



## **From The Shtetl To The Tenement: The East European Jews and America, A Social History 1850-1925**

Curriculum Unit 79.02.02

by Jay M. Brown

### **INTRODUCTION**

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We Americans are either descendants of immigrants or have come ourselves to North America from somewhere else.

Before 1825, fewer than 10,000 immigrants entered the United States annually. By the early twentieth century America was receiving an annual average of more than one million immigrants, two-thirds of whom came from Eastern and Southern Europe.

The men and women who arrived in the United States in the century after 1820 brought with them discontent with their status at home and the desire to improve their conditions. Some entered under the pressure of great disasters in their native homeland. Others were moved by the force of more gradual economic and social change. America's need for labor and the widespread belief that the United States was a land of opportunity and a refuge for the oppressed were principally responsible for America's last great migratory wave, which began in the middle of the nineteenth century.

The newcomers often found themselves in conflict—sometimes they seemed to take jobs away from the earlier inhabitants. In the cities, they drifted into the slum areas, and seemed partially responsible for the rise in crime and taxes. They appeared frequently as clients of charitable agencies.

But the immigrants also made a decided contribution to our civilization. Their labor was an important factor in America's economic expansion and development into a major industrial and world power. As the author of *Ethnic America* points out, America did the immigrants no favors; they were discriminated against, and forced into menial occupations and the most miserable housing. They were exploited, hated, despised, condemned. Attempts were made to change them into "good Americans" by making them ashamed of their heritage.

Yet still they came—from Russia, Poland, Austria, Hungary, Rumania, Lithuania—came because they were persecuted both in the old country by governmental actions that made them third-class citizens and by constant threats of violence to themselves and their families.

This unit, designed to be incorporated into the Social Studies curriculum in the eighth grade or above, is an

attempt to examine the reasons why one of the Eastern European groups—the Jews—came to America and how they overcame some of the problems they faced when they arrived. It is also hoped that this unit will stimulate others to develop units devoted to America’s ethnic groups. This unit may be used as part of a full marking period’s unit on the *Contribution of Immigrants and Minorities to America* or as part of a unit devoted to the treatment of Jews in Russia. No time limitations are set for this component as each educator may desire to add or delete materials suitable for the grade level of his or her class.

## CONTENT OBJECTIVES

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For many Americans and Europeans living in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth century the two continents were not only thousands of miles apart, but were two different worlds. However, to those of Jewish extraction, the continents and their worlds were only a heartbeat or letter apart.

The two worlds were very different, yet to the East European Jews they had many similarities. One world was represented by government-enforced closeness to people of your own kind; a similar language; and similar problems in the struggle to keep one’s dignity and life. The other world was represented by the desire to be with ones’ own kind, in an attempt, against great odds and pressures, to maintain one’s religious identity and traditions. At the same time, one tried to make a better life for himself and his family.

In Europe it was the world of “the Shtetl” and the “Pale of Russia”—a world of traditions, culture and the government-encouraged hatred of the Jews. In America it was the world of the Lower East Side of New York City—a world in which the East European Jews could attempt to transplant their culture and tradition, a world in which they could meet and overcome hardships, but not escape the scorn of others who disliked “Foreigners and Jews.”

## EUROPE: SHETEL LIFE AND PERSECUTION

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Officially, the shtetl was the small-town Jewish community of Eastern Europe. But to its residents the shtetl was more than a town—it was a whole way of life. To understand the shtetl is to understand hundreds of years of Jewish life in Eastern Europe.

Jews lived in thousands of shtetls in the territory bounded by the Black and Baltic Seas and the Vistula and Dnieper River Basins. Each shtetl was uniform, linked by economic and family ties with other shtetls. Quite often the shtetls were located near a river or a small lake. In the center of the town was the market place, where on Christian holidays fairs were held. Although members of the shtetl did business with each other, their economy was based on trade with the peasants of the countryside.

Families often lived in the same shtetl for generations. It was not uncommon for three generations to live together under the same roof. When a daughter married, the son-in-law was taken into the house and a little room was partitioned off for the couple.

The shtetl was a close-knit community. People were always involved in their neighbors’ affairs. They lent and

borrowed things, helped in time of need and generally were closely bound to each other. No one was isolated or alone. The whole shtetl was like a chain providing strength and endurance for its inhabitants. <sup>2</sup>

From Sunday through Thursday the shtetl Jews were busy earning their living. But on Friday things changed. Early in the morning, the women started chopping fish to prepare the Sabbath meal of fish, soup, fowl, wine, and hallah. All week long the people scraped and borrowed to provide food for their festive Sabbath meal.

