

# COMING TO AMERICA: A LIVING HISTORY

*by Marcia Posner & the Long Island Chapter of the  
ASSOCIATION OF JEWISH LIBRARIES*

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## COMING TO AMERICA: A LIVING HISTORY

**-Narrator A:** After being forced out of Israel first by the Babylonians and later by the Romans, the Jewish people moved from country to country, carrying their religion in their books; seeking lands that would allow them to practice it and to earn a living.

**-Narrator B:** Where opportunities existed they took them. Where there were no opportunities, they created them. The very obstacles they faced enabled them to gain skills and connections that would help them in the future.

**-Narrator A:** Their persecutors accused the Jews of having a secret cabal that enabled them to have proficiency in trade and banking. Little did they realize that persecution was the Jews secret weapon--that each of the massacres they vested upon the Jews: the Crusades, the pogroms, the Inquisition, the Thirty Years War, the edicts that forbade them to join trade unions, to farm, to do this or that—in the end taught them new skills, necessary for survival but also a key to their ultimate success.

**-Narrator B:** They would have flourished without such *tsuris*. The horrors vested upon the Jews almost destroyed them numerous times!

**-Narrator A:** Yes. Yes, of course . . . But without the Inquisition would Jews have accompanied explorers to new parts of the world? Would they have found themselves in countries that were ripe for commercial development? The Netherlands, for instance.

## **Dramatization #1 – Fleeing the Inquisition**

**-Daughter Becky:** Father, it is too horrible! Don Aravanel and his family have been arrested. Someone reported seeing them light candles for the Sabbath!

**-Father:** Poor man. Poor family. With two little children! He thought he was protecting his family by converting to Christianity. What do you say, Wife?

**-Mother:** Husband, Jews are still being allowed to emigrate. I say we leave at once!

**-Father:** I am happy to hear you say that, as I have already arranged passage for us on a Portuguese ship bound for the Netherlands.

**-Becky:** You and Mother go with the little ones. I cannot go, Father. Ronaldo and I are deeply in love and plan to marry. We have already informed his mother, Donna Teresa. I will convert to Christianity and marry Ronaldo.

**-Father:** Ronaldo is coming with us. It is he who insisted on packing our silver Sabbath candlesticks and menorah in his own trunk. If it is inspected he will say that he intends to sell them in the Netherlands.

**-Ronaldo's Mother, Donna Teresa,** (enters and hugs each one) *Vaya con Dios.* This horror is not from El Padre, but from greedy evil men in league with El Diablo. Take good care of my son and tell my grandchildren that their *abuela*, Donna Teresa loves them.

**-Narrator A:** The Netherlands lacked natural resources. In the early 16th century it began to expand its navy, explore distant lands, conquer them and use their natural resources at home or in trade. It wanted to become a world power, like England.

**-Narrator B:** This was just when the Jews were arriving in the Netherlands, in 1593.

**-Narrator A:** Right! And within twenty years, Jews, who were experienced merchants, occupied a prominent place in the country's commerce--even to being among the early settlers of the Dutch territories in newly discovered America.

**-Narrator B:** By 1621, they joined in the organization of the Dutch West India Company. In fact, several Jews were Directors of the company. And others would take advantage of opportunities offered by the company.

## **Dramatization #2-Emigrating to Brazil**

**-Father:** I tell you, good wife, even though we have done well here in the Netherlands, an even larger opportunity awaits us in Brazil. It is an undeveloped country, yet many of our co-religionists, New Christians and Crypto Jews from Portugal, have settled there. Wherever we Dutch have defeated the Portuguese, former Jews have begun to live openly

as Jews. Ronaldo and Becky are eager to emigrate there, but we must go as a family.

**-Mother:** Would you take us into the mouth of the Inquisition again! Brazil is owned by Portugal and what guarantee do we have that the Dutch will prevail?

**-Father:** The Dutch West India Company is looking for 600 Jews to settle in Brazil. They would not send us into danger.

**-Narrator A:** But by 1654, the Portuguese had begun to liberate Brazil from the Dutch. As feared, the Jews were once again fleeing from the Inquisition. Some returned to Amsterdam. Some went to the Caribbean islands where they introduced the sugar industry.

**-Narrator B:** Some stayed in Recife, Brazil, where the laws against the Jews were revived. Before long the Jews were reduced to poverty. They needed a way out, but how, and where!

