

Strangers in a Once Strange Land: A July 4th Reader

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What does it mean to be a stranger in a strange land?

This is part of the story of American Judaism in the 21st century. Many American Jews were raised with a historical memory, a narrative, around the founding of the Jewish community in the United States. For some, this historical memory goes back to the first Jewish immigrants, the Spanish-Portuguese traders in New Amsterdam. For others, this tale starts later, in the subsequent waves of immigration. For some this story is a story of moving from the closed world of the ghetto to the open cities of America, from tradition to modernity, from particularity to universality. For others, the story moves in the other direction, as their families continue to navigate their own relationship with tradition.

The move to America—and movement within America—can be a movement from poverty to material success on these shores. For others, the movement is in the opposite direction, as families tell of the homes and businesses that they abandoned across the world before coming to America. The waves of Jewish immigrants were also waves of Jewish stories, as each culture and family brought their own narrative, and continues to cultivate their own narrative of what America means, or doesn't mean, to them.

This eager self-reflection, this crafting of our stories, is itself part of the immigrant's story, as we work to find a meaningful narrative with which to make sense of our movements. Neil Gabler, in his book *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood*, sees the early Jewish participation in the film industry as an expression in part of this same urge. Jews, settling into a new land with a new set of cultural expectations, sought a deep invisibility, an assimilation into the dominant American narratives and culture, but also worked to forge their own narratives, to tell their own stories.

As American Jews gained increasing financial success, cultural assimilation, and social status, their stories also shifted, often to a redemption story, a tale about the hope and possibility offered in America to the oft-persecuted people of the Book.

However, a shifting in the tectonic plates of American self-identity occurring as we speak may also influence the Jewish self-understanding, in all of its shapes and forms, as we understand it today. An increasing amount of attention in contemporary American society focuses on the marginalized narratives, on those left aside by the redemption story of America, on those sacrificed for the financial success of American society. A deepening attention on the history of Native American and non-white peoples in the United States, and the uphill battle that they have had to face in achieving success in this society has led to a cultural reconsideration for many in America, as they have rethought the trajectory of the American history they once knew. Another view pushes back, urging that we remember the

hope and optimism that are mainstays of American immigration, inviting us instead to appreciate the complex hope of this country, even as our society moves ever slowly towards appreciating all sides of our own history.

How might these shifts influence the self-understanding of the American Jewish people, the narratives that we have developed to make sense of our story on this land?

Samuel Freedman, the journalist and author, in closing his book *Jew vs. Jew*, speaks to one complex narrative that narrates American Jewish life this way:

“As a jazz fan I might offer an analogy. From the 1900s through the 1970s, jazz was revolutionized by waves of innovation. Swing replaced the New Orleans style, bebop replaced swing, modal jazz replaced bebop, free jazz replaced modal. In the process, every rule of melody, harmony, and rhythm was shattered. And then, looking up from the wreckage, musicians realized there was nothing else left to rebel against. They could turn only in one direction: to the past, to the tradition.”

While talking about tradition and change, and the movement back to the past, Freedman’s analogy is helpful in other ways: how can we think in a more creative, a more musical fashion, about the tides of change in our societies? Perhaps we need not think of the shifting winds of self-understanding as threatening, but instead as all parts of this same jazz standard, the slight bumps and turns that make great music great. This too is part of the story of the complex hope that is America, and that is the American Jewish story. We have found, as a people, a profound level of safety, success, and joy on these shores, a level of success that has allowed us to think along with this society about the heritage, the past of the country that we have moved into.

In honor of the complex hope of America, we offer some of our favorite articles on the Jewish immigration story in America, in the hopes of a more hopeful tomorrow. These articles help us appreciate the stories that we tell about this land, and about our own place in this land. Each article invites us to think more deeply about our society, our place in this complicated, hopeful country. We start with Jonathan Sarna’s “The Myth of No Return: Jewish Return Migration to Eastern Europe, 1881-1914,” a deeply interesting read about a story that we don’t often tell: the Jews who chose to leave America. Then we move on to Zev Eleff’s “The Immigration Clause that Transformed Orthodox Judaism in the United States,” a fascinating read about an underappreciated part of the transformation of the Jewish community. Join us in appreciating this beautiful, complex story that is America, as we look forward to taking part in building a better tomorrow, together.



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The Immigration Clause that Transformed Orthodox Judaism in the United States

JONATHAN D. SARNA AND ZEV ELEFF

The 1921 Emergency Quota Act, Jeffrey Gurock has shown, ended “a century of constant unrestricted Jewish immigration” and inaugurated an era of “crisis and compromise” in American Orthodoxy. In the wake of drastic restrictions, directed especially at immigrants from Eastern Europe, the flow of Orthodox Jews into the United States slowed to a trickle. As a result, Gurock argues, the children of Orthodox immigrants (the “second generation”) came into their own, “with ears deaf to calls to return to tradition.”¹ The numbers seem to bear out Gurock’s argument. Between 1903 and 1914, according to standard accounts, some 115,000 Jews immigrated *annually* into the United States. Between 1925 and 1934, that number dropped to less than 9,200 annually. The growth of the American Jewish population from 1925 was largely due to natural causes, rather than immigration. During the 1920s, for the first time in the twentieth century, the majority of America’s Jews became native born.²

Yet, buried deep within the 1921 legislation, and usually overlooked by historians, lay a provision that would reshape the trajectory of American Orthodoxy, notwithstanding the rise of the “second generation.”³ The law read, “Aliens who are professional actors, artists, lecturers, singers,

1. Jeffrey S. Gurock, *Orthodox Jews in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 148–149.

2. See “A Century of Jewish Immigration to the United States,” in Jonathan D. Sarna, *The American Jewish Experience* 2nd ed. (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1997), 360; Jacob Rader Marcus, *To Count a People: American Jewish Population Data, 1585–1984* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1990), 240–41. In a private communication, Roger Daniels has properly questioned the reliability of historical immigration and population figures involving Jews. In the absence of better data, we make use of standard numbers here. Many thanks to Professor Daniels for his helpful comments on this paper.

3. The point is also omitted in popular Orthodox biographies. See, for example, Shimon Finkelman, *Reb Moshe: The Life and Ideals of HaGaon Rabbi Moshe Feinstein* (Brooklyn: Mesorah, 1986), 48–53; Yonason Rosenblum, *Reb Yaakov: The Life and Times of HaGaon Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky* (Brooklyn: Mesorah, 1993), 115–19; Shimon Finkelman, *Rav Pam: The Life and Ideals of Rabbi Avrohom Yaakov HaKohen Pam* (Brooklyn: Mesorah, 2003), 45; and Yitzchok Dershowitz, *A Living ‘Mishnas Rav Aharon’: The Legacy of Maran Rav Aharon Kotler* (Jerusalem: Feldheim, 2005), 73. For an exceptional case in which the writers acknowledged the rabbinical exemption, see David Kranzler and David Landesman, *Rav Breuer: His Life and His Legacy* (Jerusalem: Feldheim, 1998), 12.

nurses, ministers of any religious denomination, professors for colleges or seminaries, aliens belonging to any recognized learned profession, or aliens employed as domestic servants may, if otherwise admissible, be admitted notwithstanding [this quota].”⁴ From a Jewish perspective, this meant that the quota exempted rabbis. Even if their followers were restricted by quota from immigrating to America, they themselves could apply to do so as “non-quota immigrants.” This provision had dramatic, if unintended, consequences for Orthodoxy and for American Judaism generally. Hundreds of rabbis, most of them Orthodox, immigrated to America after 1921, changing the ratio of rabbis to congregants, revitalizing Orthodox leadership, resulting in the establishment of new Orthodox institutions, and setting the stage for the renewal of Orthodoxy, especially fervent or so-called Ultra-Orthodoxy, following World War II.

American immigration legislation had long distinguished between “desirable” and “undesirable” immigrants. The earliest restrictions in 1881–82, for example, barred Chinese “laborers,” but permitted the entry of Chinese subjects “proceeding to the United States as teachers, students, merchants, or from curiosity.”⁵ Similarly, the 1885 Foran Act, which banned the importation of workers (contract labor), exempted from its provisions, among others, professional actors, artists, lecturers, and singers. Clergy, however, were not explicitly exempted by the Foran Act. This led to an important Supreme Court decision, in 1892, declaring that immigration laws limiting contract labor could not be applied to churches. In his decision, Justice David J. Brewer, himself the son of a missionary, asserted that Congress never intended to limit the immigration of celebrated priests, ministers and rabbis to America, and the Court enjoined it from excluding less-celebrated ones as well:

Suppose, in the Congress that passed this act, some member had offered a bill which in terms declared that if any Roman Catholic church in this country should contract with Cardinal Manning⁶ to come to this country and enter into its service as pastor and priest, or any Episcopal church should enter into a like contract with Canon Farrar,⁷ or any Baptist church should make

4. Sixty-Seventh Congress, Session 1, ch. 8 (1921), 6. Available online at <http://legisworks.org/sal/42/stats/STATUTE-42-Pg5a.pdf>. The 1917 immigration law likewise contained a ministerial exception; see 64th Congress, session 1, ch. 29 (1917), 876–877 online at <http://library.uwb.edu/static/USImmigration/39%20stat%20874.pdf>.

5. As quoted in Roger Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants since 1882* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2004), 19.

6. Cardinal [Henry Edward] Manning (1808–1892) was the Archbishop of Westminster and a prominent Catholic theologian; see Vincent Alan McClelland, *Cardinal Manning: His Public Life and Influence 1865–1892* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

7. Canon [Frederic William] Farrar (1831–1903) was the archdeacon of Westminster Abbey and the Dean of Canterbury; see Norman Vance, “Farrar, Frederic William (1831–1903),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/33088>.

similar arrangements with Rev. Mr. Spurgeon,⁸ or any Jewish synagogue with some eminent rabbi,⁹ such contract should be adjudged unlawful and void, and the church making it be subject to prosecution and punishment. Can it be believed that it would have received a minute of approving thought or a single vote?¹⁰

As a result of this widely-applauded ruling, Congress amended the Foran Act, exempting from its provisions “ministers of any religious denomination” as well as “professors for colleges and seminaries.”¹¹ The immigration law of 1907 and subsequent restrictive laws through 1921 repeated these same exemptions.¹² This was the immigration clause that admitted rabbis into the United States without running afoul of either the ban on contract labor or the 1921 emergency quota.