Toward afternoon the bath attendant rushed through the streets calling the men to come to the public bath so that they could approach the Sabbath in physical and spiritual cleanliness. The public bath was an important institution in the shtetl's life, the men alternating with the women in its use. After the Sabbath meal, the master of the house usually took a nap from which he arose to test his sons on what they had learned at the heder during the week. <sup>3</sup>

For the Jews of the shtetl the Sabbath and other religious holidays were a time to forget their daily problems and hardships and to reflect on the richness of their heritage. It was a time to give praise and thanks to God for seeing them through another week.

With the conclusion of the Sabbath the shtetl Jews went back to their everyday life of scrimping, working and saving in an effort to escape generations of poverty and perhaps the confines of the shtetl itself.

Because they generally kept to themselves in order to preserve their culture, the Jews were thought by many to be clannish. They were considered as foreigners because they spoke a strange language—Yiddish.

Various Russian governments and officials attempted to Russify the Jews. When the Jews refused to give up their own culture, Czar Nicholas II turned his anti-Jewish campaign to another course of action. Jews living in the cities were forced by government decrees to sell their homes and businesses. At the same time, with the full knowledge and backing of government officials, riots or Pogroms broke out in a number of Russian cities. Jews were stoned and beaten; their houses were burned; the survivors were ordered to move to the interior of Russia, in a special quarter of the Western provinces—the Jewish Pale.

Three waves of pogroms occurred in Russia, each worse and broader than the last: they took place in 1881-1884, 1903-1906, and in 1917-1921.

On April 27, 1881, the city of Yelisavetgrad was the site of the first anti-Jewish riots in Russia; Kiev was the second on May 8, 1881. During the last nine months of 1881 there were over 160 towns and villages in which cases of riot, rapine, murder and spoliation occurred.

The May Laws of 1882 restricted the rights of Jews to settle in the cities, curtailed their religious rights and forced them to resettle in unfamiliar territory. Jews were restricted to the towns and cities of the Pale of Settlement. The government's strategy was to convert one-third of them, force another third of the Jews out of Russia, and starve the remaining third. In addition, many Jews feared conscription into the Russian army, where additional attempts were made to convert them.

The forced movement of the Russian Jews from small villages and the city of Moscow to "The Pale" did not stop the government campaign against them. In April 1903, hundreds of Jews were massacred in Kishinev and thousands were left destitute. Additional pogroms followed throughout Russia. The magnitude of the various massacres led the United States Congress to adopt and receive the President's approval of a Joint Resolution passed in 1906 "that the people of the United States are horrified by the reports of the massacre of Hebrews

in Russia on account of their race and religion and that those bereaved thereby have the hearty sympathy of the people of this country.”

## THE FLIGHT TO A NEW WORLD

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Over twenty-three million immigrants came to America in the period 1880-1919. For those Eastern European Jews who chose to escape the persecution of their homeland and immigrate to America there was no turning back. In 1851, only one immigrant from Russia was admitted to the United States. In 1890, 35,600 Russian immigrants arrived in the United States; and by 1907 over 259,000 Russian immigrants escaping the “Pale” came to the United States to seek refuge from persecution and economic hardship.

The flight of the European Jewish immigrants was spurred not only by economic exigencies but also by the systematic persecution of an antagonistic government. They could not return to their homeland; few carried with them nostalgic memories of a beloved mother country. John W. Foster, U.S. Ambassador to St. Petersburg, compared the situation of the Jews in Russia to the barbarities of the Dark Ages.

For most modern Americans, the name Castle Garden has little or no meaning but, to the early European immigrants, it meant America. Built originally in 1808-1811 as Castle Clinton, a fort for the defense of New York Harbor, it became Castle Garden, an amusement hall—the scene of Jenny Lind’s American debut in 1850. In 1855 the amusement hall was converted into a reception center for the newly-arrived European immigrants.

As the amount of immigrants increased, the Garden located at the southern tip of Manhattan Island was closed; a former army arsenal on Ellis Island was converted into a reception center in 1892.

Arrival at Castle Garden or Ellis Island did not mean immediate admittance for the immigrants to the New World. Before actually setting foot on American soil, the immigrants had to pass government inspection.

Those immigrants who were without friends or relatives in New York, without letters of employment or money, or incapable of work were sent to Ward’s Island. A few were permanently employed there, but the majority were placed in hospitals and lunatic asylums. The death rate was large after all those able to work and healthy had been drafted off.

