

How Do We Create a Vibrant and Sustainable Community?

Jewish Life in Colonial America

Discovering American Jewish History Through Objects

01 YOUR NEIGHBOR

Judge your neighbor fairly... Do not hate your neighbor in your heart... Love your neighbor as yourself.

בצדק תשפט עמיתך... לא תשנא את אחיך בלבבך... ואהבת לרעך כמוך.

Leviticus, 19:15, 17, 18

SOCIAL MEDIA 09

Ruth Sullivan...has used social media to find what she calls her "little niche part of the queer community" after struggling in the local club scene. "On Twitter, the bi community is way more visible and I've been able to find people to chat with and celebrate those elements of myself I felt were keeping me on the outside," she says.

Frances Ryan, "The missing link: why disabled people can't afford to #DeleteFacebook," *The Guardian Online*, April 4, 2018

02 THE SAME FREEDOM

One of our Nation...requested of the Noble Burgomasters that he might obtain his Burgher certificate, like other Burghers, which to our great surprise was declined and refused by the Noble Burgomasters.... [W]e should enjoy here the same freedom as other inhabitants of New Netherland enjoy.

Petition by Salvador Daranda, Jacob Cohen Henriques, Abraham DeLucena, Joseph Acosta that Jews be admitted to the Burgher Right, April 20, 1657



Model of Touro Synagogue made by Stuart Gootnick, 1984 National Museum of American Jewish History, 1986.16.1a The Mr. and Mrs. Robert Saligman Purchase Fund

BUILD BRIDGES 08

As you discover what strength you can draw from your community in this world from which it stands apart, look outward as well as inward. Build bridges instead of walls.

Sonia Sotomayor, U.S. Supreme Court Justice, 2013

03 PUBLIC WORSHIP

The Jews petition to the Governor for Liberty to Exercise their Religion... was read in Common Councill, and they returned their opinions there-upon That noe publique Worship is Tolerated by act of assembly, but to those that profess faith in Christ, and therefore the Jews' Worship not to be allowed.

Minutes of the Common Council of the City of New York, September 14, 1685

A WIDE GULF 07

Arabs as a class are not white and therefore not eligible for citizenship.... It cannot be expected that as a class they would readily intermarry with our population and be assimilated into our civilization.

District court denying the petition of Ahmed Hassan, the first Arab Muslim to apply for citizenship, 1942

Should citizenship be based on skin color?

LAND OF THE FREE 06

The thought of being settled... in a land of peace... gave much comfort to myself and family... We

had hoped with them to build a home where violence and the rage of mobs would no more invade the settlements of an innocent people who had been hunted and pursued from the beginning of their religious identity—though their ideas of Gospel truths had their earliest inception in "the land of the free."

Lyman Omer Littlefield, *Reminiscences of Latter-day Saints: Giving an Account of Much Individual Suffering Endured for Religious Conscience*, 1888

04 BREAD AND BUTTER

In what ways does food define who is or is not part of a community?

[Y]ou [were] asked at my brother Asher's to a fish dinner but you did not go. I desire you will never eat anything with him unless it be bread and butter nor nowhere else where there is the last doubt of things not done after our strict Judiactal method, for whatever my thoughts may be concerning some fables, this and some other fundamentals, I look upon them conscientiously.

Abigail Levy Franks of Philadelphia in a letter to her son in England, 1733

LANGUAGE OF THE COUNTRY 05

[I]t has been necessary to translate our prayers in the language of the country wherein it hath pleased the Divine Providence to appoint our lot. In Europe the Spanish and Portuguese Jews have a translation in Spanish, which, as the generally understand, may be sufficient, but that not being the case in the British Dominions in America has induced me to attempt a translation in English...to the improvement of many of my brethren in their devotion.

Isaac Pinto's introduction to the first Jewish prayer book published in North America, 1776

OPEN BOOK

Teacher
Guide
7th – 11th
Grade

How Do We Create a Vibrant and Sustainable Community?

Jewish Life in Colonial America



NATIONAL MUSEUM OF
AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORY
A Smithsonian Institution Affiliate

Discovering
American
Jewish History
Through
Objects

How did the earliest Jewish settlers form and maintain community in the colonial period of American history? How do we maintain stable and vibrant communities today?

