

ASSIMILATION AND TRADITION: AMERICAN JEWISH RESPONSES TO THE 1911
ABROGATION OF THE RUSSO-AMERICAN COMMERCE TREATY

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ABSTRACT

In 1911, U.S. Congress voted to abrogate the Russo-American Commerce Treaty of 1832. This treaty originally guaranteed that American businessmen living and working in Russia and Russian businessmen living and working in the United States would be granted the rights and privileges of the local citizens. However, at the dawn of the twentieth century it became evident that Russia was categorically denying visas to American Jewish businessmen. This led to the American Jewish Committee launching a campaign in the United States to abrogate the treaty with Russia on the grounds that Russia was violating the terms and disrespecting the American passport and, ultimately, the institution of American citizenship. One important element of this plan was a press campaign. This thesis examines the English-language and Yiddish-language press to compare the responses to abrogation across diverse Jewish communities in the United States. While this work focuses on a particular historical event, it also uses this moment to explore on a broader scale how Jews wrote about their relationship to their own Jewishness and Americanization across political, religious, and linguistic lines.

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INTRODUCTION

On a mild December night in 1911, dozens of people gathered in a local auditorium to attend a meeting hosted by the *Los Angeles Examiner*. The auditorium was packed with members of the local community, reporters, politicians, and performers. The central issue of discussion that had prompted this event was the looming vote in United States Congress concerning the abrogation of the Russo-American Commerce Treaty of 1832. For months, the American Jewish Committee had been waging a campaign to garner support and apply pressure to American politicians to abrogate the treaty on the grounds that it had become clear that Russia had been categorically denying business visas to Jewish Americans interested in travelling to the Russian Empire for work. The issue had been successfully pushed to the forefront of the political sphere and this meeting in Los Angeles was one of many that had been happening for months all over the country in auditoriums, town halls, and houses of worship. The meeting opened with a performer singing “America” and a reading of Zangwill’s *The Melting Pot*. The speakers were varied: rabbis and politicians, leaders of women’s groups and local members of the community, Jews and non-Jews alike. They all spoke to one central idea: this was not a question of religion, but a question of a foreign country’s respect for a united, universal American citizenship. The night ended with an emotional rendition of the Star-Spangled Banner, the national anthem of the United States, emphasizing that this was not a Jewish issue, but an American one.¹

The Russo-American Commerce Treaty of 1832 explicitly guaranteed American businessmen in the Russian Empire and Russian businessmen in the United States “the same

¹ Maurice Salzman, *B’nai Brith Messenger*, December 22, 1911.

security and protection of natives of the country wherein they reside...on condition of their submitting to the laws and ordinances there prevailing.” When Jewish American businessmen made plans to travel to Russia for work, many found their visas being categorically denied based on their Jewishness. This led to individual protests and local petitions which pressed Congress to re-negotiate the treaty to clarify the terms which allowed Russia to treat Jews as a separate class of American citizens; Russia resisted any attempts at renegotiation and by early 1911, the AJC was spearheading a coordinated campaign to abrogate the treaty altogether.²

This research intends to explore not only the actions and work of diplomats and politicians in the public eye, but more the responses within different local American Jewish communities to the campaign for abrogation, with a particular interest in how Jewishness and American-ness intersected and were conceptualized among different Jewish ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups. American Jewry was hardly a monolith, and the early 20th century was a particularly important moment in formations Jewish American belonging. This work is divided into three major sections: it starts by detailing instances of visa rejections and the campaign of the AJC before it turns to examining examples from the English-language Jewish press in the United States, followed by the Yiddish-language Jewish press in the United States. By looking at newspapers, personal correspondence, and minutes of meetings, this work will explore how (and some possible reasons why) the way in which the call for abrogation (and, by extension, national belonging and Jewishness in the United States) was framed by American Jews from community to community.

² Naomi W. Cohen, “The Abrogation of the Russo-American Treaty of 1832,” *Jewish Social Studies* 25, no. 1 (1963): 3.

The Russo-American Commerce Treaty of 1832

Article One of the Russo-American Commerce Treaty of 1832 guaranteed that Americans working in the Russian Empire could move, live, and work within the Russian Empire with relative ease and a degree of protection, and vice versa. It ensured “reciprocal liberty of commerce” and that “the inhabitants of their prospective states shall mutually have liberty to enter the ports, places and rivers of their territories of each party, wherever foreign commerce is permitted.” This further meant that these businessmen were “at liberty to sojourn and reside in all parts whatsoever of said territories” and were granted “the same security and protection of natives of the country wherein they reside...on condition of their submitting to the laws and ordinances there prevailing.”³ The treaty was, for its time, nothing unusual; Russia had the same agreements with Great Britain, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, and a handful of other Western European countries.⁴ It did not cause any significant issues until the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when over two million Jews emigrated from the Russian Empire-- 84 percent of those emigrants immigrated to the United States.⁵ As a result, the number of Jews in the United States grew and expanded while many American Jews were also experiencing a degree of upward economic and professional mobility.

The period between 1880 and 1920 was a moment of mass emigration from Eastern and Southern Europe. Jews in the Russian Empire, in particular, experienced a series of ‘push’ factors that encouraged them to emigrate. The pogroms (instances of mass anti-Jewish violence) of the 1880s wrought devastation across shtetls and families in the western borderlands of the

³ Naomi W. Cohen, “The Abrogation of the Russo-American Treaty of 1832,” *Jewish Social Studies* 25, no. 1 (1963): 3.

⁴ Vasilii Petrovich fon Ègert, *Nado Zashchishchat’sia* (Sankt-Peterburg: Tipografiia Glavnogo Upravleniia Udelov, 1912).

⁵ Zvi Gitelman, “Native Land, Promised Land, Golden Land: Jewish Emigration from Russia and Ukraine,” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 22 (1998): 138.

empire, prompting many Jewish families to leave altogether for fear of loss of property, personal harm to them or their families, or even death. The passage of the May Laws in 1882⁶ and worsening economic conditions in the Pale of Settlement also contributed to emigration.⁷ Adding to the economic burden of residency restrictions and the low industrial production of the Pale⁸ was a series of laws that barred Jews from certain professions and career paths. Starting in 1889, Jewish lawyers could only qualify for the bar if they were granted special permission from the minister of justice; this happened very rarely. Jewish doctors were only allowed to practice privately, and barred from any government or public work.⁹ Jewish students faced ever-shrinking quotas on the number of Jewish students being accepted to universities.¹⁰

This work will look at two Jewish populations resulting from different waves of immigration to the United States: the settling of German Jews in early-colonized America in the early 1800s, and Eastern European Jewish immigration at the turn of the 20th century. Both waves of immigration were important in the story of abrogation, though the Eastern European wave may seem at first glance to have had more obvious effects. The influx of Eastern European Jews to the United States and subsequent significant increase of the American Jewish population

⁶ The May Laws (or “Temporary Regulations”) were passed in 1882 and “[forbade] Jews from owning land or buildings outside of the Pale...[which]...closed many Jewish businesses in rural areas.” The May Laws also renewed and strengthened existing residency restrictions on Jews in the empire (Tim Chapman, *Imperial Russia, 1801-1905* (Psychology Press, 2001), 128).

⁷ In 1894 alone, the liquor trade (a major industry for Jews) was put under government control; this put 200,000 Jews out of work in an environment where finding other employment was severely restricted by laws barring Jews from certain professions and residence restrictions. This contributed to the worsening economic situation in the Pale, where the number of Jewish families who needed community assistance increased 27 percent overall and up to 50 percent in some major cities during Passover (Simon Dubnov, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland: From the Earliest Times Until the Present Day*, vol. 3 (The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1920), 24).

⁸ In a rapidly industrializing society, 40 percent of Jews in the Russian Empire were still merchants or tradesmen. Only 10 percent of Jews in the Pale worked in manufacturing, and it was more often in consumer products than in lucrative heavy industry (Yoav Peled, *Class and Ethnicity in the Pale: The Political Economy of Jewish Workers’ Nationalism in Late Imperial Russia* (St. Martin’s Press, 1989), 25).

⁹ Simon Dubnov, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland: From the Earliest Times Until the Present Day*, vol. 3 (The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1920), 26.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

was one reason the question of abrogation was so prevalent. Jews composed only two percent of the total population in Europe, but between 1840 and 1946, they composed six percent of immigrants to the Americas. In the United States at the turn of the century, Jews made up 48.3 percent of immigrants from Russia and by 1910, New York City's population was nearly 20 percent Jewish, while Chicago's was close to 10.¹¹ Eastern European Jews also had a comparatively low rate of return, meaning more Eastern European immigrants remained in the United States permanently than, for example, Italian immigrants.¹² This influx of Jews to the United States meant that the number of American Jews was slowly but surely becoming significant enough to have an effect not only on American culture, but on American politics.

Previous Efforts of American Jews to Advocate for Russian Jews

The abrogation of the Commerce Treaty was not the first time American Jews had gotten involved in Russian-American Jewish issues. In 1869, two thousand Jews were expelled from Bessarabia when the Russian Empire began attempting to enforce old residence restrictions on the border of Romania. Many American Jews and American Jewish organizations (such as B'nai Brith and the Board of Delegates of American Israelites) were outraged by the act and petitioned the United States government to address the issue with the Russian government directly.¹³ President Ulysses S. Grant himself enthusiastically approved of the petition, though his cabinet members did not share his optimism. His Secretary of State in particular was hesitant to bring a petition up to the Russian government, fearful it would cause tension between the two relatively

¹¹ Gitelman, "Native Land, Promised Land," 137.

¹² Eli Lederhendler, "Classless: On the Social Status of Jews in Russia and Eastern Europe in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50, no. 2 (2008): 510.

¹³ Ronald J. Jensen, "The Politics of Discrimination: America, Russia and the Jewish Question 1869–1872," *American Jewish History* 75, no. 3 (1986): 280.

friendly countries. Russia ultimately ignored the petition altogether, citing the norm in international law that forbid countries from interfering in each other's domestic affairs. The next major event that garnered American Jewish interest in Russian Jewish affairs was the Kishinev Pogrom around Passover of 1903. This pogrom ended in an estimated 47 dead, hundreds injured, and 1.2 million dollars worth of property damage.¹⁴ When word of the pogrom reached the United States, it made its initial rounds in the Yiddish press. On April 24, the New York Times ran a short article reporting on the event and numerous American Jewish religious, political, and community bodies rushed to organize a response.¹⁵ Many of these groups attempted to appeal to the U.S. government to interfere in Russia's treatment of its Jews. Ultimately, a petition was sent to the Russian state in July, but it was again promptly rejected and ignored on the same grounds as in 1869. While neither of these attempts were ultimately successful in making any change to the life of Jews in Russia, they do demonstrate that American Jews were becoming more and more concerned with Russia's treatment of Jews. These attempts gave American Jews some experience in political organization around the issue of foreign Jews and laid the groundwork for the groups who organized the abrogation campaign in 1911.

Previous Work on the Treaty

The issue of abrogation of the Treaty of 1832 has been addressed by scholars from many points of analysis and in various disciplines. In 1912, John V. Hogan wrote a piece for *Political Science Quarterly* which analyzed abrogation primarily from an economic perspective. He explored what concrete direct, immediate impact abrogation had on Russian-American

¹⁴ Philip Ernest Schoenberg, "The American Reaction to the Kishinev Pogrom of 1903," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (1974): 262.

¹⁵ "Massacre of Jews in Russia," *The New York Times*, April 24, 1903.

commercial relations and the import-export of Russian- and American-made products. He ultimately critical of abrogation, writing that there should have been more attempts to negotiate a new treaty instead of abrogating the original one completely, which he claims would have resulted in less commercial unrest.¹⁶

Naomi Cohen approached her analysis of the treaty differently, through the lens of the work of political pressure groups. She proposed the treaty as an important historical moment because it demonstrated the development of an ethnic collective lobbying ability of Jewish Americans. Jews in the United States had previously attempted to petition the United States government to address certain issues related specifically to their ethno-religious community, but all attempts were relatively unsuccessful in facilitating any major change. The abrogation of the treaty, on the other hand, was taken on as a campaign by the newly formed American Jewish Committee; the AJC was ultimately successful in making political change as representatives and an organization specifically concerned with Jewish Americans.