The Supreme Court, in a painful 1924 case involving an immigrant rabbi named Solomon Gottlieb, his wife Gittel, and their son, Israel, tightened the application of this clause. Reading the 1921 law literally, the Court restricted non-quota status to the “minister” alone and ruled that his wife and child could not gain entry into the United States except in the ordinary manner—as determined by the quota. Justice George Sutherland, speaking for the Court, explained that there was nothing in the 1921 law “which gives the wife or children of a minister any right of entry beyond that enjoyed by aliens generally.” But the Court, clearly uncomfortable with the ramifications of its decision, which would have entailed great hardship and separated families, likewise observed that if the law as written seemed “absurd and unreasonable” then it was up to Congress to change it.¹³

8. Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892), known as the “Prince of Preachers,” was the pastor of London’s New Park Street Chapel (Metropolitan Tabernacle); see Russell H. Conwell, *Life of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the World’s Greatest Preacher* (Philadelphia: Edgewood, 1892).

9. England’s chief rabbi at that time was Rabbi Hermann Adler (1839–1911), but his name was apparently unknown to Justice Brewer; see Derek Taylor, *British Chief Rabbis 1664–2006* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2006).

10. *Church of the Holy Trinity v. United States* 143 U.S. 457 (1892) at 472; on Brewer, see Timothy S. Huebner, “Brewer, David Josiah,” *American National Biography Online*, Feb. 2000, accessed March 07, 2016, <http://www.anb.org/articles/11/11-00102.html>.

11. For the Foran Act and its amendments, see *The Federal Statutes Annotated Containing All of the Laws of the United States of a General and Permanent Nature in Force on the First Day of January 1903* (Northport, NY: Edward Thompson Company, 1903), vol. 3, 301.

12. For the text of the Immigration Act of 1907, see <http://www.historycentral.com/documents/immigrationact.html>.

13. *Commissioner of Immigration of Port of New York v. Gottlieb et al* 265 US 310, <http://caselaw.findlaw.com/us-supreme-court/265/310.html>; see on the case, Martha Gardner, *The Qualities of a Citizen: Women, Immigration and Citizenship, 1870–1965* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 125–132.

Fortunately, Congress did just that. As Louis Marshall who argued on behalf of the Gottliebs observed at the time, “the decision, though apparently adverse...proved a blessing.” Thanks to a Congressional resolution, Gittel and Israel Gottlieb were admitted into the United States and so were thousands of others in similar circumstances, including the families of at least seven rabbis. The Jewish press, as well as the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), rejoiced that thanks to the *Gottlieb* decision immigrating rabbis would not be separated from their families.¹⁴

In 1924, Congress rewrote and reinforced the special status of ministers, along with their wives and their minor children, through Section 4 (d) of the “National Origins” Act of that year (often known as the Johnson-Reed Act), which defined a non-quota immigrant as follows:

An immigrant who continuously for at least two years immediately preceding the time of his application for admission to the United States has been, and who seeks to enter the United States solely for the purpose of, carrying on the vocation of minister of any religious denomination, or professor of a college, academy, seminary, or university; and his wife, and his unmarried children under 18 years of age, if accompanying or following to join him.¹⁵

According to this new definition, which was repeated with minor modifications in the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, rabbis, their wives and their minor children could all gain entry into the United States outside of the regular quota system.¹⁶ Other classes of non-quota immigrants under the 1924 law included the wives and children of U.S. citizens; legal immigrants returning from temporary visits abroad; anyone born in Canada, Newfoundland, Mexico, Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, the Panama Canal Zone or other independent countries in Central or South America, along with their wives and children; as well as bona fide students over the age of 15. Thus, legal immigration did not “end” in 1924, as sometimes mistakenly alleged. In terms of Jews, the provisions of section 4 (d) kept the doors to the United States open just wide enough to permit rabbis, scholars, and some other transformative figures to resettle in America, even when others found America’s gates tightly barred against them.

Special interest groups made section 4 (d) possible. They had lobbied on behalf of each of its exempted classes of immigrants. In the case of ministers, Archbishop Edward J. Hanna and the National Catholic

14. *American Jewish Year Book* 27 (1925–26): 425–426; see Gardner, *The Qualities of a Citizen*, 130, note 22.

15. 68th Congress, Session 1, ch. 190 (1924), 155, <http://legisworks.org/sal/43/stats/STATUTE-43-Pg153a.pdf>.

16. Public Law 89–236; 79 Statutes-at-Large, 911 (October 3, 1965), Sect 8A (d).

Welfare Conference worked hard to ensure that Catholic priests born in foreign countries could gain admission outside of the 1924 quota so as to meet the growing needs of the Catholic population. Protestant foreign-language churches presumably expressed similar concerns.¹⁷ Given past precedent as well as the 1892 Supreme Court ruling, Congress's decision to exempt "ministers of any religious denomination" from the 1924 National Origins Act is readily understandable. The consequences of that exemption for Orthodox Judaism, of course, could not be foreseen.

The Jewish community viewed the "ministerial exemption" as an all-too-rare victory amid the many depressing communal defeats that characterized the era of immigration restrictions. Once the administrative procedures connected with the new law were clarified, HIAS exulted. Its press release, published in the Boston *Jewish Advocate*, read, "All Rabbis' Wives and Families are Quota Exempt." While the news was clearly welcomed by rabbis—most East European Jews, after all, had little hope of gaining entry into the United States under the strict quotas—the instructions issued to consulates by the State Department demonstrated that many burdensome obstacles still remained to be overcome before a rabbi and his family members could win a coveted entry document.¹⁸ All of the following had to be submitted—in duplicate:

Proof that he is a duly ordained Rabbi (*smiches* [ordination certificates] with sworn English translations of same); proof that he has been exclusively following said vocation for at least two years previous to his admission to this country; proof that he has exclusively followed and is now following said vocation since his admission to this country, the same to consist (among other things) of a duly verified copy of his contract with his present congregation, a sworn affidavit of the secretary of the congregation accompanying an extract from its minutes showing when the Rabbi was elected as such by the congregation, for what term, what salary, etc; affidavits of the president and secretary of the congregation showing when the congregation was organized and incorporated, whether they own or lease their place of worship, the location of the place of worship, its seating capacity, number of members, annual income and expenses, present financial condition of the congregation, etc.; affidavits or letters by responsible banks or business firms certifying to the credibility and high standing of the congregation, its officers, etc; the usual immigration affidavit of the Rabbi showing his means and willingness and ability to care for his wife and children, naming them and giving their ages,

17. Richard Gribble, "Church, State, and the American Immigrant: The Multiple Contributions of Archbishop Edward J. Hanna," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 16 (Fall 1998): 11–18.

18. For an instance in which a rabbi was delayed due to these procedures, see Department of State to William M. Butler, September 30, 1926, Box 161, Folder, 43, 1–96, American Jewish Historical Society, New England.

places of birth, etc. Of course, the wife and children must submit to the Consul proof of the wife's marriage and proof of the birth, ages of the children, etc.¹⁹

Notwithstanding these wearisome procedures, however, numerous rabbis applied to enter the United States under the new regulations. The HIAS press release and the fact that all these precise details were spelled out in American Jewish newspapers suggests that HIAS went so far as to invite rabbis and their families to take advantage of their exemption from the quota.

But finding a pulpit, the prerequisite for entry, was not always easy. In 1932, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik entered the United States "with immigration papers issued by the Hebrew Theological College."²⁰ Amid the Depression, however, it became clear to the Chicago rabbinical seminary that it could not afford the young Talmud scholar. So with help from his father—who had likewise settled in the U.S., in 1928, with the aid of the ministerial exception clause—Soloveitchik secured a new position in Massachusetts, as "chief rabbi and spiritual leader" of Boston, a post that supposedly granted him authority over eleven Orthodox congregations in the area.²¹

Rabbi Fritz [Frank] Plotke (1906–1994), a non-Orthodox rabbi, likewise struggled to secure a steady rabbinical position when he arrived in New York in the late 1930s. Plotke offered much for prospective congregations in the United States. He had trained in rabbinical schools in Berlin and Breslau, and earned a PhD from the University of Wurzburg. Still, his chances of securing steady employment looked so dim that HIAS officials recommended that he consider resettling in Canada, where quota restrictions were more relaxed and job opportunities more plentiful. In 1939, Plotke, with great eagerness, informed HIAS that a colleague had helped identify a "rabbi-less congregation" that planned to issue him a contract in the very near future, so that he might fulfill the terms of the exemption clause. He obtained a position in a small congregation in Phillipsburg, Pennsylvania, and reunited with his wife and three-year-old son. For him and others like him it proved difficult to "carry on the vocation of minister" during the Depression, but it was

19. "All Rabbis' Wives and Families are Quota Exempt," *Jewish Advocate*, May 20, 1926, B4.

20. See Oscar Z. Fasman, "After Fifty Years, an Optimist," *American Jewish History* 69 (December 1979): 160.

21. "Will Install Dr. Soloveitchik Here Sunday," *Jewish Advocate*, December 9, 1932, 1. See also Seth Farber, *An American Orthodox Dreamer: Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Boston's Maimonides School* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2004), 29.

still far easier as a rabbi to enter the United States and settle there than it was for ordinary Jews.²²

Indeed, as quotas limited millions of ordinary Jews from legally entering the United States, and as tens of thousands of Jews, according to Libby Garland, entered the country illegally, rabbis and their families enjoyed the possibility of immigrating without running afoul of quota restrictions.²³ Rabbi Israel Tabak, who immigrated to the United States in 1924, took advantage of this fact. He recalled years later that, to avoid being drafted, he had traveled by train from Bukovina to Bucharest seeking a visa to the United States. Prospective immigrants at the U.S. consulate in Bucharest discouraged him, wondering why he had wasted money on his trip before receiving a coveted quota number, as standard procedures dictated. "I had no number," Tabak explained, "since I had applied for a special visa granted...to ordained ministers." To the surprise of onlookers, the consul called him in for an interview and within half an hour supplied him with a visa "under the special category of a...minister of the Jewish faith."²⁴

America, in short, continued to offer refuge to rabbis long after its gates were closed to most other people. Considering the cruel persecutions faced by rabbis in Russia following the advent of Communism, the poverty endured by rabbis in Poland, conscription laws in some European countries and the dearth of jobs in others, it comes as no surprise that rabbis made the most of this bountiful opportunity. While not all emigrating rabbis entered the United States—some went to Canada and "a number of Jews in Palestine," according to Philadelphia's *Jewish Exponent*, "organize[d] a committee to devise a plan to enable some of them to settle in the Holy Land"—America was by far the preferred destination. That is why the American rabbinate remained disproportionately foreign-born so much longer than most other professions did, and why, in the case of Orthodox Judaism, the image of the rabbi as a bearded, accented, immigrant newcomer endured in popular culture well into contemporary times.²⁵

22. Fritz Plotke to HIAS, May 11, 1939, Box 112, Folder 43, I-96, American Jewish Historical Society, New England Archives; for a brief biography of Plotke see http://www.geocities.ws/schneidemuehl_pila/rabbis.html.

