

## JEWISH IMMIGRATION TO THE U.S. 1880–1924

In this lesson, students will investigate the history of Jewish immigration between 1880 and 1924. Through class discussion, critical analysis of historical events, and examination of primary source documents, students will gain a deeper understanding of life for Jewish immigrants during that time.

### Essential Questions

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- Why might someone decide to leave their home and move to a new country? What might be some of the pros and cons of going to a new country?
- What are some historical factors that caused Jews to immigrate to the United States between 1880 and 1924?
- How did American culture influence the lives and experiences of Jewish immigrants?
- What was the Immigration Act of 1924, and how did it affect Jewish immigration to the United States?

### Learning Objectives

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Students will be able to:

- Analyze the social, political, and cultural factors that both encouraged and hindered Jewish immigration to the U.S. in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.
- Describe how Jewish immigrants influenced U.S. culture, policy, and social movements.
- Explain why many Jews chose to immigrate to the United States, and why many chose to remain in their home countries.

### Vocabulary

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- **acculturation:** the process of two or more cultures adopting one another's practices, traits, or values
- **antisemitism:** discrimination or prejudice against Jews, based on age-old stereotypes and myths
- **Ashkenazi:** Jews of Central or Eastern European descent
- **assimilation:** the process of adopting practices, traits, or values of a majority culture
- **emigration:** the act of leaving one's country of origin to move to a new one (one emigrates *from* a country)
- **homogeneity:** the quality of being the same or similar; e.g., people who share a similar racial, cultural, or ethnic background
- **identity:** the qualities, beliefs, and traits that make up who we are or how we understand ourselves
- **immigration:** the act of coming to live in another country (one immigrates *to* a country)
- **Mizrahi:** Jews of Middle Eastern and North African descent
- **pogroms:** organized violence against a particular ethnic group, particularly Jews in Eastern Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries
- **quotas:** numerical limits, often referring to numbers of immigrants allowed into a country
- **Sephardi:** Jews of Spanish or Portuguese descent, sometimes including Jews from parts of the Middle East and North Africa (see "Mizrahi," above)

- **tenement:** a building or residence with many individual apartments or rooms, often located in poorer parts of cities; often referring to crowded, cheaply made housing constructed for immigrants to the U.S. in the early 20th century
- **xenophobia:** a fear or dislike of people from other countries

## Materials Needed

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**PRIMARY SOURCES** *All of these sources are available as pdfs and in an interactive digital format.*

- **SOURCE 1:** Jewish immigration numbers between 1880 and 1924
- **SOURCE 2** (optional): Map of Jewish emigration and immigration
- **SOURCE 3:** “The New Colossus” by Emma Lazarus, 1883
- **SOURCE 4:** Excerpt from Israel Zangwill’s play *The Melting Pot*, 1908
- **SOURCE 5:** Excerpt from “The Russian Jew in America” by Abraham Cahan, 1898
- **SOURCE 6:** Letter to President Theodore Roosevelt on behalf of the Jews of Russia by Max Kaplan, 1908
- **SOURCE 7:** Excerpt from a speech by South Carolina senator Ellison Smith in support of the Immigration Act of 1924

Please note that the “jigsaw activity” in part 7 of this lesson provides a variety of primary and secondary sources, including quotes, photographs, and first-person accounts by Jewish immigrants to the U.S.

## Lesson Plan

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Did you know? According to the Pew Research Center, immigrants made up 13.7% of the U.S. population in 2018, almost triple the amount (4.8%) in 1970.<sup>1</sup> Immigrants have come to the United States throughout its history, arriving from many different places and for many different reasons.

In this lesson, we’ll explore one group’s immigration story during a significant period of time: **Jewish immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.**

**Vocabulary note:** **Migration** describes the movement of people, usually in large numbers, from one place to another. **Immigration** is the act of moving *to* a new country, while **emigration** is the act of moving *from* a country.

### 2. SET INDUCTION

Before jumping into this chapter of American history, begin with a discussion about immigration. Explain that immigration is *the act of coming to live in another country*. Then, choose one of the discussion prompts below. Have students brainstorm responses as a group or in pairs, or invite them to reflect individually.

- **OPTION 1: What is immigration?** Ask students: What do you know about immigration to the United States? What are some reasons people might have immigrated to the United States?

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<sup>1</sup> Source: <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/08/20/key-findings-about-u-s-immigrants/>.

- **OPTION 2: Personal histories.** Whether we identify as immigrants or not, many of us have ancestry stories that include migration, conflict, cultural assimilation, and/or adaptation.