However, she additionally engages the question of abrogation from a more legal perspective concerned with international diplomacy, providing an analysis of the legal justifications and interpretations of the treaty from both American and Russian legal traditions. She outlines four major points of contention the United States had with Russia concerning the treaty: Russia requiring a religious test to be granted a visa, a certain group of American citizens having their rights limited, Russia refusing to honor the U.S. passport, and Russia attacking “freedom of religion, a sacred principle in the American code of liberty.”¹⁷ Cohen’s work also diverges from diplomatic/legal history to reflect on how the treatment of American Jews in the

¹⁶ John V. Hogan, “Russian-American Commercial Relations,” *Political Science Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (1912): 631–47, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2141216>.

¹⁷ Cohen, “The Abrogation of the Russo-American Treaty of 1832,” 4.

Russian Empire could impact the rights of Russian Jews themselves. Russia expressed concern that granting more rights to American Jews would only encourage Russian Jews to push for more rights as well, and American Jews consistently expressed concern for the state of Russian Jewry in talks of abrogation. She argues that the AJC was not only fighting for the rights of American Jews, but working to “to repudiate the status of second-class citizenship foisted on [American Jews] by Russian discrimination and to achieve the emancipation of Russian Jewry.”¹⁸

Clifford L. Egan focuses more on the actions of the United States government and the State Department. He asserts that the U.S. government was motivated to abrogate the treaty largely because of fear of losing the Jewish vote. William Taft, the republican incumbent in the upcoming presidential race, was hesitant to alienate any more voters than he already had during his first term as president. The State Department released a memorandum at the time that claimed that “[in] New York City alone the Jews cast 175, 000 votes, and in national elections the majority of that vote is with the Republican party,” meaning Jews did hold some voting power and Taft was aware that his actions on abrogation could shift not only the Jewish vote away from him, but the votes of those who sympathized with Jewish American’s political efforts.¹⁹

A thorough history of the diplomatic correspondence between the United States and Russia concerning this treaty has been documented by Carl George Winter in his work, *The Influence of the Russo-American Treaty of 1832 on the Rights of American Jewish Citizens*, where he focuses heavily on American politicians and their actions over the course of the

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Clifford L. Egan, “Pressure Groups, the Department of State, and the Abrogation of the Russian-American Treaty of 1832,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 115, no. 4 (1971): 332.

campaign for abrogation.²⁰ On the side of Russian-language secondary literature concerning the treaty, much of the content is concerned with the Russian government's response and effects on Russian politics. For example, F. A. Seleznev in their article titled *Conflict Around the Abrogation of the Russo-American Commerce Treaty and the Moscow Bourgeois (1911-1912)* examines the treaty from the perspective of the Moscow elite in an effort to understand the political repercussions abrogation had on the Russian side of the conflict.²¹ Fedorova Ekaterina Valerevna in *On the Question of the Commercial-Economic Emancipation of Russia in the Beginning of the 20th Century in Light of the Abrogation of the Russo-American Commerce Treaty of 1832* focuses more on the economic repercussions and how the Russian Duma chose to handle the economic fallout of the abrogation.²²

This research intends to build on the existing work of previous scholars by addressing the abrogation of the treaty through a new lens of American Jewry's relationship to Americanization and assimilation.

Methodology/Framework

An important framework for this thesis centers around immigration, assimilation, and multinational/supra-national belonging. Fundamentally, the press analysis of this thesis are divided into two sections to reflect this: the first chapter of press analysis will focus on the English-language press organs run by American Jews (mostly of German origin), while the

²⁰ Carl George Winter, "The Influence Of The Russo-American Treaty Of 1832 On The Rights Of American Jewish Citizens," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 41, no. 2 (1951): 163–94.

²¹ F.A. Seleznev, "Konflikt Vokrug Rastorzhenija Russko-Amerikanskogo Torgovogo Dogovora I Moskovskaja Burzhuaizija (1911–1912 Gg.)," *Otechestvennaja Istorija* 1 (2002): 74–82.

²² Fedorova Ekaterina Valer'evna, "K Voprosu O Torgovo-Ėkonomicheskoj Ėmansipatsii Rossii V Nachale Khkh V. V Svete Uprazhdeniia Russko-Amerikanskogo Dogovora 1832 G.," *Istoricheskie Nauki*, no. 3 (2021): 24–29.

second chapter of press analysis will cover the Yiddish-language journals written by recent Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. In each group, there are a series of themes reflected that arise based on a multitude of situational circumstances, but this work will explore them through the lens of immigration to the United States and the corresponding theories of assimilation. The more established, long-residing American Jews with German ancestry²³ tended to express support of the abrogation couched in frequent and virulent warnings against using this to create an ethno-religious Jewish party, which they feared would undermine their status as American citizens. Sources for and by more recent Eastern European immigrants, however, do not tend to reflect this fear ethnic activism; they also frequently spend long portions of the articles about the treaty in the Yiddish press simply explaining the working of the American legislative system, something not as present in the English-language press. These differences are, in part, a reflection of systems and cycles of immigration and assimilation, with many German Jews being more assimilated into mainstream America while Eastern European Jews were just beginning the process.

Assimilation theory in specific reference to the United States at the turn of the twentieth century has been and remains a hotly debated, often critiqued development of scholarship. The term itself is a loaded one, and has no single accepted definition in the field of assimilation/immigration scholarship. At its most basic definition, ““Assimilation” meant to become alike’; however, that immediately begs the question ‘...but like whom? And in what way?’”²⁴ In terms of immigration, “assimilation is a radical, unidirectional process of simplification: ethnic minorities shed themselves of all that makes them distinctive and become

²³ Unless otherwise noted, American Jews of German ancestry will from here on be referred to simply as “German Jews;” likewise, Jews with Eastern European ancestry will be referred to as “Eastern European Jews.”

²⁴ Silvia Pedraza, “Assimilation or Transnationalism? Conceptual Models of the Immigrant Experience in America” (Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy, 2005), 419.

carbon copies of the ethnic majority.”²⁵ This definition still remains broad and unsatisfactory. For the purposes of this work, assimilation will refer specifically to “becoming like the dominant population, which at the turn of the century clearly meant conformity to Anglo-Saxon ways.”²⁶ One of the most prominent scholars of early 20th century American assimilation is Milton M. Gordon, who developed the idea of “behavioral” v. “structural” assimilation. He defined behavioral (sometimes also referred to as cultural)²⁷ assimilation as “absorption of the cultural behavior patterns of the “host” society.”²⁸ This would include language, values, and general behavior.²⁹ Structural assimilation, however, “refers to the entrance of the immigrants and their descendants into the social cliques, organizations, institutional activities, and general civic life of the receiving society.”³⁰ This would, in Milton’s framework, eventually result in a higher rate of intermarriage. He asserts that at the time of him writing (1961), the United States had still not in any meaningful way achieved structural assimilation.

Milton’s assimilation theory also lays out specific patterns of the immigrant experience in the United States; he asserts that in both the wave of “old” immigrants (pre-1880s) and “new” immigrants (post-1880s) the immigrant groups formed ethnic based “enclaves” and made some effort to preserve their traditions. However, the “old” wave of immigrants had been in the United States long enough for half a generation or the next generation to slowly stray from these “enclaves.”³¹ Oftentimes, they were motivated by more economic opportunity, social mobility,

²⁵ Richard Alba, “Immigration and the American Realities of Assimilation and Multiculturalism,” *Sociological Forum* 14, no. 1 (1999), 7.

²⁶ Pedraza, “Assimilation or Transnationalism?,” 421.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 420.

²⁸ Milton M. Gordon, “Assimilation in America: Theory and Reality,” *Daedalus* 90, no. 2 (1961), 279.

²⁹ Pedraza, “Assimilation or Transnationalism?,” 420.

³⁰ Gordon, “Assimilation in America,” 279.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 274-275.

and a ‘better’ life, in addition to growing loyalty to their country of residence.³²

Often, the concept of assimilation is criticized for being presented as a singularly one-way process, when in reality many contemporary scholars focusing on immigration and assimilation argue that not only did their new country have an influence on its immigrants, but that the immigrants themselves had an influence on their new country.³³ Immigrants rarely came to the United States and left their entire tradition, belief set, and culture behind; this resulted not in a singularly ethnic or singularly ‘American’ identity, but a “bicultural identity” which resulted in them “[forging] and [sustaining] multistranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement.”³⁴ This is evident in the American Jewish attempts to impact Russian Jewish legislation; clearly, American Jews (many of whom still had family in Eastern Europe or felt an obligation to members of their ethno-religious group despite national boundaries) felt some responsibility towards and concern for Jews outside of the United States. Jews were not alone in this kind of cross-national relationship; Irish immigrants would make political contributions for nationalist causes back in Ireland and immigrants from all over the world would often send money back home to family in addition to maintaining “transnational households” with family members living in various countries.³⁵³⁶

This thesis will use these more contemporary theories of assimilation, transnationalism, and multiculturalism, but will primarily be seated in how Amos Funkenstein frames assimilation

³² Alba, “Immigration and the American Realities of Assimilation and Multiculturalism,” 15.

³³ Ibid., 7; Pedraza, “Assimilation or Transnationalism?,” 423.

³⁴ Pedraza, “Assimilation or Transnationalism?,” 423.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ These feelings and demonstrations of connection to a larger community regardless of national borders also existed on a smaller scale within the United States. As Eastern European Jewish immigrants flooded into the United States at the turn of the century, Jew already living in the United States founded charity organizations that focused on English language education and financial assistance for new immigrants (Mrs. W. T. Barnett, *B’nai Brith Messenger*, January 19, 1912, 15 edition, sec. President’s Report).

in his work *The Dialects of Assimilation*. In this piece, he explores the history of how Jewish historians have written about assimilation. He posits that too often, Jewish historians have fallen prey to a false dichotomy in their work which has encouraged the idea that there is a distinct line between Jewish culture and the culture of a given majority community. Funkenstein argues that while there are some phenomena that can be called strictly “Jewish” or “majority culture,” oftentimes it is impossible to separate the two because they have such a strong influence on one another.³⁷ There has been a resistance in scholarship to talk about assimilation in any non-negative context, treating it as bad and avoidable, which has led to the framing of any changes of Jewish life/tradition as “adjustments,” which are good and unavoidable to function in majority society; Funkenstein argues that this dichotomy is unnecessary, and that assimilation is not necessarily always a negative process, or one that can be seen as simply minority cultures being forced to completely give up their own values and traditions in order to conform to majority culture. He points out that Jews have existed and lived in a wide range of diverse communities and that it has led not to a loss of Jewish culture, but to the continued development and expansion of it.³⁸ Even though Jewish communities may assimilate in certain ways to the larger communities they live within, they maintain self-assertions of Jewishness and certain elements of Jewish culture. Funkenstein offers a poignant metaphor for this phenomenon, citing R. Simone Luzzato of Venice; he said that Jews were like a river in the sense that “its waters may change their colors according to the various soils through which the river runs, but they always remain the same water.”³⁹

Funkenstein’s work provides a framework for discussing assimilation that effectively

³⁷ Amos Funkenstein, “The Dialectics of Assimilation,” *Jewish Social Studies* 1, no. 2 (1995): 4.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 7; 10.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 7 (originally from Simone Luzzato, *Maamar al yehudei venetsia*, trans. Dan Lates (Jerusalem, 1950), 106).

describes the situation of Jews in the United States at the time of abrogation. Historians from Simon Dubnov (writing in the early twentieth century) to Israel Bartal (writing less than twenty years ago) have explored how political participation in the majority system was a potentially positive sign and common method of Jewish assimilation that could benefit Jewish communities as it developed.⁴⁰⁴¹ This work will demonstrate that Jews were able to adopt American citizenship and Americanize (largely through political participation in the American political system), but also maintain their own traditions and practices. This is demonstrated in the appeals and discussions about the abrogation of the treaty, where Jews were forced to confront and navigate their complex relationship to their Judaism, American identity, and how the two influenced and impacted one another.

