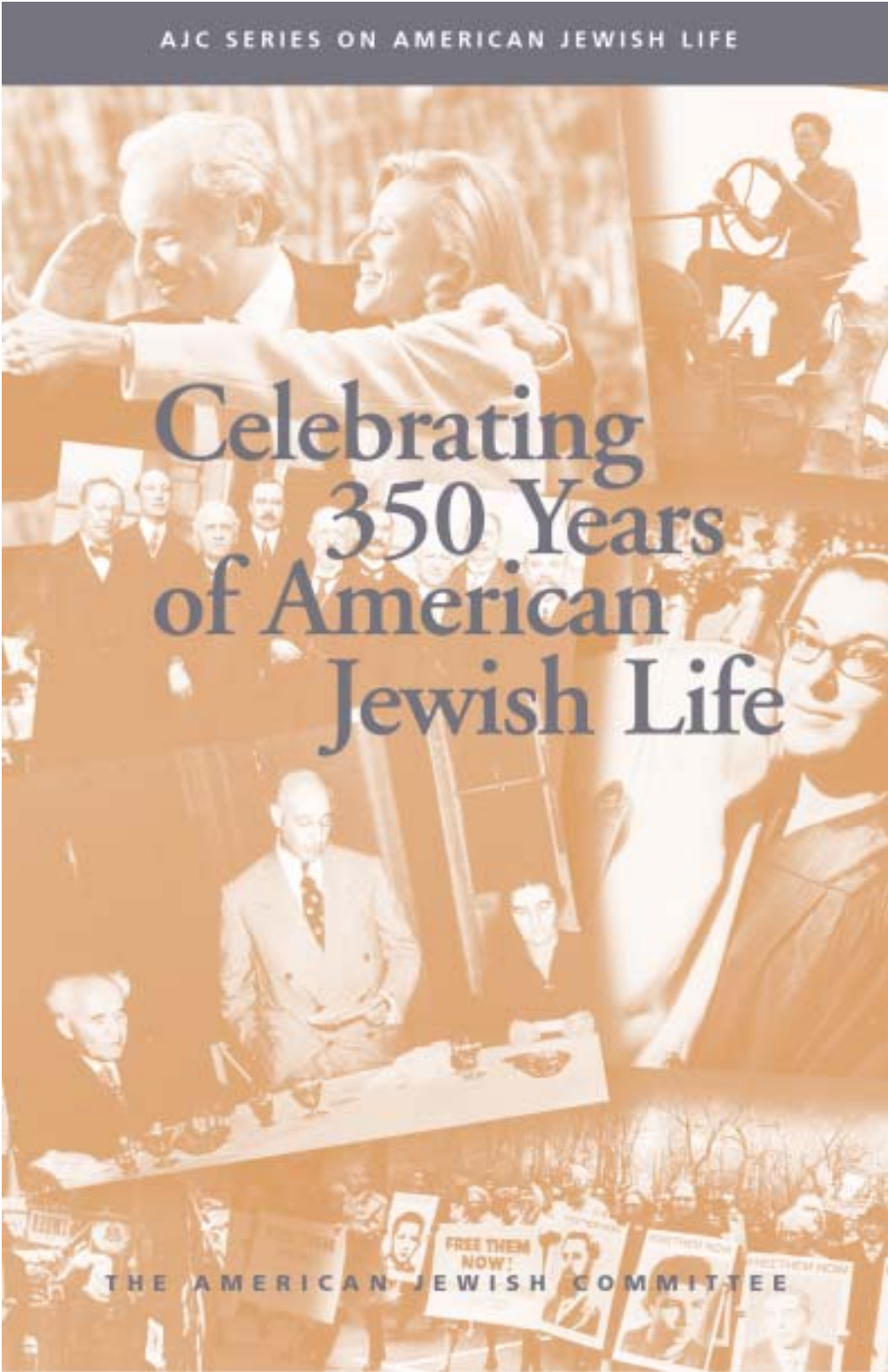


AJC SERIES ON AMERICAN JEWISH LIFE



Celebrating 350 Years of American Jewish Life

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

The American Jewish Committee protects the rights and freedoms of Jews the world over; combats bigotry and anti-Semitism and promotes human rights for all; works for the security of Israel and deepened understanding between Americans and Israelis; advocates public policy positions rooted in American democratic values and the perspectives of the Jewish heritage; and enhances the creative vitality of the Jewish people. Founded in 1906, it is the pioneer human-relations agency in the United States.

Celebrating 350 Years of American Jewish Life

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

Commission on Contemporary Jewish Life
Lynn Korda Kroll, Chair Steven Bayme, Director

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American Jewish Committee Statement Commemorating 350 Years of American Jewish History

May 9, 2003

September 2004 will mark the 350th anniversary of the first Jewish settlement in North America. With the clarity of hindsight we can see that the arrival in New Amsterdam of 23 Jews seeking asylum from the Inquisition in Brazil was the first page of an extraordinary new chapter in the annals of the Jewish people. The reception of that first handful and of the millions who were to follow them plainly constitutes a deliverance that calls for celebration and thanksgiving. The 250th and 300th anniversaries were celebrated in 1904 and 1954, respectively, by Jews and Jewish institutions across the country. On the occasion of the 350th anniversary we must do no less.

The AJC now commits itself to active participation in the observance of 350 years of American Jewish history. In doing so we recognize:

- Our need to reaffirm the reverence for justice, freedom, equality and pluralism that have made America the haven it has been for us and for all Americans;
- Our commitment to sustaining America's role as the champion of freedom and democracy throughout the world;
- Our obligation to recognize what American Jewry has achieved over three and a half centuries and to consider and dedicate ourselves to the tasks that lie before us in the century ahead;
- Our duty to give thanks for having been sustained and enabled to reach this anniversary.

The Board of Governors of the American Jewish Committee therefore declares the commemoration of 350 years of American Jewish history an agency priority for the 2004-2005 program year. It calls upon all the departments, commissions, committees, and chapters of the AJC to cooperate in planning and carrying out appropriate programs and events both within AJC and in coordination with other organizations, both Jewish and non-Jewish, at the national, state and local levels.

History, Memory, and Jewish Identity

Robert S. Rifkind

In the summer of 1947, testifying before the UN Commission Regarding the Partition of Palestine, David Ben-Gurion spoke as follows:

About 300 years ago a ship named the *Mayflower* set sail to the New World. It was an important event in the annals of England and America, yet I wonder if there is even one Englishman who knows exactly when that ship set sail, and how many Americans know how many people were on that ship? And what type of bread did they eat when they left England? Yet more than 3,300 years ago, before the *Mayflower* set sail, the Jews left Egypt. And every Jew in the world ... knows exactly on what day they left: They left on the 15th of Nisan. And everyone knows what kind of bread they ate: They ate matzo. And until today Jews all over the world eat matzo on the 15th of Nisan ... and recount the Exodus.... That is the nature of the Jews.

Now Ben-Gurion was using history transmuted by memory to make a particular point about the nature of Jewish commitment, but surely his little homily also illustrates a larger point: History is for us the mine from which we extract meaning, and attention to the meaning of our past has been the glue that binds us together as a people. The memory of our collective experience and the meaning we find in it provide the warp and woof wherefrom we weave the tapestry of Jewish civilization generation after generation. It is not an incidental embellishment of Jewish identity. It is of the very core. Conversely, the failure of memory—historical amnesia, or ignorance of our past—is the greatest possible threat to identity and continuity.

Recognition of this truth strongly suggests the considerations that prompted Harold Tanner last year to appoint a committee, of which I have the honor to be the chair, to consider the ways in which the American Jewish Committee might participate in the celebration of the 350th anniversary of the arrival of Jews in North America. This committee, which has been ably guided by Steve Bayme, has deliberated during the course of the year and today is pleased to present to this plenary session of the AJC's 97th Annual Meeting, the first fruits of its labor.