When the first Jews permanently settled in America, their small community sought, defended, and tested freedom—in political affairs, in relations with Christian neighbors, and in their own understanding of what it meant to be Jewish. In Colonial America, there were no long-standing structures of Jewish life and no central authority. Free from traditional European Jewry, they collaborated, struggled, and experimented to form communal bonds in a place where Judaism had never existed. In this improvisational and exciting period of U.S. history, the Jewish immigrants forged a new identity as American Jews.

This lesson begins in 1654 when a ship of Jewish refugees from Brazil landed in New Amsterdam. However, the lesson is not only about the Jewish community. Other cultures and religions faced obstacles and decisions while trying to establish themselves. From Latter-day Saints to Muslim-Arab immigrants, they also formed unique communities of Americans. In an age of pluralism and technologies, has the concept of community changed? How do communities continue to be part of our lives today?

KEY QUESTIONS:

- What did it mean to be a colonial Jew? What was it like to live in the colonial period of American history?
- How did early Jewish Americans earn rights that had only been granted to Christian colonists at that time?
- How did other groups form their communities throughout American history?
- How can we foster positive relations between communities of differing beliefs or heritages?
- What effect does technology and social media have on our understanding of community in the 21st century?
- How can we contribute to maintaining stable and vibrant communities?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this unit students will be able to:

- Apply inquiry-based methods to interpreting museum objects and/or primary sources
- Explore a historical question using critical thinking, text analysis, object interpretation, and discussion
- Identify factors that define a community
- Trace the development of Jewish communities during the formative years of American history

- Make connection between the Jewish experience and the way other religions formed communities in the U.S.
- Discuss how communities have adapted to the 21st century

Suggested Pre-Lesson Activity

Introduction to Teacher: This lesson will demonstrate what it meant to be a Colonial Jew as well as how other distinct communities have become part of American society. Across both time and religion, the texts highlight the struggles that people faced in order to be accepted, their desire to maintain their identity, and their responsibilities to other communities

- 1. Ask students to volunteer to share their own definitions of “community” and to list any communities of which they are a part.**
- 2. Explain to students that they will encounter ideas and words describing the process of community-building that might have different meanings for different people. These terms are at the root of how an individual identifies themselves and defines with one or more communities.**
- 3. Create a chart on the board with three vertical columns or reproduce a worksheet with three vertical columns. Fill the first column with these 17 terms:**

| | |
|--------------|-------------|
| Acceptance | Integrate |
| Citizenship | Nationality |
| Community | Neighbor |
| Congregation | Race |
| Culture | Religion |
| Ethnicity | Society |
| Friend | Toleration |
| Heritage | Worship |
| Identity | |

- 4. Students will work in groups of two or three. Ask each group to select three terms and discuss what each term means. They should come to a consensus in their group and write down their definition in the second column. Students should also discuss examples/demonstrations of each term from a community to which they belong. For the third column, students will look up and record the dictionary definition.**

- 5. When the class is back together, lead the discussion by asking:**

— For which words or ideas were the students’ interpretations the most similar to the dictionary definitions? Which ones deviated the most?

- Are there some terms for which the class cannot come to a consensus on the meaning?
- What do you think happens when members of the same community cannot come to an agreement on what these words mean? For example, people might have different ideas about how the meaning of heritage, ethnicity, race, and nationality are connected.
- Does the class agree on a single definition of “community?” Why or why not? How do their understandings of the term differ?

Procedure

1. Refer to the *OpenBook Overview* and follow the instructions for the “See, Think, Wonder” activity as a class. Consider using the following discussion questions.

See:

- What details do you notice?
- Do you see any Jewish decorations or symbols? Are they inside the sanctuary or on the outside of the building?
- How are the seats arranged?
- What does the Torah Ark look like?
- Do you see a *mechitzah*? Where did the women sit?
- Where is the *bimah* located?
- What does the outside of the building look like from the sides that are not cutaway for the interior view?

Think:

- Do you think people could tell the building was a synagogue from the outside?
- Why do you think the original synagogue was built to resemble the surrounding buildings?
- Where do you think the congregation is located? Do you think they sit or stand?
- Why do you think the seats are arranged this way?
- Why do you think the artist chose to create the model?
- How do you think the candlesticks and other miniature metal objects were made?
- Do you think the artist put miniature Torah scrolls in the Ark?
- Do you think the model should have miniature people inside?
- What features do you think should be included in a model of your own house of worship?

