

Jews in American History: A Teacher's Guide

Overview

Incorporating the contributions and experiences of minority groups into the American History curriculum increases student understanding of history and promotes multiculturalism and appreciation of diversity.

This guide provides information about topics that are enriched by including Jewish American history, significant facts and experiences in Jewish American history, and notable Americans who should be identified as being Jewish.

It is organized into the following thirteen sections: *Colonial and Revolutionary America; The Young Republic; Westward Migration; The Civil War; Urbanization, New Immigration, and the Labor Movement; Early 20th Century Political and Social Issues; Early 20th Century Popular Culture; World War II; The Civil Rights Movement; Feminism and Influential Women; Other Influential Individuals After World War II; The Digital Revolution; and Jewish Celebrities.*



Colonial and Revolutionary America

Big Idea: Discussions of the colonies as havens for religious minorities and discussions of diversity in Colonial America are enriched by Jewish American history.

Notable Facts:

- **Jews settled throughout the colonies and contributed to Colonial America's diversity in all three colonial regions** (New England, Middle, and Southern). The first known Jew in what would later become the United States, Joachim Ganz, arrived on Roanoke Island in 1585.
- **In general, the colonies were much more tolerant of Jews than most European states.** In Europe, Jews could be legally required to live in ghettos that were walled off from the rest of the city; they could be expelled from their homes and the areas where they lived; there were often restrictions on the occupations they could pursue; and there were outbreaks of anti-Jewish violence. In the colonies, Jews were usually able to live their lives and practice their religion with some restrictions, but this did not compare to the severe limitations imposed on entire communities in Europe.
- **The first Jewish community in America was established in New Amsterdam in 1654 by refugees seeking religious tolerance. They were forced to flee their homes in Brazil after the Dutch colony where they lived was conquered by the Portuguese.** They were allowed to settle in the colony and practice their religion, but they faced a variety of restrictions, many of which continued after the colony became a British possession and was renamed New York. For example, Jews did not have the right to public worship (to pray in a synagogue, a Jewish house of prayer) until 1695, more than forty years after their arrival. Before this time, they could only pray in private homes.
- **The legal status of Jews varied between colonies, but there were often discriminatory laws.** Jews increasingly gained civil rights. But, even after the Revolutionary War, most states still had laws granting preferential status to certain religious groups and/or limiting religious minorities' political rights such as holding office.
- **The Maryland Toleration Act of 1649 did not include Jews.** While it is an important development in America's tradition of religious tolerance, it should be acknowledged that the act granted religious freedom to Christians only. In fact, the act stipulated that denying the divinity of Jesus was punishable by death.
- **Rhode Island is an example of a colony that welcomed Jews.** In 1658, a group of fifteen Jewish families arrived in Rhode Island. Roger Williams separated government and religion in his colony, and Jews and Quakers were welcomed there. The oldest existent synagogue in America, Touro Synagogue, was built in Newport, R.I. in 1763.
- **The first Jew elected to a notable government office in an American colony was elected in South Carolina in 1774.** Francis Salvador was elected to the General Assembly of South Carolina. He also served in the South Carolina's revolutionary Provisional Congress. He was killed in battle fighting for the Patriot cause during the war. After the American Revolution, South Carolina's constitution, like the constitution of most states, placed religious restrictions on who could hold state offices.



- **Jewish perspectives on, and participation in, the American Revolution paralleled the general population.** The Continental Congress sent a request to pray for a peaceful resolution to the conflict with the Crown on July 20, 1775 to both churches and synagogues. There were Jewish merchant blockade runners, Jewish soldiers in the Continental Army, a Jewish colonel, and two lieutenant colonels.

Notable Jewish Americans:

- **Jonas Philips** (1736-1803) provides an interesting anecdote. Philips was a strong supporter of the Patriot cause and a blockade runner. He wrote his supplies list in Yiddish, the language of Eastern European Jews, hoping that this would help him avoid trouble if the ship was boarded by the British. His plan backfired. When the British boarded the ship, they assumed the Yiddish was a code, seized the ship, and sent the note to England to be decoded. It is noteworthy that Philips was fined in 1793 for refusing to testify in a Philadelphia court on the Jewish Sabbath because of his religious obligations. This illustrates the lack of sensitivity toward minority religions at this time.
- **Haym Solomon** (1740-1785) was a key figure in financing the Patriot cause during the Revolutionary War. In 1975, the United States Postal Service issued a stamp identifying him as a “Financial Hero” who was responsible for “raising most of the money needed to finance the American Revolution and later to save the new nation from collapse.” This stamp was issued as part of the “Contributor to the Cause” series that honored four lesser known Revolutionary War heroes on the bicentennial of the beginning of the war. Images of the stamp can be found through internet search engines.