Let me state the bare facts. In 1654, some 23 Jews fleeing from the Inquisition arrived in the port of New Amsterdam on a small ship from Brazil. In New Amsterdam—the Dutch settlement that was to become New York—the refugees immediately got into a struggle with the governor general, Peter Stuyvesant, who was very reluctant to allow them to remain, the colony being poor and the Jews being poorer. Significantly, he soon came under a good deal of pressure from his masters in Amsterdam, who in turn were vigorously encouraged by the Jews of Amsterdam to permit the Jews to stay. Eventually, with ill-concealed reluctance, Stuyvesant agreed. Even as he did so, Stuyvesant admonished his masters in Amsterdam, with remarkable foresight, that if he admitted these Jews to the colony there would be no keeping out the Lutherans or the Papists. And there, in a nutshell, is the earliest demonstration of the great truth that all America's minorities have a powerful shared interest in an open, pluralist society. There, in this small transaction, one may see a forecast of the power of pluralism in American history, its profound significance for the Jewish community and, equally, the significant role of Jews in sustaining pluralism as the American norm.

In short, those long-ago events on the periphery of the world stage, minor though they must have seemed at the time, were in fact pregnant with consequence both for Jewry and for America. It is not surprising then that, with the wisdom of hindsight, the events of 1654 came to be regarded as the starting point of American Jewish history and, indeed, a major turning point in the long history of

the Jewish people. The 250th anniversary was duly celebrated under the leadership of Jacob Schiff in 1904-05, and in 1954 the AJC played a leading role in organizing the nationwide celebration of the 300th anniversary. Surely what was true in 1904 and in 1954 must be true in 2004: This community, which has through the course of time become the largest Jewish community in all history, cannot possibly ignore its past, cannot fail to celebrate its significant anniversaries, and must not fail to rededicate itself to the values that have sustained it. Not, at least, if we hope to have a communal future.

I am sure I needn't persuade this gathering of AJC leaders of the contributions of Jews to America or America to Jewry. The obvious fact is that those 23 original settlers established the first foothold for the millions that were to follow in one of the great migrations, perhaps the greatest migration, in the whole history of Jewry. The whole history of Jewry has been forever changed by that migration. It is an awesome thing to consider what would have happened if there had been no migration to America. It is awesome to consider where we would be today—or, indeed, whether we or our brethren in the Diaspora or in Israel would exist today, but for the chain of events which we trace back to September 1654. That sense of awe or, if you will, the hand of Providence, calls for communal recognition.

Against that background, our committee recommends to you that, notwithstanding the many demands on the time and resources of the American Jewish Committee, we make the celebration of the 350th anniversary of Jewish life in America a significant institutional priority during the year 2004, and that we spend some time thinking about how we should proceed and preparing for it.

*Remarks at a plenary session of the Annual Meeting
of the American Jewish Committee
May 7, 2003*

Historical Memory and Jewish Identity: 350 Years of American Jewish History: What Do They Mean?

Jonathan D. Sarna

It is a great pleasure to be here: A privilege like this comes but once in 350 years! Robert Rifkind has already set forth some of the planning that has gone into the 350th. He has *not* told you that he personally played an absolutely central role in ensuring that there would be a 350th anniversary celebration of American Jewish life. Back in 1954, the American Jewish Committee as a whole played a lead role in what was known at that time as the American Jewish tercentenary—300 years of American Jewish life—and on the committee that planned that event sat, among many other AJC notables, Judge Simon H. Rifkind. Fifty years later we see the family tradition continuing.

What We Are Commemorating at the 350th

The question I think many are asking today is what really are we commemorating in 2004? Why bother about something that happened 350 years ago? The simple answer is that we are commemorating the arrival in New Amsterdam of a small boatload of Jewish refugees from Recife, Brazil: “Twenty-three souls big and little”—an old record relates. Some have now disputed that precise number, but nobody can dispute that they were all impoverished refugees. Jews (and, by the way, Protestants too) had to leave Recife, after the Portuguese recaptured it from the more tolerant Dutch. All alike

were given three months to leave, and the Jews were wise enough to take the hint.

Today we know that these refugees were not really the first Jews to set foot on North American soil. (Historian Jacob Rader Marcus used to say that nobody is *ever* the first Jew anywhere. There is always another Jew who was there before.) In the American case, we now know that one of those who came before was a metallurgist named Joachim Gaunse, who came to the settlement of Roanoke Island in 1585. (See *Timeline*, page 24.) Then he went back to England, questioned the historicity of the Virgin Mary, was thrown into prison, and never was heard from again. There were also a few other intrepid Jewish traders who stopped in briefly at various colonial ports in the intervening years, especially in the early 1650s. But September 1654 is nevertheless an appropriate date for us to commemorate, for the refugees from Recife who landed in New Amsterdam came to settle permanently; theirs was not just a one-night stand in some harborside inn.

The year 1654 marks the beginning of Jewish communal life in North America. These early Jews overcame a series of legal and political obstacles, including opposition from the colony's governor, Peter Stuyvesant. With help from the Jewish community back in Amsterdam, they won the right to set down roots in New Amsterdam—specifically the right to “travel,” “trade,” “live,” and “remain,” provided that “the poor among them shall not become a burden to the company or to the community, but be supported by their own nation.”

The Role of Jews in American Pluralism

The story of early American Jewry reflects some very important themes that should continue to concern us. From the very beginning, for example, the fate of Jews in America was tied in with that of other religious dissenters. “Giving them [Jews] liberty,” Peter Stuyvesant wrote, “we cannot refuse the Lutherans and the Papists.” The decision about admitting Jews to New Amsterdam was, at the

deepest level, a decision about the social and religious character of New Amsterdam. Because the Jews and the Lutherans and the Papists (meaning the Catholics) did eventually receive liberty, New York became, as we know, a multireligious, multiethnic, and multilingual community—and so, eventually, did the nation as a whole. Small as they were in number, Jews played an important part in that early story and have remained part of the story of pluralism and tolerance in this country ever since. AJC has played a vital role in this area for almost a full century.

No less important a theme from 1654 is the fact that the Dutch authorities, forced to choose between their economic interests and their religious sensibilities, voted with their pocketbooks in allowing Jews to remain—a significant sign of modernity. The “usefulness” of Jews, that they might help to enrich the colonies, proved far more important to the Dutch than that they were not Christians. The Dutch West India Company was worried that a heavy-handed and restrictive colonial policy would diminish the population, discourage immigration, and scare off investors. Its advice to Stuyvesant in 1663 might profitably be studied by some of our politicians and religious leaders today. “Shut your eyes, at least [do] not force people’s consciences,” the company wrote, “but allow everyone to have his own belief, as long as he behaves quietly and legally, gives no offense to his neighbor and does not oppose the government.”

In short, 1654, viewed in its proper perspective, is truly an important historical milestone. It serves as a jumping-off point for recalling and exploring a whole range of significant themes, many of which are still highly relevant today.

Why American Jewish History Matters

Of course, the 350th anniversary of American Jewish life should not exclusively focus on 1654. We have, after all, come a long way from those initial Jews from Recife. My hope is that we will celebrate, commemorate, and investigate all aspects of American Jewish life in 2004-05: heroes and villains, time-tested themes and neglect-

ed ones. The 350th anniversary should mark a serious educational and intellectual milestone in American Jewish life: a time to learn from our past, reflect upon our present, and shape our agenda for the future.