Wonder:

- I wonder how closely this model matches the original building.
- I wonder how many people in the community attend this synagogue today.
- I wonder what percentage of the Jewish community attended synagogues in the Colonial period and today.
- I wonder if all synagogues back then looked like this one.
- I wonder what the non-Jewish residents of Newport thought of synagogue when it was built.

— I wonder what are the most common architectural motifs of synagogues today?

2. If you haven't already, divide students into pairs or trios. Distribute one Talmud page to each group and Student Guide to each student.

3. Refer to the *OpenBook* Overview and follow the instructions for the *havruta* study.

4. Refer to the *OpenBook* Overview and follow the instructions for the Wrap up activity. Consider using the following discussion questions.

— Can you find two texts that agree with each other? What do you think their authors might say to each other?

— Can you find two texts that disagree with each other? What do you think their authors might say to each other?

— Which text surprised you? Why?

— Trace how the Jewish-American community in New York evolved from arrival (#2) to the time of Abigail Franks (#4). How did they balance religious innovation and continuity?

— Imagine a conversation between the petitioners for public worship (#3) and the followers of Joseph Smith (#6).

— Do you think early Arab immigrants, from before the 1940s (#7), had been granted the rights requested by Colonial Jews in 1657 (#2) and 1685 (#3)?

— How can online communities and social media users (#9) follow Justice Sotomayor's advice (#8)?

— If the instructions given in Leviticus (#1) had been followed, how might the different experiences described in the Talmud page have been different?

General prompting questions:

— What are some the communities with which you identify? Do any of your communities appear to contradict one another?

— Which texts oppose certain communities establishing themselves in the United States? Which ones support those communities' right to exist?

— How welcoming is the U.S. today to religious minorities who would like to construct their own houses of worship, such as a Buddhist Temple or Muslim Mosque?

— Do physical structures, like Touro Synagogue, demonstrate tolerance or acceptance of community?

— Do you think events that took place long ago or far away affect your community today? Why or why not?

Suggested Post-Lesson Activity

Introduction to Teachers: When Peter Harrison designed Touro Synagogue, he had never seen a synagogue before but he was responsible for other well-known buildings in that area. Perhaps the congregation chose Harrison purposefully to help them fit into the wider community better. In this activity, students will compare and contrast houses of worship in their own neighborhoods, which can provide insight into both the wider civic community and the individual religious communities.

1. Give students a moment to brainstorm as many local houses of worship that they know of or have noticed in their neighborhood or town. Ask for suggestions and separate the responses into two categories as you write them on the board. One category should be for specific congregations, for example, Shearith Israel, Cathedral of Christ Our King, or Second Presbyterian Church. The other category is for denominations whose structures they have seen, such as Christian, Buddhist, or Jewish.

2. As a class, discuss the following points based on the results of the lists on the board.

- Which category had more entries?
- How many congregations in the first list are part of the same religion? (For example, multiple Jewish synagogues)?
- How many individual religions were named?
- How many students have been in a house of worship other than their own?
- Do the religions featured in the Talmud page, other than Judaism, appear on the class list— Latter-day Saints, Islam, Catholicism (Justice Sonia Sotomayor)?

3. Divide the class into groups of two or three students. Each group should select two local houses of worship for different religions, either from the list on the board or from additional research. Based on where you live, possibilities may include Catholicism, multiple Protestant faiths, Buddhism, Seventh-Day Adventist or Jehovah’s Witnesses, Unitarianism, Hinduism, Sikhism, etc.

4. The groups will conduct investigations either online or by visiting the places themselves, if time permits, and compare their two selections. Information to gather for each place of worship can include:

- What religion uses it?
- When did the congregation first form? Is it a new community or an historic one?
- How many people belong to that house of worship?

- Can the religion be identified by looking at the building (without signs)?
- Which symbols and decorative elements could you see?
- When was the existing structure built?
- How large is the building?
- What other uses does the building have, if any?

Students should answer these questions about the two houses of worship they selected to compare:

- What is the physical distance between the two?
- How similar are the two religions?
- Do the buildings look more or alike or different on the outside? What about on the inside?
- What are the similarities between the architecture of the two? What are some differences?