*Note: for many people living in the U.S., ancestry stories can be painful. We encourage teachers to use their discretion about whether this would be a generative or challenging conversation, based on the context of their classrooms and students' level of prior knowledge. Feel free to choose **Option 1** if discussing personal histories feels too sensitive.*

Ask students:

- What do you know about your family's ancestry? How long has your family been living in the U.S.? (Explain that "family" can have many meanings. It might refer to one's biological family, caretakers, or anyone whose cultural history might affect them.)
- How do you think your experience of living in the U.S. might differ from those of previous generations? For instance, do you eat some of the same foods your parents, grandparents, or other caretakers ate? Do you speak the same languages? How is the way you celebrate holidays the same or different?
- Are there new traditions you've adopted? Are there traditions you've lost over time?

**Creative project extension: "I Am From" Poems**

Have students compose a poem using the phrase "I am from..." in as many ways as they can think of. They might describe places, traditions, memories, sounds, smells—anything that relates to their unique personal history and heritage. For more, see <https://eleducation.org/resources/i-am-from-poems> and <http://www.georgeellalyon.com/where.html>.

Next, explain to your students that you'll be exploring the history of Jewish immigration between 1880 and 1924. You'll begin with an overview of the history, then continue with an investigation of primary source documents.

### 3. FROM 1880 TO 1924: A SIGNIFICANT PERIOD OF JEWISH IMMIGRATION

*What started the large wave of Jewish immigration to the U.S. around 1880? Why did it slow down dramatically in 1924?*

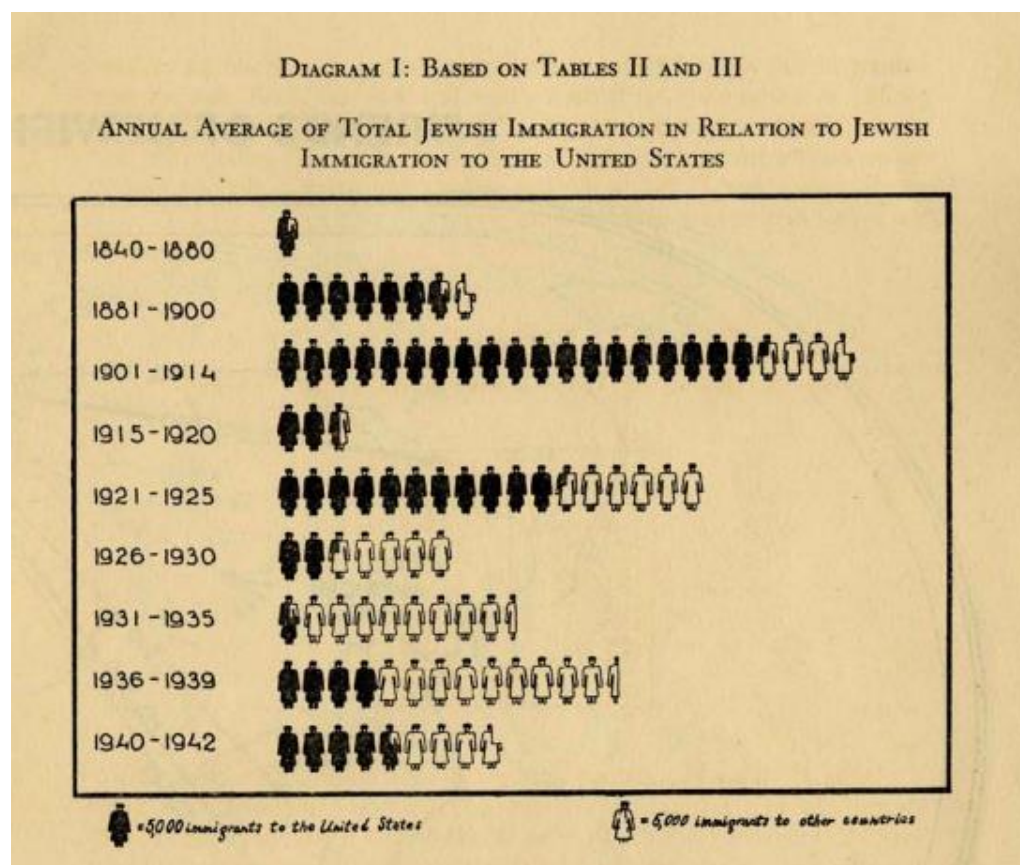
Share an overview of the history of Jewish immigration to the United States:

- The first Jews in the New World arrived in 1654. They were Sephardic Portuguese Jews from Brazil, pushed by the Portuguese persecution and expulsion. The American Jewish community was predominantly Sephardic for more than 100 years, including the decades after the U.S. became an independent country.
- From 1840 to 1880, Jewish immigrants to the U.S. were primarily from Germany and other parts of Central Europe, pushed by poverty, persecution, anti-Jewish violence, and revolution.
- Between 1880 and 1924, two million Jewish immigrants came to the U.S. from Eastern Europe, which included Russia, Poland, Austria-Hungary, and Romania.

