

Exploring Judaism's Denominational Divide

Coming to America...

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A very brief early history of Jews in America

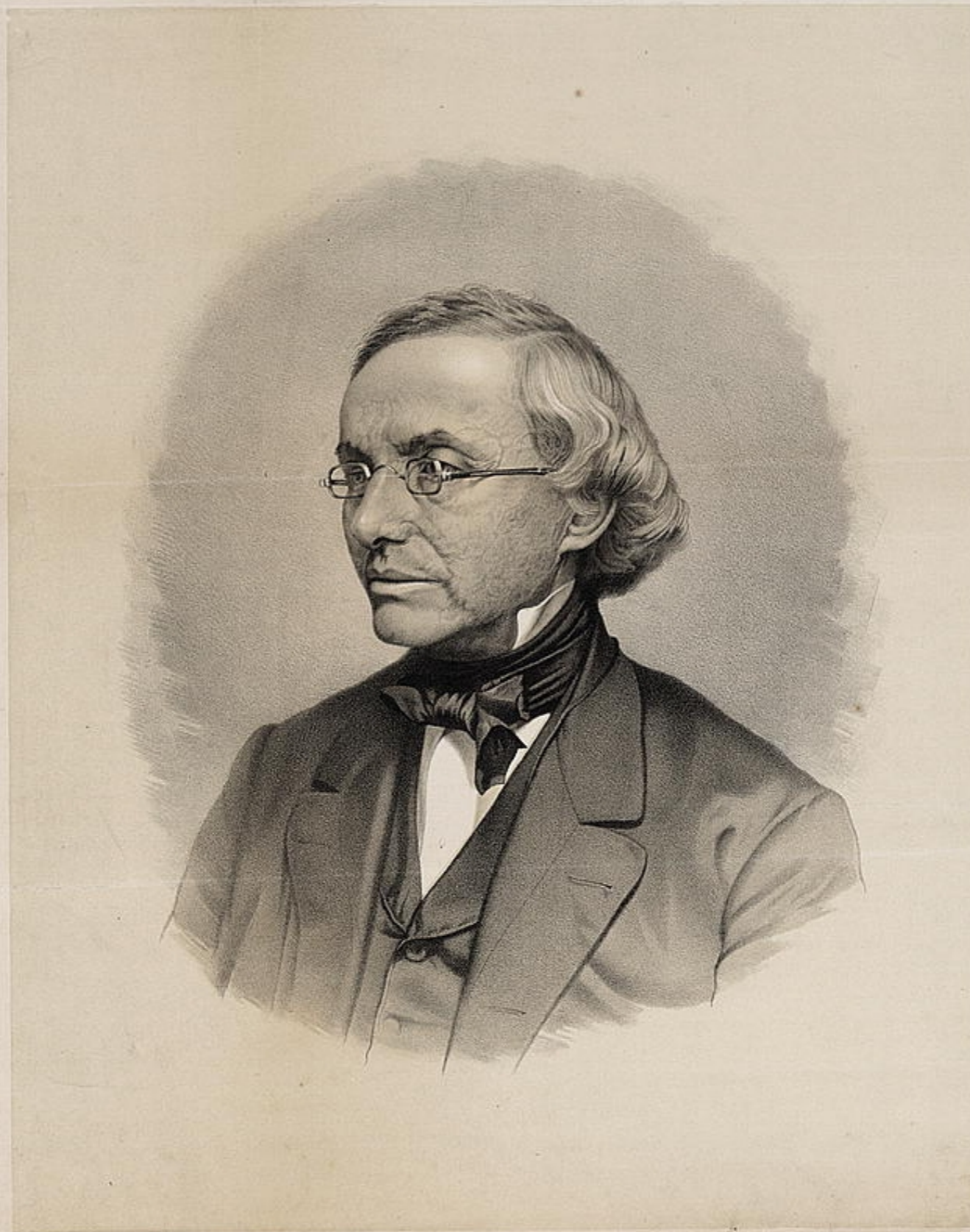
- September 1654 a small group of Sephardic refugees arrived aboard the *Ste. Catherine* from Brazil and disembarked at New Amsterdam, part of the Dutch colony of New Netherland.
- The Governor, Peter Stuyvesant, petitioned the Dutch West India Company for permission to expel them but for financial reasons they overruled him.
- Soon other Jews from Amsterdam joined this small community.
- After the British took over in 1664, more Jews arrived and by the beginning of the 1700's had established the first synagogue in New York.
- Officially named K.K. Shearith Israel, it soon became the hub of the community, and membership soon included a number of Ashkenazi Jews as well.
- Lay leadership controlled the community with properly trained Rabbis only arriving in the 1840's.
- Communities proliferated throughout the colonies e.g. Savannah (1733), Charleston (1740's), Philadelphia (1740's), Newport (1750's).