5. Reconvene the class and have groups present their findings. The discussions that follow should explore:

- The role architecture may have played in early Jewish American communities' integration into larger society
- Whether students feel it is better for a religious minority to blend in or stand out
- Whether the students would feel welcome within the sacred spaces of these differing religions
- The benefits of having more interaction with people of different religions and the steps can students take to encourage it
- If an open house tour of different houses of worship has ever been organized in the area, or what would it take to make that happen

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Object Information

Model of Touro Synagogue made by Stuart Gootnick, 1984

Stuart Gootnick made this model of the Touro Synagogue between 1979 and 1984. The intricately detailed model replicates the original building for Congregation Jeshuat Israel (Salvation of Israel) in Newport, RI, as designed by prominent Rhode Island architect Peter Harrison (1716-1775). Harrison, a British-born Quaker, had never seen a synagogue when he took on the project. To ensure its accuracy, Gootnick studied floor plans at the Library of Congress and consulted with a former rabbi of the congregation, Morris Gutstein, and his son. He included turned-wood columns and cast brass candlesticks that he made using a process similar to jewelry-making. The building is lit with tiny lightbulbs that have to be replaced occasionally, and very carefully.

Harrison was the first trained architect in colonial America. Today Harrison's buildings are considered the best contemporary American examples of Palladian architecture, a very formal, symmetrical style based on the

work of the sixteenth century architect Andrea Palladio, who based his style on ancient Greek and Roman buildings. Harrison also designed King's Chapel in Boston, Christ Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and two Newport, Rhode Island landmarks: Redwood Library, which was the third community library in America, and the Brick Market, which is now the Museum of Newport History. The Touro Synagogue as it later become known, continues to be used today by Congregation Jeshuat Israel and it is also a National Historic Site. George Washington's famous 1790 letter, in which he pledged that the new nation "gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance" was written to the Jewish community in Newport.

Stuart Gootnick attended art school, worked in advertising, and sold his own painting for years. He entered the world of model making while working on the history of fire-fighting in the United State. His series of miniature fire apprentices were featured in museums, newspaper and magazine articles, and television programs. After the fire-fighting miniatures, he began making historically accurate models of buildings, including private homes. He resides in Niles, Illinois.



National Museum of American Jewish History, 1986.16.1a
The Mr. and Mrs. Robert Saligman Purchase Fund

Appendix A – Historical Background

In September 1654, twenty-three Jews disembarked to begin a new life in the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam. Former Dutch colonists from Recife, Brazil, they had been forced to flee when the Portuguese conquered Brazil. Under Portuguese rule, the Jews living in the Brazilian colony would be subject to the rules of the Inquisition, meaning that all would be forced to leave or convert to Catholicism. The twenty-three Jews had fled for the Caribbean and then North America, where they landed in New Amsterdam, then also a Dutch colony. Although the colony's governor, Peter Stuyvesant, disliked Jews and intended to prevent them staying, leaders of the Dutch West India Company saw potential economic benefits in allowing the group to stay. And so, this tiny group of men, women, and children became the first Jews to permanently settle in North America. They founded Congregation Shearith Israel (Remnant of Israel), which still exists today.

The Jews of New Amsterdam advocated for civil and political rights, which they slowly won by filing petitions to own property, conduct business, and trade with non-Jews. In 1657, they were granted Burger rights which was akin to citizenship status at that time, although they the same status did not transfer to Europe. After several requests, one of the early residents, Asser Levy, was able to obtain his butcher's license in 1660 with an exemption from killing hogs. Levy took on a non-Jewish partner so that the business could profit from offering pork. However, the ability to worship freely and in public took longer to obtain.

Jewish established small communities along the eastern seaboard, in Newport, New York (as New Amsterdam became to be known after the British took control of the colony in 1664), Philadelphia, Savannah, and Charleston. At the turn of the eighteenth century, most of the 250 identifiable Jews in the Atlantic coastal colonies lived in New York, with Philadelphia coming in second. Southern colonies tended to be more diverse and hospitable to the Jewish colonists than Puritan New England, thanks to their more liberal charters. In 1733, 42 Jewish immigrants began a congregation, Mickve Israel in Savannah, Georgia. Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim in Charleston, South Carolina, followed in 1750.