In looking at my son's high school history textbook recently—it includes, by the way, next to nothing on American Jewish history, and that is true of almost all American history textbooks in this country—I was nevertheless interested to see that each chapter in the book ends with a section entitled “Why it matters.” That, I think, is a good question for us to ask as well. Why should we care about these events? Why should we ask others to care about them? Why should we still consider our history important and relevant?

This is not the occasion for a full-scale exploration of this theme, but one point is critically important. Both Jews and non-Jews today tend to view Jewish history in tragic or lachrymose terms. When people think of the history of the Jews, they think of persecution, expulsion, tragedy, mass-murder, and now terror. The magnificent and highly popular Holocaust Museum in Washington reinforces that somber view of our past, as does every incident of Middle East violence.

Why American Jewish History Is the Exception

American Jewish history stands as the great exception to this melancholy story. Without downplaying the history of anti-Semitism here—and we shouldn't downplay it—the fact remains that persecution, expulsion, tragedy, and mass murder are *not* the central themes of American Jewish life and never have been. Instead, American Jewish history offers us the opportunity to explore how Jews have flourished in a free and pluralistic society where church and state are separated and where religion is entirely voluntary. If there is a central theme to American Jewish history, it is the story of how Judaism and Jewish life have been transformed by freedom; that, in fact, will be the central theme of the forthcoming National Museum of American Jewish History being built in Philadelphia, just opposite (appropriately enough) the Liberty Bell. Freedom, of

course, is not an unmixed blessing.

Freedom carries with it significant perils to Judaism and Jewish life. Some minority groups in America—think of the French Huguenots—have literally been loved to death in this country, intermarrying out of existence, and that danger threatens us too. We worry about it; our Armenian and Greek Orthodox neighbors worry about it; all endangered minority groups in this country worry about it. But even with this fear, American Jewish history necessarily challenges the standard narrative of persecutions and expulsions—what one wag summarized as “they tried to destroy us, God saved us, let’s eat”—and encourages us to explore an entirely different set of questions which emerge, unsurprisingly, from the central themes of American life: freedom, diversity, and church-state separation.

There are many other reasons as well for studying American Jewish history. The American Jewish Committee and Temple University’s Feinstein Center a few years ago published *Moving Beyond Haym Solomon: The Teaching of American Jewish History*, forty-four thoughtful pages on this subject, reminding us, for example, that American Jewish history contextualizes contemporary challenges facing American Jews. It helps American Jews understand where they are by showing them where they have been and allows them better to appreciate what sets them apart both as Americans and as Jews. It helps Jews find the links between their own history and the history of the Jewish people as a whole. It provides Jews with a master story that unites them both vertically with their ancestors in previous eras and horizontally with Jews who live in other communities. It makes Jews appreciate that they are part of something much larger than themselves and creates a shared sense of community. The writer Nessa Rapoport adds that our obligations are really to posterity. Our job is “to translate and explain what has come before us to those who will carry it on after us.”

Another writer, the great Norwegian novelist Ole Edvaart Rolvaag, once wrote that “when a people becomes interested in its past life [and] seeks to acquire knowledge in order to better under-

stand itself, it always experiences an awakening of new life.” The 350th anniversary of American Jewish life provides us with a welcome opportunity to profit from Rolvaag’s keen insight. To study the history of American Judaism is, among many other things, to be reminded anew of the theme of human potential, in our case, the ability of American Jews—young and old, men and women alike—to change the course of history and transform a piece of the world. American Jewish history is, after all, not just a record of events; it is the story of how people *shaped* events—establishing and maintaining communities, responding to challenges, working for change. That is perhaps the greatest lesson of all that American Jewish history can offer us: the lesson that we too can make a difference, that the future is ours to create.

Celebrating the 350th Anniversary

By Paula Hyman

For a historian who specialized initially in the history of European Jewry, it is easy to dwell on the exceptionalism of America. In fact, American Jews are probably the group most aware of how different, and how much more welcoming, America has been in contrast to Europe. Most American historians have backed away from the argument of American exceptionalism, but scholars of American Jewish history still affirm that America provided Jews with opportunities that were unparalleled in Europe. We are justified in celebrating our history in America.

How American Jewry Differed from European

We remember that Jews achieved civic equality in many of the American colonies and in the newly founded United States before the first emancipation decree was signed in Europe. Jews shared the rights of all individuals of diverse origin who had settled in the American colonies. In Europe, emancipation occurred first in France in 1790, soon after the founding of the United States, but the prosperous, acculturated Jews of Austria and Germany had to wait until 1867 and 1871 respectively for that privilege. And Jews achieved a level of social acceptance in America that was unheard of in European societies.

Europe in the eighteenth century was heir to a governmentally supported compulsory Jewish community, to which all Jews owed not only allegiance, but also taxes. The American Jewish community has always been voluntary. Jews in America were free to affiliate with a synagogue or not. They chose, and continue to choose, just

how much, or how little, community they were willing to accept and to fund. It is clear that most Jews seek a Jewish communal affiliation that will not interfere with their integration into American society.

The place of religion in American society and the separation of church and state in the United States have also allowed American Jewry to create a peculiarly American panoply of Jewish religious expressions. It is easy to see that the separation of church and state legitimated Judaism as one of America's many religions and prevented the imposition of Christian ritual upon Jews. The separation of church and state also prevented the government, as was often the case in Europe, from interfering in internal debates about the authenticity of various types of Judaism. Whether the separation of church and state remains a fundamental aspect of American Jewish civil religion, and what are the implications of a relaxation of that doctrine, are central questions for American Jews to consider in this anniversary year.

The importance of religion in American society—from colonial days to our own time—has also influenced American Jews to remain engaged with Judaism as the most legitimate aspect of their particularist identity. Even in this age of multiculturalism, secular ethnicity as a basis for identity has no proven record of transmissibility. As we consider the distinctiveness of American Jewry, we should celebrate the religious creativity and pluralism that characterizes the American Jewish community, and particularly the openness to gender egalitarianism, even if it violates our simplistic slogan that “we are one.” We are diverse and fragmented, and that is one source of our strength.

Anti-Semitism in America: A Muted but Crucial Phenomenon

We have been most fortunate that anti-Semitism has not become the cultural code for opposition to modernity that it did in Europe beginning in the late nineteenth century. Most significantly, American political elites have disavowed anti-Semitism with greater

alacrity than ever occurred in Europe. President Abraham Lincoln's abrogation of General Ulysses Grant's Order Number Eleven, which tarred all Jews under his control with profiteering during the Civil War, reassured American Jews that anti-Semitism would not be tolerated by American political leaders. For anyone familiar with the doctrines and popularity of anti-Semitism in modern Europe, American anti-Semitism in fact appears both modest and marginal.

Yet one political scientist, Benjamin Ginsberg, who has written a smart book on anti-Semitism entitled *The Fatal Embrace: Jews and the State*, has argued that despite the muted appearance of anti-Semitism in American history, America is not exceptional in this regard. As in Europe, anti-Semitism has served as a tool for those who reject the modern state and its economic policies, such as industrial capitalism, with which Jews have been identified and under which they have flourished.

Anti-Semitism became most widespread in America in the late nineteenth century when popular resentment of urbanization and industrialization reached its height. Anti-Semitism in America was largely confined to social discrimination, as Ginsberg argues, not because America was exceptional or because American liberalism was so tolerant but because capitalist political forces in America were so strong that they were able to deflect resentment against themselves onto the Jews without promoting political anti-Semitism. Marginalizing the Jews socially was sufficient. Anti-Semitism thus became an important means of elite formation; the American elite was defined through its exclusion of economically successful Jews. Jewishness became a marker of social unacceptability. This social marginalization continued and intensified when Jews of East European immigrant origin, stigmatized by their "cultural inferiority" and later by their identification with communism, attempted to enter the elite through their business success and through their educational achievements. American Jews, we should remember, experienced decades of social marginalization, residential restriction, and discrimination that essentially came to an end only in the 1960s.