### **Dramatization # 3—Fleeing Recife**

**-Mother:** Husband! Never shall I listen to you again! Why did we not go back to Amsterdam like the others? So what if you had sold your business! Now we are penniless. No more boats are sailing to The Netherlands and we shall all die, including Becky and Ronaldo's baby. How will we be able to tell Donna Teresa ?

**-Father:** Hush wife. You are frightening the children. Several families, including us, have booked passage on the Sainte Caterina.

**-Mother:** Booked passage! Booked passage! Passage to where! To a deserted island! To live with the natives!

**-Father:** I don't know where we are going, but it will be safer than here. We have no choice. We must go.

**-Narrator A:** The Sainte Caterina discharged its 23 Brazilian passengers at the shore of a Dutch colony situated at the mouth of the Hudson River, where it meets the Atlantic. It happened to be the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam.

### **Dramatization # 4 – The Captain Demands Payment**

**-Captain:** Well if it is here that you are staying, I demand payment.

**-Father:** We have paid you some money, but not the sum you are demanding. It is far in excess of what we own.

**-Captain:** I will give you until tomorrow to pay up or I will have the lot of you jailed.

**-Narrator A:** Some were jailed, held as security. Peter Stuyvesant, the governor of the colony seized the Jews meager remaining possessions and ordered them sold at auction. Still, the captain was not satisfied. A correspondence ensued between Stuyvesant and the Company.

### **Dramatization # 5**

**-Stuyvesant:** *To the Officers of the Dutch West India Company:* Meinheers: As governor of New Amsterdam, I hereby petition you for permission to expel the Hebraic community that has come among us uninvited, unwanted, and penurious. Should they remain among us as permanent residents, they would destroy the Christian character of the colony.

**-The Dutch West India Company:** *To Peter Stuyvesant:* Dear Governor Stuyvesant: The Jews are to stay if they wish. The colony will benefit from their expertise in trade; furthermore, many of their brethren are officers of this company.

**-Narrator A:** The Jews had arrived in New Amsterdam in 1654. Stuyvesant kept on trying new ways to discourage them from staying. But he didn't reckon with Asser Levy

### **Dramatization No. 6**

**-Asser Levy:** *To the Dutch West India Company:* Dear Sirs: I feel it only just that I petition the Company for various rights of citizenship of which your citizens of the Hebraic persuasion are now denied. They include: the right to stand watch, or to be relieved of the tax they we are obliged to pay for someone else to stand in our place; the right to obtain trade permits and to own real estate.

**-Narrator A:** These rights were granted, but Jews still could not open a retail shop or establish a synagogue-- for which rights Levy sued and achieved in 1657.

**-Narrator B:** When the English captured New Amsterdam in 1664 and renamed it New York, Levy—who felt he owed the Dutch no allegiance—swore to support the British Crown. In 1671, he became the first Jew to serve on an English jury in North America. Ironically, Peter Stuyvesant, was the first to be tried on misuse of office, but Levy voted to acquit him.

**-Narrator A:** Soon more Jews were arriving—*mohels* for circumcisions and *schochets* for kosher slaughtering, rabbis, teachers . . .But Jews weren't welcome in all the colonies.

**-Narrator B:** Connecticut and Massachusetts were strictly for Protestants for many years. Jews settled in Philadelphia, Newport, Savannah and Charleston—places of tolerance and commerce. They were involved in trade—shopkeepers, silversmiths, barrel makers, and vendors of goods needed for daily use.

**-Narrator A:** Some Jews showed up in remote outposts, like Albany, New York, where

they traded furs with Indians and supplied good to fur trappers. Some went to Georgia, Virginia and the Carolinas.

**-Narrator B:** Back in Portugal, in the early 18th century, even Catholics of Jewish origin were suspect; so in 1752, two Catholic converts: Duarte and Gabriel Lopez fled to Newport, Rhode Island.

### **Dramatic Presentation # 7**

**-Duarte:** Brother Gabriel, here in Newport we are free to live as Jews. I am changing my name from Duarte Lopez to Aaron Lopez, and will undergo circumcision as a way of affirming my return to the religion of my ancestors.

**-Gabriel:** I shall do the same, brother Aaron, and my name will be Moses Lopez. When our brother, Miguel, and his family arrive, they will surely follow our example.

