary Jewry, vol. 10), Jonathan Frankel, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 186–204. The “Executive Committee” for celebrating the 250th anniversary of Jewish Settlement in America published a volume on the occasion. See, *The Two Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary of Jews in the United States: Addresses Delivered at Carnegie Hall, New York, on Thanksgiving Day MCMV Together with Other Selected Addresses and Proceedings* (New York: The New York Co-operative Society, 1906).
 4. Arthur A. Goren, “A ‘Golden Decade’ for American Jews: 1945–1955,” in *The Politics and Public Culture of American Jews* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 186–204.
 5. See Jonathan D. Sarna, “The Impact of Nineteenth-Century Christian Missions on American Jews,” in *Jewish Apostasy in the Modern World*, ed. Todd M. Endelman (New York, 1987), 239; on the “slow and gradual development” of political equality for the Jew in the United States, see Stanley F. Chyet, “The Political Rights of the Jews in the United States: 1776–1840,” in *American Jewish Archives*, vol. 10 (April 1958), 14–75; Oscar and Mary F. Handlin, “The Acquisition of Political and Social Rights by the Jews in the United States,” *American Jewish Year Book* 56 (1955), 43–98; and Jacob Rader Marcus, “Three Hundred Years in America,” in Gary Phillip Zola (ed.), *The Dynamics of American Jewish History: Jacob Rader Marcus’s Essays on American Jewry* (Hanover, N.H.: Brandeis University Press, 2004), 125–26.
 6. Some argued that Asser Levy arrived with the Recife refugees on the *St. Catrina*. See Morris U. Schappes (ed.), *A Documentary History of the Jews in the United States, 1654–1875* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971). Historian Leo Hershkowitz disputes this contention, claiming that Levy came to New Amsterdam on a Fluyt called the *Peachtree* (*Peereboom*), which left Amsterdam on July 8, 1654. See idem, *By Chance or Choice: Jews in New Amsterdam 1654*, located in The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio. For additional background on Asser Levy, see Maurits Prins, “Asser Levy,” *Judaism*, vol. 41, no. 4 (1992), 395–400; Leo Hershkowitz, “Asser Levy and the Inventories of Early New York Jews,” *American Jewish History* vol. 80, no. 1 (1990), 21–55; and Malcolm H. Stern, “Asser Levy: A New Look at Our Jewish Founding Father,” *American Jewish Archives*, vol. 26 (1974), 66–77.
 7. Jonathan Israel, “The Republic of the United Netherlands until 1750: Demography and Economic Activity,” *The History of the Jews in the Netherlands*, edited by J. C. H. Blom, R. G. Fuks-Mansfeld, and I.

- Schöffner (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2002), 85–115.
8. Directors of the Dutch West India Company to Peter Stuyvesant, 26 April 1655, in Schappes, 4–5.
 9. Jacob Rader Marcus, *The Jew in the American World: A Source Book* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996), 164–65.
 10. On Levy, see L. Huhner, *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, vol. 8 (1900), 9–23; and Schappes, 1–13.
 11. Schappes, 15–16. Jacob Rader Marcus, *The Colonial American Jew: 1492–1776*, vol. 2 (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970), 247.
 12. Leo Pfeffer, “Jews and Jewry in American Constitutional History,” in *Jews, Judaism and the Constitution* (Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 1982), 21–34.
 13. Schappes, 122–24.
 14. On Grant’s Order No. 11, see Bertram W. Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1951), 121–55.
 15. *Ibid.*, 124.
 16. *Ibid.*, 124–25.
 17. Egal Feldman, *Dual Destinies: the Jewish Encounter with Protestant America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990).
 18. David Vital’s recent tome titled *A People Apart: A Political History of the Jews in Europe, 1789–1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) powerfully drives this point home.
 19. For Harby’s famous quote, see Joseph L. Blau and Salo W. Baron (eds.), *The Jews of the United States 1790–1840: A Documentary History*, vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press), 318–22.
 20. Abraham J. Karp, *Haven and Home: A History of the Jews in America* (New York: Schocken Books, 1985).
 21. Howard M. Sachar, *A History of the Jews in America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 32. On Cohen, see Edwin Wolf 2nd and Maxwell Whiteman, *The History of the Jews of Philadelphia from Colonial Times to the Age of Jackson* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1975), s.v. index.
 22. Jacob Rader Marcus, *Memoirs of American Jews, 1776–1865* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1955), I, 203.
 23. Jacob Rader Marcus (ed.), *The Jew in the American World* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996), 105, 107–8.
 24. Schappes, 333–41.
 25. Edward Jacobson, “Two Presidents and a Haberdasher – 1948,” in *American Jewish Archives*, vol. 20 (1968), 3–15.
 26. Leonard Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).
 27. Jacob Rader Marcus, “Testament,” as quoted in Gary Phillip Zola (ed.), *The Dynamics of American Jewish History*, 148.