Why have I paid so much attention to a phenomenon that I define as marginal in the experience of American Jews? Partly because the perception of anti-Semitism was crucial in the formation of American Jewish political values and strategies. And largely because our certainty of the marginality of anti-Semitism in American society has been challenged in the past few years, when anti-Semitic statements, often expressed in terms of extreme anti-Zionism, have become acceptable in public discourse, as they were not a decade ago. Or when Jewish concerns with group survival are dismissed as an expression of racism. Or when wild conspiracy theories are embraced by people who should know better. Paying close attention to the conditions that have led historically to the eruption of anti-Semitism and to the conditions that have fostered its cultural and political suppression is a vital part of our contemporary self-understanding. It is also essential in planning effective communal self-defense and self-presentation and in linking the Jewish experience in America to America's commitment to its highest ideals. Indeed, the contribution of Jews to American culture has often consisted of offering a loving critique of America, in holding America to its highest ideals, while taking seriously our right as Americans to reinterpret them. That is something to celebrate and to reiterate.

An Unfinished Agenda?

Despite the fact that Jews have experienced discrimination in America, we have achieved much of what the successive waves of immigrants dreamt about. As we are all well aware, for the past generation American Jews have enjoyed a prosperity and political and cultural influence unprecedented in history. In elite universities—a world that I know well—Jews account for a significant proportion of both the faculty and the administration; in the government, even this one which has no Jews in its cabinet, Jews play a significant role in the leadership ranks and as policymakers and advisers. Jewish influence is likely to decline in the coming years, but there is no unfinished American agenda as far as Jews specifically are concerned.

There is, however, an unfinished Jewish agenda in America—one which Jewish leaders and thinkers have articulated time and again. It is our problem with America, and it was articulated in precisely those terms by Israel Friedländer, a new American who had immigrated in 1904 to New York from Russian Poland. He taught Semitics at the Jewish Theological Seminary and thought deeply about his new home and its Jews. In a 1907 lecture that he called “The Problem of Judaism in America,” he raised the challenge that America presented to its Jews. America was an extreme case of a post-Emancipation society that enabled Jews to join the life and the culture of the surrounding society. Emancipation conferred civic equality on Jews, but led to the decay of Judaism, by which he meant not only the religious expression of Jews but their very culture as a people. America had been very good for the Jews, eliminating their physical misery, but was, in his eyes, inimical to Judaism. Judaism had been weakened in America—not because most Jews in America were not traditionally observant—but because Judaism had been reduced from a culture, the “full expression of the inner life of the Jewish people,” to “a creed, the summary of a few abstract articles of faith.” “Judaism,” he concluded, “that stood out like a rock amidst the bellows of hatred and storms of persecution is melting away like wax under the mild rays of freedom.”

Friedländer looked at America through the eyes of an immigrant Russian Jew who had witnessed a still-vibrant and creative Jewish culture sustained by a group with few economic and political opportunities. He lived in an America where the masses of Jews (except for the Central European immigrants of two generations earlier) were, for the most part, neither prosperous nor assimilated. Yet he recognized the challenge that an American freedom that privileged individualism posed to all newcomers with a collective tradition of their own. He was not advocating a return to the ghetto. Rather he recast American freedom, not as individualism, but as respect for “the traditions and associations” of other nationalities, or in other words, as respect for their ethnic cultures. He saw the value

AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY



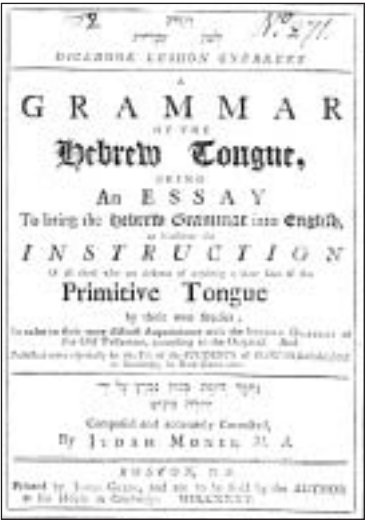
New Amsterdam harbor about 1650: Similar boats bore Jews fleeing the Inquisition from Recife, Brazil, in 1654 to create the first permanent Jewish settlement in North America.

AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY



The Mill Street synagogue, the first home of Congregation Shearith Israel, the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York: Opened in 1730, it was the first synagogue in North America.

A Hebrew grammar by Judah Monis, 1735, was the first book printed with Hebrew type in America. After converting to Christianity, Monis was appointed an instructor in Hebrew at Harvard.



AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Mordechai Manuel Noah, the first Jew in the U.S. diplomatic corps, was appointed consul to Tunis in 1813, but his appointment was rescinded upon discovery that he was Jewish. Later he tried to establish a Jewish colony in Ararat, NY.

AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Jewish female garment workers: The sweatshops were the chief employment prospect for unskilled immigrants. In the 1880s Jews dominated the garment industry as both proprietors and workers.

AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY



AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Jewish farmers: Groups such as the Baron de Hirsch Fund and Industrial Removal Office (IRO) encouraged Jews to become farmers by helping them buy land and equipment and relocating them across the country.

AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Jewish peddlers fanned out across America, settling down and founding retail stores when they had amassed enough capital. Russian Jewish immigrants who reached Colorado pose in front of E.S.Hart's store in Cotopaxi in the 1880's.



The Lower East Side during the early decades of the twentieth century teemed with Jewish life, as tens of thousands of Eastern European immigrants made it their first home in America. Many institutions, from the Henry Street Settlement House to the *Forward*, had their genesis here.

American Jewish Committee founders in Washington, D.C., in 1911, to press for the abrogation of a treaty with Russia: In the first row, from the left, are Louis Marshall, second president of AJC; Judge Mayer Sulzburger, first president of AJC; and Oscar S. Straus, former U.S. secretary of commerce.

AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE ARCHIVES



HADASSAH,
THE WOMEN'S ZIONIST ORGANIZATION OF AMERICA



World Zionist Organization leaders in New York in 1915: Seated from the left are Henrietta Szold, the founder of Hadassah; Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, founder of the Federation of American Zionists; Jacob de Haas, Joseph Kesselman; Louis Lipsky, a leader of FAZ and the ZOA, Charles A. Cowen, Shmarya Levin, and Rabbi Meyer Berlin.



The historic meeting in 1950 of Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, left, with Jacob Blaustein, president of the American Jewish Committee, standing, and Minister of Labor Golda Meir laid down the parameters of the Israel-Diaspora relationship.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, second from the right, marched with the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., fourth from the right, and Ralph Abernathy, fifth from the right, in a civil rights demonstration in Selma, Alabama, in 1965. For many American Jews, such civic activism became a pillar of their Jewish identity.



THE RATNER CENTER, JEWISH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

HEBREW UNION COLLEGE/JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION



Sally Priesand, in 1972, became the first woman rabbi ordained by Hebrew Union College.



President Jimmy Carter signing the Camp David Accords, the peace treaty he brokered between Anwar al-Sadat of Egypt and Menachem Begin of Israel, at a ceremony on the lawn of the White House, on March 26, 1979.

Freedom Sunday, December 6, 1987, the largest rally ever held for Soviet Jewry, organized by the director of AJC's Washington office, drew more than 250,000 American Jews to Washington and helped open the doors for many "prisoners of conscience."



Senator Joseph Lieberman accepting the nomination of the Democratic Party for vice president of the United States in August 2000—the first time a Jew is selected to run for a major party ticket.



of cultural pluralism before the term was coined, also by a Jew, Horace Kallen, in 1915.