23. David S. Wyman, *Paper Walls: America and the Refugee Crisis 1938-1941* (New York: Pantheon, 1985 [orig ed., 1968]); Libby Garland, *After They Closed the Gates: Jewish Illegal Immigration to the United States 1921-1995* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

24. Israel Tabak, *Three Worlds: A Jewish Odyssey* (Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing House, 1988), 84.

25. "Palestine to Admit Russian Rabbis," *Jewish Exponent*, May 29, 1931, 4. Tony Kushner's "Angels in America," televised in 2003 and set in 1985, still features a bearded,

Exactly how many Orthodox rabbis immigrated to the United States under the “ministerial exemption” clause is difficult to gauge. The incomplete records of immigrants assisted by the Boston office of HIAS, the bulk of which cover the period between 1938 and 1954, list rabbis by title. We counted 67 of them, including such well-known local Orthodox rabbinic figures as Rabbi M.Z. Twersky (the Tolner Rebbe), Rabbi Arnold Wieder, Rabbi Isaiah Wohlgemuth, and Rabbi Maier Zaitchik.²⁶ The latter, a 53-year-old Russian rabbi, has a relatively complete HIAS file, which his grandchildren have kindly supplemented from their personal knowledge. It demonstrates poignantly how the ministerial exemption clause saved the lives of many—but not all—members of a rabbinic family (Figure 1).

Rabbi Zaitchik, forced to flee from the Communists who considered teaching Judaism a crime, received a non-quota visa as a minister of religion from the American consul in Riga, Latvia and migrated to the United States, along with his daughter, Sarah (Sally) in September 1927. There, he found employment, at least officially, at Temple Tifereth Israel in Everett, Massachusetts. He earned \$40 per week (today, \$550), and declared his savings to consist of \$1,500 (today, \$20,700). On this basis, after five months in the United States, he applied to bring his wife, Malke, and five of his children who were under eighteen—Moishe, Nahoma [Naomi], Elka, Shmerel [Samuel], and Abraham Josef [Joe]—to the United States under similar non-quota visas. Three children over eighteen, two of whom were already married, were ineligible for non-quota visas. As part of Rabbi Zaitchik’s application, he swore under oath that he neither belonged to nor had any connection “with any group or organization whose principles are contrary to organized government.” In addition, Zaitchik agreed and guaranteed that he would “properly receive and take care” of his wife and children, never allow them to become public charges, and that he would send any children under age sixteen “to the public schools.” The American consul in Riga, Latvia, Alfred W. Kliefoth, offered assurance on January 27, 1929, that when Malke Zaitchik and her children departed from Russia and appeared in person at the consulate in Riga, “all possible courtesies will gladly be extended to them and non-quota visa issued should they prove admissible under the

accented immigrant Orthodox rabbi, played by Meryl Streep. The Coen Brothers’ film “A Serious Man” (2009), set in 1967, likewise featured a bearded, accented immigrant Orthodox rabbi (“Rabbi Marshak”), played by Alan Mandell.

26. “Guide to the Boston Immigrant Aid Society Collection, 1886–1977,” American Jewish Historical Society, New England Archives, <http://digifindingaids.cjh.org/?pID=365459#serI>.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.
United
State of Massachusetts)
City of Boston) SS.
County of Suffolk)

RABBI MAIER ZAITCHICK , being duly sworn deposes and says:

That he is a Declarant of the United States of America, as evidenced by his Declaration Certificate # 205585, issued by the United States District Court of Boston, Massachusetts on Feb. 24, 1928.

That he resides at 56 Deering Road, in the City of Boston, in the County of Suffolk in the State of Massachusetts.

That he is a Rabbi by profession, occupying the pulpit at Congregation Tifereth Israel, 34 Malden Street, Everett, Massachusetts.

That he earns Forty dollars (\$40.00) per week and has a savings of \$1,500.00.

That he is the husband of Malke Zaitchick and the father of the four children, due to arrive on the SS. Americana.

That he will relieve his wife and children upon their arrival, care for them and provide fully for their maintenance, and see that they do not become a public charge.

That he respectfully request the immigration authorities to discharge his wife and children to the custody of the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society of America.

Sworn to before me this
30th day of September, 1929.

Notary Public.

Seal

Figure 1. Rabbi Maier Zaitchik's testimony to his rabbinical credentials and employment status as a clergyman in Everett, MA. Courtesy of the American Jewish Historical Society, Jewish Heritage Center, Boston, MA and New York, NY.

laws and regulations in effect.” The family, minus one child who had in the meantime turned eighteen and become ineligible for a visa, finally arrived at Ellis Island on November 1, 26 months after Rabbi Zaitchik had immigrated. Once officials confirmed the rabbi’s immigration status, his family was allowed to enter the United States on non-quota visas.²⁷

Orthodox rabbis living in America during the 1920s did not always understand that rabbis like Rabbi Zaitchik were able to immigrate outside of normal quota restrictions. Rabbi Gedaliah Silverstone of Washington, D.C. made no mention of this fact when, in an impassioned sermon, he criticized the tragic decision of legislators to “close the gates.”²⁸ Rabbi Tobias Geffen of Atlanta likewise omitted the exemption when he shared with his congregants in Atlanta his consternation and uncertainty about the welfare of the suffering Jews of Europe who could no longer settle in the United States due to the “anti-Jewish legislation.”²⁹ A short essay authored by a student at the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) in New York, Eliezer Ladizinsky, actually drew completely erroneous conclusions because he too failed to appreciate the importance of the clause that exempted ministers from the quotas:

Of late, the closing of gates to the United States to our brethren who wish to emigrate from Eastern Europe has occasioned much debate over the fate of Judaism in the not too distant future. Some say that now, as the source of our religious vitality has been halted, American Jews must, with all their power, generate the courage to fortify Judaism in its new environs; others reason that the foundations of this American Jew are not at all solidified and therefore first need to be strengthened.³⁰

Orthodox Judaism, according to Ladizinsky, could no longer rely upon European immigrants to teach piety and the observance of Jewish law. “The value of this moment is great, and the historical charge is immense,” he wrote, seeking to encourage his American-trained rabbinical friends to save Orthodoxy from imminent peril. History, however, showed his analysis to be far wide of the mark.

What Ladizinsky and so many others failed to understand was that the ranks of Orthodox rabbis dramatically swelled rather than declined in the wake of the immigration quotas. East European Orthodox rabbis took advantage of the clause exempting them from the immigration

27. See Box 176, Folder 4, I-96, American Jewish Historical Society, New England. Many thanks to archivist Judith Garner for her assistance with this material and to Dr. Alan Zaitchik for filling in important details.

28. Gedaliah Silverstone, *Sefer Me'irat Einayim* (St. Louis: Moinester Printing Co., 1924), 32.

29. Tuvia [Tobias] Geffen, *Lev Yosef* (St. Louis: Moinester Printing Co., 1924), 221.

30. Eliezer Ladizinsky, “She’elah Bi-Zmanah,” *Hedenu* 1, June 25, 1926, 2.

quotas and migrated to the United States in large numbers. This is evidenced by tracing the remarkable growth of the Agudath Ha-Rabbonim, the organization of East European trained rabbis, in the years that followed the quota's enactment. The Agudath Ha-Rabbonim, founded in 1902 with 59 members, only accepted as members "someone who was ordained to rule on Jewish law by the great and sagacious rabbis of Europe."³¹ It rejected American-trained rabbis. So changes in its membership must almost entirely have been due to immigration. The Agudath Ha-Rabbonim's growth can thus serve as a barometer of the ministerial exemption's singular impact.

In 1920, just prior to the Emergency Quota Act, the Agudath Ha-Rabbonim reported to the *American Jewish Year Book* that its membership stood at 200.³² By 1924, that number had grown to 225. In 1928, it rose to 315.³³ By then, Jeffrey Gurock reminds us, half of the organization's charter members were dead, but instead of shrinking, its membership numbers continued to grow, reaching 400 in 1933 and 450 in 1939.³⁴ By the time World War II ended, it boasted 500 members.³⁵ Its membership thus increased by 150 percent (200 to 500) during a period when, according to standard estimates, the Jewish population of the country as a whole increased by only about 36 percent (3.3 million to 4.5 million)! In contrast to others, the Agudath Ha-Rabbonim well understood that the exemption of rabbis from the immigration quota was the major reason for this fabulous rate of growth. It even claimed, back in 1928, that its leaders' own lobbying in Washington had helped to make the ministerial exemption possible.³⁶

Numbers alone, however, do not adequately portray the ministerial exemption clause's overwhelming impact. To better understand the importance of these new arrivals—described by Gurock as "Torah-world leaders" who transplanted the "European Agudath Israel's position to America" and "chart[ed] a course for their movement in line with their group's worldwide position"—one must look at the roster of "promi-

31. *Sefer Ha-Yovel: Agudath Ha-Rabbonim ha-Orthodoxim de-Artzot ha-Brit ve-Canada* (New York, 1928), 24.

32. *American Jewish Year Book* (henceforth *AJYB*) 22 (1920–21): 317. *AJYB* listed the organization by its official English name, "Union of Orthodox Rabbis of United States and Canada."

33. See "Jewish National Organizations in the United States," *AJYB* 29 (1927–1928): 182; and "Jewish National Organizations in the United States," *AJYB* 33 (1931–1932): 247.

34. Gurock, *Orthodox Jews in America*, 149; *AJYB* 37 (1935–36): 327; 42 (1940–41): 562.

35. *AJYB* 47 (1945–1946): 604.

36. *Sefer ha-Yovel shel Agudat ha-Rabbonim ha-Orthodoxim de-Artzot Ha-Brit u-Canada* (New York, 1928), 84.

nent” Orthodox rabbis who immigrated to the United States during the quota years (many more Orthodox rabbis, of course, loyally served their communities but never rose to prominence).³⁷ Moshe Sherman’s biographical dictionary makes such an analysis possible.³⁸ Of its 120 biographies of “rabbis, educators, and philanthropists who have made contributions to American Jewish life in general and Orthodox Judaism in particular,” some 32, or just over a quarter, were rabbis who had immigrated to America between 1921 and 1946, in most cases with their families. The complete list of prominent rabbis appears in the appendix of this article, but here it is sufficient to notice the most famous of these men; the year of their arrival in America is listed in parentheses. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (1937), the foremost rabbinic decisor (*posek*) of his generation and the head of Mesivta Tifereth Jerusalem in New York; Rabbi Aharon Kotler (1940), the founder of Beth Midrash Gevoha, the Lakewood Yeshiva; Rabbi Yaakov Ruderman (1930), the founder of Ner Israel Yeshiva in Baltimore; Rabbi Eliyahu Meir Bloch (1940), the founder of Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland; Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner (1931), head of New York’s Mesivta Rabbi Chaim Berlin; Rabbi Joseph Breuer (1939), the grandson of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch and the founder of K’hal Adath Jeshurun in Manhattan’s Washington Heights; Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetsky (1937), head of Yeshiva Torah Vodaath; Rabbi Yosef Henkin (1922), longtime director of the New York-based Ezras Torah organization that assisted Orthodox scholars; Rabbi Shmuel Aaron Pardes (1924), editor of *Ha-Pardes* in Chicago; Rabbi Samuel Belkin (1929), second president of Yeshiva University; Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (1932), Talmudist, philosopher, and Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva University; Rabbi Moshe Soloveitchik (1929), Rabbi Chaim Heller (1937), Rabbi David Lifshitz (1941), Rabbi Shlomo Polachek (1922), and Rabbi Moshe Shatzkes (1941), central rabbinic faculty members of Yeshiva University; Rabbi Yoseph Yitzhak Schneerson (1940), the sixth Rebbe of Lubavitch; Rabbi Menaham Mendel Schneerson (1941), the seventh Rebbe of Lubavitch; and Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum (1946), the Rebbe of Satmar. Together, these rabbis changed the face of Orthodox Judaism in America, winning it new adherents and power, transforming its institutional structure, opposing compromises with modernity, banning alliances with non-Orthodox Jews, and (with a few exceptions) battling

37. Jeffrey S. Gurock, “Resistors and Accommodators: Varieties of Orthodox Rabbis in America, 1886–1983,” *American Jewish Archives Journal* 35 (November 1983): 153–54.