The Young Republic

Big Idea: America's social progress includes the movement towards religious equality and acceptance of minority religions.

Notable Facts:

- **After the Revolutionary War almost every state government discriminated on the basis of religion or showed religious favoritism.** The right to hold political office could be limited to Christians or, more narrowly, to Protestants. Government funds could be provided to churches and ministers from specific denominations. Additional information is available in the ICS resource *Religious Protections and Religious Favoritism in Early State Constitutions*.
- **The Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom was one of earliest and most influential victories in the fight for religious equality. It is one of only three accomplishments listed on Jefferson's epitaph.** It granted legal equality to religious minorities, including Jews, in Virginia. Jefferson wrote the statute in 1779, but it was not enacted into law by the legislature until 1786, seven years later. The other two accomplishments listed on Jefferson's tombstone are the Declaration of Independence and the University of Virginia. His presidency and other political offices are not mentioned. Jefferson explained that he wanted his epitaph to reflect things he had given his fellow citizens, not things they had given him.
- **The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 was one of the first examples of the federal government promoting religious tolerance.** It passed under the Articles of Confederation before the U.S. Constitution was adopted and guaranteed freedom of religion in future territories and states.
- **Article VI of the United States Constitution bars religious qualifications for holding office at the federal level.** It reads, "...no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States." This is especially significant because state constitutions often contained these eligibility restrictions. It is important to note that, due to the separation of power between the national and state governments, states could maintain their religious qualifications for state offices after they ratified the constitution.
- **Intolerance existed in some former colonies.** Though life for Jews in America was far better than in other places, religious intolerance continued to be a problem in many areas. For example, Connecticut did not allow Jewish public worship until 1843. Jews did not gain full political equality in every state until 1877 when New Hampshire amended its constitution to remove the requirement that office holders be Christian.
- **President George Washington clearly communicated the federal government's support of religious tolerance to the Jewish community.** In 1790, he responded to a letter that was sent by Moses Seixas, the warden of Touro Synagogue in Newport, R.I. Washington wrote, "'For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support...May the children of the Stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other Inhabitants.'"



- **The ratification of the first amendment in 1791 was an important event in the history of religious minorities in America.** It begins, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...” These two restrictions are referred to as the “establishment clause” and the “free exercise clause.” The political and legal principle of “Separation of Church and State” is derived from these clauses.
- **Thomas Jefferson was the first president to appoint a Jew to a federal post.** Reuben Etting was appointed by Jefferson as the U.S. Marshall for Maryland in 1801. Interestingly, religious qualifications for state office in Maryland would have barred Etting from holding any state position in Maryland at that time. Thus, he illustrates the contrast between the federal government’s progressive approach towards religious minorities and the discrimination that could exist at the state level.
- **The struggle to give Jews equality in Maryland illustrates the challenges in obtaining religious equality in the Young Republic.** Jews began to petition for the right to hold public office in 1797. A bill to give Jews this right, called “The Jew Bill,” was not introduced until 1818. The effort to give Jews political equality was led by a member of the legislature named Thomas Kennedy. It is noteworthy that he did not “have the slightest acquaintance with any Jew in the world.” He simply felt that religion was “a question which rests, or ought to rest, between man and his Creator alone.” Opposition to the bill was strong and the bill was defeated. Another bill was introduced in 1822. It became a major issue in the election of 1823. A “Christian Ticket” succeeded in defeating many of the bill’s supporters, including Kennedy, with the result that the bill was defeated again. Finally, in 1826, the bill became law. Later that year, the first Jews in Maryland were elected to office.
- **Jews eventually gained full legal equality in every state.** Including their experiences helps teach that progress towards greater equality has been part of the American experience since the beginning of the country.

Westward Expansion

Big Idea: Including Jewish history helps educators teach about diversity in America's westward expansion.