⁴⁰ Israel Bartal, *The Jews of Eastern Europe, 1772-1881* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 158.

⁴¹ Of course, not all contemporaries of Dubnov were so optimistic about Jewish political participation in the majority systems (staunch Zionists, for example). World War II and the Holocaust only reinforced this pessimism for many Jews (Israel Bartal, *The Jews of Eastern Europe*, 159).

CHAPTER 1: THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE AND THE OFFICIAL CAMPAIGN FOR ABROGATION

At the turn of the twentieth century, Jews across a wide range of backgrounds found themselves being denied visas to travel to Russia for business. Their complaints to the State Department eventually culminated in a circular that garnered the attention of the newly formed American Jewish committee. This chapter explores some concrete examples of visa denials based on the Russo-American Commerce Treaty and the campaign of the American Jewish Committee for abrogation.

Cases of Visa Denials

The original commerce treaty was signed in 1832, and it appears that for the first few decades, there were few to no issues with Jewish American businessmen travelling to Russia. However, as the 19th century progressed and Alexander the III enacted new and more aggressively enforced existing restrictions on Jewish residence within the empire, American Jewish businessmen began to run into issues. Suspensions around Jewish ‘plots’ to overthrow the tsar and Jewish involvement in anti-tsarist acts were on the rise and the Legation of the United States in St. Petersburg at the time explained that “this occasioned a strong demand for the rigorous enforcement of the old laws which had for some time been very loosely carried out.”⁴² There were various cases throughout the late 1800s of American Jewish businessmen not only being denied visas, but being expelled from the Russian interior after having been granted entrance and living there, sometimes for months or years. This section will give a handful of

⁴² “Termination Of The Treaty Of 1832 Between The United States And Russia,” House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs (1911), 116.

specific instances of attempted expulsions and visa rejections of American Jews living in or wishing to travel to Russia under the Russo-American Commerce Treaty of 1832.

One of the first cases that brought significant attention to the issue was the case of Henry Pinkos, an American Jewish businessman residing in St. Petersburg who was told around May of 1880 that he was forbidden from continuing to live in the city. Originally, he was given three days to pack and leave St. Petersburg; he was, however, able to obtain permission to stay for three months longer to wrap up his affairs.⁴³ In another case the same year, the Russian government turned their attention to Marx Wilczynski, an American agent of a mercantile firm who was of Jewish origin. In October of 1880, he received notification that he was no longer allowed to reside in St. Petersburg and had to leave the city.⁴⁴ He was told it was “on account of his being a Jew by birth.”⁴⁵ Both reached out to the Legation of the United States in St. Petersburg to report what had occurred and request an intercession on their behalf. While Wilczynski was eventually granted an official exception to reside in St. Petersburg long enough to tie up his affairs, Pinkos stated “he [had] had enough of Russia and [wished] to return to the United States.”⁴⁶ After these occurrences, the Russian government informed the United States that American Jews would, like domestic Jews, require a special status of exception to live in the interior. Major figures in commercial and manufacturing industries could petition to the Russian government for this exception and bankers or heads of major commercial enterprises who came to Russia with the intent of buying and exporting Russian-made products could be approved to enter the interior as merchants of the first guild.⁴⁷

⁴³ Ibid., 108.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 113.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 114.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 109.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 135.

While most exceptions seemed to be granted based on economic status, there was one case that stood out as linked more closely to the question of religious identification. In 1882, an American Jew working as a stable director in St. Petersburg was ordered to leave the city. He appealed to the police, saying he was not “one of those Talmud Jews” and in fact belonged to the American Reformed Church. The Russian government classed him as a Karaim or Reformed Jew and allowed him to stay in St. Petersburg, demonstrating the even within the class of Jewish American businessmen there seemed to be sub-classes of Jews, some of whom were more acceptable to the Russian government and some of whom were not.⁴⁸

These Jews already living in the interior were not expelled because of any newly passed law; they were simply the victims of a sudden stricter application of an existing law, which had before been less aggressively enforced.

Meanwhile, many Jews were never granted visas to travel to Russia in the first place; this was particularly the case from 1890 on. Visa requests by American Jewish businessmen were further complicated by Russia’s policies concerning expatriation. The Russian Empire, unlike many nation states at the time (including the United States), did not recognize the right of expatriation. Often, being permitted to leave the Russian Empire came with the expectation that a person would not accept another foreign citizenship and would return within five years;⁴⁹ if they accepted a foreign citizenship and returned to Russia, they could be put in prison.⁵⁰ Many of the Jews who left Russia in the emigration waves of the 1880s did so with the expectation that they were not to return; a number of Jews emigrated illegally because of the difficulty and expense of

⁴⁸ Ibid., 136.

⁴⁹ Russian subjects could apply for an extension to those initial five years if they were able to pay (Ann E. Healy, “Tsarist Anti-Semitism and Russian-American Relations,” *Slavic Review* 42, no. 3 (1983): 413).

⁵⁰ Ann E. Healy, “Tsarist Anti-Semitism and Russian-American Relations,” *Slavic Review* 42, no. 3 (1983): 413.

legal emigration.⁵¹ By accepting American citizenship, they were violating Russian law and could be subject to legal punishment upon return to the empire.⁵² Additionally, they could be charged with evading military service and arrested if they attempted to re-enter Russia; sometimes, naturalized American citizens returning to Russia were even threatened with exile to Siberia.⁵³

Despite this, some American Jewish businessmen who were Russian-born did attempt to acquire visas to return. Louis J. Horowitz, born in Polish lands and president of the Thompson-Starrett Company (responsible for the construction of Washington D.C.'s Union Station), was denied a visa to travel to Russia on the basis of his Jewishness. At the time, he had contracts in the United States amounting to around fifty million dollars and he intended to travel to St. Petersburg to ascertain if he wanted to bid on the construction of a new station being built there.⁵⁴ Harry Cutler, a member of the American Jewish Committee, was born in the Russian Empire and later, after becoming an American citizen, attempted to apply for a visa to return to Russia in order to handle some family business there; he was told if he entered Russia, he would be considered a Russian subject (since Russia would not recognize his American passport as he was a Russian-born subject) and he would be subject to laws pertaining to all Russian Jews.⁵⁵ Lithuanian-born Leon Kamaiky, publisher of the *Jewish Daily News* (at the time, the newspaper with the largest circulation of any Jewish paper in the United States) was denied a visa as well, not on the basis of his place of birth, but on the basis of his religion.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² "Termination Of The Treaty Of 1832 Between The United States And Russia," House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, 198.

⁵³ Ann E. Healy, "Tsarist Anti-Semitism and Russian-American Relations," 413.

⁵⁴ Egan, "Pressure Groups," 329

⁵⁵ "Termination Of The Treaty Of 1832 Between The United States And Russia," House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, 54.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 57.

Despite the issues of expatriation and naturalization in the eyes of Russian law (as seen in the case of Cutler's application), the Russian embassies granting visas would often deny Russian-born American Jews on the basis of their Jewishness as opposed to their place of birth. In the notice sent out in 1907 by the U.S. Department of State, they stated, "Jews, whether they were formerly Russian subjects or not are not admitted, to Russia unless they obtain special permission in advance from the Russian government..." This makes it clear that the issue affects Jews applying for a visa whether they are Russian-born or not; both have to obtain special permission.⁵⁷ It simply meant that if an American Jewish businessman who had been born in Russia did manage to get a visa, he could be subject to certain punishments and American-born Jews would not be. This would be a moot point, however, if no Jews were being granted visas to enter the Russian Empire anyway, regardless of their place of birth. There are many examples of men who were American-born who faced the same rejection. Oscar Hammerstein, an American-born Jewish artist, was denied a visa on the ground of his Jewishness. Both Pinkos and Wilczynski were American-born and faced expulsions from the Russian interior.

According to Russian law and the language of the treaty, these expulsions were justified. The treaty granted American businessmen in Russia the right of Russian subjects; therefore, Jewish American businessmen would be granted the rights of Jewish subjects. Since Jewish subjects were not allowed to reside in the interior, neither would American Jews. However, the United States government long chafed at that response. There were letters sent back and forth between Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Legations, and embassies concerning the issue, and the United States often made it clear it did not approve of Russian interpretation of the treaty. However, there was no real major action made by the United States government to actually

⁵⁷ Ibid., 59.

meaningfully address the issue until they were forced to in 1911 by the actions of the American Jewish Committee.

Founding of the American Jewish Committee

The American Jewish Committee (AJC) was founded in New York in 1906 by a group of Jewish men who had already been informally meeting to discuss issues surrounding Jewish life in America. Its primary founding members who would later play an important role in the campaign for abrogation were: Jacob H. Schiff, a German-born broker involved in railroads and finance; Louis Marshall, a lawyer of German-Jewish descent; and Cyrus Adler, a scholar who had previously worked as a secretary at the Smithsonian Institution and director of the Jewish Theological Seminary. Other important men functioned more on the periphery of the core founding group, such as Adolph S. Ochs, who had owned the New York Times since 1896. Through business, family, and personal networks, the AJC was also tied to prominent families such as the Guggenheims, the Strauses, and the Warburgs. This wide range of relationships gave the AJC a reach outside of New York City, and as far as Boston, Chicago, and San Francisco. The founders were generally united by the assertion that their Judaism and American-ness were not at odds with one another, but were inherently compatible; American-ness allowed some level of diversity and non-conformity and Judaism encouraged tolerance. They were adamant that being American did not mean abandoning their Jewishness and that the United States was, in fact, a perfect environment for Judaism to evolve in a meaningful and logical direction that did

not violate traditional practice and ideals, but allowed them to be expressed and adhered to in new and more updated ways.⁵⁸

The founding of the AJC was prompted by a few specific events, such as the ongoing Dreyfus case in France and the Kishinev pogrom in the Russian Empire. However, it was also due to long-standing issues the Jewish community was facing in the United States and the desire for some sort of official institution to support and fight for the rights of Jews in the United States;⁵⁹ bodies like this existed in other countries, and founders of the AJC thought it was only logical that one existed in the United States as its Jewish population grew and expanded. In its constitution, the AJC states that its goal is “to prevent infringement of the civil and religious rights of Jews, and to alleviate the consequences of persecution.”⁶⁰ Social progressiveness and equal rights were core values of many of the founders, and those ideals expanded beyond the Jewish world; Schiff was an avid supporter of public education, ending child labor, and unions, and both Schiff and Marshall were dedicated to promoting civil rights for black Americans.^{61,62} These ideals were in line with the parallel development of Reform Judaism in the United States, which was beginning to advocate for social action and applying Jewish values of justice and tolerance to civic participation and political protest. As the first decade of the twentieth century progressed, the AJC tackled issues of financial destitution in Jewish communities, immigration, and examined the treatment of Jews in foreign countries such as the Russian Empire. In 1908, their attention was turned to the issue of the Russian Empire refusing to issue visas to Jewish American businessmen. This was, to the AJC, a direct violation of Jewish American rights, and

⁵⁸ Oscar Handlin, “The American Jewish Committee A Half-Century View,” *Commentary*, January 1957, available at <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/oscar-handlin/the-american-jewish-committee-a-half-century-view/>.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Louis Marshall, “The American Jewish Committee,” 8, <http://ajcarchives.org/AJCArchive/DigitalArchive.aspx>.

⁶¹ Cyrus Adler, “Louis Marshall: A Biographical Sketch,” *The American Jewish Year Book* 32 (1930): 21–30.

⁶² Handlin, “The American Jewish Committee A Half-Century View.”

they moved to action. Over the next three years, they would launch a progressively more aggressive campaign in what can be identified as two parts: a behind-closed-doors campaign based on appealing directly to politicians and a public campaign that would include the entire country.

