

# American Jewish struggle

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American Jewish Struggle Jewish entry into the Americas s back to about 1492 when they were forced out of Spain. The expulsion triggered Jewish migration into among other places the Netherlands. When the Dutch established a colony in Recife, Brazil, some Jews moved with them. In 1654 Portugal recaptured Recife from the Dutch and Jews fled across the Caribbean with some heading to New Amsterdam. This was a remote Dutch port settlement and the first for Jews in North America (Sarna and Golden). Jews upheld their long held tradition of preserving their identity, customs and religion. Like other Jews in the rest of the world they developed the following traits:

- i. Jews organized themselves around synagogues. For instance, New York, Newport, Charleston and Philadelphia Jewish communities maintained their local synagogue that catered by their religious needs.
- ii. Jews who established themselves in large settlements like New York and Newport distinguished themselves in trade and commercial enterprise.
- iii. American Jews retained the group identity based on their point of origin. For example, Jews from Eastern Europe identified themselves as Sephardic Jews. At the same time, those from Germany called themselves Ashkenazi Jews (Rosove 50).

With the American Independence, the nation granted its citizens freedom which extended to religion. Consequently, Jews had to struggle against members of their community dissenting from their Judaic religion to join among other religious inclinations, Christianity, Atheism and secular ways of life. Jews had to withstand prejudices promoted by the freedom of worship in the United States.

Starting from the 1840, American Jews struggled against widespread

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adoption of American models in their synagogues which threatened their long-held traditions. For example, rabbis began to merge aspects of their religion with Orthodox and Protestant American denominations as others sought to adopt the Reform Judaism (Rosove 52).

When the American Civil War began, Jews also found themselves split into Southern pro-slavery and Northern anti-slavery Jews. The ensuing tensions brought anti-Semitic sentiments in America to the fore. In the armies, Jews fought to have their own chaplains until the law was amended to allow this (normally, only Christian ordained ministers occupied this role). In 1872, General Order No. 1; an anti-Jewish order called for the expulsion of Jews from General Ulysses Grant's army regiment. Protests by Jews made President Abraham Lincoln reverse the order (Sarna and Golden).

Politics, particularly prior to and after World War II has presented a trying existence for American Jews. The persecution of Jews by the Stalinist regime in Russia, the Nazi regime in Germany and the Holocaust show manifestations of Jewish struggles that account for significant immigration to the U. S (Charters 24).

After 1948, American Jews have fought with allegiance and political identity issues around the sense of belonging to the Zionist nation of Israel and the U. S. The Palestinian and Arab World challenge on the legitimacy of Israel has also impacted heavily on American Jews (Sarna and Golden).

Jewish tradition also presents a challenge to individual spirituality in the modern American Jew. For instance, unlike other religions such as Islam that are passed down generations through the father, Judaism is matrilineal.

Judaism also discourages intermarriages with non-Jews which has escalated in present-day America. Israel also continues warring with her Middle Eastern

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neighbors particularly the Palestinians, Hamas and Hezbollah militants. These developments contribute to modern American Jews struggle with identity from the religious, social and political standpoint.

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