- Jewish immigrants settled in many large American cities, including New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Baltimore, and Chicago.<sup>2</sup>
- While the majority of Jews arriving in the U.S. between 1880 and 1924 were from Eastern Europe, smaller numbers of Jews also immigrated to the U.S. from other regions.<sup>3</sup>

Share **SOURCE 1: Jewish immigration numbers between 1880 and 1924.**<sup>4</sup> Ask students to make observations about the numbers of Jewish immigrants over time. What might be some reasons the numbers fluctuated over this time?

Explain that the filled-in icons represent 5,000 Jewish immigrants to the U.S., while the empty ones represent 5,000 Jewish immigrants to other countries.



Some things to point out:

- World War I: 1914–1918; World War II: 1939–1945
- If students don't find it themselves, note that something other than a world war caused a steep decline in Jewish immigration to the U.S. following the period of 1921–1925. What do students think may have caused this decline?

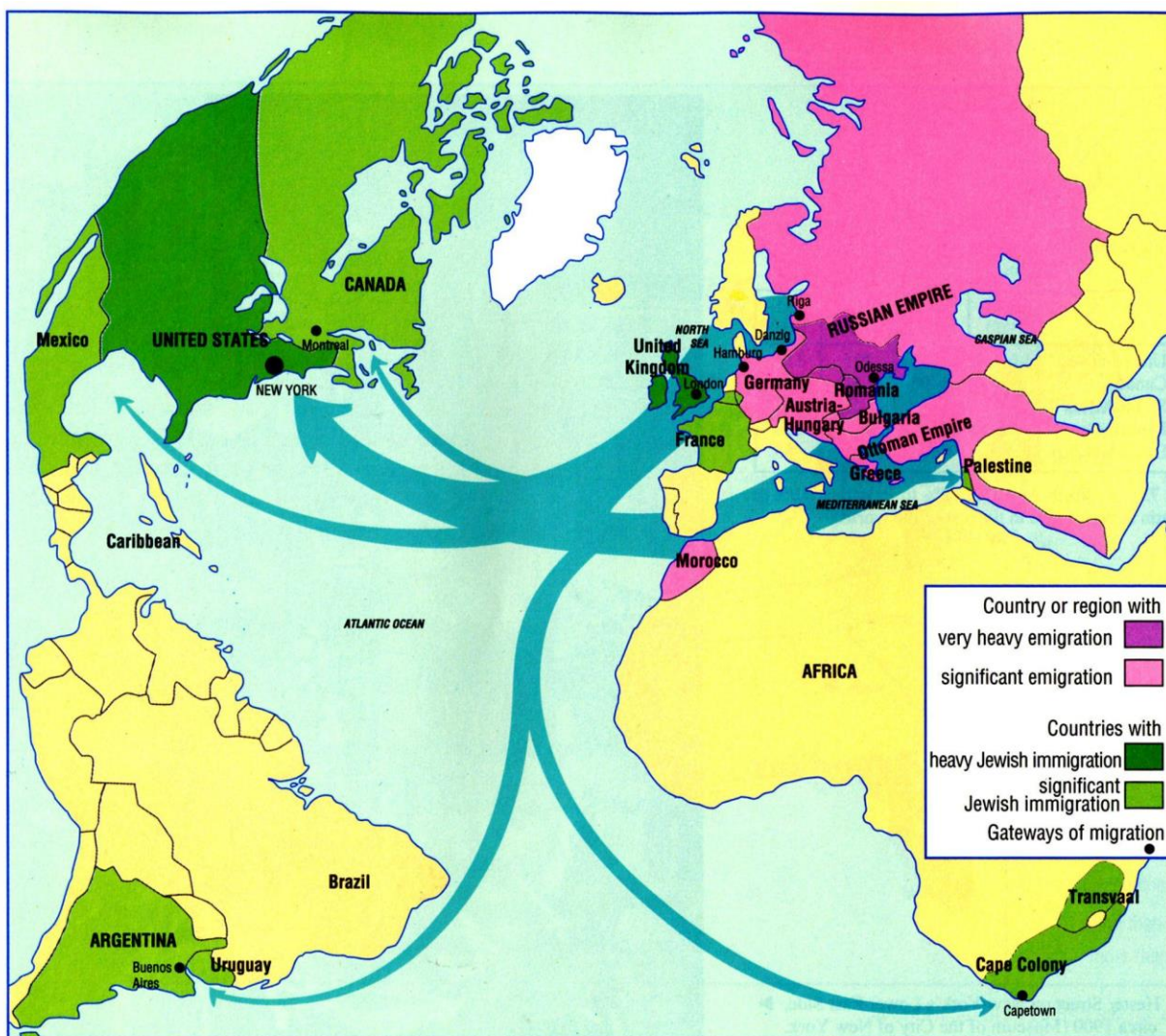
<sup>2</sup> Source: <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/jewish-immigration-to-america-three-waves/>.

<sup>3</sup> Source: <https://sephardicheritagemuseum.com/shm-initiatives/films/episode-2-coming-to-america-1900-1919/>.