Notable Facts:

- **The westward expansion was multicultural.** A wide range of cultural and ethnic groups, including Jews, moved westward in the nineteenth century. Discussions of the migrants should acknowledge this diversity. The Institute for Curriculum Services' *Many Voices from the Gold Rush* is one useful resource that provides first person accounts from many of the groups who took part in the California Gold Rush.
- **The realities of frontier life gave Jews greater opportunity for civic participation in much the same way that it gave women greater opportunity for civic participation.** There were Jewish mayors in Tucson, Tombstone, and El Paso.
- **German-Jewish immigrants played an important role in the mid nineteenth century American economy.** From 1820 to 1880, between a quarter million and a half million German-Jews immigrated to the United States and America's Jewish population increased approximately ten-fold. For centuries, these Jews had been barred in Europe from many professions by law. As a result, many were peddlers. After immigrating to America, many played an important role as middlemen who brought goods to rural areas and the West. Many eventually opened stores and some become very prosperous and expanded into other industries.
- **Jewish peddlers whose economic niche was bringing goods to remote, underserved communities could develop close relations with Native American tribes.** Julius Meyer was reportedly able to speak six Native American languages. He eventually opened a store called "Indian Wigwam" in Omaha, NE where he served as a translator for the community and Native American tribes. In fact, he translated for Red Cloud and Sitting Bull; two of the most famous photos of these leaders together include him (he is the only non-native American in these pictures). Images of these photos can be found through internet search engines. Solomon Bibo traded with the Acoma Pueblos in the New Mexico territory, married an Acoma Pueblo wife, and advocated on the tribe's behalf. The tribe elected him tribal governor, equivalent to a chief, of the Acoma Pueblos. He is possibly the only non-Native American to ever serve as governor of a Pueblo tribe.
- **The experiences of German-Jewish immigrants are often seen as an embodiment of the rags to riches American dream.** Wealthy individuals from German-Jewish backgrounds in the late nineteenth century include Joseph Seligman (railroad financier), the Lehman Brothers (whose dry-goods store evolved into a commodities trading firm that eventually became one of the major global financial services firms until declaring bankruptcy in 2008), Isadore and Nathan Strauss (owners and managing directors of Macy's Department Store), and Julius Rosenwald (co-owner and President of Sears, Roebuck, & Co.), Joseph Spiegel (founder of one of the most successful mail order catalogs), and Levi Strauss (founder of the denim jean manufacturer Levi Strauss & Co.).



Notable Jewish Americans:

- **Joseph Seligman** (1819-1880) was a German-Jewish immigrant who saved enough money from his dry goods store to open an importing house and eventually a banking firm. He became part of the Committee of Seventy that challenged Tammany Hall. In 1877, he became part of a national controversy when the Grand Union Hotel in Saratoga refused to admit him because he was Jewish; this was the first prominent example of this sort of antisemitic discrimination in America and foreshadowed what would become common in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
- **Levi Strauss** (1829-1902) was a German-Jewish immigrant who founded the first company to manufacture blue jeans after he moved to San Francisco and opened a dry-goods store during the Gold Rush. He recognized there was a demand for something more durable than the cloth pants most miners wore so he began making denim overalls. Levi Strauss is still one of the most popular jeans companies in the world.



The Civil War

Big Idea: *President Lincoln combated measures that discriminated against Jews during the Civil War.*

Notable Facts:

- **The perspectives and participation of Jews in the Civil War paralleled their neighbors.**
- **During the Civil War, Lincoln proposed legislation to allow Jews to serve as military chaplains.** The Civil War greatly increased the need for military chaplains. According to the U.S. Army Chaplain Center, on August 3, 1861, Congress passed a bill that enabled regiment commanders to appoint a regimental chaplain who was “a regularly ordained minister of some Christian denomination.” Due to the influence of President Lincoln the qualification section was changed on July 17, 1862, to allow regularly ordained ministers from any religious denomination.
- **The most significant act of antisemitism by the U.S. government occurred during the Civil War.** In 1862, General Grant issued General Order No. 11, which expelled all Jews from Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee. He associated Jews with the merchants who were violating trade restrictions in the area even though most were not Jewish. The order was revoked several weeks later by President Lincoln. Grant later apologized and there are no other antisemitic incidents associated with him. In fact, as president, Grant named several Jews to high office, and he was the first president to visit a synagogue while in office.