38. Moshe Sherman, *Orthodox Judaism in America: A Biographical Dictionary and Sourcebook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996); for some strengths and weaknesses of the volume, see the review by Kimmy Caplan in *American Jewish Archives* 68, no. 2 (1996): 221–229.

against Zionism. Absent these immigrant rabbis, Orthodox Judaism in America would have been rabbinically, educationally, institutionally, and numerically far weaker than it is today and the entire course of its postwar history would have been different.³⁹

The rise of Nazism underscored the importance of the non-quota immigration clause. One-third of the rabbis listed in our appendix left Europe in the face of the Nazi onslaught. Immigration to America was notoriously difficult for Jews during the late 1930s and early 1940s, for quotas were rigidly enforced. Consular officials were instructed to adhere closely to the ban on admitting persons “likely to become a public charge,” and State Department officials responsible for issuing visas advocated a policy of “postpone and postpone and postpone.” Nevertheless, and in large measure due to the non-quota immigration clause, various rabbis succeeded in hurtling these obstacles.⁴⁰

The efforts were spurred along by the formation of the Va’ad Ha-Hatzalah. Founded by the Agudath Ha-Rabbonim in 1939, the Va’ad was established to bring Orthodox rabbinic scholars and students to safety in the United States, although its valiant efforts proved instrumental in the survival of many other Jews as well. The challenge for the organization was to convince government officials that all official regulations were being properly enforced, and that the refugees brought to the United States would not become “public charges,” forced to rely on federal or state aid. Accordingly, the Va’ad Ha-Hatzalah vouched on many occasions that the “organization is [able] and willing to guarantee [the immigrant rabbis’] future maintenance from the day they will arrive [in the] country, and we guarantee to the Government of the United States that this group [will] not become public charges.”⁴¹ Of course, to secure employment for these rabbinic émigrés the Va’ad required the support of rabbinical seminaries and synagogues. Rabbi Oscar Z. Fasman of Hebrew

39. A counter-historian might want to consider how different American Judaism would look had the ministerial exemption *not* been written into the immigration quotas. For a thoughtful counter-history of this era, see Jeffrey Gurock, *The Holocaust Averted: An Alternate History of American Jewry 1938–1967* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015).

40. Sarna, *American Judaism*, 259–260; for additional sources see p.407 n.108; and Richard Breitman and Allan J. Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 67–83.

41. “Draft of affidavit of the Va’ad ha-Hatzalah on behalf of Shanghai refugee rabbinical scholars, March 1946,” in *Archives of the Holocaust*, vol. 18, ed. Jonathan Helfand (New York: Garland Publishing, 1991), 185; on the Vaad Ha-Hatzala, see Efraim Zuroff, *The Response of Orthodox Jewry in the United States to the Holocaust: The Activities of the Vaad ha-Hatzala Rescue Committee 1939–1945* (Hoboken: Ktav/Yeshiva University Press, 2000).

Theological College in Chicago and Rabbi Bernard Revel of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary found room in their budgets to hire rabbis as “professors,” per the 1924 legislation.⁴² These positions, though, were limited. The Va’ad, therefore, reached out to Orthodox synagogues and their lay leaders to absorb refugees and facilitate in the resettling process of rabbis and their families, under the terms of the “ministerial exemption.” To encourage synagogues, the Va’ad circulated the following sample letter to be submitted to consuls for the purpose of procuring visas for rabbis trapped in Europe:

Honorable Sir:

We are taking this means of informing you that our Congregation has extended a contract to Rabbi _____ of _____ inviting him to our pulpit and assume duties as our spiritual leader.

Rabbi _____’s fine personality traits and theological erudition is known to many of our members and he has also been highly recommended by Rabbinical authorities.

We shall appreciate any courtesies extended to Rabbi _____ (and his family) and trust the Consul will facilitate the granting of their visas and expedite their travel to America.

Respectfully yours,⁴³

The Va’ad Ha-Hatzalah figured prominently in this history but its energies contributed to larger initiatives among American Jewry, as well. The well-documented effort to bring the leadership of the Chabad religious movement to the United States illustrates this point, and likewise highlights both the importance and the limitations of the ministerial exemption clause in saving rabbis’ lives. In 1939, Rabbi Joseph Isaac [Yosef Yitzhak] Schneersohn, his son-in-law Rabbi Samarius Gourary, and his close aid, Rabbi Chaim Lieberman, applied to the American Consulate in Riga for non-quota visas as ministers of religion; they also sought visas for their wives and minor children, consistent with the law. Influential American politicians, such as Senator Robert Wagner of New York and Postmaster General James A. Farley, as well as Jewish leaders, including Justice Louis Brandeis and Benjamin V. Cohen, petitioned the State Department to assist in saving the Rebbe and bringing him to the

42. See Aaron Rothkoff, *Bernard Revel: Builder of American Jewish Orthodoxy* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1972), 209–13; and *B’nai Emunah: Tulsa Oklahoma, 1916–1966* (Tulsa, 1966), 55.

43. “Sample Consul Letter,” in *Archives of the Holocaust*, 13.

United States. The State Department expected “that other Rabbis of the Chabad will make similar applications.” Since “the intent of the law,” according to the State Department, was “to enable religious bodies to bring *needed Ministers* rather than to exempt such persons from quota requirements simply because of their vocational status,” the question was whether Chabad rabbis were eligible for non-quota visas. Compounding this question was the fact that the Chabad rabbis “were not technically affiliated with any Congregation or community as Rabbi.” The novel principle upon which Chabad’s lawyers met these challenges and applied for immigrant visas was “that they constitute members of the hierarchy of the Chabad; that the Chabad constitutes an independent sect or group among Orthodox Jews and is ruled by a hierarchy of which the supreme authority is vested in Rabbi Schneersohn, the Lubowitzer Rabbi, who holds a somewhat analogous position to that of the head of the Catholic Church.”⁴⁴ Thanks to financial obligations made by Chabad supporters in the United States to ensure that their leaders would not become public charges, as well as an extensive legal and lobbying campaign orchestrated by Washington attorney Max Rhoades on Chabad’s behalf, including direct intervention on the part of Robert T. Pell, Assistant Chief of the Division of European Affairs at the State Department, and also Secretary of State Cordell Hull, the non-quota visas were ultimately approved for the Rebbe and most of his entourage. The non-quota clause of the immigration act proved necessary to win these visas, but as so often the case in dealing with government agencies, the wording of the law hardly sufficed. A good lawyer and effective lobbying turned out to be no less essential.⁴⁵

The case of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the son-in-law and later successor to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, underscores these points. The future seventh Rebbe of Lubavitch was a student in Paris when World War II began. Since he had not, “for at least two years immediately preceding the time of his application for admission to the United States” been serving as a “minister” to any congregation, as the law demanded, he seemed to be ineligible to apply for a non-quota visa to immigrate to the United States. So, describing himself as an engineer, he and his wife (the daughter of the Sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe), applied for ordinary visas

44. “Memorandum of Investigation by U.S. Department of State re Transfer of Hierarchy of Agudas Chasidei Chabad to America (January 10, 1940),” in Rachel Altein and Eliezer Y. Zaklikovsky, eds., *Out of the Inferno: The Efforts that led to the Rescue of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson of Lubavitch from War Torn Europe in 1939–40* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot Publication Society, 2002), 310–11.

45. Bryan Mark Rigg, *Rescued from the Reich* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); for documents, see Altein and Zaklikovsky, *Out of the Inferno*.

on the tiny quota, limited to 2,248 people annually, reserved for those born in Russia. Their chances of obtaining a visa on that basis seemed vanishingly small. Back in New York, where the Sixth Rebbe had found refuge, Chabad's lawyers worked tirelessly to save the Schneersons. Applying on their behalf, the lawyers argued that as a member of the same "Chabad hierarchy" recognized in the case of his father-in-law, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson met the legal requirement for a non-quota visa. His "congregation," they insisted, was the worldwide community of Chabad followers. The American consul in Paris, on June 5, 1940, rejected this claim since Schneerson had submitted two different visa applications—one, that he submitted as an engineer, and the other, submitted in New York, that listed him as a rabbi in the Chabad hierarchy. So, on the heels of the Nazi occupation of Paris on June 14, 1940, Schneerson and his wife fled south to the spa town of Vichy and then to Nice. It took personal intervention by Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge Long, an ardent nativist and on other occasions a vocal opponent of Jewish immigration,⁴⁶ to save the Schneersons. "I see no reason why he should not be granted immigrant visa even though we authorized non-quota," Long wrote, doubtless aware of the torrent of correspondence that the State Department had received on behalf of the Chabad hierarchy. Political expedience thus trumped Long's nativist inclinations, and following his intervention the future Rebbe and his wife arrived in New York on June 23, 1941.⁴⁷

Orthodox Rabbis and their families were, of course, not the only Jews saved by the non-quota immigration clause (4d) of the Johnson-Reed Act. Reform rabbis, like Max Nussbaum and Max Wiener, likewise won visas on the basis of the clause, and so did some Conservative rabbis, like Rabbi Emil Schorsch. Scholars benefited from the clause too, for it specifically exempted from the quota anyone who was a "professor of a college, academy, seminary, or university; and his wife, and his unmarried children under 18 years of age, if accompanying or following to join him."⁴⁸ On this basis, as Michael A. Meyer has shown, such well-known

46. On Long, see David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust 1941–1945* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 105–109, 190–191, *passim*; Richard Breitman and Allan J. Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 164–168, 173–179.