To the question, Could Judaism, as he defined it, survive in America? Friedländer gave a qualified “yes.” After all, Jews had demonstrated in the Golden Age in Muslim Spain that Jewish identity and cultural creativity was not incompatible with full participation in the political and cultural life of the larger society. In the even more favorable circumstances of America, where Jews constituted a critical mass and enjoyed both civic equality and economic opportunity, they could perhaps achieve cultural creativity both as Jews and as Americans. But they would have to understand America as a pluralistic society and reclaim their complex identity that merged religion and ethnicity.

Survival of a Vibrant Jewish Culture? Rephrasing the Question

Friedländer’s question about the possibility of a vibrant Jewish culture persisting in America can be rephrased as we remember and interpret the meaning of 350 years of Jewish life in America. Not, can Jewish culture survive? But how have Jews fashioned and refashioned their religious lives, their communal institutions, and their cultural and political self-expression to conform to their changing and hybrid identities as American Jews? How have the conditions of America changed Jews and their cultures? And how have the various Jewish understandings of America contributed to the ways in which all Americans understand themselves?

We are celebrating 350 years of Jews in America at the beginning of a new millennium and at a time when the very definitions of American values and political traditions are contested. The current debates provide an opportunity for American Jews to do more than celebrate and reflect on our past. They provide an opportunity to raise questions relevant to all Americans about the nature of our civic identity and commitment to pluralism.

timeline

- 1585 Joachim Gaunse, a Bohemian Jewish metallurgist, sets foot on Roanoke Island, but later returns to England.
- 1649 Solomon Franco, a Jew, arrives in Boston from Holland with a consignment of goods. The Puritan authority denies his request for permission to settle in the colony, and he is forced to return to Holland.
- 1654 On July 8, Jacob Barsimon arrives in New Amsterdam on the *Pear Tree* from Holland. Two months later, 23 Jewish settlers arrive in New Amsterdam from Brazil on the French vessel the *Saint Catherine*. Peter Stuyvesant treats the new immigrants with blatant hostility.
- 1655 Dutch East India Company instructs Stuyvesant to allow the Jews to remain in New Amsterdam.
- 1656 Stuyvesant forced to allow Jews to engage freely in trade and to own real estate, but they are still barred from holding civic office and participating in Jewish religious services.
- 1657 Asser Levy, a member of the first group of Jewish immigrants to New Amsterdam, wins the right to serve in the militia. In 1661, Levy becomes the first Jew allowed to own property in North America.
- 1665 The British monarchy extends full religious rights and various privileges to the Jews of New York.
- 1677 A Jewish cemetery, later the subject of a Henry Wadsworth Longfellow poem, opens in Rhode Island.
- 1700 The population of the American colonies is 275,000 people.
- 1711 New York Jewish community contributes to a fund to build the steeple for the Trinity Church.
- 1722 Judah Monis, a Jew, is converted to Christianity in Massachusetts. Soon after his conversion, Monis is appointed to the position of Hebrew instructor at Harvard University.
- In 1735, he publishes the first book printed in Hebrew typesetting in the United States.
- 1730 The Sephardic community of New York opens the first synagogue in North America, Shearith Israel, which also contains a school and *mikve*.

- 1731 Leaders of the Jewish community in London give financial aid to indigent Jews to compel them to immigrate to Georgia. Forty-two Jews are sent from London to settle in Savannah, Georgia.
- 1740 The British Parliament ratifies the Plantation Act, naturalizing all current U.S. immigrants after seven years of citizenship. This act includes Jews residing in the colonies.
- 1755 Congregation Shearith Israel of New York opens a day school, which closes with the outbreak of the American Revolution.
- 1763 The Jewish community of Newport, Rhode Island, dedicates its synagogue in honor of the congregation's first spiritual leader, Isaac Touro.
- 1765 Ten Jews are among the 375 individuals who sign a nonimportation agreement in Philadelphia in response to the Stamp Act. A year later the Stamp Act is repealed.
- 1774 Isaac Abrahams, the first Jewish student at King's College, present-day Columbia University, in New York City, graduates.
First Continental Congress convenes in Philadelphia.
- 1775 The South Carolinian delegate to the Provincial Congress is Franco Salvador, a Jew. Salvador is the first American Jew to hold an elected political office. In 1776 Salvador becomes the first Jew to perish in the American Revolution.
- 1777 The New York constitution abolishes religious discrimination, and Jews are extended full equality.
- 1779 Solomon Bush is appointed to the position of lieutenant colonel of the Continental Army, the highest rank held by a Jew in the American Revolution.
- 1784 David Salisbury is appointed vice-consul in Marseilles, France. Salisbury is the first Jew appointed to a U.S. diplomatic post.
- 1790 The first federal census shows that Jews comprise 1/30 of 1 percent of the population, e.g., 1,300-1,500 people out of 3,929,214. Jews are settled in the colonies of New York, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, Virginia, South Carolina, and Georgia.
- 1791 A Bill of Rights is passed by the first Congress of the United States and is later incorporated into the U.S. Constitution. The Bill of Rights extends religious rights to Jews on a national but not a state level.

- 1795 A group of Ashkenazim in Philadelphia break away from Mikveh Israel to form Congregation Rodeph Shalom, the first synagogue in the country to follow an Ashkenazic tradition.
- 1796 Dr. Levi Myers of Georgetown, South Carolina, is the first Jew to serve in a state legislature.
- 1797 Solomon Etting appeals to the Maryland legislature on behalf of the Jewish community for equal rights. Etting's and the Jewish community of Maryland's struggle for equality persists for three decades until it is settled in 1826.
- 1800 The Jewish population of the United States is an estimated 2,000.
- 1813 Mordechai Manuel Noah, the first Jew in the diplomatic corps, is appointed U.S. Consul to Tunis; the appointment is revoked by President Monroe two years later upon discovery that Mordechai is Jewish.
- 1814 First Hebrew Bible published in the U.S.
- 1817 The Pennsylvania State Supreme Court indicts Abraham Wolf, a Jew, for "having done and performed worldly employment on the Lord's Day, commonly called Sunday."
- 1823 The first Jewish printer and editor in New York, Solomon Jackson, publishes the first Jewish periodical in America, which he entitles *The Jew*, designed to refute missionary attacks on Jews.
- 1824 In Charleston, South Carolina, a contingent led by Isaac Harby secedes from the Beth Elohim Congregation to form the Reformed Society of Israelites, the first congregation to observe a Reform Jewish tradition in the U.S.
- 1825 Mordechai Manuel Noah conceives of a temporary refuge for Jews on Grand Island in the Niagara River near Buffalo and calls it Ararat. In light of ridicule by the greater Jewish community, his vision never sees completion.
- 1826 Maryland's "Jew Bill" is adopted, but amendments to its offending clause are never made.
- 1840 In response to the Damascus Blood Libel, American Jews hold meetings throughout the country to protest. President Martin Van Buren demands that the American consulate in Egypt speak out against the incitement.

Rebecca Gratz founds the first Jewish Sunday school in America, in Philadelphia.

The American Jewish population increased from 15,000 to 50,000.

By 1850, the American Jewish community was comprised of over 1,000 synagogues and additional social and cultural organizations. These Jewish organizations spanned the continent from New York to San Francisco.