The original Jewish settlers in America were Sephardim who had lived in Portugal and Spain before their 1492 expulsion and relocation to Northern Europe. They brought their traditions to North America and, as a result, the first synagogues in America, like Jeshuat Israel, observed the Sephardic rite. Shearith Israel in New York is still an active Sephardic synagogue, as is Mikveh Israel, the first Jewish congregation in Philadelphia (founded in 1740). Early Ashkenazic colonists from Germany, France, and Eastern Europe often attended Sephardic synagogues at first because there was no other choice at the time. In 1796, Philadelphia Jews established the first Ashkenazi synagogue, Rodeph Shalom.

Jewish colonists would have recognized that Touro and the other early American synagogues were Sephardic by the way the interiors were designed. Sephardic synagogues placed the *bimah* at the center and seats around the perimeter of the sanctuary. In the Ashkenazic tradition, the *bimah* was placed up front and all

seats usually faced the Torah Ark. Even the appearance of the Torah itself was indicative. Ashkenazic communities used a metal plate and fabric cover to shield the Torah scroll while Sephardic Torah scrolls were kept in a case and sometimes had a fabric backing to the parchment. In fact, the Sephardic synagogues like Touro kept the Torah in the cylindrical case and read it standing upright while in the Ashkenazic tradition, the Torah was laid flat for reading.

Colonial Life and Touro Synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island

Roger Williams' views on religious freedom attracted Spanish, Portuguese, and Dutch Jews to the colony of Rhode Island. These first Jewish residents of Newport arrived soon after the group from Recife had landed in New Amsterdam. They were soon joined by more from the Caribbean and Portugal. Land on the corner of Kay and Touro Streets was purchased by Mordechai Campanal and Moses Pacheco in 1677 and became Newport's first Jewish cemetery. Campanal, Pacheco, and other Jewish merchants struggled for the same rights in Newport as their counterparts did in New York, including the ability to legally conduct trade. The General Assembly of Rhode Island granted this right in 1684.

The town of Newport thrived in the late 17th and the 18th centuries as a center of trade, industry, and shipping. Jews tended to be involved in some form of trade or commerce, including exporting and importing of manufactured goods, making and selling whale oil candles, and owning fleets for foreign and coastal trade, including slaves. Soon, Newport's Jeshuat Israel (Salvation of Israel) was large enough to begin planning a building. It was

completed in five years and dedicated during Hanukah in 1763. This is Touro Synagogue—the oldest extant synagogue building in North America.

Many local Jewish residents helped Harrison understand how to design a synagogue interior including Isaac Abraham Touro, the hazzan who had recently arrived from Amsterdam and worked closely with Harrison. Isaac's story is representative of the journey made by many Jewish settlers who came to the colonies. His family escaped the Inquisition in Spain, moved to Portugal, and then Amsterdam before traveling to Jamaica and, eventually, Newport. Isaac Touro's sons, Abraham and Judah, were generous philanthropists who supported both Jewish and non-Jewish communities in Newport, Boston, and New Orleans. Their fortunes maintained Touro Synagogue during a time when the Jewish population of Newport shrunk considerably. In the nineteenth century the city never returned to pre-Revolution levels of prosperity and as a result, many of the Jewish merchants dispersed.

Even as the Jewish population of Newport decreased, they did not relinquish their sense of responsibility for the synagogue or burial ground. Newport natives Abraham and Judah Touro, sons of Isaac Touro, both made bequests to ensure for the Congregation's care and maintenance. When Judah Touro died in 1822 he left \$10,000 to the State of Rhode Island to the support the "Old Jewish Synagogue" in Newport. An additional bequest of \$5,000 ensure that the street running from the cemetery to the synagogue would be maintained. As a result, the street was named "Touro Street" and the synagogue became known as "Touro Synagogue."

Upon its designation as a National Historic Site in 1946, U.S. President Harry S. Truman commented on how Touro Synagogue, once the home of a fledgling minority religious community, had become a symbol of freedom for the whole country:

“The setting apart of this historic shrine as a national monument is symbolic of our national tradition of freedom, which has inspired men and women of every creed, race, and ancestry to contribute their highest gifts to the development of our national culture.”

Appendix B – Supplementary Information for Talmud Page

01 YOUR NEIGHBOR

Judge your neighbor fairly... Do not hate your neighbor in your heart... Love your neighbor as yourself.