**-Narrator A:** Aaron Lopez and his family thrived in America. He became one of Newport's most prosperous merchants as well as an active and committed Jew. He viewed America as a place where he was entitled to the same privileges as all other white men and he sought them assertively. Some acculturated Jews began to mix socially with Christians.

### **Dramatic Presentation #8**

**-ABIGAIL FRANKS:** I am Abigail Franks. I was born in London. When I moved to New York with my family, I met and married Jacob Franks, a successful merchant in 1715. Although we belong to Shearith Israel and taught our nine children Hebrew and the Jewish way of life, we socialize with non-Jews as well as Jews. Neither do I cover my head. I see no reason to call attention to myself as a Jew. Still, one of my daughters has gone too far. She has married a Gentile, and I am heartbroken. I refuse to meet him-  
EVER!

**-Narrator A:** On the eve of the American Revolution, about two thousand Jews lived in the British colonies of North America. By then, most were Ashkenazic, not Sephardic.

**-Narrator B:** The Ashkenazic emigration consisted of Jews from Poland and Germany. The 30 years war, allegedly a war between Catholicism and Protestantism, turned its fury upon the Jews, and 10,000 Jews were slaughtered.

**-Narrator A:** Polish and German Jews fled to Amsterdam and London. There they heard about the economic opportunities for young people willing to work in the New World. A number of them journeyed to America. Sephardic Jewish communities sponsored a group of émigrés who landed in Georgia.

**-Narrator B:** This brings us up to the period of the Revolution. Most Jews supported the Revolution. Few Jews in the colonies came from England, except for that brief sojourn as refugees. And Jewish colonists had their own complaints about the Mother Country.

### **Dramatic Dialogue # 9 – Merchants Complain Against England**

**-Jewish Merchant:** If England is going to limit where we are allowed to trade, we shouldn't stand for it. Let's join the army and fight against Britain!

**-Narrator A:** Jews were prominent in the Revolutionary Army. Haym Salomon and other Jewish brokers helped to obtain loans to finance it.

**-Narrator B:** After the Revolution, Jewish patriots who had fought in it felt that they had the right to continue to press for equal rights: the right to have their religious traditions protected, the right as citizens to hold government office, to participate in politics... and the right to swear allegiance on the Jewish Bible, rather than the New Testament.

**-Narrator A:** The Constitution's Bill of Rights is the most important guarantor of Jewish rights, and especially its first amendment and two important clauses: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

**-Narrator B:** A Jew named Moses Seixes wrote a letter to President George Washington and received from him an appreciative reply that reaffirmed the rights of Jewish citizens.

### **Dramatization: George Washington's Letter (excerpted)**

**MORRY--**

**All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. . . 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.**

**-Narrator A:** By the first quarter of the nineteenth century, German emigration to the United States swelled.

### **Newspaper Article: Dramatization # 10**

**-Reporter 1:** Hey boss! Look at these figures. The United States is beginning to be flooded with Germans. Between 1827 and 1828 more than 10,000 Germans landed in New York. But that was nothing! By the end of last year, 1847-- 50,000 more Germans arrived, and most of them Jews! What gives?

**-Editor:** Don't you read our paper? I wrote a big story on it last month. Bavaria limited the number of Jews who could marry. And they have other problems too. After so many centuries there is overpopulation, a shortage of land, and with the Industrial Revolution, unemployment.

**-Narrator A:** New methods of production have displaced the small farmers and artisans. People want to blame it on someone. So it is the Jews' fault, for a change.

**-Narrator B:** Then there is also revolutionary unrest. Thousands and thousands of Germans, not only Jews, have been driven from their homes. They come to America, the land of freedom and opportunity—they think.

### **Dramatization # 11-How to Make a Living**

**-Hannah:** Julius, we are penniless. What shall we do? I will try to find a job today. It is good we do not have children.

**-Julius:** Hannah, the woman who met us at the boat gave me a card with the name of a Jewish charity that helps new arrivals like us. She said that the New York Jewish community has many charities. I will visit one or more today. In the meantime, our neighbor has sent over *lochshun* for our supper.

**-Narrator A:** Later that day, Julius came back with household goods, money for a month and supplies from a Jewish wholesaler whom he could pay back after he peddled the goods and earned some money.

**-Narrator B:** With little more than the clothing on their back, many turned to petty trading. With a pack on his back, or a covered wagon laden with trinkets and household goods, the Jewish peddler set out for the wilds, close behind the agricultural pioneer.