- During the American Revolution the Jews, like everyone else, were split between those who were Loyalists (apparently a distinct minority) and those who supported independence.
- There was a migration from places like Newport to Philadelphia and New York.
- The Constitution etc. guaranteed Jewish freedom of worship but no specific “Jew Bill” was needed.
- By the 1820’s there were about 3000-6000 Jews in America and although they were spread across the country New York and Charleston were the main centers.
- In both of these, younger American born Jews pushed for revitalization and change, forming B’nai Jeshurun in New York and a splinter group in Charleston. (The Reformed Society of Israelites)
- This movement paralleled what was happening in Germany around the same time.
- In NY there were two congregations in 1825 and over twenty by 1855. Judaism, synagogues and the Jewish Community had become more democratic, free, diverse, and competitive.

Isaac Leeser

1806-1868

- Arrived from Germany at age of 18, not well educated but self-taught.
- Invited to become the *Hazzan* of Mikveh Israel Congregation, a major Sephardic congregation, in Philadelphia.
- Started the *Occident*, the first significant Jewish periodical in 1843 and translated both the Bible and prayerbook into English.
- Which Rebecca Gratz he started the first Sunday school for Jewish children and he wrote a series of textbooks and even established a short-lived Rabbinical school.
- Although a strictly observant Orthodox Jew, he did introduce English sermons and favored eliminating those customs that detracted from the sanctity of the service.
- He was prepared to adapt superficially to American life, without compromising principles (S. R. Hirsch)
- Initially, Leeser's struggle was against secularization and Christian missionaries but that changed as a push for reform arose.



Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1848 by C. Colden in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the U. S. for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.

Isaac Leason

- The Jewish population in the US grew from about 5000 in 1825 to approx. 250,000 in 1875.
- Most of these immigrants came from Germany. Initially they consisted of less educated more rural Jews from Southern Germany but in 40's and 50's they were joined by a large influx of better secularly educated and wealthier urbanized Jews.
- Many of these had had some experience of reform in their home congregations and looked for similar observance in their newfound home. This paralleled a demand for change by the more Americanized Jews who had arrived decades earlier.
- During the 1840's in several of the major cities Reform minded groups of congregants broke off from the established congregations and formed their own congregations e.g. Har Sinai in Baltimore and Emanu-El in NY.
- With the arrival of Rabbis from Europe starting with the very traditional Abraham Rice in 1840 this trend was solidified. Some of these Rabbis were properly ordained and some were university educated.
- However, generally the lay leadership of the Congregations maintained power and the newly arrived Rabbis frequently found themselves looking for new jobs.
- Rabbis fell across the spectrum from Abraham Rice on the extreme right, through Morris Raphall (Modernish Orthodox), Isaac Mayer Wise (Reform) and David Einhorn (Radical Reform).