First Stage of the Campaign: Direct Appeals

At first, the AJC focused their attention on personally meeting with and attempting to persuade politicians to address the issue of unequal treatment under the treaty. They tended to favor this approach in general, which they felt would keep things more under control and preclude any public or personal embarrassment if the campaign failed. Keeping things confined to politicians' offices and meeting rooms meant that the AJC was not perceived as being in an open conflict with the United States government and administration. Additionally, they worried that a more public campaign would require a huge amount of education of the public on the issue, which would mean more money and effort on the part of the AJC.⁶³

The publication of the circular from the Department of State stating that the "department will not issue passports to former Russian subjects, or to Jews who intend going to Russian territory, unless it has assurance that the Russian Government will consent to their admission" marked the impetus of the AJC's actions concerning the treaty. After the publication of the circular, Marshall was tasked with writing a letter of protest addressed to the administration.⁶⁴ The letter was sent directly to the president on May 18th and was an "attempt on the part of [the]

⁶³ Cohen, "The Abrogation of the Russo-American Treaty of 1832," 13.

⁶⁴ "The American Jewish Committee Meeting of Executive Committee Held on January 26, 1908," January 26, 1908, AJC Archives.

Committee to induce the Government to do something effective to terminate the controversy.”⁶⁵

The letter further condemned the administration, saying they “[sought] to...apply an unconstitutional religious test to upwards of a million of [their] own citizens.”⁶⁶ The State Department had already retracted the circular by the time the letter was sent and removed the offending language, but the damage was done and the AJC was not willing to simply drop the issue. Over the course of the remainder of 1908, another letter was sent to the president, but no action was taken by the administration to actually act in accordance with the requests and recommendations of the AJC.⁶⁷

The next major event was a meeting in the summer of 1909 between two committee members (Cyrus Adler and Judge Mayer Sulzberger) and President Taft, Secretary of State Henry Knox and the new ambassador to St. Petersburg, William Rockhill. The president assured the AJC members that Rockhill was going to do his best to handle the issue.⁶⁸

In February of 1910, the meeting of the AJC’s executive board focused more heavily on the treaty than ever before. They discussed writing yet another letter to the president outlining their recommendations, but many committee members felt that it would just be in vain. Schiff pointed out that the administration had been giving them “...similar promises and assurances for many years, that everything was being done to reach an understanding with Russia, but nothing has ever come of them.”⁶⁹ He pointed out that despite their efforts to reach the administration, even United States elected officials were still unaware of the issue of the treaty. Schiff was of the

⁶⁵ “Fifth Annual Report Of The American Jewish Committee: November 12, 1911,” *The American Jewish Year Book* 14 (1912): 296.

⁶⁶ Cohen, “The Abrogation of the Russo-American Treaty of 1832,” 13.

⁶⁷ “The American Jewish Committee Meeting of Executive Committee Held on October 8, 1908,” October 8, 1908, AJC Archives.

⁶⁸ Cohen, “The Abrogation of the Russo-American Treaty of 1832,” 10.

⁶⁹ “The American Jewish Committee Meeting of Executive Committee Held on February 20, 1910,” February 20, 1910, AJC Archives.

steadfast belief that amending the treaty to include equal treatment of American Jews would prompt two further responses: Russia would be forced to treat its own Jews better and perhaps even open the Pale of Settlement, and the actions of the United States concerning the treaty could encourage other countries to follow their lead. He proposed giving up on trying to reach the president and turning their attention to a campaign in Congress. The Committee agreed they would attempt one last time to appeal to the president before they began any actions in Congress.⁷⁰

May of 1910 saw another meeting in Washington D.C. with Adler, Schiff, Sulzberger, Taft, Knox, and Rockhill. This time, instead of assuring the committee members that they were doing all they could to solve the issue, the administration told them that they were not going to press the Russian government for any changes. Rockhill felt that the situation in Russia was calm for the moment, and any agitation on the part of foreign Jews would only prompt violent reactions and tightening restrictions.⁷¹ Again, the Committee left the meeting and proceeded to write another letter to the president, as well as a proposal for how to address the issue surrounding the treaty. This time, the Committee advocated for not simply renegotiation, but abrogation of the treaty altogether.⁷² By the end of 1910, it was becoming more and more clear to the AJC that the administration was not going to address the issue with Russia, held back by fear of agitating the Russian Empire and putting the United States's commercial interests in the Far East at risk.⁷³

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Cohen, "The Abrogation of the Russo-American Treaty of 1832," 12.

⁷² "The American Jewish Committee Meeting of Executive Committee Held on May 29, 1910," May 29, 1910, AJC Archives.

⁷³ Cohen, "The Abrogation of the Russo-American Treaty of 1832," 14.

The turning point in the campaign came on January 19th, 1911, when Marshall gave a public address and the official public campaign for abrogation began.⁷⁴

Second Stage of the Campaign: Public Appeals

Marshall's address on January 19th set the tone for the rest of the public campaign. He appealed to a sense of American pride, pointing out that Russia's actions were not only an insult to American Jews, but to the American passport as a whole. Additionally, he pointed out that the Russian government was not only denying visas to Jewish Americans; by this point, it was clear that Catholic priests and Protestant missionaries were also being denied entry.⁷⁵ Marshall's address was printed in newspapers and as independent pamphlets to be distributed and circulated across the country, setting a precedence for the importance of print media and the press in the AJC's public campaign for abrogation.⁷⁶ In addition to action in the press and the general public, the AJC began specifically reaching out to certain groups and institutions; they began pressuring state legislatures for resolutions supporting abrogation, appealing to the clerical bodies of the Catholic and various Protestant churches, and combining forces with B'nai Brith and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (now the Union for Reform Judaism) to establish an alliance of three major American Jewish organizations.⁷⁷

In early February, a resolution for abrogation was introduced in Congress. Marshall spoke in front of the House Committee of Foreign Affairs, encouraging abrogation and laying out the AJC's reasons for their support. This resolution died in committee, but the AJC just set

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 17.

⁷⁶ "Fifth Annual Report Of The American Jewish Committee: November 12, 1911," 296.

⁷⁷ Cohen, "The Abrogation of the Russo-American Treaty of 1832," 21.

its sights on the next session of Congress in April.⁷⁸ The new session of Congress brought with it a new chairman on the Committee of Foreign Affairs who was rumored to be more sympathetic to abrogation than his predecessor.⁷⁹ By mid-November, the campaign had grown and garnered so much public support that the United States administration reached out to warn the embassy in St. Petersburg that abrogation was most likely imminent.

A House Congressional Hearing on December 13th sealed the treaty's fate. Over the course of the hearing, the Committee of Foreign Affairs heard testimony from various senators and congressmen (both at the state and federal level), the previous ambassador to Russia, bishops and reverends, and important figure heads in American business and educational institutions. Various members of the AJC testified as well. Marshall gave an impassioned speech where he argued that abrogation was the only way "to prevent further discrimination among the citizens of the United States, not by Russia but by the United States itself."⁸⁰ He reiterated the AJC's position that the United States abrogating the treaty would set a precedent for other countries to stand up against Russian discrimination as well,⁸¹ and that "[this] country can not afford to create different classes of citizens. When it permits this treaty to stand and permits Russia to violate it, as it has for so many years, it is acquiescing in the Russian attitude and it is discriminating against American citizens, and in that respect violating its own Constitution."⁸² Harry Cutler (another AJC member) gave a statement about his personal experience of being denied a visa to travel to Russia;⁸³ he also pointed out that at that point thirteen state legislatures had passed resolutions supporting abrogation.⁸⁴ AJC Executive Committee member Oscar Straus

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 28.

⁸⁰ Termination Of The Treaty Of 1832 Between The United States And Russia, 50.

⁸¹ Ibid., 80.

⁸² Ibid., 92.

⁸³ Ibid., 53.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 55.

emphasized that this was not a Jewish issue, but was “a Presbyterian, a Congregational, a Protestant, and a Catholic question” and an American one.⁸⁵ The resolution for abrogation passed in the House and was approved by the Senate on December 18th.

This Congressional victory would perhaps not have been possible without the AJC’s use of the American press to promote the campaign for abrogation. Starting in June of 1911, the AJC began a concentrated press campaign. They turned first to their own network; they had ties to Samuel Strauss, who had previously headed the New York Globe, and Adolph S. Ochs, head of the New York Times. With their expert help, the AJC was able to create a plan for the press campaign. Often, AJC members would write articles about the abrogation and distribute them directly to the press to be published. They solicited articles from important figureheads in various communities and curated them for distribution and publication in magazines and newspapers across the country. They also reached out to the editors of major newspapers in cities that had a population over 100,000 to submit frequent editorial and opinion pieces that were pro-abrogation.⁸⁶

In the month of December leading up to abrogation, articles concerning abrogation were generally front-page news in the Yiddish-language press and common in the English-language press. Over the course of the following two chapters, this work will analyze the content first of the English-language and then the Yiddish-language press concerning abrogation in relation to the conflicts and convergence of Jewishness and American-ness in both linguistic spheres.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 69.

⁸⁶ Cohen, “The Abrogation of the Russo-American Treaty of 1832,” 22.

CHAPTER 2: RESPONSES IN THE ENGLISH-LANGUAGE PRESS

Understanding the diversity of responses to the calls for abrogation in 1911 of the Russo-American Commerce Treaty of 1832 requires an understanding of the divisions that were present among American Jews at the time. These divisions ran mainly along ethnic, religious, and class lines and were heavily impacted by immigration patterns. This thesis will show that these divisions and the history of individual communities did impact how Jews of different linguistic and ancestral backgrounds discussed abrogation and, on another level, how it impacts American Jews' diverse relationship with Americanism and Judaism.

Jewish presence in the Americas dates back to early European colonization of the land. Initially, primarily Sephardic Jews were the first Jews to come to the United States.⁸⁷ However, by the 1720s there was a distinct shift in Jewish immigration to the United States that led to German and Polish Jews (mainly coming from the Prussian areas of the Polish partition) becoming the numerically dominant group over Spanish and Portuguese Jews.⁸⁸ These first two waves of immigration (but more the German wave) occurred as the requirements and definitions of citizenship were delineated in the United States. The 1790 naturalization law was the first act passed by Congress concerning naturalized citizenship; it granted citizenship to any free white person of "good character" who had resided in the United States for two years.⁸⁹ Over the following decades, the length of required residency would increase, but the race and gender qualifications remained in place for much longer. According to this act (and the multiple acts

⁸⁷ Jacob Rader Marcus, "The Periodization Of American Jewish History," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 47, no. 3 (1958): 127.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁸⁹ A Bill to Establish an Uniform Rule of Naturalization and Enable Aliens to Hold Land under Certain Conditions, 40 H.R. § 1 (1790).

succeeding it over the next decades), German Jews residing in the United State in good standing for the required residence period were eligible for naturalization; much of the difference between Jews and non-Jews in the United States at that point were conceptualized around religious ideals, not in terms of racial difference. In terms of citizenship rights, German Jews were considered white and able to fully participate in political and civil life if so long as they also met the other non-racial requirements.⁹⁰

By the mid-1800s, German Jews had almost taken over the cultural and religious sphere. German Jewish immigration boomed in the 1830s and by 1840, fifteen of the twenty-one major Jewish congregations in the United States were Ashkenazi, not Sephardic. In the wake of the Civil War, German Reform Judaism was a strong (though not majority) movement that had significant influence not only on Jewish religious practice, but the organization of Jewish social, cultural, and institutional life as well.⁹¹

Eastern European Jewish immigration had begun by the mid-1800s; the first Russian Orthodox synagogue in the United States was established in 1852 and handfuls of Eastern European style schools had begun functioning by the 1870s.⁹² However, the trickle of Eastern European immigration in the early- to mid-nineteenth century was miniscule compared to the flood of Eastern European Jews that entered the United States between 1880 and 1914. In the Russian Empire starting in 1881, waves of pogroms rattled the empire and resulted in the death, injury, and property destruction of many European Jews. The anti-Jewish violence resurged and escalated between 1903 and 1906. Large scale unrest swept the Pale of Settlement as the economic conditions worsened and antisemitic violence and institutional policies increased.⁹³

⁹⁰ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color* (Harvard University Press, 1999), 172.