Of the actual arrival, George M. Price gave a detailed and somewhat bitter account which first appeared in book form in 1893 ( *The Russian Jew in America* ) .

Castle Garden, Price wrote, “is a large building through which all Jewish arrivals must pass to be cleansed before they are considered worthy of breathing freely the air of the land of the almighty dollar. In the spacious courtyard, which is surrounded by high walls so that no one can enter or leave except through the gate, at which are stationed half a dozen guards, those immigrants who have not been admitted to the United States have to find a place for themselves . . .

“About the conveniences of the immigrants,” said Price, “the Americans worry very little. The Europeans they say are unaccustomed to luxury; they can be satisfied with the soiled courtyard of the ‘Gates of Freedom’, as the Yankees call this preliminary prison . . . For about a week, they kept us in this Hades where we had to sleep on the floor under the open skies . . . they finally found accommodations for those who came on our

boat . . . some were placed in houses . . . and the rest, among whom was I, they simply expelled from the Gates of Freedom, 'Go', they said, 'our land is big and fruitful, go ahead and live in it by begging.'" <sup>5</sup>

For most of the immigrants, the conditions at Castle Garden and later on Ellis Island, really didn't matter—they were in sight of the new promised land, America. The Czar, pogroms and the poverty of Europe were behind them; better times, they felt, were ahead in the country whose streets were "paved with gold."

## **NEW YORK: STREETS PAVED WITH TEARS AND SWEAT**

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Those immigrants who successfully passed the authorities' physical examination, had their passports stamped and were allowed to board a barge that took them to the landing area at the tip of Manhattan Island. The long trip was over—Europe was a memory, their problems and poverty, they thought, were ended. But the streets of America were not paved with gold, and living conditions were not much better than in Europe.

Five of every six Russian Jews settled in urban communities, clustering with other Russian and Eastern European Jews, in decaying and congested areas. For most, Manhattan's slum section became their new home.

In the city of the New World you find there Jews born to plenty, whom the new conditions have delivered to the clutches of penury; Jews reared in the straits of need, who have risen to prosperity: Good people morally degraded in the struggle for success amid an unwonted environment: Moral outcasts lifted from the mire purified and interbred with self-respect: Educated men and women with their intellectual polish tarnished in the inclement weather of diversity; ignorant sons of toil grown enlightened; in fine, people with all sorts of antecedents, tastes, habits and inclinations. <sup>6</sup>

The old German section of New York's Lower Side was the area of primary settlement for most Eastern European Jews. They were directed to the area by members of the immigrant aid societies or came at the behest of friends, relatives or employers. The houses were old and run-down; apartments were overcrowded; the streets were dirty, unsafe and unhealthy. Although the ghetto was a horrible place to live, its location put the immigrant at the very heart of the city's garment industry.

The immigrants found that though they were not persecuted in the United States, they encountered various degrees of anti-Semitism. Henry Adams, steeped in the prejudices of his patrician class, expressed how intense these feelings were, saying, "the Russian Jews and other Jews will completely control the finances and government of this country in ten years or they all will be dead. The hatred with which they are regarded . . . ought to be a warning to them. The people of this country won't be starved and driven to the wall by Jews who are guilty of all crimes, tricks, and wiles." <sup>8</sup>

Not only were non-Jews leery of the new immigrants, but the older Jewish community saw the Jewish exodus from Eastern Europe as a problem of great magnitude.

At first the leaders of Jewish organizations were severely alarmed, as they considered it their duty to care for the needy of New York City only—not of the world. They approved of the United States' protective immigration acts of 1882; they sent letters of protest to European leaders and to newspapers urging more discrimination in the selection of immigrants. <sup>9</sup>

Unable to stop the flow of immigrants to the United States, the leaders of New York’s Jewish community took constructive measures to help the immigrants. Agents of the Hebrew Benevolent Society were placed at Ellis Island to assist the newly arrived immigrants; they opposed the deportation of dependents; they established temporary shelters; they developed other means to assist the immigrant’s adjustment to the New World.

## **THE TENEMENTS: POVERTY AND PRIDE**

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At the time of the Eastern European migration, the Lower East Side of Manhattan Island was a depressing area. Most of the buildings were in desperate need of repair; the immigrants, often with large families, were forced to occupy small flats in highly-congested tenement buildings. Row upon row of tenement buildings lined the streets of the Lower East Side. Between the rows were alleys and streets, mostly unpaved and in disrepair. Inside, the tenement houses, though built by various contractors, possessed the same squalid features—long narrow halls, poor lighting, broken stairways, and mouldy walls separating one flat from another in a three- or four-story building. The flats, usually unheated in wintertime except by the kitchen stove, had walls and ceilings that also were in disrepair. During the oppressively hot summers, fire escapes doubled as sleeping areas; since there was no refrigeration, they were used to keep perishables cold in winter.