<sup>4</sup> Source: [http://fau.digital.flvc.org/islandora/object/fau%3A32211/datastream/OBJ/view/Jewish\\_migration\\_for\\_the\\_past\\_hundred\\_years.pdf](http://fau.digital.flvc.org/islandora/object/fau%3A32211/datastream/OBJ/view/Jewish_migration_for_the_past_hundred_years.pdf).



Optional: Share **SOURCE 2: Map of Jewish emigration and immigration**<sup>5</sup> to show where Jews emigrated from and immigrated to between 1880 and 1914. Ask students: Besides Europe, what are some regions Jews emigrated *from*? Besides North America, that are some regions Jews immigrated *to*?



THE "GRAND MIGRATION" (1880–1914) ▲

Note that many present-day countries did not exist between 1880 and 1914. At that time, the Ottoman Empire ruled a large area that included modern-day Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza. This large area was informally referred to as "Palestine" during this period (as indicated on the map) but was not a separate country or political entity.

<sup>5</sup> Source: <https://commons.princeton.edu/mg/the-grand-jewish-migration-1880-1914/>.

#### 4. 1880: “THE NEW COLOSSUS” AND “THE MELTING POT”

*Remind students that history is a series of cause-and-effect actions, events, and forces that we can better understand by looking at documents and accounts from the past.*

Emma Lazarus (1849–1887) was a Jewish American author and activist. She was a descendant of Sephardic Jews who immigrated to the U.S. in the 18th century. In 1883, Lazarus wrote the sonnet “The New Colossus” to raise money for the construction of a pedestal for the Statue of Liberty. In 1903, her words became immortalized on a bronze plaque that was mounted on the statue’s pedestal.

Share **SOURCE 3: “The New Colossus” by Emma Lazarus, 1883:**

*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! (1883)<sup>6</sup>*

Share **SOURCE 4: Excerpt from Israel Zangwill’s play *The Melting Pot*, 1908.** Did you know that Jewish playwright Israel Zangwill coined the term “melting pot”?

*Understand that America is God's Crucible, the great Melting-Pot where all the races [meaning “nationalities”] of Europe are melting and re-forming! Here you stand, good folk, think I, when I see them at Ellis Island, here you stand in your fifty groups, your fifty languages, and histories, and your fifty blood hatreds and rivalries. But you won't be long like that, brothers, for these are the fires of God you've come to—these are fires of God.... Germans and Frenchmen, Irishmen and Englishmen, Jews and Russians—into the Crucible with you all! God is making the American.<sup>7</sup>*

Ask students:

- What do you think Lazarus meant by “the golden door”?
- A *crucible* is a container in which metals and other materials are melted at high temperatures. Why do you think Zangwill chose to use this word?
- What do these sources tell us about how people thought about immigration to the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries?

#### 5. PUSH AND PULL: WHAT BROUGHT JEWS TO THE U.S.?

Ask students:

- What might make people leave their home and move to a new country? What might be some of the pros and cons of immigrating to a new country? What are some things that might draw (or *pull*) them to a new country? Explain that these are questions associated with **voluntary migration**, in which people have a choice to leave their home countries or to remain.
- What are some things that might force (or *push*) people to move to a new country, whether or not they want to? Explain that these are questions associated with **forced migration**, in which people have no choice but to leave their home countries. Explain that forced migration usually takes place during periods of conflict or persecution.

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<sup>6</sup> Source: <https://www.nps.gov/stli/learn/historyculture/colossus.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> Source: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/applied-and-social-sciences-magazines/melting-pot>.

Next, introduce the concept of *push and pull factors*. Have students identify the push and pull factors in the sources that follow. Ask: What was happening in the United States that might have *pulled* Jews to move there? What was happening in Europe that might have *pushed* them to leave?

Share **SOURCE 5: Excerpt from “The Russian Jew in America” by Abraham Cahan, 1898.**

*There is no hope for Israel [Jews] in Russia. The salvation of the downtrodden people lies in other parts, in a land beyond the seas, which knows no distinction of [nationality] or faith, which is a mother to Jew and [non-Jew] alike. In the great republic is our redemption from the brutalities and ignominies to which we are subjected in this our birthplace. In America we shall find rest; the stars and stripes will wave over the true home of our people. To America, brethren! To America!<sup>8</sup>*

Share **SOURCE 6: Letter to President Theodore Roosevelt on behalf of the Jews of Russia by Max Kaplan, 1908.**

Explain to students that this letter was written by Max Kaplan, a Russian citizen, during a period of widespread, state-sponsored violence against Russia's Jews. Point out that in his appeal for support from the U.S., Kaplan refers to an expulsion of Jews from the city of Kiev, an example of *forced migration*.