**-Narrator A:** He was often the sole contact between isolated settlers and the large town. He brought not only goods, but also news. The settler came to depend on this wandering Jewish peddler, welcoming his visits with warmth and friendship.

**-Narrator B:** As the settlements grew bigger, the peddler stopped roving and established a little depot in the midst of a growing village.

### **Dramatization #12- Dear Hannah**

**Julius-**My dearest wife,

I have found here a little house. Many of my customers are helping me to buy it so that I stay here. In front we can make a store. I will allow them credit on future purchases so as to pay them back. Enclosed is money to buy a ticket. Pack what household goods and clothing you need, and join me here in Kansas. With a steady income and home, with God's help we maybe can at last start our family.

Your faithful husband,  
Julius

**-Narrator A:** Trade and settlement monopolized the energies of this new generation of immigrants. They settled in every new town that sprang up between 1820 and 1860.

**-Narrator B:** Then came the Gold Rush in California in the 1850s. Jews rushed to the area. Congregations soon sprang up in the mining camps as well as in the cities. A steady stream of young Jewish men from Poland headed for the Pacific coast.

**-Narrator A:** The unpredictability of gold mining and a growing demand for supplies encouraged many Jewish “59ers” to establish small businesses in towns and mining camps throughout the West, including in Colorado.

**-Narrator B:** The largest community was in San Francisco, California, where a new Jewish middle class established itself within a few decades, a variety of Jewish houses of worship were established, and Jews even entered politics.

**-Narrator A:** By the 1860s Jews had a new problem. The Civil War! Some lived in the South and some in the North. Some in the East and some in the West. They didn’t agree on issues of slavery. In the Civil War they split into two factions and fought with armies on both sides. Even though by then Jews had divided into various forms of religious identity, two things happened that caused them to raise their voices as one.

### **Dramatization # 13**

**-Bertha:** Noah! Have you read about that anti-Semitic General Grant! He has called for the expulsion of all Jews from the region under his command.

**-Noah:** Have I read it! Why every Jew in America has read it in one Jewish paper or another. What is just as bad is Congress decreeing that only Christian ministers can be commissioned in the Union Army!

**-Bertha:** So what’s going to happen?

**-Noah:** Every congregation in America is protesting to Congress that this is un-American! Against the American Constitution! The Delegates of American Israelites made a formal complaint to Congress. And President Lincoln is rescinding Grant’s command. After all, 7000 Jewish soldiers are in the Union army and 3000 in the Confederate army.

**-Bertha:** Which reminds me--Noah, do you want to see something funny? Celia Morganthau just showed me a photograph of her cousin Maurice and other solidiers who are in the Union army that is now in Albany, Georgia, and guess what! They are surrounded by their Southern female relatives!

**-Noah:** Funny indeed! Their husbands might be in the Confederate Army. I hope none of us manage to wound or kill the other.

**-Narrator A:** After 1870, Jewish immigration to America became predominantly Eastern European. Eastern European society was coming apart at this time. The old



feudal way of life was dying. Squires, priests, and guildsmen could not hold their own against the powerful new social orders and against modern technology.

**-Narrator B:** Large-scale land ownership squeezed out not only the peasants but also the Jewish middlemen. Modern manufacturing destroyed the artisan. The masses in the Jewish villages of the Pale, where they were confined, struggled harder and harder each year to eke out a living. But here in America, times were hard also.

#### **Dramatization # 14 – It’s Hard to Be a Jew in 19TH Century Russia**

**-Itzig:** Tsili, It’s no use. Again nobody bought anything. Nobody traded. The marketplace is empty.

**-Tsili:** And the baby is sick. Not enough food. Soreh-Leah’s son was snatched for the Czar’s army. Itzig, I cannot comfort her. She will never see him again.

**-Itzig:** When things get this bad I worry about pogroms. When the peasants are starving, the Czar’s Cossacks whip up a pogrom to take the peasants’ minds off their misery. They are starving too.

**-Tsili:** I’ve had enough, Itzig. I have a customer for our horse and wagon. It will bring enough to buy us tickets to America, the “goldene medina,” the golden land.

**-Narrator A:** The Jews of Russia left in droves – for Western Europe, England, South America, South Africa, Palestine, and above all, the United States.