⁹¹ Marcus, "The Periodization Of American Jewish History," 129.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 130.

⁹³ Shlomo Lambroza, "The Tsarist Government and the Pogroms of 1903-06," *Modern Judaism* 7, no. 3 (1987): 29.

Many Jews chose to respond to the rising instability in the Russian Empire by emigrating. While emigration was previously illegal, in the 1890s the Russian Empire loosened restrictions somewhat, enough for significant numbers of Jews to leave (though many left through illegal means as well).⁹⁴ The Russian Empire as a rule did not recognize the right to expatriation, but if the person left, received another foreign citizenship, and never returned to the empire, there was no realistic way to enforce it; if the person returned to the empire, however, they could be arrested and jailed.⁹⁵

Between 1881 and 1912, almost two million Jews emigrated from the Russian Empire. Eighty-four percent of those Jews immigrated to the United States.⁹⁶ Most of these Jews settled on the east coast, primarily in New York City where by 1915 they made up twenty eight percent of the population.⁹⁷ A significant number of Jews moved slightly inland to settle in Chicago, where they composed about ten percent of the city's population by 1910.⁹⁸

“Old” and “New” Immigrants

The large influx of Eastern European Jews to American cities was a matter of serious consideration and contention for the established American Jewish community. Institutionally and economically, German Jews held significant power in comparison to the more recently mass-immigrated Eastern European Jews, and many felt an obligation to their co-religionists despite

⁹⁴ I. Michael Aronson, “The Attitudes of Russian Officials in the 1880s Toward Jewish Assimilation and Emigration,” *Slavic Review* 34, no. 1 (March 1975): 7, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2495871>.

⁹⁵ United States Congress. Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations, A Joint Resolution Providing For The Termination Of The Treaty Of Commerce And Navigation Between The United States Of America And Russia Concluded At St. Petersburg December 18, 1832 (Washington Government Printing Office, 1911), 26, <http://archive.org/details/treatywithrussi00stragoog>.

⁹⁶ Gitelman, “Native Land, Promised Land, Golden Land,” 22.

⁹⁷ Ronald Bayor, ed., *The Columbia Documentary History of Race and Ethnicity in America* (Columbia University Press, 2004), 429.

⁹⁸ Pierre Birnbaum and Ira Katznelson, *Paths of Emancipation: Jews, States, and Citizenship* (Princeton University Press, 2014), 188.

the gulf of cultural differences between them. Some of this obligation seemed to be based on their shared religious background, but a significant amount of the push to help support and integrate these new Eastern European immigrants was rooted in feelings of insecurity among German Jews themselves.⁹⁹

German Jews who had been living the United States for generations feared that this influx of Eastern European Jews (who were more religiously traditional, spoke Yiddish, and were in general less acculturated to the dominant culture) would serve to negatively influence non-Jewish American's views of Jews in general. This insecurity of Jewish place in the American landscape can be linked to the rising antisemitism and scientific racialism in the United States¹⁰⁰ and the increasingly fraught racial tension permeating all levels of American life. The United States was a country where citizenship was, at its onus, linked directly to race. White Jews had been eligible since the eighteenth century for citizenship, but discussions of Jews and whiteness were not always so straightforward. As Eastern and Southern European immigrants streamed into the United States at the turn of the century, the notions of race and whiteness in American definitions were challenged. While Eastern European Jews were considered white in terms of citizenship eligibility, they were not necessarily considered "as 'white'" as Anglo-Saxon immigrants.¹⁰¹ Relationally, Jewish immigrants were "whiter" than black Americans (and therefore entitled to citizenship through naturalization), but in the social and cultural sphere, they were "less white" than Western and Northern European immigrants. This placed Jews in a realm that Matthew Brown calls "probationary whiteness," meaning Jews were considered white in

⁹⁹ Robert Rockaway, "Ethnic Conflict in an Urban Environment: The German and Russian Jew in Detroit, 1881–1914," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (1970): 134.

¹⁰⁰ In this period, some prominent American hotels and resorts admitted openly to discriminating against Jews (Lee Livney, "Let Us Now Praise Self-Made Men: A Reexamination of the Hilton-Seligman Affair," *New York History* 75, no. 1 (1994): 66–98).

¹⁰¹ Bayor, *The Columbia Documentary History of Race and Ethnicity in America*, 339.

some contexts and less-white in other contexts.¹⁰² German Jews, largely acculturated and more assimilated than their Eastern European counterparts, worried that the influx of these visibly, linguistically, and religiously different Jews would negatively tip the scales of racial perception on which Jews in America were already precariously balanced.¹⁰³

Recent work by Selma Berrol and Steven Aschheim suggest that some of this fear of “vulgar [Eastern European] Jews” compromising “the better class of [German] Jews” was actually rooted not only in the American context, but carried over from Germany itself.¹⁰⁴¹⁰⁵ After experiences with German antisemitism and seeing how the arrival of less assimilated Eastern European Jews had led to internal rifts and hostility in the community in Germany, Berrol and Aschheim theorize that these German Jews were reluctant to allow similar developments in the United States.¹⁰⁶

This anxiety was expressed frequently in the English-language Jewish press. There were frequent calls for financial and physical support of these new Eastern European immigrants, often with justifications along the previous stated lines. Organizations dedicated to the financial, professional, and educational support of new immigrants sprung up in cities all over the country; these organizations were largely funded and run by American Jews themselves. The president of the Hebrew Ladies Benevolent Society of B’nai Brith Temple in Los Angeles, Mrs. W. T. Barnett, published the following report in the local English-language Jewish newspaper in January of 1912:

¹⁰² Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 176.

¹⁰³ Gerald Sorin, “Mutual Contempt, Mutual Benefit: The Strained Encounter Between German and Eastern European Jews in America, 1880–1920,” *American Jewish History* 81, no. 1 (1993): 56.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Steven Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800–1923* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1982).

¹⁰⁶ Selma Berrol, “Germans Versus Russians: An Update,” *American Jewish History* 73, no. 2 (1983): 150.

Imagine, if you can, thousands of immigrants coming yearly into this city, where only hundreds are coming now, not necessarily in distress and need of money, but requiring the assistance of friends and their (protection and advice to make them to obtain and maintain a proper existence here. This is no fancy, this is no dream. It is stern reality, and it is up to us to meet it and solve the difficulty. And following that, to educate them, to make them independent of outside assistance, and thus prevent them from becoming a burden to our city, state and nation, and a stigma on the fair name of Judaism.¹⁰⁷

Her report reflects two important, wide-held beliefs: 1) that American Jews had an obligation, both financial and ideological, to these new immigrants coming into their communities, and 2) that not meeting this obligation would not only harm the immigrants themselves, but harm the reputation of all Jews and Judaism as a whole in the United States.

One major point of contention between the German and new immigrant Russian Jewish communities was religious difference. Most German Jews in the United States tended towards a more modified, modern Orthodoxy and Conservative movements, but increasingly moved into Reform with the arrival of more and more Russian Jews, possibly at least partially in an effort to distance themselves from these new immigrants.¹⁰⁸ Russian Jewish religious organization was a direct threat to the existing structures and institutions German Jews had built in the United States. As major Orthodox Eastern European rabbis immigrated to the United States and built their own congregations and realms of influence that frequently exceeded the explicitly religious sphere, organizations and newspapers run by German Reform Jews spoke up, saying in one

¹⁰⁷ Mrs. W. T. Barnett, *B'nai Brith Messenger*, January 19, 1912, 15 edition, sec. President's Report.

¹⁰⁸ Selma Berrol, "In Their Image: German Jews and the Americanization of the Ost Juden in New York City," *New York History* 63, no. 4 (1982): 422.

instance that the chief rabbi of Vilnius in particular (recently immigrated to the United States in 1888) should remember that his authority was over “his own congregation or congregations only.”¹⁰⁹

Religious conflict often crossed into the economic sphere. Work on Shabbat was forbidden for Orthodox Jews and many were unwilling to break that obligation, which disqualified Jews from some jobs and industries.¹¹⁰ The German Jews running organizations and charities could sometimes become frustrated with these restrictions, or find them obsolete or outdated. Orthodoxy was called “backward and filled with superstition”¹¹¹ and some Reform Jews were always quick to remind the non-Jewish public “that the ways of these people are not our ways, nor their thoughts our thoughts.”¹¹² The criticism was not one-sided; Orthodox Russian Jews thought these Reform Jews were “socially degenerate.”¹¹³ Many Russian Jews also felt resentment towards these organizations formed by Reform German Jews, claiming that they felt humiliated by them.¹¹⁴ Many of these cultural and religious divisions were exacerbated by the class lines in the United States; oftentimes, the German Jews were the landlords, the factory owners, the trade leaders, whereas the Russian Jews were the tenants, the factory workers, and the laborers. The garment industry was especially relevant in this, where in 1885 German Jews owned ninety seven percent of garment factories, which were one of the largest employers of Eastern European Jews.¹¹⁵ German Jews were horrified by Russian Jewish participation in labor unions, strikes, and politics, claiming it made the entirety of American Jewry look ungrateful and

¹⁰⁹ Irving Aaron Mandel, “Attitude of the American Jewish Community Toward East-European Immigration as Reflected in the Anglo-Jewish Press (1880-1890),” *American Jewish Archives*, June 1950, 31.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹¹¹ Rockaway, “Ethnic Conflict in an Urban Environment, 145.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 146.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 145.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 137.

¹¹⁵ Berrol, “Germans Versus Russians, 155.

made them all look bad. It is important to note that while German Jews may have had issues with how new immigrants practiced or behaved according to different cultural standards, this did not mean that German Jews were resistant to or ashamed of their own Jewishness. On the contrary, many German Jews felt strong connections to their Jewishness; this can be seen in the obligation felt to their brethren Jews and in their press organs, which often discussed current events and religious practice.

English-Language Press and Discussions of Abrogation

The cleavage between German and Russian Jews in the United States is important to understand and take into consideration when looking at the press. In 1911, the year the Russo-American Commerce Treaty was abrogated by the United States, there were dozens of Jewish newspapers being produced across the country. They were published in a variety of languages, and the language the newspaper was published in is often an indication of certain facets of political and cultural identity of the publishers, the journalists, and the readers. In this case, English-language Jewish newspapers in the United States during this time were largely products of German Jewish communities, oftentimes that had ties to Reform Judaism. English-language press tended to be less willing to be critical of the United States governments actions concerning abrogation.¹¹⁶ Major German Jewish leaders often thought that being polite and persuasive was the most efficient and safest way of voicing discontent, as opposed to aggressive or bold protest.¹¹⁷ The Yiddish-language press was much less wary of being critical, perhaps comforted by the fact that most people reading their papers would be sympathetic to their arguments; it was

¹¹⁶ Jonathan D. Sarna, "The American Jewish Press," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the American News Media*, ed. Diane Winston (Oxford University Press, 2012), 541.

¹¹⁷ Sorin, "Mutual Contempt, Mutual Benefit, 40.

unlikely that the non-Jewish or facets of society that they were criticizing were reading the Yiddish newspapers, if they even had the ability to understand them in the first place. The Hebrew press was even less concerned with being diplomatic about criticism, content that the only people reading their papers were Jews, and traditionally educated ones at that to be able to read in Hebrew.¹¹⁸

English-language newspapers did not have the language barrier buffer afforded to Yiddish- and Hebrew-language papers. Any English-speaking person in the United States could pick one of their papers up and read it, which, in times of rising international antisemitism and a flux of potentially destabilizing Jewish immigration, was a significant motivation to present the image of a community that fit into the American landscape without scandal or controversy and “deserved” to be there.¹¹⁹ This ideal can be seen across the board in these English-language newspapers in the discussion of the abrogation of the commerce treaty, an especially sensitive point because of its links to Russia, where many of these new Jewish immigrants had come from. This manifested in the English-language press in expressions of concern about the formation of a distinctly Jewish political party in the United States, which caused some concerns of factionalism and perceptions of being separate from other American citizens. However, these English-language Jewish press organs were still Jewish; resistance to the formation of a Jewish political party (which existed in the Russian Empire in the form of the socialist Bund, for example) did not equate to any shame or reduction of the Jewish identities of the authors or their readers. This section focuses on two newspapers, both published by organs of the Reform movement: one based in Chicago with a Reform rabbi as the editor, and one based in Los Angeles out of a local Reform congregation.