*TO HIS EXCELLENCY THEODORE ROOSEVELT, President of the United States of America.*

*Honorable Sir: —*

*The recent massacres of Jews by organized mobs at Kishinev, undisturbed by the Russian Government, and the expulsion of the entire Jewish population of Kiev...cannot be treated any longer as an internal affair of Russia, concerning no other country but Russia.*

*If the Government of the United States realized its right to intercede in behalf of the persecuted Jews in Romania,<sup>9</sup> it can remain true to itself only by asserting this right in behalf of the outraged Jews in Russia.*

*Whatever interests of America were threatened by the anti-Semitic policy of the Romanian Government, they are now more gravely threatened by the anti-Semitic outbreaks in Russia. Official anti-Semitism in Russia is more dangerous to this Country than official anti-Semitism in Romania [and] more ferocious and inhuman character of its manifestation.*

*The undersigned, therefore, respectfully petitions your Excellency to employ the good offices of our Government...with the aim in view of securing more safety to Jews in Russia, and making their existence there less wretched.*

*Max Kaplan<sup>10</sup>*

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<sup>8</sup> Source: <http://tenant.net/Community/LES/cahan5.html>. For more information, see: <https://reimaginingmigration.org/jewish-immigration-and-the-bintel-brief/>. In this context, Cahan's use of the term "Israel" is a reference to the Jewish people.

<sup>9</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, who opposed antisemitism throughout his life, had recently expressed opposition to Romania's persecution of its Jewish population.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.loc.gov/resource/rbpe.13103000/?st=text>

Loop back to the discussion about push and pull factors by sharing this list of reasons why many Jews emigrated from their countries of origin:

- Push:
  - Antisemitism
  - Pogroms
  - Poverty
  - Political upheaval and conflicts (including the Russian Revolution of 1905)
- Pull:
  - Joining family already in the U.S.
  - Social mobility
  - Promise of rights and freedoms in the U.S.

For a more in-depth exploration of push and pull factors, visit:

[https://www.tenement.org/lesson\\_plans/explore-push-and-pull-factors](https://www.tenement.org/lesson_plans/explore-push-and-pull-factors).

Remind students that many people chose not to leave their home countries. What are some reasons people decide not to emigrate?

- Not wanting to leave behind friends, family, and home
- Fear of losing traditions and identity in an unfamiliar country
- Uncertainty over whether life in another country will be any better, or worth such a big change
- Illness or disability, making the long and dangerous journey more difficult
- Unable to afford the journey
- Worries about learning a new language and finding a job



### *Creative project extension*

#### **Ports of Immigration and Settlement: The Galveston Movement**

Not all Jews who came to the U.S. settled in major cities. In fact, there was a concerted effort to re-route Jewish immigrants through a port in Galveston, Texas. Share the two following sources with students and discuss the questions below:

*The Galveston Movement operated between 1907 and 1914 to divert Jews fleeing the pogroms of Russia and eastern Europe away from congested communities of the Atlantic coast to the interior of the United States. The Jewish Immigrants' Information Bureau directed the movement as a means of preventing an anticipated wave of anti-Semitism on the Eastern seaboard, which might lead to immigration restrictions. Several benevolent groups tried to find a southern port of entry to disperse the burgeoning population.<sup>11</sup>*

[Excerpt from Mendelson Letter](#), 1909

Ask students:

- According to these sources, why was the Galveston Movement created?
- How would you describe Mendelson's opinion of the Galveston Movement? Support your responses with examples from the letter.
- What are some ways the Galveston Movement might have affected American culture and life today?

## **6. THE IMMIGRATION ACT OF 1924**

Remind students of the data you examined in Source 1 ("Jewish immigration numbers between 1880 and 1924") at the beginning of the lesson. Point out the steep decline in Jewish immigration to the U.S. following the period of 1921–1925.

Explain that as the Jewish immigrant population in the U.S. grew, so too grew a backlash against this "melting pot" of cultures. Fears that immigrants posed a threat to the racial and cultural makeup of the U.S. led to efforts to keep Jews out. This backlash became policy when the U.S. Congress passed the **Immigration Act of 1924** (also known as the Johnson-Reed Act). Share the key points of the Act:

- Limited each nationality's immigration quota to 2% of their total population from the 1890 census. (This was intended to promote a return to the U.S.'s ethnic makeup to what it had been in 1890, when immigration was predominantly from Western European and Nordic countries.)
- Aimed to exclude Eastern European Jews and Southern Italian Catholics, groups that made up the bulk of new immigrant arrivals since 1880. (Previous legislation already excluded immigrants from most Asian countries, who were categorized according to race, rather than national origin.)
- Set numerical limits (quotas) on the total number of immigrants allowed in per year. (This applied only to Europe, as immigration from Asia was blocked.)

Explain that the Immigration Act of 1924 dramatically reduced the number of immigrants to the U.S. by restricting legal immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe. Jews hoping to escape persecution and poverty in Eastern Europe now had to look elsewhere. Later, this would have profoundly negative

<sup>11</sup> Source: <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/galveston-movement>.

consequences for Jewish refugees attempting to flee the Holocaust and for survivors looking for new homes after liberation.