**-Narrator B:** These newcomers shook up the old communities, built new ones, and changed the nature of American Jewry. By 1880 the Jewish population had increased to a quarter of a million.

**-Narrator A:** The impact made by the arrival of Eastern Jewry in America was tremendous. The Eastern Jews, were first frowned upon by their German co-religionists for being uncouth, loud and different. In the small villages from where they came, life crept along. In America, they had to get used to the pace and efficiency of the factory and the marketplace.

**-Narrator B:** Unlike the German Jews, they clung to their traditional Orthodox way of life and brought a strong measure of Old World Judaism to the New World. 65% settled in cities, industry being a magnet attracting them. The rest dispersed inland, some moving to small towns, others into the country to farm.

**-Narrator A:** American Jews were sensitive to the stereotype of Jews as urban dwellers, primarily interested in peddling and mercantilism. To counteract this stereotype, Baron Maurice de Hirsch decided to help large groups of Russian Jews escape the pogroms of Russia and settle on the pampas of Argentina, Canada and the United States where the

newly created Jewish Agricultural Society had purchased land. American Jews also took advantage of the offer of farm land.

### **Dramatization # 15**

**-David:** Regina you are forgetting that Jewish women don't mix with the *Gentiles*, and don't leave off their *sheitel* to wear a fancy hat.

**-Regina:** But David, the ladies see my hat and want one just like it. While you are at the *shul*, *davening*, I am making hats and pretty dresses for the ladies and they are paying good money.

**-David:** I have made up my mind. You are not as pious as before! We are emigrating to New Jersey to one of Baron de Hirsch's farms.

**-Regina:** How can we emigrate? We live in Yonkers!

**-Narrator A:** Parts of New York City became a super *shtetl*—the dynamic life of the sidewalks, the carts and peddlers crowding the streets, the signs in both Yiddish and English.

**-Narrator B:** New York became an endless workroom where hundreds of thousands were forever laboring. Once again, established Jewish wholesalers outfitted the new immigrants with merchandise that they gave free of interest. The new immigrants learned from other Jewish peddlers how to say a few phrases in English relevant to the merchandise they were selling.

### **Dramatic Narration # 16**

**-Yetta:** Nu, Heshy, so how was the business today?

**-Heshy:** Yetta your *lanzman*, Benny, should grow like an onion with his head in the ground.

**-Yetta:** So what's the problem?

**-Heshy:** The shoes and laces he gave me to sell—well the shoes were all for the same foot, and the shoelaces had no points and couldn't fit through holes. If that's his *chesed*, better I should deal with *goyim*.

**-Yetta:** *Sha*, Heshy, *sha*. Tonight you'll have a nice *kugel*... you'll rest... Don't let the *kinder* hear you should complain about their uncle Benny. And don't worry about paying the landlord. I made for the *kinder* beds under the kitchen table— -- and in their room, now we have a boarder, Mr. Teitlebaum. For his "food"-- he will teach the *kinder* their *alef-beis* and for his "bed" -- he will pay part of the rent.

And Heshy, tomorrow you will go to Shmuel. I heard that he is an honest man. After all, in Riga, everyone *knew* Benny was a horse thief! So is it a surprise that in America he cheats poor peddlers? Leave Benny to God to punish and for you Heshy, *Got vel helfen*.

**-Heshy:** Yetta *vel helfen*. You are a woman higher than rubies.

**-Narrator A:** And it was true, that among the Eastern European immigrants, their wives often sold shoelaces, buttons, and pins and needles from their babies' buggies. Some sold fish from pushcarts lined with ice, and others, drygoods . . .

**-Narrator B:** And don't forget the sweatshops where men and women toiled long hours under terrible conditions to earn a living. And the old clothes peddler: -- *I Cash Clothes*. *I Cash Clothes*. -- the song of the streets. Children worked too, selling newspapers and shopping bags, and shining shoes.

**-Narrator A:** Or the piecework at home. Tend the baby, wash and iron the children's school clothes, cook the family meal and work non-stop on the sewing machine.

**-Narrator B:** So this is the east coast of America in the 19th century. In America's heartland, what the German Jews had accomplished in the West, was being repeated by Eastern European Jews at the turn of the century.

### **Dramatization # 17**

**-Sophie:** Jake, we have saved up some money and I think it is time to stop traveling from town to town. Here the people are nice to us and seem happy with what we sell. They pay without cheating. Why don't we look for a little shop here? We can live behind the stores or upstairs.