Urbanization, New Immigration, and the Labor Movement

Big Idea: Jews were one of the major groups immigrating to America during this period and were heavily affected by industrial and social changes, leading to Jews playing a key role in the labor movement.

Notable Facts:

- **Large numbers of Jews immigrated to America.** Jews should be identified as one of the largest immigrant groups during the period of “New Immigration” (1880-1924). Extreme poverty and vicious antisemitism, including horrific anti-Jewish riots and massacres, drove more than two million Eastern European Jews to America. They were drawn to America by economic opportunity and the absence of government sanctioned religious persecution. They primarily settled in cities where most struggled economically, living in tenements and working in factories. The majority of the American Jewish population today has at least one ancestor who immigrated during this period.
- **Jews played a leading role in the history of the American labor movement.** They were immigrant workers in sweatshops as well as leaders in labor reform.
- **Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe fueled antisemitism that impacted Jewish Americans who had previously been relatively well accepted.** Like other immigrant groups during this period, such as the Italians and the Irish, nativists depicted Jews as un-American foreigners. This led to a dramatic increase in antisemitism that impacted earlier Jewish immigrants and native-born Jewish Americans who had previously been relatively well accepted. See the following section, *Early 20th Century Political and Social Issues*, for additional information.
- **Legislation limited Jewish immigration.** The Immigration Acts of 1921 and 1924, which grew out of racist and anti-immigrant sentiments, were designed to limit the number of immigrants from outside of Northwestern Europe; they greatly reduced the ability of Jews to immigrate to America. This legislation ultimately contributed to hundreds of thousands of Jews who wanted to flee Nazi rule in the 1930s being trapped in Germany and other Nazi-occupied countries.

Notable Jewish Americans:

- **Emma Lazarus** (1849-1887) wrote “The New Colossus” (1883), the poem quoted at the base of the Statue of Liberty. It is one of the most famous expressions of America’s understanding of itself as a haven for immigrants. It reads in part, “...‘Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!’ cries she / With silent lips. ‘Give me your tired, your poor, / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, / The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. / Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, / I lift my lamp beside the golden door!’”
- **Samuel Gompers** (1850-1924) was a major figure in American labor history. He founded the American Federation of Labor (AFL) in 1886 and served as its president every year except one until his death.
- **David Dubinsky** (1892-1982) was a founding member of the Committee of Industrial Organizations as president of the International Ladies’ Garment Workers Union (ILGWU). He advocated for reforms in the AFL-CIO to decrease corruption. Dubinsky was awarded a Presidential Medal of Freedom, one of the two highest civilian awards in the U.S., in 1969.



- **Saul Alinsky** (1909-1972) is widely considered to be the father of community organizing. He founded the Industrial Areas Foundation in 1940. He was highly influential in the rise of grassroots political organizing and his methods and writing have influenced individuals such as Fred Ross, Caesar Chavez, and President Barak Obama.



Early 20th Century Political and Social Issues

Big Idea: Antisemitism was a major problem in early twentieth century America. The Jewish community and conscientious citizens organized to combat it. Despite widespread bigotry, individual Jews were able to reach high political office.

Notable Facts:

- **Discrimination against Jews was common.** Antisemitism was a major problem in America at this time, including slurs, employment discrimination, social discrimination that barred Jews from hotels, clubs, and boardrooms, quotas limiting Jews at universities, housing discrimination, and acts of violence.
- **Leo Frank was lynched in 1915.** Due to antisemitism, he was arrested for the rape and murder of a young girl named Mary Phagan in 1913. Despite scant evidence, he was convicted and sentenced to death. When additional evidence emerged suggesting his innocence, the governor commuted his sentence to life imprisonment. Frank was then kidnapped from prison and lynched by a group named the Knights of Mary Phagan. Later that year, the Knights of Mary Phagan participated in the revival of the Ku Klux Klan on Stone Mountain in Georgia. In 1982, a witness named Alonzo Mann broke his 69 year silence and swore an affidavit that the real killer was not Frank, and that the real killer had threatened to murder him if he told anyone what he saw. In 1986, the Georgia State Board of Pardons and Paroles granted Frank a posthumous pardon on the grounds that his lynching had deprived him of his right to further appeal. The Anti-Defamation League was founded in response to Frank's arrest and trial.
- **There were Americans who spoke out strongly against antisemitism.** *The Dearborn Independent*, which had the second highest circulation of any newspaper in the country by 1925, regularly published antisemitic articles. When these articles were published in booklet form as *The International Jew*, more than 100 prominent American citizens, including President Woodrow Wilson, former Presidents Taft and Roosevelt, W.E.B. DuBois, and William Jennings Bryan, signed a statement that condemned it and the antisemitism it espoused and urged other public leaders to do the same. *The International Jew* was distributed around the world and remains popular among hate groups today. Two of the twenty-one Nazi defendants present throughout the Nuremberg trials, Hitler Youth Leader Baldur von Schirach and Radio Propaganda Chief Hans Fritzsche, cited the German edition as an influence on their antisemitic views. Ultimately, the newspaper's owner, Henry Ford, closed the *Dearborn Independent* as a result of the furor caused by its libelous attacks against Jewish individuals and its promotion of hatred against the Jewish people.
- **Organizations were founded to combat antisemitism.** Jewish Americans should be identified as one of the groups struggling for equality during this period. Organizations created to address antisemitism include the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee, and the American Jewish Congress.
- **The first Jew was elected governor of a state in 1914.** Moses Alexander served as governor of Idaho from 1915-1919.
- **The first Jew was appointed to the Supreme Court in 1916.** President Wilson appointed Louis Brandeis after a long confirmation battle. More information is provided below.



- **The first Jewish woman to serve in the Congress took office in 1925 and became the first woman on the House Military Affairs Committee.** Florence Kahn served as a Representative from California from 1925-1937. She was the fifth woman to serve in Congress.

Notable Jewish Americans:

- **Louis Brandeis** (1856–1941) became the first Jewish Supreme Court Justice when he was appointed by Woodrow Wilson in 1916. Many, including Brandeis himself, believed his long confirmation battle was motivated primarily by antisemitism. After his appointment, he continued to face antisemitism from his fellow Supreme Court Justice James McReynolds. Current Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg relates that one year there was no official court photograph because McReynolds was so antisemitic he would not sit with Brandeis. Brandeis is remembered for his arguments in favor of a right to privacy and of greater protections for freedom of speech. Brandeis University is named after him.

Early 20th Century Popular Culture

Big Idea: Jewish individuals played an important, positive role in the development of American popular culture.

Notable Facts:

- **Jews played an important role in the rise of the motion picture industry.** Samuel Goldwyn, William Fox, Louis Mayer, and the Warner Brothers helped found major movie studios such as Paramount, Fox, MGM, and Warner Brothers Studios.
- **Many Jewish entertainers changed their names** to be more acceptable to a larger audience.
- **The Jazz Singer was the first “talkie” or movie with sound.** It tells the story of a Jewish cantor who becomes a popular singer and struggles to reconcile his professional ambitions with his heritage.
- **Antisemitic attitudes were widely accepted during the early 20th century.** Hotels and clubs often refused to admit Jews. Universities placed quotas on the numbers of Jews they would accept. Famous individuals such as Charles Lindbergh, Henry Ford, and Father Coughlin publicly expressed antisemitic views and accusations such as blaming World War I and the Great Depression on “the Jews.”
- **Freud’s theories impacted American thought and culture and were popular during the interwar period.** Freud should be identified as a Jew. He is the father of the psychoanalytic school of psychology. Though many of Freud’s specific theories are rejected by modern psychologists, he has had a tremendous impact on psychology. He popularized the idea that an individual can solve problems by talking about them, one of the cornerstones of modern psychiatry. His theory of an unconscious mind has been influential in psychiatry, other academic disciplines, and popular culture.

Notable Jewish Americans:

- **Harry Houdini** (1874-1926) was born in Hungary as Erik Weisz. He was one of the greatest magicians of all time. He is most famous as an escape artist but is also remembered for debunking spiritualists.
- **Al Jolson** (1886-1950) was born in Lithuania as Asa Yoelson. He had the leading role in the world’s first movie with sound, *The Jazz Singer*.
- **Samuel Goldwyn** (1879-1974) was one of the fathers of the movie industry. He was a founding member of the companies that evolved into Paramount and MGM (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer).
- **The Warner Brothers** (four brothers: eldest-born 1881, youngest-died 1978) were Jewish immigrants from Poland who established Warner Brothers Studios and played a key role in the development of the motion picture industry.
- **Irving Berlin** (1888-1989) was born Israel Isidore Beilin in what is today Belarus. He was one of the most prolific and influential songwriters in history and composed the lyrics and music for thousands of songs, 17 film scores, and 21 Broadway shows. His songs include: "God Bless



America," "White Christmas," "Anything You Can Do (I Can Do Better)," "Puttin' on the Ritz," and "There's No Business Like Show Business."