47. Chaim Miller, *Turning Judaism Outward: A Biography of the Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson* (New York: Kol Menachem, 2014), 122–140; the February 7, 1941 letter from Breckinridge Long is reprinted on p. 135; for a related account, see Altein and Zaklikovsky, *Out of the Inferno*, 328–331.

48. The government interpreted immigration laws in a highly gendered way ("his") permitting eligible men to bring their wives on a non-quota basis, but not permitting women to bring their husbands on that same basis. See Adena M. Rich, "The Status of Women Under the United States Immigration and Naturalization Laws," *Social Service Review* 23 (June 1949): 218–230.

academics as Eric Werner, Franz Rosenthal, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Isaiah Sonne, Eugen Täubler, and Samuel Atlas received non-quota visas to teach at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati.⁴⁹ The State Department made it no easier for those scholars than it did for the Lubavitcher Rebbe; lawyers and high-level interventions were in all cases required. As Hebrew Union College's president, Julian Morgenstern, complained to Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, Jr. in 1941, "I have never been able to accomplish anything whatever with that Department unless it was possible to bring pressure from some person high in the present administration upon the Office of the Visa Division."⁵⁰

Following World War II, amidst sympathy for Displaced Persons, conditions eased somewhat for rabbis seeking to enter the United States on non-quota visas. Although a literal reading of the regulations required a rabbi to have served in his position "continuously for at least two years immediately preceding the time of his application for admission to the United States," the State Department amended the rule for those living in Displaced Persons (DP) camps. "If facts in each case prove conclusively to the American Consul that the applying rabbi had been in the clergy at least two years and had not abandoned his profession, but merely was prevented from pursuing it," the Department explained, "he will be eligible for immigration to the United States as a non-quota immigrant." According to HIAS, many "bona-fide rabbis" were affected by that ruling.⁵¹ Most of them were Orthodox.

The Orthodox rabbinate, indeed, was at all times the prime Jewish beneficiary of the ministerial exemption to the immigration quota. Since the vast majority of rabbis in Central and Eastern Europe were Orthodox, the vast majority of rabbis who took advantage of section 4d exemptions in emigrating were Orthodox as well. For decades, prior to the existence of the quota, those Orthodox rabbis had been reluctant to immigrate to America. The country was known as a *treifene medinah*, an unkosher land where Jews violated the commandments and spurned

49. Michael A. Meyer, "The Refugee Scholars Project of the Hebrew Union College," in *Judaism Within Modernity: Essays on Jewish History and Religion*, ed. Michael A. Meyer (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001): 345–361; see also David G. Dalin, "Cyrus Adler and the Rescue of Jewish Refugee Scholars," *American Jewish History* 78 (March 1989): 351–362.

50. Julian Morgenstern to Henry Morgenthau Jr. (September 26, 1941), Samuel Atlas File, Box 3204, AJA, as quoted in Meyer, "The Refugee Scholars Project," 357. Student visas for those seeking to escape Europe were handled through a different clause in the Johnson-Reed Act (4c), with its own set of regulations.

51. "Rabbis Classified as Displaced Persons Will Be Considered for Non-quota Entry to U.S.," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, January 12, 1947.

rabbinic authority.⁵² Rabbi Moses Weinberger, one of but three or four rabbis in New York with the highest level of Orthodox ordination back in 1887, advised his colleagues in Europe to “stay home.”⁵³ Most Orthodox rabbis did. Even as hundreds of thousands of Orthodox and anti-Orthodox Jews immigrated to the United States, the number of rabbis who joined them was paltry. As late as 1927, according to the U.S. census, there was only about one rabbi per 2,415 Jews.⁵⁴ Later, as conditions deteriorated in Eastern Europe, and later still during the Holocaust years, America provided a haven for growing numbers of rabbis, as we have seen. Indeed, thanks to their exemption from the 1921 and 1924 quota legislation, immigration became far easier for rabbis than for ordinary Jews. As a result, the number of rabbis coming to America grew year by year, and the ratio of rabbis to laity narrowed.

This proved deeply significant, especially for Orthodox Judaism. Not only did it save the lives of many Orthodox rabbis, it also transformed Orthodoxy in ways that could not have been predicted prior to World War I. First, the rabbis who came to America following the immigration restrictions brought new levels of East European Jewish learning to the United States; some were world-class Orthodox scholars. These men enhanced existing institutions of Jewish learning, like RIETS and Yeshiva Torah Vodaath in Brooklyn, and also established new ones in places like Manhattan, Brooklyn, Lakewood, Baltimore, and Cleveland. In time, they created a cadre of thousands of American-trained Orthodox rabbis—some Fervently Orthodox, some Modern Orthodox—who made possible Orthodoxy’s post-World War II revival.

Second, the arrival of Orthodox rabbis after World War I did much to swing Orthodoxy to the religious right. Many of these rabbis, influenced by their European training, saw no reason to cooperate with their Conservative and Reform counterparts. They spurned institutions like the Synagogue Council of America (est. 1926) and the New York Board of Rabbis (est. 1946) that sought to promote Jews’ common religious interests. Indicatively, every single one of the eleven Fervently Orthodox rabbis who signed the celebrated 1956 ban on maintaining any official contacts with Reform and Conservative rabbis (“It is forbidden by the law of our sacred Torah to participate with them either as an individual

52. Arthur Hertzberg, “‘Treifene Medina’: Learned Opposition to Emigration to the United States,” *Proceedings of the Eighth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (1984): 1–30.

53. Jonathan D. Sarna, ed., *People Walk on Their Heads: Moses Weinberger’s Jews and Judaism in New York* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1981), 59.

54. Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 160; *AJYB* 31 (1929): 120, 306.

or as an organized communal body") had immigrated to the United States after 1921.⁵⁵

Finally, by allowing rabbis to immigrate free of quota limitations while the immigration of other Jews remained severely restricted, the quota law unintentionally reversed the great imbalance between rabbis and congregants that characterized the prior era of mass immigration. Moses Weinberger, in 1887, had described America's Orthodox Jews as "sheep without a shepherd" and that characterization remained true on the eve of World War I, when there were but 120 members of the Agudath Ha-Rabbonim and only 79 members of the Jewish Theological Seminary Alumni Association (many of whom, at the time, considered themselves Orthodox)—or about 200 Orthodox rabbis for some three million Jews.⁵⁶ In contrast, by 1945, the *American Jewish Year Book* noted the existence of some 875 Orthodox rabbis, as well as 301 members of the Conservative Rabbinical Assembly—or almost six times as many non-Reform rabbis for about 4.5 million Jews.⁵⁷ Eleven years after that, Yeshiva University President Samuel Belkin (who had himself immigrated in 1929) described the American Orthodox rabbinate as "the youngest movement on this continent ... not more than twenty-five years old."⁵⁸ He likely excluded the Fervently Orthodox from his analysis, but his central point was correct. The Orthodox rabbinate, by then, had found a firm place in America. The clause exempting ministers of "any religious denomination" from the immigration quotas goes far to explain how that happened.

55. Rabbi Gedalia Shorr, who immigrated as a youngster in 1922, was the only signer who had spent significant time training in America. The other rabbis who signed were: Avraham Joffen, Avraham Kalmanowitz, Ahron Kotler, David Lifshitz, Chaim Mordecai Katz, Yaakov Kaminetsky, Yaakov Ruderman, Yitzchak Hutner, Menachem Yosef Zachs, and Moshe Feinstein; for the background, see Sarna, *American Judaism*, 303; for the text and signers, see Louis Bernstein, "The Emergence of the English-Speaking Orthodox Rabbinate" (PhD diss., Yeshiva University, 1977), 556; and on Orthodoxy's swing to the right, see Samuel C. Heilman, *Sliding to the Right: The Contest for the Future of American Jewish Orthodoxy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

56. Sarna, ed., *People Walk on Their Heads*, 114. The *American Jewish Year Book* listed a total of 406 rabbis who belonged to rabbinical associations in 1914, including 207 members of the Reform Central Conference of American Rabbis, then the largest of the three rabbinical associations. An unknown number of rabbis belonged to no rabbinical body. See *AJYB* 16 (1914–15), 279, 297, 310, 358.

57. Orthodox rabbis were divided among the Assembly of Hebrew Orthodox Rabbis of America and Canada, with 125 members; the Union of Orthodox Rabbis of United States and Canada [Agudath Ha-Rabbonim] with 500 members; and the Rabbinical Council of America with 250 members; see *AJYB* 46 (1944–45): 428, 430, 459, 462. In all likelihood, there were many additional rabbis who paid dues to no rabbinical body.

58. Samuel Belkin, "The Jewish Community in a non-Jewish World," in *Essays in Traditional Jewish Thought* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 141–142.

APPENDIX

**PROMINENT ORTHODOX RABBIS ADMITTED UNDER THE
NON-QUOTA IMMIGRATION CLAUSE (1921–1946)**

Belkin, Samuel (1929)
 Bloch, Chaim (1922)
 Bloch, Eliyahu Meir (1940)
 Breuer, Joseph (1939)
 Chazan, Eliyahu Simcha (1946)
 Epstein, Chaim Fischel (1923)
 Feinstein, Moshe (1937)
 Greenwald, Yekutiel (1924)
 Grozovsky, Reuven (1924)
 Heller, Chaim (1939)
 Henkin, Yosef (1922)
 Hutner, Yitzchak (1931)
 Jablonski, Nissan (1922)
 Kalmanowitz, Abraham (1941)
 Kaminetsky, Yaakov (1937)
 Korb, Chaim Isaac (1927)
 Kotler, Aharon (1940)
 Krieger, Israel Abraham Abba (1923)
 Lifshitz, David (1941)
 Notelovitz, Chaim Ben Zion (1925)
 Pardes, Shmuel Aaron (1924)
 Polacheck, Shlomo (1922)
 Porath, Israel (1922)
 Rosen, Moshe (1928)
 Ruderman, Yaakov (1930)
 Schneerson, Menachem Mendel (1941)
 Schneersohn, Yosef Yitzhak (1940)
 Schwab, Shimon (1936)
 Shatzkes, Moshe (1941)
 Soloveitchik, Joseph B. (1932)
 Soloveitchik, Moshe (1929)
 Teitelbaum, Yoel (1946)
 Telushkin, Nissan (1924)

Source: Moshe D. Sherman, *Orthodox Judaism in America: A Biographical Dictionary and Sourcebook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996). The year in parentheses indicates the year when these men immigrated to America. A far larger group of Orthodox rabbis who served their communities, but did not become “prominent,” likewise entered the United States under the non-quota immigration provision.