**-Jake:** Maybe, maybe. But here there are no other Jews, no synagogue, no one to supply us with goods.

**-Sophie:** My brother has promised to make the trip to supply us. And if you take him as a partner, he will help pay for the shop.

**-Jake:** And live with us, with that fat wife of his and children with their noses running all the time.

**-Sophie:** Jules. Stop talking *lashon harah*. My brother has made a pretty penny in the glass business in New Jersey, but he wants to move to the country to be with me. After all, we are the only family we have in the New World. He will buy his own house, and maybe even start a glass business here.

**-Jake:** O.K. already. Let's look for a house. Soon more *mishpocha* will find their way here and we'll have enough for a *minyán*. What will the *goyim* say to a synagogue in a town full of churches?

**-Sophie:** If we are honest people and helpful to the town, they will say “welcome,” I am sure.

**-Jake:** From your mouth to God’s ears.

**-Sophie:** So park the wagon in the inn’s stables and let’s inquire about a shop.

**-Narrator A:** Previously, because of the Industrial Revolution, there had been a great need for manpower, but between 1870 and 1924, immigration to the United States was cut sharply by Congress. Still, in the next fifty years, three million more Jews arrived in America, desperate Jews fleeing from Eastern Europe.

**-Narrator B:** And what an effect they had on labor !

### **Dramatization # 18**

**-Boris:** Some “Goldene medina!” The bosses are getting rich on our backs. We have to organize! They can’t get away with murder!

**-Herman:** And what about the rabbis!

**-Boris:** So what’s with the rabbis? They don’t bother us.

**-Herman:** They are big bosses too. “Don’t do this. . .You can’t do that. . . This is forbidden. . . Only this way is allowed.” The rabbis made us different from other people. I say down with religion! Socialism is the new religion!

**-Boris:** Remember our Bund in Europe? We will organize the needle industry here in America. But we will call it a new name. We will call it a UNION! We UNIONIZE in America.

**-Narrator A:** And the women, what about the women labor organizers!

**-Narrator B:** The International Ladies Garment Workers Union hired Pauline Newman as an organizer. She organized the first industry-wide strike in the women’s garment industry, beginning in her shop.

**-Narrator A:** Don’t forget the other women prominent in the labor movement—like Rose Schneiderman, Bessie Abramowitz, and Rose Pesotta.

**-Narrator B:** Despite the improvements gained by the ILGWU and the Amalgamated, the men’s union, conditions were still horrible and the fire in the Triangle Waist factory was the result.

## Dramatization # 19

**-Triangle Fire Survivor:** It was horrible. We couldn't breathe. Everyone was screaming. I hear those screams to this day. I was screaming too. The flames were getting closer. It was burning hot. The doors were locked. Girls were jumping out the windows, but one of the bosses, I saw him go up a stairway. I followed him to the roof. That is why I am here today.

**-Narrator A:** Around this time the American Progressive Party was demanding that the state improve working conditions for workers and the poor. Most of the Progressives were Protestants, but a substantial number were Jews.

**-Narrator B:** The Jews' sense of responsibility toward other Jews shaped their political participation, especially in New York, where the majority of Eastern European Jews settled. Here they found work in a wide variety of retail enterprises, and especially in the garment industry, using skills brought from Europe.

**-Narrator A:** They established their own unions and workers' organizations such as the Arbeiter Ring or Workman's Circle. They created resorts and summer camps for their leisure time. They created orphanages, old age homes, day nurseries, medical clinics and other social service agencies

**-Narrator B:** . . .And developed a rich social and cultural life-- clubs, the lectures, the theatre . . .

**-Narrator A:** After Russia banned the Yiddish theatre, Sara and Jacob Adler emigrated to America. They helped make America, and New York, in particular, the heart and soul of Yiddish theatre.

## Dramatization # 20- THE FAMOUS ADLERS—ACTORS

**-Sara Adler:** Jacob, have you heard! The government has banned Yiddish theatre as subversive. We must go to America!

**Jacob Adler:** I know you are right, darling, but in America we have no actors, no actresses. Will our troupe go with us?