- **George Gershwin** (1898-1937) was born Jacob Gershowitz in New York to Ukrainian immigrant parents. He played the piano and was an important American composer who often collaborated with his older brother, the lyricist Ira Gershwin. Many of his songs are now jazz standards. These include "Someone to Watch Over Me," "They All Laughed," "Our Love is Here to Stay," "I Got Rhythm," "Fascinating Rhythm," and "Lady Be Good." The Library of Congress' award for lifetime contributions to popular music, the Gershwin Prize, is named after him.
- **Gertrude Stein** (1874-1946) played an influential role in the development of modern and avant-garde art and literature. She coined the phrase "lost generation," which was then popularized by Hemingway, to describe the post-World War I generation, especially the intellectuals and artists who established their reputations in the 1920s.



World War II

Big Idea: *The Holocaust impacted America.*

Notable Facts:

- **Jews under Nazi rule tried to flee to other nations including the United States.** For the most part, they were turned away. Most of those who sought asylum were later murdered in the Holocaust. The U.S. attended the Evian Conference of 1938 and the Bermuda Conference of 1943, both international conferences to discuss refugees, but no major country was willing to accept more Jews. Toward the end of the war, governments, including the United States, became more aware of the need to protect refugees. In the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention, governments agreed not to return refugees to any territory where he or she fears persecution.
- **The War Refugee Board was created in 1944.** It was created in response to the Secretary of the Treasury's report to President Roosevelt detailing U.S. failures to obstruct Hitler's annihilation of the Jewish population and to help victims of Nazism. It was an important development in the idea that there is an obligation to protect civilians within other states' borders.
- **Jewish scientists (including many who fled fascists in Europe) made major contributions to the American war effort.** Many of the scientists who worked on the Manhattan Project or influenced its development were Jewish. These individuals include Oppenheimer, Teller, Feynman, Szilard, and Einstein. After the war, Jewish scientists continued to contribute to our understanding of the universe. Medical researchers, such as Jonas Salk and Albert Sabin, made important advancements.
- **Jews were very involved in the war effort.** Of the more than 550,000 Jewish soldiers, 26,000 received the Medal of Honor or the Purple Heart. 60% of all Jewish physicians under the age of 45 served in the armed forces during the war.
- **U.S. troops were often the first to reach the concentration and labor camps that held Jews in Nazi occupied Europe.** The role of U.S. troops as liberators made a huge impact on Jewish survivors of the Holocaust. Discovery of the horrors of the Holocaust made a major impact on U.S. soldiers and, ultimately, American opinion and international law.
- **The Holocaust influenced U.S. asylum policies.** See the first entry in this section (*Jews under Nazi rule tried to flee...*) for additional information.
- **The Nuremberg Trials following the end of the war established the principle that individual officials could be held responsible for their role in crimes against humanity and violations of international law.** The trials also rejected the defense that officials were following orders or were not at the scene of the crime.
- **In response to inhumane Nazi experimentation on Jews and others persecuted groups, new research guidelines were created.** The Nuremberg Code, a set of principles for human experimentation, was created because of experiments carried out on Jews and others. Notably, it stated, "The voluntary consent of the human subject is absolutely essential." This code is not part of U.S. legal code but is the basis for regulations governing federally funded research.



The U.S. military also issued new guidelines for the use of human subjects in medical studies following the war.