Isaac Meyer Wise

1819-1900

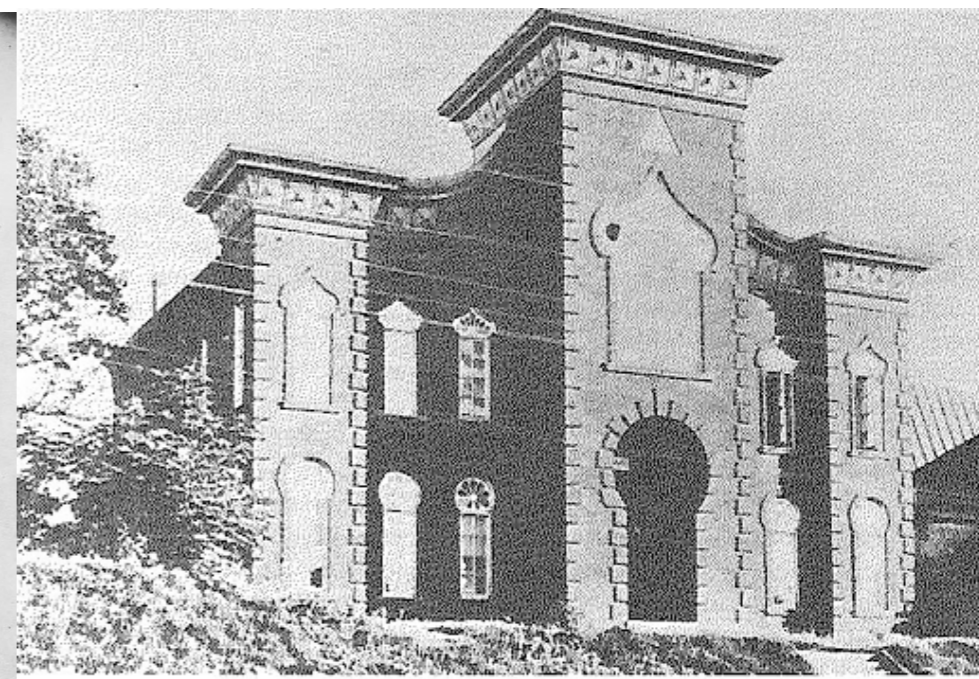
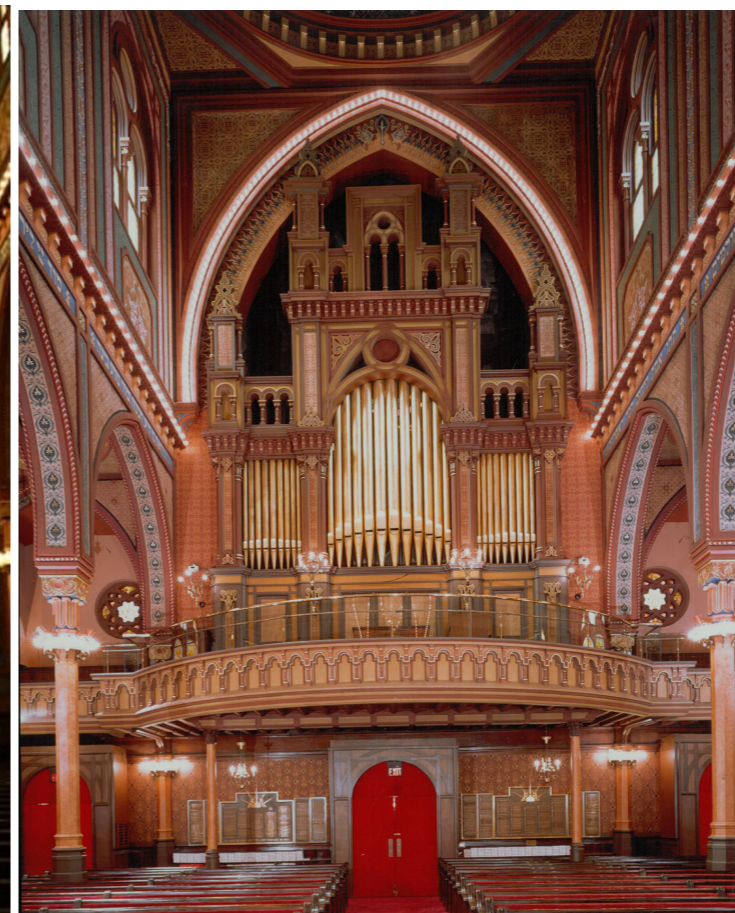
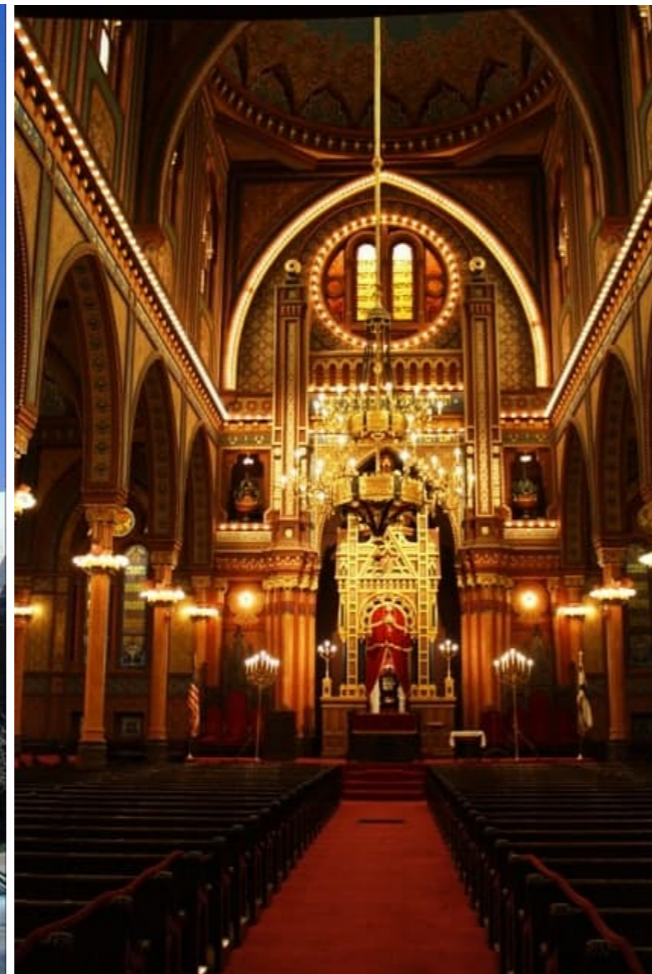
- Born in Steingrub, Bohemia and studied in Prague and Vienna.
- In 1843 became the Rabbi in Radnitz, Bohemia but emigrated to the US in 1846.
- His first pulpit was Temple Beth El in Albany, NY.
- Here he introduced German and English hymns, confirmation and mixed choral singing.
- Ultimately he quarreled with leadership and in 1850 a splinter group formed *Anshe Emet* with Wise as their Rabbi.
- They immediately adopted his reforms including mixed seating.
(condemned by Orthodox opposition as an abandonment of tradition, a violation of Jewish law, assimilation, Christianization and promiscuity!)