- 1842 Congregation B'nai Jeshurun founds the first day school program in the U.S., combining Jewish religious studies with Hebrew and English language instruction.
- 1843 The first Jewish fraternal order, B'nai B'rith, comes into existence.
- 1847 The Harmonie Club, the most prestigious of Jewish clubs, is established in New York.
- 1849 While there are few Jewish gold miners, there are Jewish shopkeepers in almost every one of the towns and trading posts during the Gold Rush in the West.
- 1850 Due to the heavy involvement of Jews in the Gold Rush, there is a large influx of Jews into California. The majority of the Jews settle in San Francisco. By the end of the 1850s, Jews comprise 6 percent-10 percent of the city's population, a higher percentage than New York.
- 1852 Rabbi Morris J. Raphall edits and publishes a prayer book prepared especially for women, *Rochamah: Devotional Exercises for the Use of the Daughters of Israel, Intended for Public and Private Worship on the Various Occasions of Women's Life*.
The first Jewish hospital is established in New York City; it is renamed Mount Sinai Hospital in 1866.
- 1859 In the so-called Yom Kippur incident in San Diego, California, Moses Manassee is pulled by police out of Yom Kippur services to testify as a witness in court, sparking wide debate among American Jews about balancing Jewish rights with obligations to the state.
- 1860 More than 16,000 peddlers in the United States are reported to be Jewish.
- 1861 Rabbi Morris J. Raphall delivers a pro-slavery sermon, but during the Civil War Raphall becomes an ally of the Union. David Einhorn takes issue with Raphall's sermon and as a result has to flee to Philadelphia.

Judah Philip Benjamin is appointed attorney general of the Confederacy. Benjamin had been the first Jew in the Senate before the outbreak of the war.

- 1862 In the heat of the Civil War, Union General Ulysses S. Grant issues General Order No. 11, expelling all Jews from Kentucky, Tennessee, and Mississippi.

Judah Philip Benjamin is appointed Secretary of State of the Confederacy. He occupies this position until the Confederacy collapses, when he flees to England.

A revision in the military laws permits Jews to be military chaplains.

Jews are scapegoated by Southerners for the food shortages and inflation that are curtailing Confederate progress. In the *Richmond Examiner* Jews are referred to as “speculators” and “extortionists.”

The American Jewish population triples in size to 150,000.

- 1867 The Ku Klux Klan is formally established in Nashville, Tennessee.

- 1873 The Union of American Hebrew Congregations is formed. Its aim is to establish a Jewish theological seminary and publish books for use in Jewish schools.

- 1875 The Union of American Hebrew Congregations founds Hebrew Union College, the first native rabbinical school in the U.S., with Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, the leader of American Reform Judaism, as president.

- 1876 Felix Adler, the son of a Reform Jewish rabbi, forms the Ethical Culture Society. The Society is based on “deed not creed.”

- 1877 Joseph Seligman, a prominent Jewish figure in the financial world, confidant of the president, and member of the Union League Club, is refused a reservation at the Grand Union Hotel in Saratoga, New York.

New Hampshire eliminates a law from its constitution that had previously precluded Jews from holding state public office by requiring individuals to take a religious test.

- 1880 It is reported that 50 percent of Jewish business firms are engaged in the garment industry or allied occupations. Jews own 80 percent of all retail and 90 percent of all wholesale garment firms.

- 1883 At a dinner celebrating the first graduating class of Hebrew Union College, shrimp is inadvertently served. Offended by the “*treif* banquet,” traditionalists begin planning an alternative seminary.
- 1886 The Jewish Theological Seminary is founded in New York by Reverend Sabato Morais as a traditionalist alternative to HUC.
Two brothers, Lyman and Joseph Bloomingdale, open the Bloomingdale Brothers Department Store.
The first yeshiva for Talmudic studies, Etz Chaim, is established in New York.
- 1888 A graduate of Columbia College, activist in the Daughters of the American Revolution, and ardent Zionist, Annie Nathan Meyer, is a founder of Barnard College for Women in New York.
- 1890 Ray Frank is the first American woman to preach the Kol Nidre sermon. While Frank never graduated from HUC, she did take several courses there. Frank practices but is never ordained as a rabbi.
- 1892 The Workmen’s Circle is established in the U.S. The group aims to promote Yiddishist and socialist values among the Jewish workforce.
- 1893 Hannah G. Solomon and Sadie American found the National Council of Jewish Women, whose program calls for Jewish women’s study, schools, philanthropy, and intellectual exchange.
- 1895 The Henry Street Settlement is built on the Lower East Side of New York by Jewish social worker Lillian Wald.
The first mail-order catalog, Sears, Roebuck & Co., is introduced and revolutionizes retail shopping throughout the continent. Julius Rosenwald becomes the company’s president in 1909.
- 1897 The *Jewish Daily Forward*, published in Yiddish, begins circulation.
- 1898 The Federation of American Zionists (FAZ) is established with Dr. Richard Gottheil as the first president.
The first Jewish fraternity is founded in New York. The Zeta Beta Tau fraternity’s (Zion be-Mishpat Torah) mission is to encourage the study and practice of Judaism.

- 1901 The Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Aid Society establishes the Industrial Removal Office (IRO) on the Lower East Side to settle recent immigrants in cooperating Jewish communities throughout the continent. Within a decade the IRO is responsible for the relocation of over 54,000 individuals to 1,300 cities and towns in 46 states.

Solomon Schechter comes to New York from Cambridge University to become the head of JTS. Schechter reorganizes JTS as a rabbinical school and teacher training institution.

The first Yiddish version of *Merchant of Venice* is performed at the People's Theater, located on the Lower East Side of New York.

- 1903 Emma Lazarus's sonnet "The New Colossus" is engraved on the bronze plate at the base of New York's Statue of Liberty

Jews comprise 50 percent of the physicians in New York, approximately 5,000-6,000.

Henrietta Szold is permitted to attend classes at JTS on condition that she not use her newly acquired knowledge to seek ordination.

- 1905 The American Jewish community celebrates "The Two Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary of the Settlement of Jews in the United States" at Carnegie Hall.

- 1906 The American Jewish Committee is founded to protect the rights of Jews everywhere. The organization's many prominent founders include Jacob Schiff, Louis Marshall, Oscar S. Straus, Cyrus Adler, and Mayer Sulzberger.

Sholem Aleichem (Sholem Rabinowitz) moves to New York, where he hopes to promote his Yiddish theater productions, but he returns to Europe two years later, dejected.

- 1909 The Kehillah of New York is founded. AJC leaders are elected to the organization's first executive committee. The organization concentrates its work on four areas of Jewish communal life: Jewish education, religious life, crime, and the Jewish clothing industry.

- 1911 Fire breaks out in the Triangle Shirtwaist factory, killing 146 of the approximately 500 workers, mostly Jewish and female, and radicalizing the garment workers.

- 1912 Henrietta Szold founds Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, to provide health care for Jews in the land of Israel.

- 1913 Samuel Goldwyn, later the president of MGM pictures, and Cecil B. DeMille produce the first feature-length movie, entitled *The Squaw Man*.

Leo Frank is lynched in Georgia for a murder that there is virtually no evidence that he committed.

The Anti-Defamation League is established as a subsidiary of B'nai B'rith to combat anti-Semitism in the United States.

- 1914 Maurice Wertheimer, the son-in-law of Henry Morgenthau, the U.S. Ambassador to Turkey, goes to Palestine with a suitcase filled with the equivalent of \$50,000. The money was sent by AJC as relief for Jews.

The Central Relief Committee and the American Jewish Relief Committee join forces to become the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee of American Funds for the Relief of Jewish War Sufferers.

By 1914, thirty colleges and universities had chapters of the Jewish student organization, the Intercollegiate Menorah Association.

- 1916 Woodrow Wilson appoints Louis Brandeis, a former leader of the Zionist group FAZ, to the U.S. Supreme Court.

- 1917 The Jewish Publication Society publishes a new translation of the Hebrew Bible, replacing Isaac Leeser's edition published sixty years earlier.

Benjamin Leonard, born Benjamin Leiner, wins the World Lightweight Boxing Championship.