28. Malcolm H. Stern stressed this important point in his article "The 1820's: American Jewry Comes of Age," in Bertram W. Korn (ed.), *A Bicentennial Festschrift for Jacob Rader Marcus* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1976), 539–49. See also Harry Golden, *Jewish Roots in the Carolinas; A Pattern of American Philo-Semitism* (Greensboro, N.C.: Deal Printing Company, 1955).
29. Jacob Rader Marcus, *United States Jewry, 1776–1985*, vol. 4 (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), 776–68.
30. Arthur Hertzberg, *The Jews in America: Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter: A History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 55.
31. Isaac Mayer Wise, *Reminiscences* (Cincinnati: Leo Wise & Company, 1901), 21, 24.
32. W. M. Rosenblatt, "The Jews: What They are Coming To," in *The Galaxy* (January 1872), 47–60.
33. *Look*, May 5, 1964.
34. In the wake of the Council of Jewish Federations' (CJF) *Jewish Population Study* of 1990, ominous essays peppered the pages of the Anglo-Jewish press and a cornucopia of books with the grimmest of prospects appeared. Most of these books bespeak their perspective in the title: Alan Dershowitz's volume, *The Vanishing American Jew: In Search of Jewish Identity for the Next Century* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1997); writer Anne Roiphe's *Generation Without Memory*, Rabbi David Forman's *Israel — On Broadway; America — Off Broadway*, and former statesman Elliott Abrams' book entitled *Faith or Fear: How Jews Can Survive in a Christian America* (New York: Free Press, 1997).
35. Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2004), 10.
36. David de Sola Pool and Tamar de Sola Pool, *An Old Faith in the New World; Portrait of Shearith Israel, 1654–1954* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955); and David de Sola Pool, *Portraits Etched in Stone: Early Jewish Settlers, 1682–1831* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952).
37. On Gratz, see Dianne Ashton, *Rebecca Gratz: Women and Judaism in Antebellum America* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997); on Moïse, see Solomon Breibart, "Penina Moïse, Southern Jewish Poetess," in Samuel Proctor, Louis Schmier, and Malcolm H. Stern, *Jews of the South: Selected Essays from the Southern Jewish Historical Society* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1984), 31–43; on Leeser, see Lance Jonathan Sussman, *Isaac Leeser and the Making of American Judaism*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995); on the Jewish Publication Society of America, see Jonathan D. Sarna, *JPS—The Americanization of Jewish Culture, 1888–1988* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1989).
38. Lloyd P. Gartner, *Jewish Education in the United States: A Documentary History* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1969); and Judah Pilch (ed.), *A History of Jewish Education in America* (New York: American

- Association for Jewish Education, 1969); on Benderly, see Nathan H. Winter, *Jewish Education in a Pluralist Society: Samson Benderly and Jewish Education in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 1966).
39. Michael A. Meyer, *Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion — A Centennial History, 1875–1975* (Cincinnati, Hebrew Union College Press: 1992).
 40. On Isaac M. Wise's career, see Sefton D. Temkin, *Isaac Mayer Wise, Shaping American Judaism* (Oxford, England: Published for the Littman Library by Oxford University Press, distributed in the United States by B'nai B'rith Book Service, 1992). See also Israel Knox, *Rabbi in America: The Story of Isaac M. Wise* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1957); Max B. May, *Isaac Mayer Wise: A Biography* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1916); and David Philipson and Louis Grossman (eds.), *Selected Writings of Isaac M. Wise* (Cincinnati: The Robert Clarke Company, 1900).
 41. On Aaron, see *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. Aaron, Israel; on Berkowitz, see Max E. Berkowitz, *The Beloved Rabbi* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1932); on Krauskopf, see William W. Blood, *Apostle of Reason: A Biography of Joseph Krauskopf* (Philadelphia: Dorrance, 1973); on Philipson, see Douglas J. Kohn, "The Dean of American Rabbis: A Critical Study of ... David Philipson" (Rabbinical Thesis, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1987).
 42. Gary Phillip Zola, *Women Rabbis: Exploration & Celebration: Papers Delivered at an Academic Conference Honoring Twenty Years of Women in the Rabbinate, 1972–1992* (Cincinnati: HUC-JIR Rabbinic Alumni Association Press, 1996).
 43. Jacob Rader Marcus, *The Colonial American Jew, 1492–1776*, 3 vols. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970), I, xxvi–xxvii.
 44. Goethe quote as cited in Rabbi Sidney Greenberg (ed.), *A Treasury of the Art of Living* (Hollywood, Calif.: Wilshire Book Company, 1963), 245.
 45. Jacob Rader Marcus, *The American Jew, 1585–1990: A History* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1995), 383; and idem, "America: The Spiritual Center of Jewry" and "Testament" as quoted in Zola, *Dynamics of American Jewish History*, 42 and 150.