Share **SOURCE 7: Excerpt from** a speech by South Carolina senator Ellison Smith in support of the **Immigration Act of 1924**<sup>12</sup>:

*Who is an American? ... If you were to go abroad and someone were to meet you and say, 'I met a typical American,' what would flash into your mind as a typical American, the typical representative of that new Nation? Would it be the son of an Italian immigrant, the son of a German immigrant, the son of any of the breeds from the Orient, the son of the denizens of Africa? ... Thank God we have in America perhaps the largest percentage of any country in the world of the pure, unadulterated Anglo-Saxon stock...It is for the preservation of that splendid stock that has characterized us that I would make this not an asylum for the oppressed of all countries, but a country to assimilate and perfect that splendid type of manhood that has made America the foremost Nation in her progress and in her power... [L]et us shut the door and assimilate what we have, and let us breed pure American citizens and develop our own American resources.*

Explain to students that in the 1920s, the U.S. saw a rise in **xenophobia** (zee-no-PHO-bia), which is a fear or dislike of people from other countries. Ask students to identify evidence of xenophobia in Senator Smith's speech. Have them support their responses with quotations from the text. Ask: What are some ways that xenophobia can negatively affect a country or society?

Recall "The New Colossus," the sonnet that Emma Lazarus wrote about the Statue of Liberty in 1883, and read this quote:

***Until we are all free, we are none of us free. —Emma Lazarus***

Have students compare and contrast the views of Senator Smith and Emma Lazarus, based on the excerpts above. Ask students to infer, based on the Lazarus excerpt, how she might have felt about the rise of xenophobia in the United States.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://billofrightsinstitute.org/activities/ellison-durant-smith-shut-the-door-1924>

## 7. “JIGSAW” ACTIVITY

*This activity may be used as a final assignment or as an informal lesson wrap-up.*

### Objective

Through close examination of primary source documents and collaborative group work, this activity will enrich student understanding of the Jewish immigration experience in the U.S. between 1800 and 1924.

### Materials

- Large sheets of chart paper and markers OR a digital board creator, like [Padlet](#).
- Jigsaw Activity Resources 1–4,” available below. These resources provide a variety of primary sources for each of the four “jigsaw pieces.”

### Recommended Steps

#### Introduce the activity

Explain that students will participate in a closing “jigsaw activity.” The class will be divided into four groups and assigned four topics—or “jigsaw pieces”—related to the Jewish immigrant experience: *housing*, *labor*, *religious practice*, and *culture*. Each group will create a poster (or online board) with information about its assigned topic. The four “jigsaw pieces” will then be presented to the class and “assembled” on a wall (or online).

#### Organize the activity

- Divide the class into four groups.
- Assign each group one of the four “jigsaw pieces.”
- Distribute large sheets of chart paper and markers OR a digital board creator (like [Padlet](#)).
- Distribute the four Jigsaw Activity Resources (below) to the corresponding groups. Point out that each of the resources includes a “guiding question” and a list of primary sources that explore that question.
- Have each group write the name of the “jigsaw piece” (*housing*, *labor*, *religious practice*, or *culture*) and its guiding question at the top of its poster or online chart.

#### Complete the activity

Have each group review its Jigsaw Activity Resource and populate the rest of the poster or online chart with responses to the guiding question. Responses might include student observations, key points or excerpts from the primary sources, or other elements you consider appropriate and/or useful for your classroom and learning experience.

*Have students make sure their responses include information that is accurate and can be substantiated, either by the primary sources provided or another reputable source.*

Once students have completed their posters or online charts, have each group present its “puzzle piece” to the rest of the class. Then, collect all four “jigsaw pieces”—either on a wall or in the digital board creator—and congratulate students on a job well done!

# Jigsaw Activity Resource 1 | Housing

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**Guiding Question:** What was housing like for Jewish immigrants?

**Primary Sources:**

- Photos (all taken in New York City):
  - [Two women and man in front of outhouses](#), 1902–14
  - [“Family in tenement Room”](#) or [Tenement kitchen with stove](#)
  - [Tenement playground](#), 1900–1937
- Quote about tenement disrepair: Michael Gold’s semi-autobiographical novel *Jews Without Money* (1930)<sup>13</sup>

OUR tenement was nothing but a junk-heap of rotten lumber and brick. It was an old ship on its last voyage; in the battering winter storms, all its seams opened, and wind and snow came through.

The plaster was always falling down, the stairs were broken and dirty. Five times that winter the water pipes froze, and floods spurted from the plumbing, and dripped from the ceilings.

There was no drinking water in the tenement for days. The women had to put on their shawls and hunt in the street for water. Up and down the stairs they groaned, lugging pails of water. In December, when Mr. Zunzer the landlord called for rent, some of the neighbors told him he ought to fix the plumbing.