**-Sara:** Don't you worry. In *time*, we'll make our *own* troupe.  
WE'LL HAVE A FLOCK OF LITTLE OH—BY-- GOLLIES—AND WE'LL PUT THEM IN THE FOLLIES!!!! (sings)

**-Narrator A:** And so they did. Sara and Jacob had five children, all of whom became significant players in Yiddish theatre. The Yiddish theatre was not only famous for its original plays, both comedies, musicals and dramas, but also for interpreting classic works of drama, including a Yiddish Hamlet set in Russia.

**-Narrator B:** In the years to follow, many other children of East European Jews would become prominent figures in American popular culture—Eddie Cantor, Sophie Tucker, Al Jolson, Fannie Brice, Molly Picon, George and Ira Gershwin, Aaron Copland, Georgie Jessel, Benny Goodman. . .And in later years there would be a new generation of Jewish comedians, singers, actors, directors, and writers.

**-Narrator A:** Was it the theatre that helped the immigrant East Europeans Jews acculturate?

**-Narrator B:** It was the Yiddish newspapers, really, especially *The Forverts*, later published in English as *The Forward*. Abe Cahan, the editor, even told the immigrants what cutlery to use and how to set a table. Its Bintel Brief was another attraction. In these letters, readers could confide their most intimate troubles and get advice. . .

### **Dramatization # 21—The Forverts**

**-Rosie:** Oy...Did you read in today's Bintel Brief about that nogoodnick husband who already had another wife when his poor wife from Bratislava arrived with their five children?

**-Fagie:** Such a *shanda!* It is unbelievable the letters that come into the Forverts. They are more dramatic than Singer's stories, although I like them too. So what was the husband's excuse?

**-Rosie:** He said after work he likes to relax. He met her at the dance hall and they married. How should he know that his wife would save enough money to make the crossing? A plague on him!

**-Narrator A:** The long established Jews who had begun to blend in with the Christian population were made uncomfortable by these numerous, brash newcomers whom they considered beneath them and who, they were afraid would incur anti-Semitism.

**-Narrator B:** Unfortunately, they were correct. The increasing number of Jews in the United States did make Christians worry about the destruction of American institutions.

**-Narrator A:** The ones who suffered most were the middle and upper class Jews trying to gain entrée to universities, country clubs, and businesses inhabited by Christians, but were refused. They then created their own exclusive enclaves and clubs. Their philanthropy was extensive and so were their contributions to art and scholarship.

**-Narrator B:** They also initiated free education, open libraries and other organizations such as the Visiting Nurses, the Educational Alliance, and the Henry Street Settlement and free milk stations for children.

**-Narrator A:** No doubt about it, these wealthy established German Jews stood by the new immigrants. Jews as: Oscar Straus, Cyrus Adler, Louis Marshall, Jacob Schiff, Mayer Sulzberger, and Lillian Wald were among those who, in 1906, formed the American Jewish Committee to help the immigrants, to protect Jewish political rights and to fight anti-Semitism in Europe and at home.

**-Narrator B:** American anti-Semitism reached a high point between 1910 and 1920 with the brutal lynching of Leo Frank in 1915.

### **Dramatization # 22- Leo Frank Tragedy**

**-Newsboy--**Extra! Extra! Read All About It! Read All About It! Leo Frank Lynched By Mob! Extra! Extra! Read All About It!

**-Narrator A:** Falsely convicted of murdering a young girl in Atlanta, after Frank was ultimately pardoned, he was lynched by an angry mob. This case was responsible for B'nai B'rith's founding of the Anti-Defamation League to ferret out anti-Semitism in American society.

**-Narrator B:** Despite their efforts, discrimination against Jews remained constant in college and university quotas, and the hiring of Jewish physicians and attorneys. Even the phone companies in New York and Boston got in on the act and refused to hire Jewish operators! Jews with engineering degrees were refused jobs for which non-Jews were then hired.

**-Narrator A:** There were anti-Jewish magazines and books. Major Jewish figures in the American movie industry were accused of undermining American values. And Jews were accused of being either Communist revolutionaries, or their opposite—Capitalists “sucking the lifeblood out of good Christian Americans.”

**-Narrator B:** What a commotion when President Woodrow Wilson nominated Louis Brandeis to the Supreme Court! Many jurists objected. It took the Senate months to deliberate. His appointment barely made it.

**-Narrator A:** By the early 1920s, hostility towards Jews had reached such a pitch that Congress ended free and open immigration to the United States in 1924. Henry Ford, the auto magnate spent millions spewing anti-Semitism in his Dearborn Independent with a circulation of 700,000. Later, he would support Adolph Hitler until the United States went to war against Germany. The Ku Klux Klan also flourished again.