Leviticus, 19:15, 17, 18

The third book of the Torah, Leviticus, includes a list of rules both practical and spiritual issued by Moses to the Israelites as they wandered in the desert before entering the Land of Israel. These verses come from chapter 19, called the “Holiness Code” because of how often the word “holy” appears. These are unusual because they are not practical advice or recommended actions, like how to plant crops, protect others from injury, be honest in your business dealings, or get mold out of your house.

Instead, it is an order on how to feel: “to love.” This command is so important that the Talmud tells a story about Rabbi Hillel using it to explain the entire Torah with a statement short enough that it could be conveyed “while standing on one foot.”

These verses are some of the most well-known parts of the Hebrew Bible and reflect the universal “Golden Rule” – to treat others as you yourself want to be treated. As an ethic of reciprocity, it is a blueprint for morality and is often compared to similar sayings from other religions, cultures, and eras. For example,

- “Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.” (Buddhism)
- “Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you.” (Confucianism)
- “This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you.” (Hinduism)
- “None of you [truly] believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself.” (Islam)
- “Whatever is disagreeable to yourself do not do unto others.” (Ancient Persia)
- “Do not to another what you would not yourself experience.” (Ancient Incas)
- “Treat your inferior as you would wish your superior to treat you.” (Ancient Rome)
- “What you do not want to happen to you, do not do it others either.” (Ancient Greece)
- “One who is going to take a pointed stick to pinch a baby bird should first try it on himself to feel how it hurts.” (Yoruba people of Africa)

02 THE SAME FREEDOM

One of our Nation... requested of the Noble Burgomasters that he might obtain his Burgher certificate, like other Burghers, which to our great surprise was declined and refused by the Noble Burgomasters, and whereas the Worshipful Lords consented... at the request of our Nation, that we should enjoy here the same freedom as other inhabitants of New Netherland enjoy.

Petition by Salvador Daranda, Jacob Cohen Henriques, Abraham DeLucena, Joseph Acosta, April 20, 1657

These four Jewish men made this appeal to Governor Peter Stuyvesant of New Netherland (also known as New Amsterdam, and, after British capture 1664, New York) after a petition for Burgher rights by Asser Levy was denied nine days earlier. Following their appeal, permission was granted. Initially, the colony's governor, Peter Stuyvesant, did not want to allow Jews into the territory under his control at all. The Dutch West India Company, which controlled New Netherland until 1664, considered the potential economic benefits that might accompany welcoming Jews to the colony more important than religion. Jewish colonists achieved limited civil and political rights long before they could legally practice their religion in public. These Burgher rights included permissions to join the military (instead of paying a tax), conduct trade, open a store, and own land or a house. Once they were permitted, the Jews of New Amsterdam established a cemetery followed by a *mikvah*. After several requests, Asser Levy became the colonists' first kosher butcher when he was granted a license in 1660, with an exemption from killing hogs. However, the Jewish colonists continued to meet in private homes for religious services because they were not permitted to build a synagogue until the late

seventeenth century.

03 PUBLIC WORSHIP

The Jews petition to the Governor for Liberty to Exercise their Religion...was read in Common Councill, and they returned their opinions thereupon That noe publique [no public] Worship is Tolerated by act of assembly, but to those that profess faith in Christ, and therefore the Jews' Worship not to be allowed. *Minutes of the Common Council of the City of New York, September 14, 1685*

In 1685, the city council of New York issued a declaration of "noe public worship" in response to a petition by New York's Jews "for Liberty to Exercise their Religion." Jewish residents had formed Shearith Israel (Remnant of Israel) soon after their 1654 arrival to New Amsterdam. The colony's Dutch governor did not permit them to worship publicly and so the congregation met in private homes until British authorities began to permit public worship at the end of the seventeenth century. In 1730, New York's Jews inaugurated the first synagogue in North America, when they opened the Mill Street Synagogue in lower Manhattan. At that time no ordained rabbis lived in North America and so synagogues throughout the colonies were led by members of the community. Because of the distance from Europe, Jewish settlers in America had an opportunity to design their communities from the ground-up. They formed new answers to questions about what it meant to be a small minority in a young and still-evolving nation, far away from centuries-old institutions, services, traditions, and expectations.

04 BREAD AND BUTTER

You wrote to me some time ago you [were]

asked at my brother Asher's to a fish dinner but you did not go. I desire you will never eat anything with him unless it be bread and butter nor nowhere else where there is the last doubt of things not done after our strict Judaical method, for whatever my thoughts may be concerning some fables, this and some other fundamentals, I look upon them conscientiously.