- 1918 President Woodrow Wilson expresses his approval of the proposed Balfour Declaration in a letter to Rabbi Stephen S. Wise.

First meeting of the American Jewish Congress, formed as a democratically elected representative of the Jewish voice in America.

There are twenty-four Yiddish theaters in the United States, eleven located in New York City.

- 1920 Henry Ford uses his publication, the *Dearborn Independent*, as a conduit for the distribution of anti-Semitic messages. He also publishes several anti-Semitic booklets, including *The International Jew—The World's Foremost Problem*, *Jewish Activities in the United States*, and the *Jewish Influence in American Life*. In 1927, AJC secures from Ford an apology to the Jewish people.

- 1921 Albert Einstein, world-renowned scientist, visits the United States upon the invitation of Chaim Weizmann, to raise funds for the proposed Hebrew University in Jerusalem.
- 1922 The Lodge-Fish Resolution gives formal Congressional approval to the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine.
Harvard University, with a student body that is 21 percent Jewish, places a quota on the percentage of Jews it will admit. Numerous colleges and universities throughout the country adopt this quota model.
- 1924 The Immigration Act of 1924 seeks to decrease the number of immigrants entering the U.S. The statute sharply limits the number of Jews permitted to enter the U.S. by establishing national origins quotas.
- 1925 The Hillel Foundation, a Jewish student organization, is established as a subsidiary of B'nai B'rith at the University of Illinois at Urbana. The Hillel movement subsequently spreads to college campuses throughout the country.
- 1927 Samson Raphaelson's *The Jazz Singer* is one of the first film productions to deal with a Jewish theme. Jews prominent in the film industry include Paul Muni and Irving Thalberg.
Random House is founded by Bennett Cerf, Elmer Adler, and Donald Klopfer.
- 1930 The Miller Chair of Jewish History is established at Columbia University as the first chair in Jewish history at a secular institution. Prof. Salo Baron is the first incumbent of the Miller Chair.
- 1934 The United Jewish Appeal (UJA) is created.
- 1935 The *New York Times* advocates for the U.S. to boycott the Olympics.
- 1938 A public opinion poll indicates that 60 percent of U.S. citizens believe that the persecution of Jews in Europe is either partially or completely the fault of the Jews.
American Ambassador Hugh Wilson is withdrawn from Germany as a symbol of America's condemnation of the events of Kristallnacht.

- 1939 A *Fortune* poll indicates that 85 percent of non-Jews oppose relaxing immigration quotas. Additionally, 22 percent of Jews also oppose amending the quotas despite the ongoing Nazi persecutions.

The S.S. *St. Louis*, with 936 Jewish refugees from Hitler aboard, is refused permission to dock in any American port. Its passengers are returned to Europe.

- 1940 Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan founds the Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation.

- 1941 Marc Chagall comes to New York from France in response to an invitation from the Museum of Modern Art.

The U.S. State Department prohibits the immigration of individuals with relatives in Nazi-occupied territories.

- 1942 A mass rally of over twenty thousand people is staged at New York City's Madison Square Garden to protest the Nazi persecutions.

For the first time since the beginning of Hitler's reign of terror, President Roosevelt specifically mentions the atrocities that the Nazis are committing against the Jews.

Rabbi Stephen S. Wise receives a copy of the Reigner Report, wherein the Nazi plan for a Final Solution is outlined. Wise sends the report to the president via Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles. Welles asks Wise not to release the report until the government confirms it. Wise immediately writes Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter to alert him to the existence of the Reigner Report. Wise believes that Welles did not intend to pass the report along to Roosevelt.

The president of Agudas Israel, Jacob Rosenheim, receives a telegram from his Swiss representative that reports the mass murder of Jews in Poland. Rosenheim immediately forwards the telegram directly to Roosevelt, asking him to bomb the deportation rail lines.

Wise holds a press conference in Washington, D.C., to confirm the reports that the Nazis have already exterminated two million Jews.

A day of mourning is held throughout the U.S. for the Nazi victims. In New York, 500,000 Jewish workers stop working for ten minutes as a sign of solidarity.

- 1943 J. Robert Oppenheimer is appointed director of the Los Alamos, New Mexico, laboratories, where he helps develop the first atomic bomb.

Composer and conductor Leonard Bernstein is appointed assistant conductor of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra.

The U.S. Senate and House of Representatives condemn the Nazi atrocities and urge retribution. However, the topic of redress is not broached.

AJC joins a coalition of Jewish organizations to form the Joint Emergency Committee on European Jewish Affairs.

- 1945 The American Jewish Committee sponsors the publication of a monthly magazine, *Commentary*.

The \$100 million nationwide United Jewish Appeal for Refugees, Oversees Needs and Palestine—the largest single Jewish drive in history—is launched in Washington, D.C.

Bess Myerson is chosen the first Jewish Miss America. During her reign, she encounters anti-Semitism, such as being turned away from a country club that does not admit Jews.

- 1948 The State of Israel is established in light of a UN resolution that ratified the partition of Palestine the previous year.

- 1950 There are five million Jews living in the United States. American Jewry comprises approximately 45 percent of world Jewry.

AJC publishes a seminal three-volume study on prejudice, including: *Anti-Semitism and Emotional Disorder, The Authoritarian Personality, and Dynamics of Prejudice*.

AJC president Jacob Blaustein and Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion draft guidelines for Israel-Diaspora relations.

Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn succeeds his father-in-law as the Lubavitcher rebbe and begins a wide-ranging program of outreach, setting up Chabad houses in many communities and on college campuses.

- 1951 Julius and Ethel Rosenberg receive the death sentence following a conviction for espionage.

It is estimated that 68 percent of American Jews are associated with a synagogue, approximately 3.4 of 5 million Jews in America.

- 1960 A burgeoning interest in Jewish theology is evidenced by a popular readership for the scholarship of Martin Buber, Abraham Joshua Heschel, and a renewed interest in Hasidism.
- John F. Kennedy, the Democratic presidential candidate, declares, "Friendship for Israel is not a partisan matter, it is a national commitment."
- Richard M. Nixon, the Republican presidential candidate, declares: "The preservation of the State of Israel is what I regard as one of the essential goals of the United States foreign policy."
- 1961 El Al begins nonstop flights between New York and Tel Aviv, one of the longest scheduled nonstop commercial flights to date.
- President John F. Kennedy signs the first arms agreement with Israel. The U.S. is motivated by a desire to mitigate a Middle East arms imbalance.
- 1965 Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel and other Jewish civil rights activists march alongside the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., in Selma, Alabama.
- 1967 Arthur D. Morse publishes *While Six Million Died: A Chronicle of American Antipathy*, in which he criticizes America's complacency during the Holocaust.
- Chaim Potok publishes *The Chosen*.
- Dustin Hoffman stars in the motion picture *The Graduate*. The soundtrack for the film features music by Paul Simon and Art Garfunkle.
- 1969 The Association for Jewish Studies is established as a professional organization for those engaged in teaching and research in Judaic studies at the university level.
- 1971 Sanford "Sandy" Koufax, who refused to play on the High Holidays, is initiated into the Baseball Hall of Fame.
- Israel and America sign an arms agreement, permitting American arms to be manufactured in Israel.
- 1972 Sally Priesand is ordained by Hebrew Union College as the first woman rabbi.
- 1973 The Yom Kippur War erupts in Israel. America comes to Israel's aid in the middle of the war by shipping arms.

With Kissinger's mediation, Israel and Egypt forge a disengagement agreement. At the same time, the U.S. and Israel sign an unpublished addendum wherein the U.S. pledges to aid Israel throughout this reconciliation process.