Like other groups before them the East European Jews, by sheer weight of number, overwhelmed the section of New York known as the Tenth Ward. By 1900 over 700 persons were living on one acre of land in areas that “seemed to sweat humanity at every window and door.”

A contemporary journalist describing the tenements observed:

They are great prison-like structures of brick, with narrow doors and windows, cramped passages, and steep rickety stairs. They are built through from one street to the other with a somewhat narrower building connecting them. The narrow courtyard in the middle is a damp, foul-smelling place supposed to do duty as an airshaft; had the foul fiend designed these great barracks they could not have been more villainously arranged to avoid any chance of ventilation. In case of fire they would be perfect death traps. The drainage is horrible, and even the Croton, as it flows from the tap in the noisome court yard, seemed to be contaminated by its surroundings and have a fetid smell.

Although the East European Jews were accustomed to poverty and had learned, through the ages, how to subsist on the barest of essentials, the first-generation immigrant was not prepared for America’s way of life. In Europe, especially in the shtetl, the social structure was based on scholarship—how well you knew and were able to interpret the Talmud—but in America the social structure was based on money, not scholarship.

Most of the Russian immigrants were penniless when they arrived in America. They received little, if any, assistance except from relatives. The Jewish immigrants began to fill factories and shops, especially in the clothing trade. The trade rapidly expanded; immigrant workers themselves started “home industries” and finally shops of their own where they employed those who came to America after them.

Weekly earnings were small, but above what a poor person could make in Mother Russia; the standard of living was higher than that of Europe. Soon the immigrants saved enough to bring their families and friends to America. Many of the Jewish immigrants who arrived after 1881 took up peddling and trades.

By 1900 there were more than 25,000 pushcart peddlers tramping the streets. The Lower East Side swarmed

with peddlers and market stalls hawking everything from collars and shoestrings to fresh meat and vegetables.

The competition was fierce, the haggling loud and often insulting. No other activity more set the tone of East Side life or impressed outsiders than the squadrons of carts plying the streets and the babble of negotiation that accompanied every transaction. Every street teemed with vitality and exuberance. Some did well as peddlers, but for most it was only a beginning, a transient trade until something better turned up. Yet countless Jewish immigrants got their commercial baptism as peddlers. <sup>11</sup>

## FROM MUTUAL BENEFIT TO SOCIAL AID

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Being strangers in a strange new world, the immigrants turned to their coreligionists for help and assistance. With the mass migration of Eastern European Jews to America, *Landsmanschaften*, mutual benefit societies composed of individuals who had come from the same community in the Old World, were organized. Hundreds of thousands of foreign-born Jews belonged to *Landsmanschaften* organized and named after the place of birth or Old World home of the members.

In the bewildering atmosphere of New York the *Landsmanschaften* were a fixed point for the newcomer. At its meetings he could speak his own language, and be a man with a family and a history and not just another “greenhorn” struggling with the difficulties of a new language and making a living.

The *Landsmanschaften* were also clearing-houses for jobs and housing. They were places where one might raise money in an emergency; they helped immigrants find relatives and acquaintances; and they organized committees to call on the sick and bury the dead.

With a heritage steeped in a sense of responsibility for the unfortunate, the members of the Jewish community took it for granted that they were in some way responsible for the welfare of the poor. The community responded by creating conditions and agencies which would facilitate the adjustment of newcomers to their environment.

It is estimated that ten to twenty percent of the Jewish population received assistance from one agency or another. In addition to providing economic assistance, the United Hebrew Charities was instrumental in organizing homes for chronic invalids, establishing industrial schools for boys and girls, developing a visiting nurse service, organizing a Central Refugee Committee, and establishing a legal aid society.

During this period, fraternal and community organizations such as B’nai B’rith and the Young Mens Hebrew Association were organized to meet the needs of the immigrants in the community by providing various civic and Jewish cultural programs and activities.

Despite all the help they received, the Russian Jews found that for the most part they had to help themselves. The gap between the Russian Jews and the German Jews, who had come to America in the 1840s, was wide. Although the German Jews employed many of the Russian Jews, they felt that the new immigrants should forget as quickly as possible the ways of the Old World and become Americans.