The Myth of No Return: Jewish Return Migration to Eastern Europe, 1881–1914

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The Myth of No Return: Jewish Return Migration to Eastern Europe, 1881–1914

Jonathan D. Sarna

No myth stands higher in the pantheon of received American Jewish historical wisdom than the myth of no return:

The difference between the Jewish and the non-Jewish immigrants can be defined in the following general way; whereas the others, in the main, sought to improve their lot, the Jews frequently looked simply for a refuge. . . . Others could, if they so chose, go back to their old countries; for Jews there was generally no way back. Jews came here to stay. When they left their old countries, they burned all their bridges behind them. . . .¹

In making this assertion, C. Bezalel Sherman merely echoed conclusions reached by a distinguished coterie of earlier scholars. Samuel Joseph, whose *Jewish Immigration to the United States from 1881–1910* remains a basic work, asserted that “Jewish immigration exhibits a quality of permanence and stability to so great a degree as to render this fact one of its distinguishing characteristics.” Demographer Liebmann Hersch found that “the rate of repatriation (emigrants per 100 immigrants) is much lower for Jews than for any other people.” Jacob Lestschinsky boldly declared that “Jewish immigrants arrived everywhere with the intent to settle permanently.”²

Statistics seemingly support these sweeping conclusions. As Lestschinsky demonstrated, from 1908 to 1925, 1,018,878 Jews immigrated into the United States while a mere 52,585 departed, a return emigration rate of barely 5.2%. By contrast, the return migration rate of Italians in this period was 55.8%, and even that of the Germans was 15.3%.³ More significant data on return migration comes from figures confined to the years before World War One, since later statistics were skewed by wartime conditions and subsequent restrictions.

1 C. Bezalel Sherman, *The Jew Within American Society* (Detroit: 1961), pp. 55–60.

2 Samuel Joseph, *Jewish Immigration to the United States from 1881–1910* (New York: 1914), p. 139; Liebmann Hersch, “International Migration of the Jews,” in Walter F. Willcox, ed., *International Migrations* (New York: 1931), vol. II, p. 478; Jacob Lestschinsky, “Jewish Migrations, 1840–1956,” in Louis Finkelstein, ed., *The Jews* (New York: 1960), vol. II, p. 1565. See also Uri D. Herscher and Stanley F. Chyet, *A Socialist Perspective on Jews, America and Immigration* (Cincinnati: 1980), p. 52; Salo W. Baron, *Steeled By Adversity* (Philadelphia: 1971), p. 280; and Peter I. Rose, “Introduction,” in Rose, ed., *The Ghetto and Beyond* (New York: 1969), p. 7.

3 Lestschinsky, “Jewish Migrations,” p. 1565. Kristian Hvidt, *Flight to America* (New York: 1975), p. 181 suggests that United States figures considerably underestimate the extent of return migration.

Myth of No Return

Departure of Emigrants, 1908–1914*
(fiscal years ending June 30, absolute figures in thousands)

	Non-Jewish	Jewish by Origin				
		Total	Tsarist Russia	Austria-Hungary	Romania	Other
Departures	1,947	46.8	28.1	11.3	0.7	6.7
% Distribution		100.0	60.0	24.2	1.5	14.3
Admissions (immigration)	6,053	656.5	471.4	96.1	15.7	73.3
Ratio of departures to admissions (%)	32.2	7.1	6.0	11.8	4.5	9.1

* Source: Simon Kuznets, "Immigration of Russian Jews to the United States: Background and Structure," *Perspectives in American History*, IX (1975), p. 40.

While a slightly larger percentage of Jewish immigrants returned during this period, the rate is still remarkably low, both absolutely and comparatively. Revealingly, Jews overall were almost twice as likely to return to Austria-Hungary, where they were treated comparatively well, than to Russia, where they faced persecutions and privation. In 1912, a recession year, the return migration rate among Austro-Hungarian Jews hit 19.7% (10,757 immigrants; 2121 returnees). The comparable rate for Russian Jews was only 7.6% (58,389 immigrants; 448 returnees).⁴

Unfortunately, government statistics provide no direct information about Jewish immigrants who returned to Europe before 1908. Conclusions about Jewish departure rates are thus based entirely on later figures, the assumption being that earlier ones followed the same pattern.⁵ This assumption has never been tested. In fact, it is completely groundless.

Before 1900, nobody seems to have commented on the lack of Jewish returnees; to the contrary, reports declared that the number of those returning was large. The *Jewish Messenger* in 1888 decried the existence of "hundreds of dispirited people who are as eager to

- 4 Figures calculated from Walter F. Willcox, *International Migrations* (New York: 1929), vol. I, pp. 464, 480. On this important and little appreciated difference between Russian and Austro-Hungarian Jews, see Joseph, *Jewish Immigration*, pp. 135–137; Peter Wiernik, *History of the Jews in America* (New York: 1972), p. 282; Judd L. Teller, *Strangers and Natives* (New York: 1968), pp. 5–10; and more generally, Johann Chmelar, "The Austrian Emigration, 1900–1914," *Perspectives in American History*, VII (1973), 275–378.
- 5 Simon Kuznets, "Immigration of Russian Jews to the United States: Background and Structure," in *Perspectives in American History*, 9 (1975), pp. 47–48 assumes that return migration in early years was less than in the post-1908 period. No evidence supports this view.

leave the country as a few years or months ago they were so hopeful in reaching it.” The newspaper claimed that eight hundred Jews were demanding return, even if it meant their traveling back to Europe in cattle ships.⁶ Annual reports of the United Hebrew Charities (U.H.C.) similarly stressed the immigrant desire to return. Dr. George M. Price, who reported on “the tremendous number of those returning to Russia” to readers of the Russian Jewish periodical *Voskhod*, calculated that 7,580 immigrants returned with the U.H.C.’s assistance just from 1882–1889.⁷ As late as 1896, Julius Goldman, speaking as a trustee of the Baron de Hirsch Fund, reported to the Jewish Colonization Association in Paris that “Hundreds of these people have said and are continually saying that their condition is worse than it was in Russia, and it is the opinion of those who are acquainted with them that thousands would return to Russia if they had the means and dared to do so.”⁸

Such impressionistic reports can, of course, often be misleading. With hundreds of thousands of Jews immigrating to America, evidence that a few hundred or even a few thousand of them returned would hardly blunt existing generalizations. Returning emigrants might have been more noisy than representative, and contemporaries could have been deceived. Both quantitative and qualitative evidence, however, militate against this conclusion.

One indicator of return migration comes from census figures. While not specifically enumerating Jews, they did include tallies of foreign born Russians, of whom Jews comprised better than sixty percent.⁹ Resulting figures can only be suggestive, particularly since the accuracy of the census count itself is questionable. But the vast difference between “expected population” (Russian-borns counted in the previous census, minus those who died, plus the decade’s Russian immigrants, minus those who died), and the enumerated population as tallied by censustakers does require notice. In 1890, the ex-

6 *Jewish Messenger*, September 14, 1888, p. 4; September 21, 1888, p. 4.

7 George M. Price, “The Russian Jews in America,” translated by Leo Shpall, *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, 48 (1958), 44–46; *Thirteenth Annual Report of the Board of Relief of the United Hebrew Charities of the City of New York* (New York: 1887), pp. 14–16, 31.

8 Julius Goldman to Jewish Colonization Association (October 6, 1896), Baron de Hirsch Fund Papers, American Jewish Historical Society.

9 On the use of “Russian-origin” census data for Jewish statistics, see Elias Tcherikower, ed., *The Early Jewish Labor Movement in the United States*, translated and revised by Aaron Antonovsky (New York: 1961), pp. 363–365; Kuznets, “Immigration of Russian Jews,” p. 41; and Erich Rosenthal, “The Equivalence of United States Census Data for Persons of Russian Stock or Descent with American Jews: An Evaluation,” *Demography*, 12 (May, 1975), 275–290.

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pected Russian-born population, assuming a mortality rate of 19 per thousand since 1880, equalled 230,429 (29,487 surviving Russians from 1880 + 200,942 surviving immigrants, 1881–1890). Census takers counted 182,644 Russian-borns. The difference – 47,785 – yields a return migration rate of 22.4%. Naturally, American-born children of immigrants, not being foreigners, do not enter into this calculation. Using the same procedure for the next decade, this time assuming an annual mortality of 18 per thousand, yields a return migration rate of 26.46% (152,307 surviving Russians from 1890 + 467,753 surviving immigrants, 1891–1900 = an expected population of 620,060, some 130,693 Russians more than were actually counted).¹⁰ Neither 22.4% nor 26.46% can be considered true Jewish return migration rates, owing to the large number of questionable variables employed, but both figures suggest that return migration before 1900 was much higher than generally assumed, likely in the range of 15–20%. Elias Tcherikower's independent estimate of up to 29% Jewish departures during the extraordinary economic crisis of 1882 lends credence to these figures, as does an estimate that East European Jewish return migration from England, 1895–1902, stood at least as high as 15.3%.¹¹

More powerful evidence of Jewish return migration can be found in written sources from the early years of massive East European immigration. In 1882, the Hebrew language newspaper, *Hamagid* (Lyck, Prussia), noting a growing stream of departures, exclaimed “this is what American immigration has finally come to!” The *Boston Hebrew Observer* reported that some seventy-five Boston Jews rushed down to the Commonwealth Alms House in Tewksbury merely on the rumor that the city's Provident Association would pay their way home. A good many other immigrants, Bernard Horwich remembered, remained in America only long enough to save up and head back. Rabbi Moses Weinberger's estimate of the immigrant situation in the 1880's thus seems to have been accurate. Some Jews came to America “only to make money with the thought later of returning.” Others, especially intellectuals and teachers, had “trouble finding steady work [and] after a few years shuffling about as if in a

10 I have borrowed some of my procedures here from Simon Kuznets and Ernest Rubin, *Immigration and the Foreign Born*, National Bureau of Economic Research Occasional Paper #46 (New York: 1954).

11 Elias Tcherikower, ed., *Geshikhte fun der yidisher arbeterbavegung in di Fareynikte Shtatn* (New York: 1943) vol. 1, p. 245. British figures calculated from *Report of the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration with Minutes of Evidence and Appendix* (London: 1903), appendix, tables 5, 81; see evidence #15325 and 15515 for the estimate that each case of repatriation involved an average of three people.

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world of desolation . . . g[a]ve up and return[ed] shamefacedly to their homelands.”¹²

Many immigrants, particularly in the 1880's, were aided in their efforts to return home. Charities provided one way tickets as an investment; those who departed would not become a burden on the community. While Secretary of the Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society Augustus A. Levey claimed that “In no instance is any adult returned, except [if] he has himself urgently requested it,” and a United Hebrew Charities report insisted that “In no cases were [immigrants] urged to go,” the choice offered probably was “return to Europe or fend for yourself.” Leonard L. Cohen's description of how English Jewish charities treated immigrant mendicants likely applies to America as well:

He tells us he cannot succeed without charity. He has been here, say, nine months. We say “if you cannot succeed here, and as you had nothing to bring you here, you had better go back.” He rather demurs the first time, but the second time he agrees and he goes.¹³

Immigrant-run organizations like Philadelphia's Association for the Protection of Jewish Immigrants may have treated East Europeans more respectfully, but their aim was the same. They sought to help immigrants who could not support themselves return to where they thought they would be happier. A typical letter provided by the Philadelphia Association carefully set out why individuals wanted to go back and why they were found worthy of assistance.