**-Narrator B:** Anti-Semitism reached its high point in the 1930s. In the Depression with so many out of work, it seemed that Jews were hurt less than others—with their mom & pop stores, jobs as teachers in Civil Service, or with relatives who lent a hand. Anti-Semitism increased when Hitler was appointed Chancellor in Germany and sent his emissaries to America to establish the German American Bund.

**-Narrator A:** The worst was when American Jewish organizations and American Jews with families in Europe could not get Congress to relax immigration laws to rescue European Jews.

**-Narrator B:** Father Coughlin spewed his poison over the airwaves and the churches seemed afraid to stop him. Gangs of teens in German neighborhoods as Yorkville in New York City, desecrated synagogues and broke windows of Jewish stores.

### **Dramatization #23 – Aiding the War Refugees**

**-Official A-** It's no use. Roosevelt won't budge, not even at Eleanore's urging.

**-Official B-** I don't understand it. Roosevelt has appointed more Jews to his administration than any other president. My mother-in-law worships him. She insisted that our son be called Franklin in his honor.

**-Official A-** Everyone has a different explanation. One is that there is so much anti-Semitism in the country now that if he were to allow all the Jewish refugees into the USA, he would never get re-elected nor would the Southern congressmen support his legislative agenda.

**BERNIE--Official B-**Look, the Germans think that Roosevelt is Jewish. They are convinced of it. Maybe that is the reason.

**-Official A-** It is also the State Department. It has always been anti-Semitic. The only way American Jews can help is secretly, through their organizations and quiet petitioning of those in government.

**-Narrator A:** With the passing of the Nuremberg Laws in Germany, helping Jews leave Germany was a top priority. More and more the solution seemed to lie in Zionism.

**-Narrator B:** Of course! If the Jews had a homeland of their own, there would have been no Holocaust. The Reform movement, which had first opposed a Jewish homeland in Palestine, began to change its mind. Some of its most prominent rabbis—Stephen Wise, and Abba Hillel Silver were ardent Zionists, as was Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, the charismatic and influential Reconstructionist rabbi. Lay people as Julian Mack, Felix Warburg, Hadassah founder, Henrietta Szold, and scientist Albert Einstein all supported Zionism.

**-Narrator A:** When the war ended and the true horror of the Holocaust revealed, Jews, as individuals and as congregants worked towards the formation of a Jewish state, the state of Israel.

**-Narrator B:** American Jews were transformed by World War II. Its GI Bill enabled them to go to college, which helped them to advance economically.



**-Narrator A:** After the war, because of the devastation suffered by the Jews of Europe, and the deadly effects of anti-Semitism, American Jews felt a deep connection with Jews around the world and a responsibility for their welfare and safety.

**-Narrator B:** Never again would they be silent in the face of anti-Semitism or suffering by Jews anywhere in the world. We now have our own homeland, our own universities, but the slumbering ogre of anti-Semitism has awakened. To fight this revived anti-Semitism is our biggest battle, but I have no doubt—that the Jews of America, all of us--including those who have come to these shores only recently--and those of us lucky to have been here for generations, will never give up the fight, nor forsake our brothers and sisters all over the world.

**All:** Amen                      (MEDLEY FOLLOWS)

**THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND, THIS LAND IS MY LAND  
FROM CALIFORNIA TO THE NEW YORK ISLAND  
FROM THE REDWOOD FOREST, TO THE GULF STREAM WATERS,  
THIS LAND WAS MADE FOR YOU AND ME . . .**

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**GOD BLESS AMERICA, LAND THAT I LOVE  
STAND BESIDE HER AND GUIDE HER  
THROUGH THE NIGHT WITH A LIGHT FROM ABOVE  
FROM THE MOUNTAIN, TO THE PRAIRIE  
TO THE OCEANS WHITE WITH FOAM  
GOD BLESS AMERICA, MY HOME SWEET HOME (REPEAT LINE)**

## **THE CAST**

Florence Baumuel  
Annie Bleiberg  
Robert Epstein  
Tess & Morrie Garber  
Shirley and Bernie Gershen  
Wendy Marx  
Marcia Posner  
Donald Wilson  
Sondra Winder

And a guest from the audience