The older inhabitants expected the Russian Jews to understand English rapidly, and drop Yiddish. Yiddish, although punctuated with German words, had flourished in the East European area for centuries. In the New

World, it became the cultural medium for hundreds of thousands of East European Jews. Yiddish was the language of the street, the home, the shop, the factory, and the synagogue.

## THE YIDDISH PRESS AND THEATRE

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To meet and satisfy the immigrant's hunger for information and knowledge, Yiddish newspapers, magazines, and books were published. During the 1870s a number of Yiddish weekly newspapers were started in New York, with the first daily Yiddish newspaper appearing in 1885.

The Yiddish press served the Jewish community in many ways. It helped to preserve its social structure, mores, and served at the same time as a force for social change. It provided the immigrants with an opportunity to view themselves with different eyes. ("Americans" saw them as curiosities and social problems.) The Jews saw themselves as struggling to adapt. Everyone who came to the Lower East Side had to become an American. Americanization involved discarding old values and accepting new ones. The culture of the shtetl represented the Old World; it had to be abandoned in order to adapt to the new environment. The Lower East Side was the scene of this transformation. The "Bintel Brief" letters to the editor of the *Jewish Daily Forward* tried to raise the collective consciousness. These letters provide a vivid record of the trials and tribulations of adaptation from the immigrant point of view. <sup>12</sup>

The Lower East Side symbolized the Jewish adaptation to America. Life was a panorama of hardship, misery, poverty, crowding, filth, uncertainty, alienation, joy, love and devotion. In the pages of the Yiddish press this panorama was recorded; on the stages of the Yiddish theatre it was dramatized.

The theater portrayed and satirized the lives, hopes and ambitions of the immigrants. A variety of theatrical companies produced plays in Yiddish, ranging from serious drama (including translations of Shakespeare) to light musical comedies. The immigrant Jews—the very young and the aged, workers and employers, the poor and the affluent—found in the theater entertainment, education, and an escape from the drudgery of their daily life.

## FROM SWEATSHOPS TO UNIONIZATION

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For many of the East European Jews the drudgery of daily life was epitomized by the clothing industry with its long hours, low pay and its sweatshops.

The sweatshop was the industrial locale in which Jewish workers in the needle trades earned their bread by the sweat of their brows. The sweatshop was generally not a shop at all, or at least not a plant designed and equipped for industrial production. <sup>13</sup>

Sweatshops were usually located in a tenement, often in one of the rooms of the owner's apartment. In many cases there were no windows or other ventilators in the room. Today sweatshops are rematerializing in the South Bronx area of New York City utilizing Black and Hispanic laborers.

Adult workers in the sweatshops worked six days a week for twelve to sixteen hours a day. But adults were



not the only workers. It is estimated that in New York City alone, some 60,000 children worked in sweatshops for wages of 50¢ to \$1.50 a week.

Conditions in factories were not much better than those in the sweatshops. Young girls and men worked in crowded conditions, usually in a loft-type room that was cold in the winter and stifling in the summer. There were, at all times, health and fire hazards. For working approximately sixteen hours a day, six days a week, the men earned six to ten dollars a week, while the girls and women earned four to five dollars a week. If a worker complained about conditions, he or she was fired.

In an effort to attack the sweatshop system, Jewish immigrants helped form two large labor unions, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) in 1900, and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America in 1914.

In 1909, with the support of the United Hebrew Trades, a federation of Jewish Unions, there erupted a series of strikes in New York which were without precedent for their size, duration and fury.

First the bakers—two thousand strong—struck in the spring; they were joined on November 22, 1909 by 20,000 shirtwaist makers, mostly female, who were striking for better working conditions.

Women were subjected in the factories to sexual discrimination as well as to class exploitation. They were charged for the needles they used and the power supplied to the factory at a twenty percent profit for the owners. In addition, workers were taxed for the chairs on which they sat, made to pay for clothes lockers, and fined if they came five minutes late to work. During the first month of the “Uprising of the 20,000,” which lasted until February 1910, 723 workers were arrested. The conclusion of the strike saw general improvements in working conditions for the shirtwaist-makers.

Ironically the “Uprising of the 20,000” began with two localized shop strikes, one against an employer named Leiserson, the other against the Triangle Shirtwaist Company, a firm destined to enter Jewish immigrant folklore and become a legend in American labor history.

At 4:35 p.m. on March 25, 1911, a fire broke out in the Triangle Company and spread quickly among scraps of cloth. In the eighteen minutes it took to bring the fire under control, 146 workers, most of them young Jewish and Italian girls, burned or jumped to death.