- **The Holocaust helped spur the creation of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights.** It was adopted on December 10, 1948.
- **Christian and Jewish relations improved after World War II.** Antisemitic religious teachings helped lay the groundwork for the Holocaust. After World War II, many Christian denominations reexamined and redressed these teachings. Notably, in 1965, the Catholic Church adopted the groundbreaking *Nostra Aetate* which declares that Jesus' death could not be blamed on all Jews living at that time nor could Jews today be blamed. It also "decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone." Today, interfaith dialogue and cooperation between Christian and Jewish groups is common.
- **The Holocaust helped increase American support for the creation of a Jewish state.** It reinforced the long-held Zionist argument that a Jewish state was necessary for Jewish security to provide a refuge for Jews around the world. Since its creation in 1948, Jews fleeing persecution in Arab lands, the Soviet Union, Ethiopia, and elsewhere have immigrated to Israel. National aspirations and millennia-old connections to the land of Israel, including prayers expressing the dream of being able to return, were key factors in the reestablishment of a Jewish state in the historic homeland of the Jewish people so the Holocaust and anti-Semitism should not be presented as the only or primary reasons for the creation of Israel.
- **Gentleman's Agreement won three Oscars including Best Picture in 1947.** The film addressed antisemitism in American society and helped challenge many Americans' attitudes.

Notable Jewish Americans:

- **Albert Einstein (1879-1995)** is possibly the most famous scientist of all time. His theory of relativity, including the mass-energy equivalence expressed by the formula $E=MC^2$, transformed the way people understand the universe. He made other important contributions to science as well. In 1999, *Time* magazine named Einstein the Person of the Century. He immigrated to America in 1933. The American Institute of Physics explains, "Unwilling to live in Germany under the new Nazi government, Einstein joined the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey. He turned away from strict pacifism, and warned world political leaders to prepare for German aggression. He also worked to rescue Jewish and other political victims of the Nazis."
- **J. Robert Oppenheimer (1904-1967)** was the scientific director of the Manhattan Project and is often called the father of the atomic bomb.
- **Leo Szilard (1898-1964)**, a Jewish immigrant who fled Nazi Germany, was a physicist whose work on nuclear reactions was key to the development of the bomb. He became an outspoken critic of nuclear weapons.



The Civil Rights Movement

Big Idea: *The civil rights movement drew a diverse group of activists including many Jewish Americans.*

Notable Facts:

- **Jewish individuals and organizations were extremely active in the American Civil Rights Movement.** Like many communities with strong religious heritages, Jews supported equality for African Americans because their ethical teachings stress the dignity of all humans. In addition, Jews empathized with the African American experience due to the history of persecution against Jews. The PBS documentary *From Swastika to Jim Crow* highlights the involvement of Jews in the civil rights movement by pointing out that about 50 percent of the civil rights attorneys in the South during the 1960s, two-thirds of the white Freedom Riders, and over 50 percent of the whites who went to Mississippi in 1964 to challenge Jim Crow Laws as part of Freedom Summer were Jewish.
- **Jews should be mentioned in connection with Freedom Summer.** When discussing the three volunteers who were murdered by the KKK in Mississippi on June 21, 1964, during Freedom Summer, the fact that two were Jewish should be acknowledged. James Chaney, a CORE activist was African American, Michael Schwerner, a CORE organizer, and Andrew Goodman, a summer volunteer, were both Jewish Americans.
- **African American and Jewish American relationships had a long history.** Jews were founding members of civil rights organizations such as the NAACP and the Urban League. Throughout the early history of the NAACP, Jews served as officers and were among the principal supporters. Jewish refugee professors from Nazi Europe were often unable to find employment at American universities in part due to antisemitism. Many of these professors were welcomed into historically all-black colleges in the South.

Notable Jewish Americans:

- **Sammy Davis Jr. (1925-1990)** was a Jewish African-American musician and comedian who was part of the Rat Pack with Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin. He refused to work at racially segregated venues, which helped lead to integration at nightclubs in Miami Beach and casinos in Las Vegas.



Feminists and Influential Women

Notable Jewish Americans:

- **Betty Friedan** (1921-2006) is widely considered the most influential American feminist after World War II. Her 1963 book, *The Feminine Mystique*, attacked the notion that women could find fulfillment only through childbearing and homemaking.
- **Barbara Walters** (b. 1929) was the first woman to co-anchor a network evening news show, *NBC World News Tonight*. She later co-hosted *20/20*.
- **Ruth Bader Ginsburg** (b. 1933) is the second woman to have served on the U.S. Supreme Court. She was appointed in 1993 by President Bill Clinton and continues to serve today. In 2007, *Forbes Magazine* ranked her as the 20th most powerful woman in the world.
- **Gloria Steinem** (b. 1934), a famous feminist, co-founded the national Women's Political Caucus in 1971 and founded *Ms.* magazine in 1972.
- **Bella Abzug** (1920-1998) was a leader of the women's movement who was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1970. During her election campaign, she famously stated, "This woman's place is in the House — the House of Representatives."
- **Diane Feinstein** and **Barbara Boxer** became the first Jewish women senators in 1992.