Abigail Levy Franks of Philadelphia in a letter to her son in England, July 9, 1733

British merchant Jacob Franks settled in New York City about 1708 to represent his family's London-based business. He initially stayed with the family of Moses Raphael Levy and in 1712 married Levy's daughter, (Bilhah) Abigail Levy. Franks and his sons prospered as suppliers to the Royal Navy, and general traders. Franks led Congregation Shearith Israel as parnas (president) when the congregation opened its first permanent synagogue. Abigail Franks wrote numerous letters to her oldest son Naphtali between 1733 and 1748, when he lived in London.

Rare in their survival, the letters provided a window into her life and her hopes that her children would choose to live as observant Jews. The details in her letters reveal how the Franks felt about socializing and doing business with members of New York's upper-class Christian community. In addition to the warning she sent Naphtali, above, Abigail Franks also sent her son care packages with food to help him in observing kashrut.

05 LANGUAGE OF THE COUNTRY

[Hebrew], being imperfectly understood by many, by some not at all, it has been necessary to translate our prayers in the language of the

country wherein it hath pleased the Divine Providence to appoint our lot. In Europe the Spanish and Portuguese Jews have a translation in Spanish, which, as the generally understand, may be sufficient, but that no being the case in the British Dominions in America has induced me to attempt a translation in English... to the improvement of many of my brethren in their devotion.

Isaac Pinto's introduction to the first Jewish prayer book published in North America, 1766

Isaac Pinto immigrated to the American colonies in 1740. He lived in New York, joined Shearith Israel, and worked as a merchant, which meant frequent travel. Recognizing that Sephardi and Ashkenazi worshipped together in colonial America's tiny Jewish communities and noting that many of his Jewish peers had difficulty reading Hebrew, Pinto decided to publish a prayer book entirely in English that would be suitable for Jews living in the Americas. This also reflected a new "American" Jewish identity and the growing movement for American sovereignty. At a time when most books in English were published in Britain, Pinto had his text printed by a Gentile, John Holt, in New York. The prayer book provided common ground for Jews from different heritages and languages who became a community in North America.

06 LAND OF THE FREE

The thought of being settled... permanently, in the midst of the Saints in a land of peace... gave much comfort to myself and family... We had hoped with them to build a home where violence and the rage of mobs would no more invade the settlements of an innocent people who had been hunted and pursued from the beginning of their religious identity—though

their ideas of Gospel truths had their earliest inception in “the land of the free.”

Reminiscences of Latter-day Saints: Giving an Account of Much Individual Suffering Endured for Religious Conscience, Lyman Omer Littlefield, 1888

How did religions form in the United States? Colonists and enslaved Africans had long historical connections to other countries and cultures and indigenous Americans have spent millennia on the American continent. However, the Latter-day Saints, historically known as Mormons, originated during the nineteenth century in the United States. Joseph Smith founded The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1830. He described having been visited by a prophet in 1823 who led Smith to a pair of metal tablets that described the history of an ancient American civilization, possibly one of the lost Tribes of Israel. Smith translated the plates and published it as *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ*.

Latter-day Saints increased in numbers rapidly due to energetic efforts to bring new converts into the community. This missionary work led to conflicts with neighboring religious communities. Smith moved his followers west, eventually establishing the town of Nauvoo, Illinois in 1839. The community thrived until the mid-1840s, when an anti-Mormon movement erupted into violence. By 1846, although many of them had already left the area, disagreements over influences on local politics eventually led to the killing of Joseph Smith and his brother.

Brigham Young succeeded Joseph Smith as the Church’s leader and led the community on a journey that ended in 1847 with their settlement in the area that is now Salt Lake City, Utah. Young arrived with less than 200

settlers but by the end of the year, they numbered nearly 2000. Their long journey west gave name to one of the major “highways” for wagon trains in the era of westward expansion, the Mormon Trail. The Latter-day Saints often call the journey to Utah in the 1800s an Exodus because of the struggles they faced while seeking their promised land, which they called Zion. This excerpt from Littlefield’s book was written about that migration from Illinois to Utah.

07 A WIDE GULF

Arabs as a class are not white and therefore not eligible for citizenship... It is well known that they are a part of the Mohammedan world and that a wide gulf separates their culture from that of the predominately Christian peoples of Europe. It cannot be expected that as a class they would readily intermarry with our population and be assimilated into our civilization.