Although the Triangle Company’s owners were placed on trial for manslaughter, it could not be proven that they knew that a stairwell door was locked on the day of the fire. Three months after the fire the New York legislature created the Factory Investigating Commission whose job was to check factories for fire hazards, unsafe machines and poor health conditions.

From the Triangle fire disaster and other similar events, the immigrant working class emerged in America. The Lower East Side and its ghetto was for most a stopping-off point where one lived until one could afford something better. Although the older generation of Jewish immigrants held on to their European heritage with tenacity, the younger generation desired to leave the ghetto image behind by moving to an “American” neighborhood. By the first quarter of the twentieth century, newly-landed immigrants were bypassing Manhattan and its Lower East Side for Brooklyn.

During the period of mass Jewish immigration to America the Lower East Side offered hospitality, jobs, business and political contacts, investment possibilities, schools and settlement houses. All helped the Jewish

immigrant to assimilate and to acquire essential skills; he could then help his newly-adopted country to grow and prosper.

## Course Outline

- I. *Introductory Activities*
  - a. General background information on immigration
  - b. Family tree exercise
  - c. Pretest
- II. *Why Eastern European Jews Came To America*
  - a. Current exodus of Jews from Russia
  - b. Shtetl life
  - c. The May Laws and government policies
  - d. Pogroms, and economic and social conditions in Europe
  - e. Film: *Voyage to America*
- III. *Migration To The United States*
  - a. The voyage
  - b. U.S. immigration policies
  - c. The reception centers
  - d. Film: *The Golden Door*
- IV. *The Lower East Side*
  - a. Tenement living
  - b. Reaction of earlier immigrants
  - c. Record: *The East Side Story*
  - d. Guest speaker from Jewish Federation
- V. *Adjusting to America*
  - a. Mutual benefit societies and social agencies
  - b. Fraternal and community organizations
  - c. Role of the public schools
- VI. *The Yiddish Press and Theatre*
  - a. Role played in americanizing the immigrants
  - b. "Bintel Brief" exercise
- VII. *How The Immigrants Aided The U.S. Labor Movement*
  - a. Sweatshop and factory conditions
  - b. Child labor
  - c. Triangle Fire
  - d. The Jewish unions and the "Uprising of the 20,000"

- e. Film: *The Inheritance*
- VIII. *Concluding Activities*
- a. Simulation: *Gateway*
  - b. Filmstrip: *Minorities Have Made America Great*
  - c. Field trip to New York City
    - Jewish Museum Ellis Island
    - Lower East Side ILGWU Headquarters
    - Yeshiva University
  - d. Unit test

## Notes

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1. Marjorie Weiser ed. *Ethnic America* (New York: H.W. Wilson Co., 1978), p. 11.
2. Mark Yudel, "The Shtetl " in Lily Edelman ed., *Jewish Heritage Reader* (New York, Taplinger Publishing, 1965), pp. 66-67.
3. *Ibid* , p. 67.
4. Peter Wiernik, *History of the Jews in America* (New York: Jewish Press Publishing Co., 1912), p. 262.
5. Quoted in Abraham J. Karp, *Golden Door to America: The Jewish Immigrant Experience* (New York: Penguin Books, 1967), pp. 73-74.
6. Abraham Cahan, "Yekl," in Milton Hindus's *The Old East Side: An Anthology* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1969).
7. Thomas Kessner, *The Golden Door: Italian and Jewish Immigrant Mobility in New York City: 1880-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 129-136.
8. John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New York: Atheneum Press, 1968), p. 93.
9. Maurice J. Karpf, *Jewish Community Organizations in the United States* (New York: Bloch Publishing, 1938), p. 71.
10. Quoted in Maury Klein's "Life on the Lower East Side" *American History Illustrated* , Volume VII, Number 7, (November 1972), p. 26.
11. *Ibid*.
12. Allon Schoener, ed., *Portal to America: The Lower East Side, 1870-1925* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), p. 11.
13. J.C. Rich, "The Jewish Labor Movement in the United States," *The Jewish People, Past and Present* (New York: Jewish Encyclopedic Handbook Inc., Central Yiddish Culture Organization, 1948), vol. II, p. 400.

## Sample Lesson: Pre-Test

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Directions: In the blank before each item in Section I place the letter of the definition from Section II which best explains it.