Other Influential Americans After World War II

Notable Jewish Americans:

- **Jonas Salk** (1914-1995) was the medical researcher who developed the vaccine for Polio. Before this vaccine, there were hundreds of thousands of cases of this paralysis causing disease per year. When he was asked who owned the vaccine's patent, he answered, "The people... Could you patent the sun?"
- **Albert Sabin** (1906-1993) was the medical researcher who developed the oral vaccine for polio that is credited with effectively eliminating the disease from America.
- **Arthur Miller** (1915-2005) is considered one of the best playwrights of the 20th century and won a Pulitzer Prize for Drama. His plays include *The Crucible*, *A View from the Bridge*, and *Death of a Salesman*. Miller is also famous for his marriage to Marilyn Monroe, who converted to Judaism, and his refusal to give evidence against others to the House Un-American Activities Committee.
- **Elie Wiesel** (b. 1928) was placed in a Nazi concentration camp at age 15. His memoir, *Night*, about his experience there is widely read in schools. Now an American citizen, Wiesel won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986.
- **Ayn Rand** (1905–1982) was a philosopher and author best known for her novels *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*. These novels presented the philosophical system that she developed called Objectivism. She was a strong proponent of individualism and capitalism and continues to influence millions through her novels and through the think tank *The Ayn Rand Institute*.
- **Allen Ginsberg** (1926-1997) was a famous poet and one of the leaders of America's "Beat Generation." Government officials seized copies of his poem, *Howl*, as obscene. In a 1957 court case, the judge decided it should not be banned due to its "social importance." This was a landmark anti-censorship decision.
- **Jerry Rubin** (1938-1994) and **Abbie Hoffman** (1936-1989) gained national prominence as members of the Chicago 7, individuals who were tried for conspiracy and incitement to riot during the anti-Vietnam war protests at the 1968 Democratic National Convention.
- **Henry Kissinger** (b. 1923) was the U.S. Secretary of State from 1973 to 1977 and won the 1973 Nobel Peace Prize. He is remembered for pioneering the policy of *détente* with the Soviet Union and negotiating both the SALT I treaty and the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty. He also played a crucial role in rapprochement between the U.S. and the People's Republic of China.
- **Harvey Milk** (1930–1978) according to *Time* magazine, was "the first openly gay man elected to any substantial political office in the history of the planet." A member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, he was assassinated along with George Moscone, the mayor of San Francisco, by Dan White.
- **Joe Lieberman** (b. 1942) ran for Vice President on the Democratic ticket in 2000. He was the first Jewish candidate on a major American political party presidential ticket.



The Digital Revolution

Notable Facts:

- **Instant messaging** transformed communication by enabling real-time text-based communication by distant parties. Modern instant messaging began with the creation of the computer program ICQ, which was later used as the base for AOL Instant Messenger. ICQ was created by four Israeli Jews.

Notable Jewish Americans:

- **Sergey Brin** (b. 1973) co-founded **Google** in 1998 with Larry Page (whose mother is Jewish). Brin's family emigrated from the Soviet Union to the United States to escape anti-Jewish persecution.
- **Michael Dell** (b. 1965) is the founder and CEO of **Dell, Inc.**, the company that manufactures Dell computers. His honors include being named "Man of the Year" by *PC Magazine*, and "Top CEO in American Business" by *Worth Magazine*.
- **Mark Zuckerberg** (b.1984) is the CEO of **Facebook**, which he created with his roommates Eduardo Saverin, Dustin Moskovitz (both also Jewish) and Chris Hughes while attending Harvard. He was included in *Time* magazine's 2008 list of *The World's Most Influential People*.

Jewish Celebrities

- **There are many famous Jewish celebrities who are often not recognized as being Jewish.** These individuals range from Steven Spielberg to Shel Silverstein. Additional examples can be found in the Institute for Curriculum Services' "Guess Who" activity. If contemporary popular culture is addressed in class, internet searches can reveal extensive lists.