“Next week,” he murmured into his scaly beard.

“Next week!” my mother sneered, after he had gone. “A dozen times he has told us that, the yellow-faced murderer! May the lice eat him next week! May his false teeth choke him to death next week!”

- Quote about community energy in tenement neighborhoods: “Playgrounds of Asphalt,” *New York Tribune*, 1896<sup>14</sup>  
*“It was one of the first mild evenings of spring and a large part of Delancey Street was sitting out-of-doors. Mothers were sitting on door-steps gossiping with one another and watching children who ought doubtless to have been abed. There was life, action, and social activity everywhere.... The children being on the street, there is more room on the sidewalk for their elders. Chairs are brought out on the sidewalk, and the curbstones furnish seats for many. With the old paving materials, the gutters were more or less unclean or noisome, but the asphalt makes the curbstone really an attractive place to sit.”*

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<sup>13</sup> Gold, Michael. *Jews without Money*. New York: Public Affairs. Originally Published 1930. New Edition: 2009, p. 248.

<sup>14</sup> *New York Tribune*, July 9, 1896, in Allon Schoener, Ed. *Portal To America: The Lower East Side 1870-1925*. New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1967, p.68.

## Jigsaw Activity Resource 2 | Labor

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**Guiding Question:** How did Jewish immigrants make a living?

**Primary Sources:**

- Photos and Graphics:
  - Public Record: "[Portion of the 1900 Census Record for 97 Orchard Street,](#)" New York
  - Photos: "[Sweatshop<sup>15</sup> in a Ludlow Street 'Tenement'](#)" or "[Family Making Artificial Flowers,](#)" c. 1890
  - Photo: "[A large garment factory,](#)" c. 1910
- Letter about poor working conditions, excerpted from "The Bintel Brief," an advice column in *The Jewish Daily Forward*, 1906:

*Dear Editor,*

*I'm an 18-year-old boy. I've been in this country for one and a half years. I learned the iron-work trade and earn ten dollars weekly. I work outdoors on fire-escapes and railings and every minute my life is endangered.*

*Recently, my uncle fell from the sixth floor staircase he was working on and was killed. He was 24 years old. Yesterday, myself and another man were working in a building on Eighth Street. I fell from the second floor into the yard — but luckily it turned out well. One hand is in pain and I can't really write this letter well.*

*The iron workers are constantly endangered. Two weeks ago, a man was killed. My family won't permit me to return to the trade, saying I should retrain in a different one, but I don't know another one to try. I am skilled in this trade and don't wish to quit it.*

*What should I do? My family won't permit me to go back to work. If I try another type of work I'll only earn four dollars daily. I too would say it's been enough for me already if I were not sending money home to my mother. My father is here and doesn't earn much. I've got to support them. What can be done with a mere four or five dollars weekly? Who can be supported with that?*

*Editor sir, I ask you for your good counsel. Should I return to my dangerous trade or get into another line of work?*

*Your constant reader,  
— Dazed<sup>16</sup>*

- Quote from labor activist Rose Schneiderman, from a speech to wealthy New Yorkers at a benefit for the victims of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, 1911:<sup>17</sup>  
*"I would be a traitor to these poor burned bodies if I came here to talk good fellowship. We have tried you good people of the public and we have found you wanting... This is not the first time girls have been burned alive in the city.... Every year thousands of us are maimed. The life of men and women is so cheap and property is so sacred."*

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<sup>15</sup> A sweatshop is a crowded workplace, often operating under dangerous and illegal conditions, common in large U.S. cities in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

<sup>16</sup> <https://forward.com/archive/452572/legacy-bintel-a-jewish-boy-supporting-his-family-risks-death/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://jwa.org/media/excerpt-from-rose-schneidermans-april-2-1911-speech>. The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire killed 146 garment workers, most of them women and girls between the ages of 14 to 23.



## Jigsaw Activity Resource 3 | Religious Practice

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**Guiding Question:** How did religious practices among Jewish immigrants change or evolve?

**Primary Sources:**

- Quote about working on Shabbat, the Jewish day of rest:<sup>18</sup>  
*One hears here of men who were Sabbath observers and very careful in performing [religious obligations] when they were in the land of Russia, but who in this country go to work on the Sabbath. And each one rationalized this by saying that it is not his intention to [reject] Judaism, heaven forbid. Rather it is only because...if he refuses to work on the Sabbath, he will be unable to find work even on the weekdays, as happens frequently in our country. Hence, he will not have bread with which to sustain his family and they will be in mortal danger. And there are some men who, even if they work on the Sabbath, conduct themselves as proper [Jews] in all other matters.*
- Quote about preserving Jewish traditions, from Rose Cohen's memoir *Out of the Shadow*<sup>19</sup>:  
*Mother had been here [in the U.S.] only a short time ... I thought that if I could persuade her to leave off her kerchief<sup>20</sup> she would look younger and more up to date. But remembering my own first shock [upon coming to the U.S.], I decided to go slowly and be careful not to hurt her feelings. So, one day...I asked her playfully to take off her kerchief and let me do her hair, just to see how it would look. She consented reluctantly. She had never before in her married life had her hair uncovered before anyone.... I handed her our little mirror from Cherry Street. She glanced at herself, admitted frankly that it looked well and began hastily to put on her kerchief as if she feared being frivolous too long. I caught hold of her hands.*  
  