### Section I

1. \_\_\_\_ Shtetl
2. \_\_\_\_ Pale of Settlement
3. \_\_\_\_ Pogrom
4. \_\_\_\_ Immigrant
5. \_\_\_\_ May Laws
6. \_\_\_\_ Sweatshop
7. \_\_\_\_ Landsmanschaften
8. \_\_\_\_ H.I.A.S.
9. \_\_\_\_ Garment Industry
10. \_\_\_\_ Uprising of the 20,000
11. \_\_\_\_ The Forward
12. \_\_\_\_ Kehillah
13. \_\_\_\_ Emma Lazarus
14. \_\_\_\_ David Dubinsky
15. \_\_\_\_ Sidney Hillman
16. \_\_\_\_ Samuel Gompers
17. \_\_\_\_ A. Cahan

### Section II

A. Violent attacks on Jews. B. Discriminatory laws against Jews. C. Area of Russia where Jews were confined. D. A small town in which Jews lived. E. A person who leaves one nation to settle in another. F. Organization which helped Jews to immigrate. G. Factory in which very low wages were paid. H. Mutual Aid Society. I. Businesses that made clothing. J. Strike of garment workers. K. NYC's organized Jewish Community. L. Yiddish newspaper. M. Author, poem on the Statue of Liberty. N. President of Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union. O. President of ILGWU. P. President of AFL. Q. Editor of Yiddish newspaper.

Key: 1D 2C 3A 4E 5B 6G 7H 8F 9I 10J 11L 12K 13M 14O 15N 16P 17Q

## Sample Lesson: A Bintel Brief

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### **Objective To acquaint the students with the problems that faced the Jewish immigrant.**

To assist the students in understanding one of the roles of the Yiddish press.

To help the students develop their own writing skills.

### **Materials Needed**

A teacher's copy of *A Bintel Brief* .

A teacher's prepared ditto of letters from *A Bintel Brief*.

Presenting the Lesson

Teacher would discuss with students the various roles a newspaper plays and the columns it contains. Afterward the teacher should try to get students to write an Ann Landers-type advice column. A discussion of the role the Yiddish Press played in the life of the East European immigrant will follow. The teacher should select a number of letters from *A Bintel Brief* and read them to the class. Students should be allowed to answer the letters verbally.

For homework, distribute the prepared ditto containing no more than five letters from *Bintel Brief* . Students are to answer at least three of the letters in writing. The answers should be discussed in class the next day. If desired, the teacher may allow students to write their own *unsigned* letters and give them to other students,

who will then write a response.

## Sample Lesson: Film The Inheritance

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### **Using the film**

Introduction: We are about to see a film that deals with the period 1901-1919. It is about the rise of the union movement, and is particularly concerned with the birth of the Amalgamated, a union composed mostly of Jewish immigrants.

What is a union, a strike?

Why was it necessary to form unions and to conduct strikes in the early 1900s?

What were working conditions like?

Discussion questions after showing:

What do you think most immigrants thought of their experience on Ellis Island?

What did the man mean when he said that in the Old Country he had worked like an animal?

What were his hopes for his children?

Why was America described in the film as “half dream and half nightmare”?

Activities for Students

The following activities may be used either for class discussions or homework assignments:

1. Write a diary entry recounting the events of a pogrom.
2. Write a summary of the May Laws.
3. Imagine yourself as a Jewish child living in N.Y. in the 1900s. Write a letter to a Russian cousin describing life in the United States.
4. Interview or invite a current Russian immigrant to discuss his experiences.
5. Describe the life of a Jewish worker who was forced to labor in a sweatshop.
6. Write a newspaper story about the Triangle Fire.
7. Make a list of some of the accomplishments of immigrants.
8. Describe the conditions under which the immigrants lived in the Lower East Side.

## Teachers' Bibliography

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Edelman, Lily, ed., *Jewish Heritage Reader* New York: Taplinger Publishing, 1965, An anthology of articles on various aspects of Jewish life.

Glazer, Nathan, and Moynihan, Daniel P. *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians and Irish of New York* Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1970. Contains a discussion of difference between ethnic groups and their achievements.

Handlin, Oscar. *Adventure in Freedom: Three Hundred Years of Jewish Life in America* New York: McGraw-Hill, 1954. Emphasis on the East European Jewish immigration after 1881.

Higham, John. *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* New York: Atheneum Press, 1968. Reaction of "Americans" to foreigners.

Hindus, Milton, ed. *The Old East Side: An Anthology* Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1969. Consists of essays and documents written by noted Jewish and non-Jewish personalities who lived on the Lower East Side.

Howe, Irving. *World of Our Fathers* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976, Excellent for material on the journey of the East European Jews to America and the life they found and made here.

Karpf, Maurice. *Jewish Community Organization in the United States* New York: Bloch Publishing, 1938. Covers the history of the major and minor Jewish community organizations and the role they played.