¹¹⁸ Sarna, “The American Jewish Press,” 541.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 534.

Concerns of Ethno-Religious Political Parties

One major English-language newspaper in the United States in 1911 was the *Reform Advocate*, a Chicago-based Jewish weekly that had been founded initially in 1891. The editor from its foundation was Emil G. Hirsch, a Luxembourg-born American rabbi. He was the son of the prominent Prussian chief rabbi of Luxembourg Samuel Hirsch, one of the most radical and prolific philosophers and advocates of Reform Judaism. Emil Hirsch shared his father's ideals of radical Reform based on social action and went on to immigrate with his father to the United States for his university education. He moved to Berlin for his rabbinical studies before returning to the United States and eventually settling long-term in Illinois as the congregational rabbi of the Sinai Congregation of Chicago.¹²⁰

Hirsch was a strong proponent of the abrogation of the Russo-American Commerce Treaty. He, like many Americans, was concerned about the treatment of Jewish Americans under the Russian interpretation of the treaty and the implications it had for creating another form of second-class citizenship in the United States, a country where citizenship was (if only in theory) based on universalist ideals and uniform application of rights. However, Hirsch's written pieces in the *Reform Advocate* raised concerns about the treaty abrogation that do not appear in the government or diplomatic documents. Hirsch supported abrogation, but was careful to entreat American Jewish readers not to allow the success of Jewish lobbying in this instance to create a specifically ethno-religious form of political participation.

Hirsch was concerned that views of abrogation hinged on specifically Jewish concerns would only serve to create further ethnic and religious division between Jewish Americans and

¹²⁰ Bernard Martin, "The Religious Philosophy of Emil G. Hirsch," *American Jewish Archives*, June 1952, 66–68.

non-Jewish Americans, and that was a significant danger of the narrative of abrogation being the exclusive effort of “a few rich Jews” as some Yiddish language newspapers were proposing at the time.¹²¹ That is not to say the Hirsch did not see this as a Jewish issue. He was not saying that it was in any way acceptable how Jewish Americans were being treated or that American Jews had to in any way renounce their Jewishness, but simply urging Jewish Americans not to fall victim to political ethnic factionalism that would undermine their own status as Americans.

Hirsch was not only critical of American Jews who leaned too strongly into ethnic/religious distinction in the conversations about abrogation. He was equally unimpressed with non-Jewish Americans who perceived abrogation as an exclusively Jewish issue and instrumentalized it as a tool to garner political favor from the American Jewish community. He resented that it was the responsibility of American Jews at all to justify their own belonging, and insisted that it should be the obligation of the State Department to fight for their equal rights not as Jews, but as Americans. He wrote that he and many other Jews were “disgusted at their Judaism being degraded into a political stake for which politicians will gamble” and “disgusted with politicians of whatever ranks who, for purposes of their own, are profuse in words of sympathy and indignation when elections are impending and later forget their own promises.”¹²²

His editorial following the official confirmation of abrogation is more explicit in its warning. He advocates for “self-repression and moderation in speech,” concerned that the formation of American Jewish political interest groups will only serve to “excuse the rise of an anti-Jewish combination.” He, like many German American Jews, was worried about rising antisemitism in the United States, and strongly cautioned that “[the] day [American Jews] shall

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

countenance the formation of a distinctly Jewish party for American political purposes will invite disasters the dire consequences of which cannot be overestimated.”¹²³

Hirsch, while a major contributor and editor of the *Reform Advocate*, was of course not the only writer on staff. Montefiore Bienenstok, a Jewish philanthropist, wrote an article titled “The Jews and Politics” for the *Reform Advocate* that also cautioned against a Jewish political party:

...the Jew should not eschew politics, either local or national, because he is a Jew, any more than a Christian should because he is a Christian. And further, I believe that in respect to politics, the Jews have a peculiar right to enter, and as Jews, (though not supporting any one party, or voting in a body for any man or principle), they have a great work, if not even a duty, to perform.¹²⁴

The *Reform Advocate* was not the only English-language, Reform-based, German Jewish-influenced newspaper in the United States at the time (it was not even the only one in Chicago). One important paper located on the west coast was the *B’nai Brith Messenger*, a bi-monthly publication named for the foremost Reform congregation in Los Angeles at the time. Co-founder of the newspaper and editor Victor Harris published a resolution on December 8, 1911 (ten days before Congress voted to abrogate the treaty) emphasizing that the paper was “speaking not as a representative of Jews, but as a body of citizens having at heart the preservation of the honor of the nation.”¹²⁵ An editorial published in the same edition by R. Sigmund Hecht (then rabbi of Congregation B’nai Brith), further asserted that “this is not a Jewish question; it does not concern

¹²³ Emil G. Hirsch, “After the Victory,” *Reform Advocate*, December 23, 1911.

¹²⁴ Montefiore Bienenstok, “The Jews and Politics,” *Reform Advocate*, December 16, 1911, 18 edition.

¹²⁵ Victor Harris, *B’nai Brith Messenger*, December 8, 1911.

the Jew as such; it does, however, concern the American citizen, and Russia, in denying the rights to American citizens, regardless of what they believe, has offered an insult to America” and clarifies that “the representative men among our co-religionists...speak with authority on behalf of their co-religionists, but not as Jews, simply as American citizens.”¹²⁶ Both men are clearly of the same mind as Hirsch in their assertions that they were in support of abrogation, but that it was not a Jewish issue so much as it was an American issue. Harris and Hecht do not, like Hirsch does, lean into the fear of rising antisemitism and political factionalism, but the sentiment of unity and American citizenship is undoubtedly in the same thread.

A meeting held on December 18, 1911 by the *Los Angeles Examiner* to discuss the treaty abrogation (reported on favorably by the *B’nai Brith Messenger* a few days later) perfectly demonstrated the tendency of members of the community to emphasize the Americanness of the issue over the Jewishness. The meeting opened with a rendition of “America,” included a reading of a portion of Zangwill’s *The Melting Pot* by R. Isidore Myers, and closed with the “Star-Spangled Banner.” The meeting was attended by Jews and non-Jews alike, and culminated with the resolution of the community “irrespective of politics or religion, and united solely by the brotherhood of American citizenship” that the question of abrogation was “a NATIONAL and not a RELIGIOUS question.”¹²⁷

The view of both the *Reform Advocate* and the *B’nai Brith Messenger* appears to be that it is not only possibly, but necessary for Jews to participate in politics as Jews, but that that does

¹²⁶ Sigmund Hecht, *B’nai Brith Messenger*, December 8, 1911.

¹²⁷ Maurice Salzman, *B’nai Brith Messenger*, December 22, 1911.

not mean aligning with a specifically Jewish party. It means, perhaps, being guided by Jewish morals and Jewish ideals in the context of also being an American citizen.

Religious Justifications

It is important to remember that the *Reform Advocate* was a newspaper that functioned as an organ of the Reform movement and whose head editor was a Reform rabbi and that the *B'nai Brith Messenger* was connected to a Los Angeles Reform congregation. Despite the perception of Reform Jews as more assimilated compared to, for example, some branches of Orthodox Judaism at the time, it was and is still a *religious* movement, meaning it is not in any way encouraging Jews to eschew their Jewish identity or religious obligation. It simply restructured religious life to better adapt to modernization and the non-Jewish secular world. It was a constant balance and weighing of identities, one that came out as particularly complex and important in discussions of abrogation in 1911.

R. Hirsch's editorials concerning abrogation are an example of this negotiation. They weave Jewish history, scriptural exegesis, German language/cultural references, and American political rhetoric to craft his arguments in a way that reflects the many intersections of the community he was writing for. In one editorial, he criticizes a Yiddish-language newspaper for claiming the abrogation efforts were mainly the result of the work of "a few rich Jews, who ashamed of their religion, would escape while traveling in Russia being known and watched as Jews." In response to these claims, he references the story of the Maccabees to criticize a group for "...fighting for themselves, the glory of their family...[and] under the mask of defending religion...aiming at securing the crown for their house." Hirsch is affronted by the claim that a

small minority (in this case, elite American Jews) would prioritize their own status over those of the larger community they belong to (American Jewish citizens), like some would say the Maccabees had prioritized their house's status over the possibility of harm to the stability of the larger Jewish community in the Assyrian state. He rejects the accusations presented in this Yiddish paper, writing:

Prepared as we were to have this question treated and spoken of as a Jewish question, we did not look for this narrow conception in a publication which claims to be the spokesman of true orthodox Judaism, and of Zionism and Russian Jewry in particular. If this agitation is justified it is because Russia insults the American people though the American who is a Jew is the direct sufferer from Russian discourtesy.¹²⁸

Hirsch then turns to the megillah to point to the role of Mordechai, a man who at the time of Hirsch's writing had been interpreted by some Jewish scholars as "[typifying] the attitude of the circumspect who were fearful lest open resistance would be fraught with dire consequences." He compares Mordechai to the role of later "Hofjude," Jews who had been historically responsible for handling the finances of European Christian nobility; this role came with its own difficulties and risks, but also afforded some Jews social privileges and relationship to the majority group unavailable to their co-religionists and even, on occasion, noble status. He praises the players like Mordechai, who retained their Jewishness but were more diplomatic in their influence and aware of how unstable the position of Jews was among the majority culture/state.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Emil G. Hirsch, "Editorial Notes," *Reform Advocate*, December 16, 1911.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

A Marriage of Judaism and Americanism

These newspapers, published in English, largely run and contributed to by Jews with roots or major influence in German Jewish tradition and culture, demonstrate a logical progression of thought. The experience of German Jews in Germany, and later in the United States, constructed a cultural context that made many of them hesitant of ethnic and religious factionalism. There was a real fear that that political organization that was ‘too Jewish’ would only serve to destabilize their status in American society and undermine their claims to American citizenship, as well as rouse more antisemitism. However, this does not mean that they were in any way disconnected from or ashamed their own Jewish identities; oftentimes they simply amended or developed their practices and traditions to cohere with political progressivism (particularly in many Reform circles where justice and political activism were quickly becoming synonymous with Jewish practice and tradition) and their lives as American citizens. Their connection to their Judaism can be seen here specifically in the religious metaphors used in talks of abrogation. Overall, this moment of abrogation presents a snapshot of the development of how American Jews conceptualized and navigated their Jewishness and American-ness in the early twentieth century United States.

CHAPTER 3: RESPONSES IN THE YIDDISH-LANGUAGE PRESS

Yiddish newspapers had been present in the United States since as early as 1870, but the mass immigration of Eastern European Jews to the United States beginning in the 1880s led to a veritable explosion in Yiddish press.¹³⁰ Between 1872 and 1917, there were one hundred and fifty Yiddish-language publications circulating in New York City alone.¹³¹ Many of the early newspapers of the 1880s were founded by Russian socialists and other radicals who sought to continue their ideological campaign in the United States. Most had a few false starts and short runs before their editors managed to establish more lasting newspapers, but by the 1890s, they had managed to find their footing; the decade saw the establishment of *Di Arbayer Tsaytung* (The Worker's Paper), *Abend Blatt* (Evening Paper), the anarchist *Di Fraye Arbayer Shtimme* (The Free Voice of Labor), and, of course, the *Forverts* (the Forward), which is still being published today in Yiddish and English.¹³² While all of the previously listed papers had clear ideological roots in radical political movements, the founders quickly discovered that they could not simply write about complex political theory. They had to begin by promoting a more general education of the public; therefore, they were often a mix of informative political news, articles about issues specific to new Jewish immigrants in the United States, pieces on science and art, and short works of literature or poetry. This structure was common across many Yiddish newspapers of the time, including those that were more politically conservative or not aligned with radicalism. This editorial structure was a major departure from the English-language (or

¹³⁰ Steven Cassedy, *To the Other Shore: The Russian Jewish Intellectuals Who Came to America* (Princeton University Press, 2014), 78.