District court denying the petition of Ahmed Hassan, the first Arab Muslim to apply for citizenship, 1942

The first large wave of Arab immigrants arrived during the era of mass migration, between 1880 and 1920 – the same period that saw millions of Jews, Italians, and others from southern and eastern Europe immigrate to the United States – leaving behind political repression and economic instability. They practiced Christianity, Islam, and other religions and came from places like the Ottoman Empire (which included modern-day countries of Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, and Israel). More followed after World War II. Arab communities grew quickly in major cities like New York, Detroit, and Boston. The first American

mosques, however, were built in the 1930s in Midwestern states like North Dakota and Iowa.

In 1913, a South Carolina court rejected a Lebanese Christian's citizenship petition on the basis of his skin color. The court's denial was because the man was "about [the color] of walnut, or somewhat darker than is the usual mulatto of one-half mixed blood between the white and the negro races." Nearly thirty years later Ahmed Hassan, an immigrant from Yemen, became the first Arab Muslim to apply for citizenship. He was denied naturalization in 1942 because, according to a Michigan court, Arabs were not capable of integrating into mainstream America – an argument used to prevent many minority groups from achieving full civil or political rights, including Jews. In the early 20th century, the United States followed naturalization and immigration laws from 1790, 1879 and 1882, which stated that citizenship could only be granted to an immigrant who is "a free white person." The court ruled that Hassan was too dark could not prove his ancestors came from a group considered "white" by the U.S. government. At the time, "white" was intended to mean people from northern and western Europe.

08 BUILD BRIDGES

As you discover what strength you can draw from your community in this world from which it stands apart, look outward as well as inward. Build bridges instead of walls.

Sonia Sotomayor, U.S. Supreme Court Justice, 2013

Sonia Sotomayor grew up in New York City, the child of working-class, Catholic, Spanish-speaking parents. Her family came from Puerto

Rico and she worked extremely hard to learn English and succeed in school. Sotomayor felt isolated and saw discrimination first-hand as one of very few Puerto Rican students at both Princeton (for college) and Yale (for law school). Adapting to Princeton overwhelmed Sotomayor and she initially received low grades. This inspired her to both improve her English writing skills and celebrate her heritage by joining groups for Puerto Rican and other minorities on campus. These groups she said, provided her "with an anchor I needed to ground myself in that new and different world."

Sotomayor went on to a very successful legal career and received her first appointment as a judge in 1992. At the same time, she made it a priority to give back to others, including offering pro bono (free) legal help to those who could not afford it. In 2009, President Barack Obama appointed her as the first Latina, and third woman, U.S. Supreme Court Justice. Justice Sotomayor received unofficial support from many Jewish groups during her nomination and hearing, due partly to her support of religious freedoms and emphasis on giving back to the community.

09 SOCIAL MEDIA

Ruth Sullivan...has used social media to find what she calls her "little niche part of the queer community" after struggling in the local club scene. "On Twitter, the bi community is way more visible and I've been able to find people to chat with and celebrate those elements of myself I felt were keeping me on the outside," she says.

Frances Ryan, "The missing link: why disabled people can't afford to #DeleteFacebook," The Guardian Online, April 4, 2018.

Social media receives plenty of criticism for isolating people, threatening privacy, and wasting time. Parents also worry about their children's safety online, the effects on their mental health, and the threat of cyberbullying. But it is also an incredibly pervasive form of communication, used around the world by hundreds of millions of people of all ages and backgrounds. Ryan's quote highlights the importance of online communities for people who are not able to fully interact in physical communities for a variety of reasons. For those individuals, social media is a lifeline and it prevents isolation by offering connections to family, friends, careers, and support groups.

Facebook is reportedly the most commonly used site for adults, along with Snapchat, Instagram, and Twitter. Middle school and high school students, however, are more likely to use social media platforms that are unfamiliar to adults. In a recent survey of high school students in four states, over 43% of the students said they spend about two or more hours on social media sites each day and half of the students are active on three or more different social apps. Ask your students to compare their social media use to these averages as well as whether they consider their social media connections to be a community.

OPEN BOOK

Student
Guide

How Do We Create a Vibrant and Sustainable Community?

Jewish Life in Colonial America



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