Kessner, Thomas. *The Golden Door: Italian and Jewish Immigrant Mobility in New York City, 1880-1915* New York: Oxford University Press, 1977. Examines the experiences of both groups and explores the process that made Italians and Jews Italian-Americans and Jewish-Americans.

Rich, J. C. "The Jewish Labor Movement in United States", *The Jewish People, Past and Present* Volume II, Jewish Encyclopedic Handbook Inc., Central Yiddish Culture Organization, New York, 1948. Covers the history of the Jewish unions in America.

Rischin, Moses. *The Promised City: New York's Jews* New York: Harper and Row, 1970. The encounter between Eastern European Jewish immigrants and New York. The immigrants search for a new community life.

Weiser, Marjorie, ed. *Ethnic America* New York: H. W. Wilson Company, 1978. Anthology of recollections of immigrants in various ethnic groups and the reactions of citizens to the newcomers.

Wiernik, Peter. *History of the Jews in America* New York: Jewish Press Publishing Company, 1912. Traces the history of the Jews in America from the first Jewish community in the New World.

## Suggested Reading List for Students

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Antin, Mary. *The Promised Land* Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1969. Autobiography of a Russian girl who came to the United States. Discusses the role of free education in helping immigrants.

Bass, Hyman. "Notes on the Origin and Character of the Yiddish Press", in *The World of Yiddish* , Bulletin Number 4, Winter 1974. New York: Congress for Jewish Culture Inc., 1974. A short article that discusses the role of the Yiddish press in America.

Hoff, Rhoda. *America's Immigrants: Adventures In Eyewitness History* New York: Henry Z. Walck, Inc., 1967. An anthology of articles by various immigrants recounting their early experiences.

Klein, Maury. "Life on the Lower East Side", *American History Illustrated* , Volume VII, Number 7, November 1972, Gettysburg, Pa.: Historical Times, Inc. A brief look at the Lower East Side during the period of Eastern European migration.

Metzker, Isaac, ed. *A Bintel Brief* , New York, Ballantine Books, 1972. An annotated selection of articles and letters from the pages of *The Jewish Daily Forward* . Vividly portrays the Jewish immigrant experience in America.

Roskies, Diane K. and David G. *The Shtetl Book* New York: Ktav Publishing, 1975. Stories from and history of shtetl life.

Schoener, Allon, ed. *Portal to America: The Lower East Side, 1870-1925* New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1967. A collection of contemporary newspaper articles and pictures depicting life on the East Side.

## Materials for Classroom Use

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### A: Filmstrips

*Minorities Have Made America Great: The Jews*

Available from Audio-Visual Center with phonograph record. Shows the contributions of Jews to America.

*A Nation of Immigrants* . Audio-Visual Center.

Discusses America as a Melting Pot and illustrates various immigrant groups. Includes a record.

*Immigrant America* . Social Studies School Service.

Two parts with record or cassettes. Part I profiles early 20th century immigrant communities. Part II examines contemporary cities.

### B: Films

Screen News Digest, Volume 7, Number 3, *America: The Melting Pot* . Audio-Visual Center.

Twenty minutes, black and white; portrays impact U.S. has had on immigrants.

Screen News Digest, Volume 14, Number 6, *The Golden Door* . AudioVisual Center. Thirteen minutes, black and white; traces history of Ellis Island.

*Voyage to America* , Anti-Defamation League. Twelve minutes, black and white, rental; illustrates 350 years of immigration.

*The Inheritance* , Anti-Defamation League. Forty five minutes, black and white, rental; perhaps the most effective film produced about the late 19th and early 20th century migration.

C: *Recordings and Tapes*

*The East Side Story* , Tikva Records. A history of the Lower East Side in words and songs.

D: *Simulation*

*Gateway: A Simulation of Immigration Issues in Past and Present America* . A four part simulation on problems of immigrants—Ellis Island, Atlantic Crossing, factions—available from Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute.

E: *Family Tree Exercise*

Available from author. Contains sample and directions for completing a family tree class exercise.

## Resource Addresses

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Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith

1162 Chapel Street

New Haven, CT.

Audio-Visual Center

New Haven Board of Ed.

Winchester School

New Haven, Ct.

Jewish Federation

1162 Chapel Street

New Haven, Ct.

Social Studies School Service

10,000 Culver Blvd.

P.O. Box 802

Culver City, CA 90230

Curriculum Unit 79.02.02



Tikva Records

1650 Broadway

New York, N.Y. 10019

Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute

238 Hall of Graduate Studies

Yale University

New Haven, Ct. 06520

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