12 *Hamagid*, 26 (November 1, 1882), p. 341; *Boston Hebrew Observer*, November 23, 1883 quoted in Jacob Neusner, “The Impact of Immigration and Philanthropy Upon the Boston Jewish Community (1880–1914),” *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, 46 (1956), 73–74; Bernard Horwich, *My First Eighty Years* (Chicago: 1939), p. 126; Moses Weinberger, *Jews and Judaism in New York* (in Hebrew) (New York: 1887), pp. 1, 18. For other references, see Isaac M. Fein, *The Making of an American Jewish Community* (Philadelphia: 1971), p. 148; Israel Kasovich, *The Days of Our Years* (New York: 1929), pp. 179, 277–278; William M. Bolton, “William M. Bolton Looks Back: Extracts From An Oral History,” in Barry Herman, ed., *Jews in New Haven II* (New Haven: 1979), p. 133; Marcus E. Ravage, *An American in the Making* (New York: 1971), p. 10; Myron Berman, ed., “My Recollections and Experiences of Richmond, Virginia, U.S.A., 1884–1892 by Joseph Joel,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 87 (1980), 344, 356; *Report of the Commission of Immigration of the State of New York* (Albany: 1909), pp. 75–88, 221.

13 Augustus A. Levey to Hermann Makower (July 21, 1882) quoted in Zosa Szajkowski, “The Attitude of American Jews to East European Jewish Immigration (1881–1893),” *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, 40 (March, 1951), 242; *Thirteenth Annual Report of the Board of Relief of the United Hebrew Charities of the City of New York* (New York: 1887), p. 15; *Report of the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration*, Evidence #15650, 15770, 16442–43.

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July 1, 1894

To Whom It May Concern:

This is to certify that Mr. B. Breitbart and wife have been assisted by this Association to reach Europe as they are unable to support themselves in this country on account of their advanced age.

They desire to reach their native country, Russia, where they have children to support them.

Respectfully,
per J. Ehrlich, Agent¹⁴

In the hindsight of Jewish history even such benign movements to return pauper immigrants find few defenders. We know what happened to East European Jews in the end. American Jews in the 1880's, however, considered the reasons behind Jewish and non-Jewish immigration to be pretty well the same. Persecutions aside, they considered the majority of East European Jewish immigrants to be disenchanted *luftmentschen* seeking gold in a land of opportunity. Available evidence partly supports this view. Early immigrants, unlike more frequently described later ones, were overwhelmingly young, single and male. Many arrived in New York brimming with unrealistic hopes, filled with misinformation, and lacking marketable skills. In numerous cases, family, friends, or organizations had covered the cost of their voyages, and in not a few, immigrants expected to be cared for upon their arrival. So reality came as a shock; for many newcomers, conditions in the New World proved far worse than those they had left behind. They were happy to return.¹⁵

The existence of Jewish return migration should occasion no surprise. Immigrants have been returning for as long as they have been migrating; indeed, according to demographic theory, "for every migration stream there is a corresponding counterstream flowing in the opposite direction."¹⁶ Native ties do not break easily. Return migra-

14 Association for the Protection of Jewish Immigrants Correspondence, Box 1355, p. 41, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio; Richard F. Address, "The Reaction of the Philadelphia Anglo-Jewish Press to the Russian Immigrant Community, 1882-1892," miscellaneous file, American Jewish Archives. For other evidence of return migration, see the papers of this association at the Philadelphia Jewish Archives Center, particularly the passage order books. I am grateful to Harold J. Kravitz for describing these papers to me; see also Steven W. Siegel, "Immigration Records at the Philadelphia Jewish Archives Center," *Toledot*, I (Summer, 1977), 3.

15 Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers* (New York: 1976), pp. 67-118; Elias Tcherikower, "Jewish Immigrants to the United States, 1881-1900," *Yivo Annual of Jewish Social Science*, VI (1951), 157-176; Tcherikower, ed., *Early Jewish Labor Movement*, pp. 56, 68, 71, 107, 115, 122, 125; Alexander Harkavy, "Chapters From My Life," translated and edited by Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Jewish Archives*, 33 (April, 1981), 35-52.

16 Donald Bogue, "Principles of Demography," p. 765 quoted in Robert Rhoades,

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tion from America should also occasion no surprise. Though the topic has only recently begun to be studied by historians, its importance has been recognized by economists and social scientists for years, which is precisely why they kept statistics. Push and pull factors clearly operated on both sides of the Atlantic, motivating people to move now one way, now the other. Ships departing America frequently carried just as many migrants as those that arrived.¹⁷

Yet Jewish departure from America does evoke surprise, for East European Jews were supposedly fleeing from persecution. From our perspective, the fact that they returned to the land of their affliction seems puzzling. Evidence from the period, however, suggests that contemporaries would not have been puzzled. The *Jewish Messenger*, for example, considered immigration in the 1880's "no question of persecution or involuntary exile . . . [but] the mere seeking of a new home by people who are not satisfied with their lives in their native place." Many disagreed with the *Messenger*, notably former American consul to Rumania, Benjamin F. Peixotto.¹⁸ The existence of the debate, however, is what is significant. In the Russian case, it took the Kishinev pogrom of 1903 to make most people agree that the best solution for Jewish problems was immigration. Before then opinions divided, many thinking that pogroms would pass.¹⁹ As a member of Berlin's Central German Committee for the Relief of

The Anthropology of Return Migration, Papers in Anthropology #20 (Norman, Okl.: 1979), p. 1.

- 17 Rhoades, *Anthropology of Return Migration* contains a full bibliography. Important recent studies include Betty B. Caroli, *Italian Repatriation from the United States* (New York: 1973), pp. 3-22; Lars-Göran Tedebrand, "Remigration from America to Sweden," in Harold Runblom and Hans Norman, editors, *From Sweden to America: A History of the Migration* (Minneapolis: 1976), pp. 201-227; Bernard Axelrod, "Historical Studies of Emigration from the United States," *International Migration Review*, 6 (Spring, 1972), 32-49; and Sune Akerman, "From Stockholm to San Francisco: The Development of the Historical Studies of External Migrations," *Annales Academiae Regiae Scientiarum Upsaliensis*, 19 (1975), 10, 19-24.
- 18 *Jewish Messenger*, September 21, 1888, p. 4; Benjamin F. Peixotto, "What Shall We Do With Our Immigrants?" *The American Hebrew*, April 1, 1887, pp. 114-115.
- 19 Zosa Szajkowski, "Paul Nathan, Lucien Wolf, Jacob H. Schiff and the Jewish Revolutionary Movements in Eastern Europe (1903-1917)," *Jewish Social Studies*, 29 (January, 1967), 3-26, 75-91; *idem*, "The Impact of the Russian Revolution of 1905 on American Jewish Life," *Yivo Annual of Jewish Social Science*, 17 (1978), 102-109; Philip E. Schoenberg, "The American Reaction to the Kishinev Pogrom of 1903," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, 63 (March, 1974), 262-283; I. Michael Aronson, "The Attitudes of Russian Officials in the 1880s Toward Jewish Assimilation and Emigration," *Slavic Review*, 34 (1975), 1-18.

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Russian Jews admitted to American investigators, "One part of our committee, in accordance with Baron Hirsch's ideas, wants to clear Russia of Jews altogether; the other to prevent people as much as possible from emigrating."²⁰ Among Jews in Russia the same debate took place: Jewish notables like Baron Horace Günzberg opposed emigration, Zionists and some Jewish newspapers favored it. Since Russian policies toward Jews fluctuated wildly, both sides in the debate could offer convincing arguments. As a result, even Jews who had fled from persecution could justify returning home, especially if they thought that conditions in Russia had changed.²¹ Those who had not fled on account of persecution returned with still fewer qualms. However they justified their actions, returnees merely bolstered the arguments of those who claimed that conditions in Eastern Europe were not so bad after all.

No single factor accounts for all return migration: Jews left America for as many reasons as they came. Deportations, increasing in number after 1897, account for some migrations, but they form a separate subject.²² Most departees returned of their own free will. Specific events – deaths, business failures, unpleasant encounters, or the like – sometimes occasioned return trips, but deeper causes – social, cultural, economic and political ones – usually lay behind them. From a structural perspective, return migration occurred when push and pull factors, operating in tandem and behind-the-scenes, convinced an immigrant that another arduous journey was in his interest, for he would be better off where he came from. The two factors that particularly affected Jewish migration rates were economic conditions in America and political conditions in Europe: slumps caused return migration rates to rise, pogroms led them to fall.²³ But broad underlying factors of this sort should not obscure other considerations that came into play. Ultimately, each return migrant returned for reasons of his or her own.

Many migrants planned to return temporarily just in order to visit their old home towns. Some had aged relatives whom they longed to see; others sought brides, there being a shortage of Jewish women in America; still others came home merely to show off, to demonstrate that they had somehow made good; and in a few cases immigrants re-

20 *Letter From the Secretary of the Treasury Transmitting A Report of the Commissioners of Immigration . . .* (Washington: 1892), vol. I, p. 28.

21 E. g., Kasovich, *Days of Our Years*, 179.

22 Zosa Szajkowski, "Deportation of Jewish Immigrants and Returnees Before World War I," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, 67 (June, 1978), 291–306.

23 In addition to works cited above in note 17, see Julie DaVanzo, "Differences Between Return and Nonreturn Migration: An Econometric Analysis," *International Migration Review*, 10 (Spring, 1976), 13–27.