UN passes the infamous "Zionism is Racism" resolution, effectively nullifying the UN resolutions that brought about the State of Israel and granted the right of self-determination to the Jewish people. AJC is first Jewish advocacy group to initiate a major campaign to against this resolution. In 1991, the resolution is repealed.

- 1976 The American Association for Jewish Education, today known as Jewish Education Services of North America, reports that while attendance in extra-curricular Hebrew schools has dropped from 24.4 percent to 20.2 percent, attendance in Jewish day schools has increased from 25.4 percent to 28 percent, over the past decade.

Yitzhak Rabin is the first Israeli prime minister to address a joint session of Congress.

Lilith, the first Jewish feminist magazine in the U.S., is founded.

- 1977 Judicial dispute over the Nazi Party's right to march in Skokie, Illinois, where 50 percent of the population is Jewish and 7,000 are Holocaust survivors, ends in permitting the march.

- 1978 At a covert meeting at Camp David, Menachem Begin and Anwar Sadat sign a Framework for Peace. Jimmy Carter signs the document as witness. One year later the Camp David Accords become a full-blown treaty. Subsequently both leaders, Begin and Sadat, are awarded the Noble Peace Prize.

- 1982 Reagan advises Israel of repercussions if Israel invades West Beirut. Israel attacks, and Reagan expresses his outrage. A ceasefire promptly follows.

The U.S. approves nearly \$2.5 billion in aid for Israel.

- 1983 Barbra Streisand plays the title role in *Yentl*, a musical film version of Isaac Bashevis Singer's short story "Yentl the Yeshiva Boy."

- 1984 Louis Farrakhan, an influential Black Muslim leader, describes Judaism as a "gutter religion."

Jesse Jackson and his supporters prevent the adoption of a plank condemning anti-Semitism in the Democratic Party platform.

- 1985 President Ronald Reagan visits Bergen-Belsen and addresses Holocaust survivors. He also visits the German military cemetery at Bitburg, where 49 members of the *Waffen SS*, among others, were

interred. Elie Wiesel makes an impassioned plea to Reagan not to go: "That place, Mr. President, is not your place."

Amy Eilberg graduates from JTS, the first woman to be ordained as a rabbi in Conservative Judaism.

Jonathan Jay Pollard, an American Jewish Navy intelligence analyst, is accused of espionage. He and his wife, Anne Henderson Pollard, are accused of supplying Israel with secret U.S. information. They are both found guilty and receive prison sentences.

1986 Elie Wiesel is awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

1987 The historic Freedom Sunday for Soviet Jewry rally, in Washington, D.C., organized by the director of AJC's Washington office, draws more than 250,000 activists, focusing attention worldwide on the plight of Soviet Jewry.

1988 The U.S. decides to open a dialogue with the PLO; Reagan writes to Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir to affirm that these discussions will in no way jeopardize America's commitment to Israel.

1989 Based on a Senate vote, the U.S. adopts a policy that forbids it from talking with any known PLO terrorist.

1990 *Life* magazine's list of the 100 most important Americans includes sixteen Jews: Irving Berlin, Leonard Bernstein, Bob Dylan, Albert Einstein, Abraham Flexner, Betty Friedan, Milton Friedman, Edwin Land, William Levitt, Louis B. Mayer, J. Robert Oppenheimer, William Paley, Richard Rodgers, Jonas Salk, Alfred Stieglitz, and Walter Winchell.

Meir Kahane, the founder of the Jewish Defense League and of the Kach Party in Israel, is assassinated while delivering a speech in New York. A year later, a New York Supreme Court jury acquits El Sayid A. Nosair of Kahane's murder.

1991 The National Jewish Population Survey, conducted by the Council of Jewish Federations, reports that there are 5.5 million self-identified Jews in America. It is reported that Jews marry other Jews 48 percent of the time; this statistic contrasts starkly with the 1965 statistic of 91 percent.

Riots break out in the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn after a car driven by a Lubavitch Hasid kills seven-year-old Gavin Cato, an African-American. An Australian Lubavitcher rabbinical student, Yankel Rosenbaum, is stabbed and later dies of his wounds.

At a meeting of the UN General Assembly, President George Bush argues for the reversal of the 1975 resolution that equated Zionism with racism. Later this year, the GA obliges President Bush and revokes UN Resolution 3379.

The Bush and Shamir administrations are locked in a dispute over loaning \$10 billion for the resettlement of Soviet Jews in Israel.

Dr. Leonard Jeffries, chair of the Black Studies Department of CUNY, claims there is an antiblack “conspiracy planned and plotted and programmed out of Hollywood,” by “people called Greenberg and Weisberg and Trigliani.” When his reappointment as department chair is subsequently limited, Jeffries sues the university, in *Jeffries v. Harleston et al.* (1992), for violation of his free speech rights. AJC files an amicus brief on behalf of the defendants.

- 1993 Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* is released and wins Academy Awards for both best picture and best director.

With the U.S. as mediator, Israel and the PLO sign the Oslo Accords, a framework for peace, in front of 3,000 guests on the south lawn of the White House.

The \$168-million U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum opens on the mall in Washington, D.C.

An estimated 85 percent of Jewish Americans attend college.

- 1994 President Bill Clinton and First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton attend Rosh Hashanah services at a Martha’s Vineyard synagogue. The president is purported to be the first chief executive to ever attend a High Holy Days service.

President Clinton nominates Stephen Breyer to the Supreme Court, the first time that there are two Jewish justices serving on the top court at the same time. Little attention is given to the fact of his religion.

- 1995 Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin is assassinated. As a sign of American solidarity with Israel, President Clinton orders that the flags on all federal buildings be flown at half-staff. In a heartfelt farewell, President Clinton utters the Hebrew phrase “*Shalom, chaver,*” (“Goodbye, friend”). Clinton leads a delegation of 100 Americans who fly to Israel for Rabin’s funeral.

1999 United Jewish Appeal, United Israel Appeal, and the Council of Jewish Federations merge, creating United Jewish Communities, the largest Jewish philanthropy in existence.

2000 Professor Deborah Lipstadt, with the help of a global fundraising effort led by AJC, defeats Holocaust denier David Irving in a major libel trial in England, with the presiding judge declaring that Irving had “persistently and deliberately misrepresented and manipulated historical evidence.”

President Clinton, Prime Minister Ehud Barak, and Chairman Arafat meet at Camp David in a summit aimed at reaching a final peace accord. After two weeks of negotiations, in which Barak presents the most far-reaching proposal ever offered by an Israeli chief of state and Clinton gets involved in the minute details, the talks break down. Clinton later praises Barak and essentially blames Arafat.

Democratic presidential candidate Al Gore selects Connecticut senator Joseph Lieberman, an Orthodox Jew and political centrist, as his vice-presidential running mate. It is the first time in American history that a Jew is selected to a major party ticket. In his acceptance speech, Lieberman exclaims, “Is America a great country—or what!”

2001 Over 100,000 rally in Washington in support of Israel. Organized by the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations and United Jewish Communities, the rally brings Jews by the busload from synagogues, Hillels, and local Federations. Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu address the crowd.

2003 *The Pianist*, a movie about Jewish survival against the backdrop of the Warsaw Ghetto, wins the Oscar for best picture.

Col. Ilan Ramon, an Israeli Air Force fighter pilot, becomes the first Israeli to go into space aboard the U.S. Space Shuttle Columbia. He asks for kosher food aboard the shuttle and carries several Jewish artifacts with him. Ramon dies when the shuttle disintegrates upon reentry.

The National Jewish Population Study 2000-01, after being withheld for ten months, is released and finds 5.2 million Jews in the United States and an intermarriage rate for those married since 1996 of 47 percent.

Contributors to this Volume

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The timeline was researched and written by Elisheva Hirschman-Green, a student at Dartmouth College and an AJC intern during summer 2003.