¹³¹ Robert Park, *The Immigrant Press and Its Control*, Kindle Version (Harper & Brothers Publisher, 1922), location 1468.

¹³² Cassedy, *To the Other Shore*, 78.

even the American Russian-language) press, which focused more on straight news reporting and more traditional editorials. These Yiddish papers were a central piece of culture for Jewish American immigrants, and were often read aloud in groups, passed from person to person to read, and discussed in cafes and meetings.¹³³

It cannot be underemphasized what kind of influence the Yiddish press had in Jewish life in the United States and the place of cultural importance it held. Over the course of the first decade of the twentieth century, some of the major titles in the United States had circulations in the tens of thousands, with the socialist *Forverts* reaching up to sixty thousand copies a week.¹³⁴ In 1916, Yiddish-language press reached a circulation of over 500,000 copies in just New York City.¹³⁵ It can be inferred that the actual reach of the papers was higher than the circulation numbers implied, considering the practice of group-readings and lending or passing on a newspaper to another person once one was finished with it. The Yiddish press was so prominent in the immigrant press that it was featured prominently in the report of Robert E. Park, an American sociologist who published an extensive report on the immigrant press of the United States in 1922.

In Park's report, he first addresses the myths of the time that the Yiddish press was only being read by 'greenhorns,' or new immigrants. He claims there is a general idea that the only people reading the Yiddish press are the ones who have to because they do not speak English or another language well enough to read anything else and are not Americanized enough to easily read English-language news.¹³⁶ Park refutes this, stating that many people who read the Yiddish

¹³³ Kenyon Zimmer, "Saul Yanovsky and Yiddish Anarchism on the Lower East Side," in *Radical Gotham: Anarchism in New York City from Schwab's Saloon to Occupy Wall Street*, ed. Tom Goyens (Illinois Scholarship Online, 2017), 38–39.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Park, *The Immigrant Press and Its Control*, location 1497.

¹³⁶ Ibid., location 1044.

press are American citizens who speak English; he says that he frequently receives letters concerning the Yiddish press by people who write in perfect English.¹³⁷ He posits that the success of the Yiddish press was ultimately rooted in a large cross-class audience in a compact location that allowed for wide circulation.¹³⁸ His most important contribution in terms of this thesis, however, lies in his assessment of the impact the Yiddish press had on Americanization of new immigrants.

Even in Park's time, there were complex ideas in the general public around the recent influx Jewish immigrants. Oftentimes, they were portrayed as backwards, hardline traditionalists who had no interest in any degree of assimilation. They were accused of creating enclaves and resisting Americanization. More assimilated Jews, such as the actors and groups in Chapter 2 of this work, were posed in opposition to these new immigrants and depicted as having abandoned tradition and Judaism and becoming completely 'American' with no link to their own roots. This image continued through United States historiography, largely as a result of Zionist scholarship.¹³⁹ However, it was often a much more nuanced relationship that old and new immigrants had with Americanization and assimilation. While Chapter 2 focused on the relationship that more established, 'old' immigrants had with Americanization and their own Jewishness, this chapter will focus on how 'new' Eastern European immigrants related to those concepts.

Park posed in 1922 that perhaps the idea of new Eastern European Jewish immigrants being staunch separatists uninterested in Americanization or English was not accurate. He argues that the Yiddish press, despite being a 'foreign' language, minority press, actually contributed to

¹³⁷ Ibid., location 1060.

¹³⁸ Ibid., location 1492.

¹³⁹ Robert S. Wistrich, "Zionism and Its Jewish 'Assimilationist' Critics (1897-1948)," *Jewish Social Studies* 4, no. 2 (1998): 59.

the Americanization of its readers. While it was hardly the ultimate main goal of the radical socialist and anarchist editors of the 1880s, their papers gave the masses “an opportunity to acquire a taste for reading and for listening to political and economic discussions, which was an important step toward Americanization.”¹⁴⁰ By reading the Yiddish press, which included articles about economics, politics, science, art, and literature, readers became more comfortable and equipped to have informed conversations and debates about the United States, regardless of if that particular Yiddish paper was socialist, anarchist, Zionist, or religiously influenced. Far from being a separatist press, the Yiddish press, intentionally or not, actually gave new immigrants some of the tools of Americanization. This is not to say that new immigrants would abandon their own traditions, practices, and beliefs; most preferred particular Yiddish papers that appealed to their own political or religious ideology. It simply meant they had the ability to create new, cohesive relationships with both their Jewishness and American-ness.

Primary Source Selection

In conversations and debates around the abrogation of the treaty, one can see this marriage of identities clearly. The following section will draw primarily from four prominent Yiddish papers being published at the time in an effort to explore sources that were informed by a range of religious and political ideologies.

The first is *Der Yidisher Rekord* (The Jewish Record), based out of Chicago. It was published weekly from 1910 to 1922 and founded by Roumanian-born writer James Bernard

¹⁴⁰ Park, *The Immigrant Press and Its Control*, location 1578.

Loebner,¹⁴¹ Vilnius-born Zionist Leon Zolotkoff,¹⁴² and Odessa-born Zionist writer/historian H.L. Meites. Meites was the author of a book published in 1924 titled *History of the Jews of Chicago*, which gained significant local popularity and was rooted in Meites efforts to show how Jews had been long interwoven into and making meaningful contributions to American history.¹⁴³

The second is *Yidishes Tagblatt (The Jewish Daily News)*, which was published in New York City from 1885 to 1928. It was a daily founded by Kasriel Hirsh Sarasohn which saw great success and influence in the new immigrant community, having one of the largest circulations in the United States.¹⁴⁴ Sarasohn had begun studying to become a rabbi before he emigrated to the United States, and this more traditionalist religious background is evident in his publications, as this chapter will later demonstrate in detail.¹⁴⁵

The third is *Der Morgen Jorنال (The Jewish Morning Journal)*, published from 1901 to 1971 (after merging with another two Yiddish papers in 1928 and 1952). It was founded by Jacob Saphirshstein, an Orthodox, politically conservative Jew. The *Jewish Morning Journal* was unique at the time for its explicit support of the Republican party, and reached a peak circulation of 111,000 in 1916.¹⁴⁶

The last Yiddish newspaper analyzed in detail in this work is *Forverts (Forward)*, founded in 1897 and still published today. It was founded by a group of Eastern European-born

¹⁴¹ Hyman Meites, ed., *History of the Jews of Chicago* (Chicago: Jewish Historical Society of Illinois, 1924), 361.

¹⁴² Walter Roth, "Zolotkoff: Although Almost Entirely Forgotten Today, Chicago's Representative to the First Zionist Congress Was a Brilliant and Multi-Talented Activist with a Gift for Controversy to Match His Vast Energies," *Chicago Jewish History* 21, no. 9 (Spring 1997): 1.

¹⁴³ "October 28 Meeting to Mark Publication of Meites History: Judge Marovitz, Dr. Cutler, Meites Kin to Speak," *Chicago Jewish History* XIV, no. 1 (Fall 1990): 1.

¹⁴⁴ Termination Of The Treaty Of 1832 Between The United States And Russia, 56.

¹⁴⁵ Cyrus Adler and Frederick Haneman, eds., "Sarasohn, Kasriel H.," in *Jewish Encyclopedia* (Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1906), online access at <https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/>.

¹⁴⁶ "The Jewish Morning Journal | Newspapers | The National Library of Israel," <https://www.nli.org.il/en/newspapers/tjm>.

socialists, the most prominent of which was Abraham Cahan. Cahan was born in Russia and had attended not only religious school there, but secular school as well (it was rare at the time for Jews to attend both). Upon immigrating to the United States, he began teaching himself English in addition to attending a day school to learn the language fluently. He also began teaching at a night school for immigrants and taught some secular subjects at a local yeshiva. His experience with education, teaching, and the new immigrant community provides a clear link to his work as a journalist and editor, where he was intensely concerned with educating the public through the press.¹⁴⁷ Cahan ultimately became the long-term editor of the *Forward*. By 1915, the *Forward's* circulation was at 200.000; over the next few decades, it would reach 300.000.¹⁴⁸

The Yiddish Press and Abrogation

While these newspapers each had their own ideological and political underpinnings, they were in agreement over one thing; abrogation was a good thing for American Jews, and for Jews in general. Similar to their English-language counterparts, the Yiddish press often framed abrogation in terms of equal rights. The *Forward* firmly asserted this, writing:

It is better that all American citizens will be equal, with the same rights, before they should be divided into two classes--one class [which] should have rights and the other [which] should be rightless.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Lori Jirousek-Falls, "Abraham Cahan and Jewish Immigrant Education: For Men and Women," *Studies in American Jewish Literature* (1981-) 26 (2007): 36.

¹⁴⁸ "Forward | Newspapers | The National Library of Israel," <https://www.nli.org.il/en/newspapers/frw>.

¹⁴⁹ "Senat Eynshtimig--Vas Entfert Men Fun Rusland?," *Forverts*, December 20, 1911, XV, No. 4950 edition, 1, National Library of Israel.

It was frequently emphasized that this was not just a Jewish problem, but an American one. The *Jewish Morning Journal* summarized this succinctly when it printed, "...it is not a question of Jewry. It is a question of justice. It is not a question of religion. It is a question of rights. It is a question of patriotism."¹⁵⁰

In addition to Jews not being the only group impacted by discriminatory Russian practices (since Christian missionaries in particular were facing similar rejections of their visas), there was the prevalent argument that "Russia insults the whole American nation when it does not recognize the [American] passport in Jewish hands."¹⁵¹ The *Jewish Record* argued that this insult was a grave one, grave enough to easily warrant abrogation without further negotiation:

All shout that America should not negotiate with Russia unless they, Russia, recognize the rights of American citizens and treat them decently, unless Russia will recognize all American passports no matter what religion that passport-holder has. Now...one hears that it is not Jews alone, but the whole American nation [which] is insulted by Russia...¹⁵²

It was often emphasized, as it had been in the English-language press, that this was an important historical moment "not only for Jews, not only for Russia, but also for the entire world, for justice and humanity in general."¹⁵³ Whereas the English-language press then would take the opportunity to discourage ethnic factionalism or the formation of an ethno-religious political party, the Yiddish press is not so concerned with the possibility; over the course of the

¹⁵⁰ "Sitizens Fun Ale Klasen Foreren Tzu Brekhen Di Triti Mit Rusland," *Der Morgen Jornal*, December 7, 1911, XI, No. 3133 edition, 1, National Library of Israel.

¹⁵¹ "Di Triti Muz Gebrokhen Veren," *Der Yidisher Rekord*, December 8, 1911, II, No. 96 edition, 4, National Library of Israel.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ "Es Hot Oyfgevekt Demm Velt-Gevisen," *Yidishes Tagblatt*, December 21, 1911, XXVII, No. 320 edition, 4, National Library of Israel.

archival work for this thesis, the Yiddish press never expressed anxiety over any ethno-religious political action or party formation. This could perhaps be for a few reasons. First of all, there was little risk of a non-Jew who may feel threatened by the idea of a Jewish political body picking up a Yiddish-language newspaper and being able to read it. Second, it is possible that the political cultures the old and new immigrants had internalized affected how they understood political participation. Eastern European Jews were coming from the Russian Empire, where political belonging and rights were structured based on estate, religion, profession, or even geographic location.¹⁵⁴ This meant that Jews were treated as a distinct group within the empire with rights and obligations based on their Jewishness. When mass political participation became legal in the Russian Empire, popular political parties like the Bund were explicitly Jewish political parties; in a system of differentiated rights, it is logical that some (though of course not all) political parties were also differentiated. While some Jews would describe themselves as Russian Jews, they would use the term for being civically Russian; they were not considered ethnically Russian in the way that Orthodox Russians were, for example.¹⁵⁵ German Jews who had been living in the United States for long periods of time, however, were used to a citizenship regime with (supposedly) equal rights for every citizen and no differentiation. They clearly saw this ethnic or religious differentiation as a threat to Jews being seen as fully ‘American,’ whereas in the Russian Empire that differentiation was intrinsic to the rights regime.