- In 1854 Wise moved to Cincinnati to become the Rabbi of *Bene Yeshurun*.
- Having learned his lesson Wise introduced reforms slowly and also demanded a life contract!
- The congregation grew to 220 by 1859, making it second largest in the country.
- He founded the Israelite (subsequently American Israelite) a weekly Jewish newspaper that became his and other reformers mouthpiece to the country.
- His vision was for a united American Jewry.
- In 1855 Wise called a conference in Cleveland with the aim of discussing “Ecclesiastical Authority” as well as how to bring some structure to the Jewish Community. Wise’s vision was for a united community even with its diversity. Approx. 15 clergy and lay people attended. Boycotted by both the extreme right and radical left.
- He worked with both traditionalists (Isaac Leeser) and reformers on the agenda. The resulting compromise confirmed the divine origin of the Bible and the obligatory authority of the Talmud.

- Leiser was subsequently criticized for meeting with Reformers and he soon realized that Wise and the others were pushing ahead with change beyond the Cleveland agreement.
- Wise was also attacked but from more radical reformers who were not prepared to compromise. Har Sinai in Baltimore, Emanu-El in N.Y. condemned outcome of the conference as did leading reformers in Europe.
- The community faced a more serious rift, that over slavery as the Civil War approached. Orthodox rabbis Morris Raphall and Bernard Illowy defended the institution based on Biblical texts. Reformers David Einhorn in Baltimore, Bernhard Felsenthal and Liebmann Adler in Chicago strongly denounced it.
- Isaac Mayer Wise and several others urged unity rather than separation but at the same time favored State's rights.

- In the years following the Civil War prosperous communities invested in monumental synagogues - Cincinnati, San Francisco, New York, Philadelphia to name but a few.
- Organs were installed in most and in even more traditional congregations like Rodeph Shalom in Philadelphia and Baltimore Hebrew Congregation.
- Mixed seating, choirs, abbreviated Torah readings, and abridged services became much more common.
- New Prayerbooks featuring Hebrew, English and/or German were adopted especially Wise's *Minhag America* and David Einhorn's *Olat Tamid*.



Emanu-El S.F.

N.Y.

Dallas

- In 1872 Moritz Loth, the president of Bene Yeshurun, called for a convention of all the synagogues in America. It took place in July 1873 and it created the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.
- 34 Congregations from 13 States joined together. (approx. 2000 members) By 1879 it had 118 congregations about half of the known congregations at that time.
- In 1875 Hebrew Union College was modestly launched with Wise as its voluntary head of faculty - a single paid instructor with 9 students aged 13-17. It was both intended to be both a high school and university with an 8 year curriculum.
- As it grew in stature it attracted high quality faculty and was supported by the leading rabbis of the time Reform, Conservative and modern Orthodox.
- In 1883 HUC ordained its first 4 students and welcomed the celebrants to a post-ordination banquet.

MENU.

Little Neck Clams (Half Shell).

"Amontillado"
Sherry.

POTAGES.

Consomme Royal.

"Sauternes."

POISSONS.

Fillet de Boef, aux Champignons,
Soft Shell Crabs,
a l'Amerique, Pommes Duchesse.
Salade of Shrimp.

"St. Julien."

ENTREE.

Sweet Breads, a la Monglas.

Petits Pois, a la Francaise.

"Deidesheimer."

RELEVEE.

Poulets, a la Viennoise.

Asperges Sauce, Vinaigrette Pommes
"Punch Romain." [Pate.

Grenouilles a la Creme and Cauliflower.