*"Mamma," I coaxed, "please don't put the kerchief on again—ever!" Mother put her finger on my lips.... But I finally succeeded. When father came home in the evening and caught sight of her...he stopped and looked at her with astonishment. "What!" he cried, half earnestly, half jestingly, "Already you are becoming an American lady!" Mother looked abashed for a moment; in the next, to my surprise and delight, I heard her brazen it out in her quiet way. "As you see," she said, "I am not staying far behind.*
- Image: [Rosh Hashanah Greeting Card](#).<sup>21</sup> This greeting card was designed for Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. The group on the left appears below an American eagle carrying a quote from the Book of Psalms: "Shelter us in the shadow of Your wings." The group on the right appear below the Russian coat of arms. Take note of how the two groups are dressed and portrayed.

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<sup>18</sup> Glogower, Rod. "The Impact of the American Experience Upon Responsa Literature." *American Jewish History*, vol. 69, no. 2, 1979, pp. 257–69.

<sup>19</sup> Cohen, Rose, and Thomas Dublin. *Out of the Shadow: A Russian Jewish Girlhood on the Lower East Side*. Cornell University Press, 1995, p. 153.

<sup>20</sup> Many married Jewish women cover their hair in accordance with Jewish law.

<sup>21</sup> <https://forward.com/forverts-in-english/382948/the-curious-history-of-rosh-hashanah-cards-in-yiddish/>

## Jigsaw Activity Resource 4 | Culture

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**Guiding Question:** How did immigration to the U.S. affect Jewish cultural life?

**Primary Sources:**

- Lyrics and sheet music image from “Long Live the Land of the Free,” a song popular among Jewish immigrants to the U.S., 1911
  - Excerpt from song lyrics (translated from Yiddish<sup>22</sup>)  
*Be blessed, you free land*  
*Uncle Sam, sweet heaven of freedom of us the oppressed*  
*Fly the American banner high for the land of opportunity and justice*  
*Long live the land of the free!*<sup>23</sup>
  - Image: [cover of sheet music](#)  
The words “Long Live the Land of the Free” appear in Yiddish (top of the page) and in English (just below). The combination of Yiddish, English, and American symbols—including the eagle, stars and stripes, and wreath—says a great deal about the blend of Jewish and American cultures throughout this period.
- Quote about the challenge of the Yiddish-English language barrier, from the child of Jewish immigrants:<sup>24</sup>  
*At the age of five I really knew Yiddish better than English. I attended my first day of kindergarten as if it were a visit to a new country. The teacher asked the children to identify various common objects. When my turn came she held up a fork and without hesitation I called out its Yiddish name, a goopel. The whole class burst out laughing with that special cruelty children can have. That afternoon I told my parents I had made up my mind never to speak Yiddish to them again, though I would not give any reasons.*
- Quote about the Yiddish Theater,<sup>25</sup> from an article in *Harper’s Magazine*, 1898<sup>26</sup>  
*Night after night I have seen.... Yiddish theatres swarmed with men, women, and children largely from the sweat shops.... My friend the cashier [told me], “There are many poor Jewish families that spend sometimes three, four, five dollars a week here at this theatre.” A brief calculation will show that, compared with their earnings, this represents a patronage of art infinitely beyond that of the families uptown who parade their liberality in supporting the Metropolitan Opera House.*

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<sup>22</sup> Yiddish, a German-based language written in Hebrew characters, was the language spoken by most Central and Eastern European Jewish immigrants.

<sup>23</sup> Rumshinsky, Joseph, and Solomon Small. *Long Live the Land of the Free*. Hebrew Publishing Company, New York, New York, 1911. Notated Music. <https://www.loc.gov/item/ihms.200182133/>.

<sup>24</sup> Howe, Irving. *The Immigrant Jews of New York: 1881 to the Present*. London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 197, p.276.

<sup>25</sup> The Yiddish theater was an important part of cultural life among Jewish immigrants. By combining Yiddish and other familiar aspects of the “old world” with American culture, the Yiddish theater helped Jewish immigrants better understand—and rise to—the challenges of the “new world.”

<sup>26</sup> [https://archive.org/stream/harpersnewmonthl98harp/harpersnewmonthl98harp\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/harpersnewmonthl98harp/harpersnewmonthl98harp_djvu.txt)