In the Yiddish press surrounding this issue, there are many statements of pure American support and patriotism. Evaluations of Taft and the actions of Congress were generally positive,

¹⁵⁴ Jane Burbank, “An Imperial Rights Regime: Law and Citizenship in the Russian Empire,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 7, no. 3 (August 10, 2006): 402.

¹⁵⁵ Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (University of California Press, 2002), 15.

especially after abrogation was officially passed; the *Jewish Morning Journal* even printed a large photo of Taft on the front page of their December 21st issue, stating that he had acted “courageously.”¹⁵⁶ The *Jewish Daily News* argued that:

It has been many times stated as a rule that as more Jews arrive in a certain country, hatred grows the same way and therefore their position in society becomes weaker. It may be that in other countries one can find proof to confirm this statement. But in America this rule is false. The Jewish situation in America has not deteriorated in the last few decades. This since the largest portion of the present Jewish population has come here.¹⁵⁷

This is a fairly positive assessment of Jewish life in the United States. There is no evidence of resistance to Americanization or implication that Jewish life in the United States was at risk of deteriorating. On the contrary, it is an optimistic statement that the United States is the exception to Jewish history, and that it was an environment that would allow Jews not only to survive, but to flourish. In fact, the *Jewish Daily News* used this issue of the commerce treaty and abrogation to encourage Jews living in the United States who qualified for citizenship and had not yet attempted to apply for it to do so. It stated that Jews who qualified for American citizenship but refused or neglected to claim it were “a political burden” who were only giving the impression to non-Jews that “there does not have to be much reckoning with Jews in the political sphere.”¹⁵⁸ The campaign for abrogation had proven that Jews had political power in the United States that could be wielded effectively and that the United States equally appreciated its

¹⁵⁶ “Di Hoyz Nemt On Senat’s Triti Rezolusen,” *Der Morgen Jornal*, December 21, 1911, XI, No. 3145 edition, 1, National Library of Israel.

¹⁵⁷ “Morgendiger Triti In Carnegi Hal,” *Yidishes Tagblatt*, December 5, 1911, XXVII, No. 306 edition, 4, National Library of Israel.

¹⁵⁸ “Nokh A Muzer-Heshkhel Fun Der Pasport-Frage,” *Yidishes Tagblatt*, December 22, 1911, 5.

Jewish citizens, but the *Jewish Daily News* argued that they were held back by those who refused citizenship. It stated boldly that:

Every time we meet a Jew who has already been here for a long time and is still not a citizen, we feel that they are a simpleton and irresponsible person who is capable of negligence which is almost criminal.¹⁵⁹

The article praises the abrogation, saying that abrogation was “a bonus that is better than a hundred sermons about citizenship for our neglectful brothers.”¹⁶⁰ This portrays significant hope that abrogation will not only end unequal treatment abroad, but that it might actually catalyze some non-citizen Jews in the United States to finally take the step of getting citizenship and participating more fully in the American political sphere.

Overall, positive sentiments concerning the United States litter the pages of the Yiddish press. One particularly prolific statement of American patriotism comes from *The Jewish Record*, which, after the confirmation of abrogation was released, proudly stated that “Jews in America are citizens under the protection of the stars and stripes, and must have their rights respected.”¹⁶¹ The imagery of the stars and stripes of the American flag is a strong, distinctive one of pure American pride and patriotism.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ “Di Erfalgrakhe Ende Fun Der Pasport Frage,” *Der Yidisher Rekord*, December 22, 1911, II, No. 98 edition, 1, National Library of Israel.

Religious Judaism and Abrogation in the Yiddish Press

This chapter's previous emphasis on new immigrant pro-American sentiments is not to say that these new immigrants abandoned their own traditions and practices completely, or even at all. In fact, the opposite occurred; existing Jewish ideals and traditions were simply recontextualized within the American framework, creating a new experience that was both Jewish and American.¹⁶² For example, a few days after abrogation was passed, the front page of *The Jewish Record* contained brief statements from a plethora of figureheads in the Jewish community and American politicians. One statement, made by Rabbi Bodziski of B'nai Moshe Shul, was that "[it] is one of the greatest historical events in the history of Jews. And we must thank our new Mordecai the Jew."¹⁶³ This particular statement is an echo of R. Emil Hirsch's statement in his own paper the *Reform Advocate*, where he urges the Jewish community to be more like Mordechai, who worked within the power structure to protect his own people.¹⁶⁴

Even more eager to explicitly link Jewish tradition to current American events was the *Jewish Daily News*, run by the Orthodox Sarasohn who had some rabbinical training. In its December 19th issue, multiple articles were written drawing parallels between abrogation and the Hanukkah story. One article points out that abrogation "happened the same week we celebrate the Maccabean rebellion."¹⁶⁵ It posed the question:

¹⁶² This can be seen in the English press as well (particularly in papers run by rabbi editors like Hirsch).

¹⁶³ "Di Erfalgrakhe Ende Fun Der Pasport Frage," *Der Yidisher Rekord*, December 22, 1911, 1.

¹⁶⁴ This connection between Hirsch and *The Jewish Record* is even more clear when one knows that H.L. Meites in particular saw Hirsch as "an idol" of his ("October 28 Meeting to Mark Publication of Meites History: Judge Marovitz, Dr. Cutler, Meites Kin to Speak," 7).

¹⁶⁵ "Di Tzubrokhene Triti Un Khanike," *Yidishes Tagblatt*, December 19, 1911, XXVII, No. 318 edition, 4, National Library of Israel.

Is not the breach of the treaty with Russia a demonstration that despite all forces of our enemies they are not strong enough to destroy us? Is the friendly exit by the large American nation for our honor, for our rights not clear evidence that all Antiochs, those of the past as those of the present, cannot blot out the Jewish name and cannot drive away Jews from the scene of world history?¹⁶⁶

This places American history in the existing terms of not only Jewish history, but Jewish religious history (and an important moment in it). This implies not a resistance to Americanization or a complete abandonment of Jewish identity, but a willingness to marry Judaism and American-ness in a complex mixture of histories and cultures that allows both of those things to exist simultaneously and in harmony. It relates contemporary leaders to the tyrants of the past, and contemporary proponents of abrogation to the heroes of the Hanukkah story and the Maccabean rebellion of the past; “Let us welcome the Hasmoneans from the past with light, and let us also remember our various Hasmoneans of today.”¹⁶⁷

Overall, the Yiddish press demonstrates as complex a relationship with American-ness and Jewishness as the English press. One can see clear statements and displays of pro-American sentiment, concerning the treaty as well as American citizenship and Jewish life in America in general

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ “Antiochs Hrshe Un Zeyn Triti,” *Yidishes Tagblatt*, December 19, 1911, XXVII, No. 318 edition, 4.

CONCLUSION

The abrogation of the Russo-American Commerce Treaty may seem at first like a comparatively insignificant moment in Jewish American history. However, this thesis has sought to demonstrate how this particular moment was not only a matter of foreign diplomacy and ethno-religious political lobbying, but also a valuable window into assimilation and tradition in the American Jewish community.

In the first chapter, this thesis covered specific cases of visa refusal by the Russian Embassy in the United States from a diverse range of applicants. It also explored the foundation of the American Jewish Committee as Jews in the United States felt a growing need for an organized group to advocate for them, something that existed in various other countries with significant Jewish populations. The American Jewish Committee was the driving force behind the campaign for abrogation, in which the press campaign was significantly important.¹⁶⁸

The second chapter turned to the English-language Jewish American press, largely run and written by Jews of German ancestry who had been in the United States longer than their Eastern European counterparts. In these newspapers, one can see a clear marriage of American political reporting and Jewish religious tradition. R. Hirsh in particular was a prime example of a relatively assimilated American Jew who was strongly connected to his religious ideals and tradition; he effortlessly wove together political talk with biblical stories and religiously informed morals.¹⁶⁹ While the English-language press demonstrated the negotiation of Jewish and American identities just like the Yiddish press did, there were some differences between the two linguistic spheres. In the English-language press, unlike in the Yiddish-language press, there

¹⁶⁸ Cohen, "The Abrogation of the Russo-American Treaty of 1832," 22.

¹⁶⁹ Hirsch, "Editorial Notes."

were frequent warnings to the readers against the formation of an ethno-religious based political party.¹⁷⁰ This was perceived as a threat to the social and cultural position of American Jews, a particular concern because it was a time where ethnic and racial lines were shifting and changing to include and exclude certain groups from ‘whiteness’ and all the privileges that came with it in American life.¹⁷¹ This was not present in the Yiddish press; the explanation is likely based on multiple possible factors, two of which have been proposed in this thesis. The first is that the Yiddish press could be less worried about how it (and, by extension, American Jews) were perceived by the non-Jewish population, since non-Jews very rarely would be able to actually read and understand anything in Yiddish. The other reason is that perhaps these Eastern European Jews were not as concerned about political action gravitating around a specific ethnic or religious group because in the Russian Empire (where many of these journalists and editors had spent the first portion of their lives) the norm was based on a system of rights and political access based on ones ethnic, religious, geographic, or estate belonging.

The third and final chapter focuses on the Yiddish press itself. It draws from a variety of sources, from socialist papers, to papers run by Zionists, to papers run by religiously Orthodox Jews. The goal of this chapter was to find consistencies and differences in the Yiddish press in comparison to the English press and to each other. On the first front, the Yiddish press proved to have a very different structure than the English press. Because the Yiddish press was often the only accessible press to new immigrants (though they were hardly the only Jews who read it), it attempted to provide a broad and diverse education for its readers, from science to literature to politics in the United States and abroad.¹⁷² This meant that many of the front-page articles about

¹⁷⁰ Hirsch, “After the Victory.”

¹⁷¹ Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 172.

¹⁷² Zimmer, “Saul Yanovsky and Yiddish Anarchism on the Lower East Side,” 39.

abrogation in particular were simply in-depth explanations of how the American political system worked: how a resolution passed through Congress, how Congress voted and the percentages needed for motions and resolutions to pass, how resolutions moved between the Houses of Congress and the roles each House played in amending and approving them. However, the Yiddish press also had many editorials and articles about abrogation that were more opinion-based. These articles were often pro-abrogation and praised sympathetic American congressmen, supportive American citizens, and President Taft for their efforts to abrogate the treaty. Like the English press, the Yiddish press meshed political talk with religious tradition, particularly in Yiddish periodicals with more religiously devout editors. While in the English press one can see Hirsch comparing abrogation to Purim, the Yiddish press compares abrogation to Hanukkah, which was being celebrated the very week abrogation passed.¹⁷³¹⁷⁴ Both link abrogation, an American political issue, to two Jewish holidays that center around themes of revolution, triumph, and hope.

Ultimately, while it can be tempting to draw concise lines between “assimilationist Germans” and “traditionalist Eastern Europeans,” the press from the time shows that it was hardly so cut and dry. On the contrary, assimilation is shown in this case to be a complex, nebulous process where it can be difficult to see where American-ness ends and Judaism begins (and vice-versa). In many cases, the two were negotiated and married, influencing one another and being influenced by one another. Eastern European Jews in the Yiddish press wrote about the benefits of living in the United States, promoted American citizenship, and expressed strong, personal ties to the United States. Jews of German ancestry who had been in the United States oftentimes longer than their Eastern European counterparts used religious metaphors to navigate

¹⁷³ “Antiokhs Hrshe Un Zeyn Triti,” 4.

¹⁷⁴ Hirsch, “Editorial Notes.”

discussions of the treaty abrogation and published articles by rabbis. If one thing is clear in the story of abrogation, it is that American-ness and Jewishness were not at all mutually exclusive, and were in fact being navigated in new and diverse ways by different communities all across the country.

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