ROTI.

Vol au Vents de Pigeons, a la Tyrolienne.
Salade de Saitue.

"G. H. Mumm Extra Dry."

MORS-D'OEUVERS.

Bouchies de Volaille, a la Regeurs.

Olives Caviar, Sardelles de Hollande.
Brissotins au Supreme Tomatoes,
Mayonnaise.

SUCRES.

Ice Cream.

Assorted and Ornamented Cakes.

ENTREMENTS.

Frmages Varies. Fruits Varies.
"Martell Cognac." Cafe Noir.

- Tensions leading up to Pittsburgh Platform 1885
 - New York Society for Ethical Culture
 - Conservatives - Alexander Kohut (Congregation Ahavat Chesed/Central) and immigration
- 1887 Jewish Theological Seminary - Sabato Morais
- Challenges
 - Higher Biblical criticism
 - Darwinism
 - Social Relevance
 - Comparative Religion
 - Zionism
 - Immigration from Eastern Europe and Russia.

- Jews had settled in Poland as early as the 1200's.
- Up and down history.
- Chmielnicki Massacres (1648) and subsequent invasion of Poland by Russians and Swedes was disastrous for the Jews.
- 3 Partitions of Poland by Russia, Austro-Hungarian empire and Prussia in 1772-1795 brought most Polish Jews under Russian control.
- Depending on the Czar, conditions for Jews varied between bad and terrible.
- Pale of Settlement, conscription, forced modernization, and pogroms characterized condition throughout the 19th Century and gave rise to Hassidism, Socialism, Zionism and Traditionalism.
- By the late 1800's there were approx. 5 million Jews in Russia.
- The rise of anti-Semitism in 1880's with Russian government's official support encouraged Jewish immigration out of Russia. Kishinev program of 1903 helped it along as did the aftermath of Russian-Japanese war and subsequent political turmoil.

- About 2,750,000 Jews left Eastern Europe between 1881-1914. 350,000 settled in other parts of Europe, Germany and France. 200,000 in England, 40,000 to South Africa, 115,000 to Argentina, 100,000 to Canada.
- Approx. 2 million came to the US. High percentage of women and children indicated permanency. New York - 80,000 in 1870's and 1.4 million 1915.
- Many of these immigrants were caught between progressive Americanization and traditionalism, and were uncomfortable with the German Reform Congregations that predominated in the late 1800's and early 1900's.
- The majority chose not to affiliate with any synagogue, but kept their communal ties through secular organizations like *landsmanshaftn*.
- Ultimately these groups formed their own synagogues bringing the regional differences of their towns of origin to America.

- In response to Reform institutions like the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, Central Conference of American Rabbis and Hebrew Union College, the Traditionalists like Sabato Morais (President of JTS), Alexander Kohut, Marcus Jastrow, Henry Pereira Mendes, Cyrus Adler and Bernard Drachman supported the Jewish Theological Seminary, its Alumni Association and a newly formed Orthodox Jewish Congregational Union of America, later the Orthodox Union.
- In 1902 they invited Solomon Schechter to become President of the Seminary. He was a scholar of great renown and “impressed all who met him with his dramatic personality, vast erudition, and unswerving opposition to Reform Judaism.” (American Judaism, pg. 188)
- Within a few years JTS had a new campus in Morningside Heights near Columbia University and had America’s finest Jewish Library and world-class faculty and about 100 students.
- It seemed that Judaism had bifurcated in two streams - Reform and Conservative each with its own seminary and institutions.



Eldridge Street Synagogue

- However, the right wing of traditionalism was not to be counted out. In 1902 they formed the Agudath Ha-Rabbanim (United Orthodox Rabbis) with a far narrower definition of Orthodoxy than that of the Conservatives.
- The Agudath ha-Rabanim excluded from their membership and recognition graduates of JTS and western European seminaries and only accepted rabbis trained in traditional *yeshivot* and personally ordained by an Eastern European rabbinic luminary.
- They opposed English language sermons and proposed Yiddish as the preferred language of instruction in schools.
- They supported the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) as a truly Orthodox seminary and although it struggled until the interwar period it stood in opposition to JTS and HUC.
- The Agudath ha-Rabbanim strong stance against modernization and Americanization would give birth to the Haredi ultra-orthodox movement and draw a fault line between Orthodoxy and Conservative Judaism.
- Several organizations were founded by women in the late 1800's and early decades of the 1900's which still have a major impact of American Judaism today. The National Council of Jewish Women, United Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, Hadassah the Women's Zionist Organization of America formed by Henrietta Szold in 1912 following Emma Lazarus' lead.