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turned home to study.²⁴ The government discouraged all such visits. To be naturalized, one had to have “lived in this country without returning to Europe at least five years continuously.” Once naturalized, one’s application for a passport could easily be denied.²⁵ Still, many return visits took place, and not a few turned out to be one-way visits. According to Russian statistics, 12,313 more United States citizens entered Russian territory from 1881 to 1914 than left. According to American government investigators, plenty of Jews living in Russia held United States passports, among the most famous being Cantor Pinchas Minkowsky of Odessa, formerly of New York. In the case of Jews, as in the case of non-Jews, tourists and returnees often proved difficult to distinguish from one another.²⁶

Another group of Jewish return migrants might best be termed temporary immigrants, people who came to America intending someday to return to Europe. The hope that Mottel’s neighbors expressed in a Sholom Aleichem story – that “we’d arrive in America safe and sound, make good business, earn a lot of money and then return home” – was the hope expressed by many immigrants, and at least some succeeded in achieving their goal. The immigration commissioners reported on one Bialystok native, Mr. Levy, who amassed \$20,000 in the New World and returned home to found a factory. Philip Cowen, editor of the *American Hebrew*, quoted a Russian Jewish beggar as saying “I came here five years ago to gather money for a dowry for my daughter. Thanks to you and some of your good neighbors, I have two hundred and fifty dollars together, and now I will have a fine son-in-law, for he is waiting for me in Russia.” More enterprising immigrants employed their knowledge of English and Russian to engage in commerce. In 1903, according to Alexander Hume Ford, there was “a Russian American Hebrew in each of the large Manchurian cities securing in Russia the

24 Alton Goldbloom, *Small Patients: The Autobiography of a Children’s Doctor* (New York: 1959), pp. 45–65; Ravage, *An American in the Making*, pp. 3–26; Philip Cowen, *Memories of an American Jew* (New York: 1932), p. 240; Isaac Metzker, ed., *A Bintel Brief* (New York: 1971), p. 63; “Abraham Kaspe,” *Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, VI, p. 331; and *Message from the President of the United States in Answer to the Resolution of the House of Representatives of August 20, 1890, Concerning the Enforcement of Proscriptive Edicts Against the Jews in Russia* (Washington: 1890) contain various accounts of return visits to Eastern Europe.

25 John F. Carr, *Guide to the United States for the Jewish Immigrant* (New York: 1913), p. 34; Reuben Fink, *How to Bring Relatives Into America and How to Travel Out of America* (in Yiddish), (New York: 1919), pp. 5–19.

26 Statistics calculated from Willcox, *International Migrations*, vol. I, pp. 798–799; see also Cowen, *Memories of an American Jew*, p. 228; and Akerman, “From Stockholm to San Francisco,” pp. 20–21.

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cream of the contracts for American material used in Manchuria.” Of course, not all who hoped to get rich and return succeeded in doing so. Morris Raphael Cohen’s father intended to “save enough money by hard work in America to enable him to return and set up some business in Minsk,” but never did. After several trips back and forth across the Atlantic, the Cohens settled in America for good. Others, particularly Austro-Hungarians, journeyed to and from America numerous times. They expressed with their feet the ambivalence – the tension between love of the Old World and allure of the New – that all immigrants felt. Jewish temporary immigrants sought the ultimate synthesis: an American life-style on European soil. They desired, as poet Mitchell Kaplan expressed it, to journey back home to Vladnick, “and live there with never a care.” Whether or not they succeeded in achieving this utopia in the short term, they ultimately faced severe disappointment.²⁷

Tourists and prosperous returnees might be considered successful emigrants. They often travelled home in style, as if to publicize the progress they had made since journeying in the opposite direction.²⁸ Most, however, were not nearly so fortunate. Return, in their case, was by steerage or cattle ship; it symbolized failure. No matter how they explained it away, the fact remained that their hopes had gone unrealized; their American dreams turned sour.

Inability to find work was a prime cause of return migration. Better to return home than to wander the streets of New York homeless and jobless. In many cases, however, it was less the absence of work than the absence of meaningful work that engendered dissatisfaction. Dr. M. Merkin, a chemist and well-rounded intellectual, arrived in America around 1884 from Latvia. Though he made a name for himself as a Social Democrat and incisive thinker, he had to wash dishes in a restaurant for a livelihood. Not surprisingly, he did not remain in the country for long. Many early immigrants, particularly Am Olam intellectuals, told similar stories. Some of those who did find work had trouble adjusting to the demands of American industry. “I had to work very hard in America, so I thought if I had to

27 Sholom Aleichem, *The Adventures of Mottel the Cantor’s Son*, translated by Tamara Kahana (New York: 1961), p. 76; Weinberger, *Jews and Judaism in New York*, pp. 26–27; *Letter from the Secretary of the Treasury Transmitting a Report of the Commissioners of Immigration*, p. 88; Cowen, *Memories of an American Jew*, pp. 88, 198; Alexander Hume Ford, “America’s Debt to the Russian Jew,” *Colliers Weekly*, 31 (June 6, 1903); p. 10; Morris Raphael Cohen, *A Dreamer’s Journey* (Boston: 1949), pp. 23–24; Tcherikower, *Early Jewish Labor Movement in the United States*, pp. 121–122; Mitchell Kaplan, “Back Home,” *Just Folks* (New York: 1927), pp. 49–52.

28 Edward Steiner, *On the Trail of the Immigrant* (New York: 1906), p. 360.

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work so hard I could do better here and I came back,” one returnee admitted. Others, especially those unmarried, complained of homesickness and *anomie*: “Ah, home, my beloved home. My heart is heavy for my parents whom I left behind.”²⁹

Complaints about the harshness of American life – the boom-bust cycle, the miserable working conditions, the loneliness, the insecurity – could not help but cast return migrants in a bad light. In effect, returnees admitted their own weakness; those more fit had stayed where they were, resolving to succeed whatever the odds. Complaints about American religious life, on the other hand, had precisely an opposite effect. The pious migrant could hold his head high: he had spurned the gold of America for the sake of an Orthodox Jewish life. In his own eyes he became a martyr rather than a failure. This, of course, is not to deny that religion influenced decisions to return. Those determined to observe traditional rituals in America, particularly the Sabbath and Jewish holidays, faced enormous hardships, unlike any most had known before. With good reason a returnee called America “a Godless land,” where “Jews were losing their religion very rapidly.” With similar good reason, a fictional account of “Vichne Devoshe’s” disaffection and ultimate return from America concentrates on the country’s impieties and heresies. The American way of life posed a significant challenge to traditional Judaism, and those committed to Jewish law certainly faced a harder time in the New World than most had in the Old.³⁰ But to claim that these people returned on account of religion only leaves too much unexplained; after all, some Americans did manage to lead fully Jewish lives. Return migration more likely resulted from a

29 Melech Epstein, *Jewish Labor in U.S.A.* (New York: 1969), vol. I, p. 139; Cowen, *Memories of an American Jew*, p. 249; Metzker, *Bintel Brief*, p. 114; cf. *Letter From the Secretary of the Treasury Transmitting a Report of the Commissioners of Immigration*, p. 28.

30 F. C. Gilbert, *From Judaism to Christianity* (Concord: 1916), p. 64; Oyzer Blau-stein, *Vikhne Dvoshe fort tsurik fun Amerike* (Vilna: 1894). Other references to religious factors in return migration include Joseph Gillman, *The B'nai Khaim in America* (New York: 1969), p. 58; Aaron Rothkoff, “The American Sojourns of Ridbaz: Religious Problems Within the Immigrant Community,” *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 57 (1968), 557–572; Arthur A. Chiel, ed., “An Ethical Will,” *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, 61 (March, 1972), 230; Szajkowski, “The Attitude of American Jews,” p. 243; and Alter F. Landesman, *Brownsville* (New York: 1971), pp. 74–76. J. D. Eisenstein, who faced similar pressures, remained in America; see Lloyd P. Gartner, “From New York to Miedzyrzecz: Immigrant Letters of Judah David Eisenstein, 1878–1886,” *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, 52 (1963), 239. Rabbis have traditionally had a high rate of return; see Moses A. Shulvass, *From East to West* (Detroit: 1971), p. 17.

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range of factors, religion being just one of them. Returnees lay particular stress on that one to evoke sympathy and save face.

A full listing of the causes behind Jewish return migration would have to include such diverse grounds as an inability to adapt to America's climate, a cultural aversion to indoor toilets, a patriotic urge to defend a native land in war, and most somber of all, an *agunah's* desperate need to find her missing husband.³¹ The specifics, however, merely underline a more general conclusion: that return migration serves as a mirror through which immigrant problems may be viewed. Just as immigration casts into bold relief the hardships faced by Jews in the Old World, so return migration portrays their miseries in the New. That more Jews immigrated than returned, and that quite a few returnees later re-immigrated leaves no doubt as to the final verdict on where conditions were worse and where the promise was greater. But some Jewish immigrants of an earlier day, blessed neither with prophecy nor historical hindsight, discovered that the life they remembered having lost meant more to them than the America they had gained. Particularly in the years before the Kishinev pogrom, numbers of them returned home.

Twentieth Century American Jews, as we have seen, ignored the phenomenon of return migration; indeed, they denied it was a phenomenon at all. In many cases they did so innocently; they simply reported what they thought the statistics said. Those who knew better, however, also kept return migration under wraps. During the years when America was in the midst of a prolonged debate over immigration restriction, discussion of return migration would have been impolitic. American Jews attempted to portray all Jewish immigrants as refugees to freedom, modern day pilgrims. They specifically – and accurately – sought to distinguish Jews from the much maligned transient immigrants “who have no intention of permanently changing their residence and whose only purpose in coming to America is temporarily to take advantage of greater wages paid for industrial labor in this country.” Jewish immigrants, Louis Marshall insisted, “can not go back.” To suggest in those days that some did go back

31 For climate, see *Letter from the Secretary of the Treasury Transmitting a Report of the Commissioners of Immigration*, p. 28. Regarding toilets, see Gillman, *B'nai Khaim in America*, p. 58; cf. Zane L. Miller, *Boss Cox's Cincinnati* (Chicago: 1968), p. 40; and Richard M. Dorson, *American Folklore* (Chicago: 1977), pp. 94–95. On patriotic returnees, see Metzker, *Bintel Brief*, p. 46; and Louis Greenberg, *The Jews in Russia* (New York: 1976), vol. II, p. 100. On returning *agunot*, see Metzker, *Bintel Brief*, pp. 78–79; Szajkowski, “The Attitude of American Jews,” p. 243.

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or had done so in the past would have besmirched a carefully nurtured image, at considerable potential risk.³²

So until our day return migration has remained a neglected aspect of American Jewish history.³³ Rather than analyzing its dimensions, rate, and impact, we glory in its supposed non-existence. This is not to say that the East European Jewish returnee experience parallels that of other groups, for in fact it differs markedly. The time has come, however, to examine these differences, understand them, and place them in context. We shall probably discover that almost as much can be learned from those who left America as from those who stayed.

32 Joseph, *Jewish Immigration*, p. 133; "Hearing on Immigration Bills," (pamphlet in Klau Library, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati; evidently, Washington, 1910), p. 10; see Charles Reznikoff, ed., *Louis Marshall: Champion of Liberty* (Philadelphia: 1957), p. 140; and generally, Esther Panitz, "In Defense of the Jewish Immigrant (1891-1924)," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, 55 (1965), 57-97.

33 The only studies to consider return migration at any length are Jacob Shatzky, "Polish Jews Emigrate from America (in Yiddish)," *Yivo Bleter*, 20 (September, 1942), 125-127; Irving A. Mandel, "The Attitude of the American Jewish Community Toward East-European Immigration, 1880-1890," (Unpublished Rabbinic thesis, Hebrew Union College, 1947), pp. 60-61; and Szajkowski, "Deportation of Jewish Emigrants and Returnees before World War I."