

## American Jewish History Handout - Lesson #7

1. The Battle Over Immigration
2. Yiddish Culture
3. Fighting for America
4. The Rise of American Zionism
5. The Balfour Declaration
6. Post War – At Home in America?
7. Increase in Anti-Semitism

### **Reading #1**

*The United States of America is not what once it was; a land of full freedom... A land of one law for the native-born and the stranger... The hundreds of thousands of immigrants who came to America's shores are no longer welcomed with open arms... The day is near when the gates of the United States will be closed to immigrants... The American legislature is already studying the question of immigration... To determine what kinds of immigrants America should accept. As soon as they finish with the Chinese, they will turn to the Jews and the Italians and find all kinds of reasons for exclusion... The agitation against Jewish immigration is already taken on serious proportion. Who knows where it will end?*

### **Reading #2**

*An educated immigrant is not ordinarily the most beneficial. The ranks of the anarchists and the violent socialists are recruited from the educated classes... It is the illiterate immigrants who are now building our railroads, and canals, and subways. The Native American shrinks from such labor... Personally, I know a great deal concerning the immigrant, because my parents were both of that class... The entire wealth of my father when he landed consisted of a five-franc piece. While he was able to read and write, I am sure that he would not have been able to read fluently the Constitution of the United States in German, the only language he could read, and that he would not have understood it; and yet you are able to say whether or not he has become a good citizen. What is true of him is true of millions who have come to this country from abroad.*

### **Reading #3**

*A huge mass of potential Yiddish readers was gathering in the cities. Even if they had not wished to, they really had no choice but to learn Yiddish. It was the only language that could gradually lead them into the life of the new country... They felt themselves lost in the desert where men seemed like grains of sand and the new language, English, was difficult to learn. So, they naturally turned back to Yiddish... even complete illiterates - and there were quite a few among the early immigrants -*

*as well as the many half-illiterates, who could spell out a few words in the Hebrew prayer books, now troubled to learn the alphabet in order at least be able to read a daily Yiddish newspaper.*

#### **Reading #4**

*Poems and stories help them to understand their new environment... And most of all themselves. They sought in literature the same thing they wanted in a newspaper: a way of becoming somewhat less of a greenhorn, a way of escaping a little on their loneliness. And when poem and story gave them a certain enlightenment about mankind in general, the greenhorns began to feel they were becoming a little Americanized.*

#### **Reading #5 - From the Bintel Brief:**

*Dear Mr. Editor,*

*I was born in a small town in Russia, and, until I was 16, I studied in Talmud Torahs and yeshivas, but when I came to America that changed quickly. I was influenced by the progressive newspapers, the literature. I developed spirituality and became a free thinker... But the nature of my feelings is remarkable. Listen to me: every year when the month of Elul rolled around, when the time of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur approach, my heart grows heavy and sad. A melancholy descends on me, a longing gnaws at my breast. At the time I cannot rest, I wander about through the streets lost in thought, depressed.*

*When I go past the synagogue during those days and hear the Cantor chanting the melodies of the prayers, I become very gloomy and my depression is so great that I cannot endure it...*

*These emotions and these moods have become stronger over the years and I decided to go to the synagogue. I went in order to pray to God to heal and refresh my aching soul with the Cantor's sweet melodies, and they had an unusually good effect on me.*

*Sitting in the synagogue among people from the same village or town and listening to a good Cantor, I forgot my unhappy weekday life, the dirty shop, my boss, the bloodsucker, and my pale sick wife and my children. All of America with its hurry up life was forgotten.*

### **Reading #6**

*“His Majesty’s Government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.”*

Balfour Declaration

### **Reading #7**

*“I welcome the opportunity to express the satisfaction I have felt in the progress of the Zionist movement in the United States and the Allied countries since the declaration of Mr. Balfour on behalf of the British government, of Great Britain’s approval of the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.”*

### **Reading #8** - From the Dearborn Independent

*The common criticism made against President Wilson that “he played a lone hand” and would not avail himself of advice, can be made only by those who are in ignorance of the Jewish government which continually advises the president on all matters.*

*While the president is supposed to have been extremely jealous of his authority, this view of him can be maintained only by remaining blind to the immense authority conferred on members of the Jewish War Government. It is true he did not take Congress into his confidence; it is true that he made little of the members of his Cabinet; it is also true that he ignored the constitutional place of the United States Senate in the advisory work of making treaties; but it is not true that he acted without advice; it is not true that he depended on his own mind in the conduct of the war and the negotiations at Versailles. (December 11, 1920)*

*The Jews determination to wipe out from public life every sign of the predominant Christian character of the United States is the only active form of religious intolerance in the country today... Not content to the fullest liberty to follow their own faith in peace and quietness, in a country where none dares make them afraid, the Jews declare... That every sight and sound of anything Christian is an invasion of their peace and quietness, and so they stab it out whenever they can reach it through political means. (March, 12, 1921)*

*Chief among them, B'nai B'rith's activities... Is the work of the Anti-Defamation League. This insight committee and every lodge attends to the espionage work necessary to keep the Grand Lodges informed as to what is going on with reference to Jewry in the United States. In its work, the Anti-Defamation League always takes the offensive...*

(March 19, 1921)

*The question arises whether it is patriotic for Mr. Louis Marshall to implant into the minds of his foreign-born coreligionists the idea that this is not a Christian country, that Sunday law should be opposed, and that the matter and customs of the native-born should be scorned and ridiculed. The effect has been that thousands of immigrant Jews from Eastern Europe are persistently violating Sunday Laws in the large industrial centers of the country, that they are hailed to court, lectured by judges, and fined. American Jews are carrying into practice the teachings of Mr. Marshall and his followers are reaping the whirlwind of natural resentment.*

(November 26, 1921)

### **Reading #9**

March 29, 1922

*Dear Judge Mack:*

*I think we have found a way by which we can limit the Jews in Harvard College to the number that we can really benefit. As I told you, I put this at about 15%. In the present freshman class, including the provisional freshman - that is, those coming from other colleges and rated as freshman - the proportion of Jews is about 20%. Know there are two doors into the college which we regard as discretionary. One is the transfer students from other institutions. These we do not feel obliged to take unless they are in certain ways desirable. We feel that a boy has a certain claim to enter Harvard College by the regular method of examination; that he does not have the same right to be transferred from another college without passing our entrance examinations. It appears that of the number of students transferring from other colleges, 30% are Jews.*

*We have also investigated the men coming in under the new plan would not pass all four of the sample examinations required, but who, taking their whole record together, have been admitted. These we call line cases. The admission of such boys who have not fully passed the entrance examinations is discretionary. Now it would appear that in the present freshman class, if we excluded all of the clearly desirable Jews who come from other colleges and what not fully passed examinations under the new plan, the percentage would have been reduced 15%. It seems to us that to do this would be preferable to putting any limit upon the number of any class of boys were admitted through the regular entrance examination. Being an exercise of discretion*

*already possessed by the committee, it would require no further action by any of the governing bodies; nor would it involve what Harvard cannot do - that is, purporting to have entrance exams open to everyone, and really excluding certain boys whom the examination showed to be intellectually qualified for admission*

Very truly yours,  
A. Lawrence Lowell