

The Jew in the Modern World ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr
& Jehuda Reinharz

(E)

15. Jewish Immigration into the United States: 1881* -1948

1881	8,193 [†]	1899	37,415 [‡]	1916	15,108	1933	2,372
1882	31,807	1900	60,764	1917	17,342	1934	4,134
1883	6,907	1901	58,098	1918	3,672	1935	6,252
1884	15,122	1902	57,688	1919	3,055	1936	6,252
1885	36,214	1903	76,203	1920	14,292	1937	11,352
1886	46,967	1904	106,236	1921	119,036	1938	19,736
1887	56,412	1905	129,910	1922	53,524	1939	43,450
1888	62,619	1906	153,748	1923	49,989	1940	36,945
1889	55,851	1907	149,182	1924	10,292	1941	23,737
1890	67,450	1908	103,387 [§]	1925	10,267	1942	10,608
1891	111,284	1909	57,551	1926	11,483	1943	4,705 [#]
1892	136,742	1910	84,260	1927	11,639	July 1943 to	
1893	68,569	1911	91,223	1928	11,639	Dec. 1945	18,000 [#]
1894	58,833	1912	80,595	1929	12,479	1946	15,535
1895	65,309	1913	101,330	1930	11,526	1947	25,885
1896	73,255	1914	138,051	1931	5,692	1948 (Jan.	
1897	43,434	1915	26,497	1932	2,755	to Oct.)	12,300
1898	54,630						

*We have no, even approximately exact, figures of the Jewish immigration prior to 1881. Some 50,000 German Jews arrived up to 1848. No statistics are available about arrivals from Central Europe after 1848. From 1869, when greater numbers of Jewish emigrants began to arrive from Russia, till 1880, an estimated total of 30,000 landed in the United States. Of smaller contingents of Jews from Austro-Hungary and Rumania who immigrated up to 1880 we have likewise no statistics.

[†]For 1881 to 1898 statistics are available only for

the number of Jews admitted at the ports of New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore.

[‡]For 1899 to 1907 figures are available for Jewish immigrants at all ports of the United States.

[§]Since 1908, statistics of departure as well as of arrivals have been kept on record.

[#]That is, the fiscal year of July, 1942 to June 30, 1943.

[#]The figure for July, 1943 to December, 1945, is an estimate.

Source: Mark Wischnitzer, *To Dwell in Safety: The Story of Jewish Migration Since 1800* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1948), p. 289. Copyright 1948 by the Jewish Publication Society of America. Reprinted by permission.

ABRAHAM CAHAN

16. The Russian Jew in America¹

... The Jewish population in the United States has grown from a quarter of a million

to about one million. Scarcely a large American town but has some Russo-Jewish names

Source: *The Atlantic Monthly*, July 1898, pp. 130-33.

American Jewish History ed. Gay Zola & Marc Dollinger

IMMIGRANT LIFE IN THE OLD AND THE NEW COUNTRY

5.01—LETTER TO THE EDITOR, URGING EASTERN EUROPEAN JEWS NOT TO EMIGRATE, *Ha-Magid*, MAY 3, 1882

(A)

As early as 1882, when Eastern European Jewish immigration to the United States was still relatively small, the experience of new arrivals proved so challenging that they advised their coreligionists against making the journey. In this letter, published in Ha-Magid, a Hebrew-language newspaper published in Prussia and distributed throughout the Pale of Settlement, one Eastern European immigrant implored his brethren to stay in the Old Country.

As a kindness to our oppressed brethren in Russia and for the good of all, I beg of you . . . have mercy on the unfortunates and warn them with all your power of persuasion not to leave their native land to come to America. I see the pain of the afflicted when they come here. My hair stands on end, and I find myself incapable of describing the fate of the poor unfortunates. The "benefactors" who send their poor brethren

to America will need to render an account before the Almighty because of the tragedy they inflict upon them. The number of newcomers grows daily at an alarming rate, and our brethren here can care for only a portion of them. The rest suffer hunger and pain, and there is no one here to open their homes to them . . . therefore, every Jew who can must make it his sacred task to warn the unfortunates that they should not rush like cattle into the valley, where they literally put their lives in danger. . . . Only the young, healthy, unmarried men with a trade may be able, after years of hard labor, to make a living. The others will simply languish. They are already a burden and an embarrassment to those already settled here . . .

Source: Abraham J. Karp, *Golden Door to America: The Jewish Immigrant Experience* (New York: Viking Press, 1976), 83-84.

5.02—ABRAHAM CAHAN'S IMPRESSIONS UPON ARRIVAL IN THE UNITED STATES, "IMAGINARY AMERICA," 1882

Abraham Cahan (1860-1951) grew to become one of the most important and influential figures in New York City immigrant Jewish life. Born in Lithuania, Cahan moved to Vilna at the age of six, where he received a traditional Jewish education before embracing socialism. In 1882, he immigrated to New York City, where he joined the Socialist Party of America and worked to translate texts from the leftist press into Yiddish so that they could be read by Jewish immigrants. Although Cahan would devote his career to Yiddish-language writing and lecturing, he mastered English, received training

from American journalists, and served as an English-language contributor to the Sun and Commercial Advertiser. In 1903, he rose to the editorship of the Yiddish-language Forward, the largest non-English daily newspaper in the United States. In a job he held for forty-three years, Cahan influenced attitudes toward subjects as varied as politics, evidenced in his paper's socialist orientation, and advice on Americanization, as expressed in the "Bintel Brief" advice column. Sixteen years after his 1882 arrival, Cahan reflected on his early days in the United States.

[1882] I set foot on American soil on a scorching day in July, and the first American I saw was an old customs officer, with a white beard and in the blue uniform of his office. The headless men in gray vanished as if at the stroke of a magic wand, but then, gleaming green, fresh and beautiful, not many hundred yards off, was the shore of Staten Island, and, while I was uttering exclamations of enchantment in chorus with my fellow passengers, I asked myself whether my dreams of a meadow had not come true.

Still, pretty as America was, it somehow did not seem to be genuine, and much as I admired the shore I had a lurking impression that it was not the same sort of grass, trees, flowers, sod as in Europe, that it was more or less artificial, flimsy, ephemeral, as if a good European rain-storm could wipe it all off as a wet sponge would a colored picture made with colored chalk on blackboard.

I remember joking of the seeming unreality of things in my new home. "The ice here is not cold," I would say, "The sugar is not sweet and the water is not wet." And a homesick German thereupon added in the words of a famous poet of his that America was a country where "the

birds had no sing [*sic*], the flowers no fragrance and the men no hearts." Why I should have doubted the actuality of things in the New World I do not know. Now that I try to account for that vague, hidden suspicion which the sky and clouds of New York arouse in me, it occurs to me that it may have been due to my deep-rooted notion of America as something so far removed from my world that it must look entirely different from it. If Staten Island had the appearance which its reflections had in the water, if the trees and the cliffs were all upside down, I should have been surprised but satisfied. . . .

When I found myself on the street and my eye fell on an old rickety building, I expressed a feeling akin to surprise. I could only conceive of America as a brand-new country, and everything in it, everything made by man, at least, was to be spick and span, while here was an old house, weatherbeaten and somewhat misshapen with age. How did it get time to get old?

Source: Abraham J. Karp, *Golden Door to America: The Jewish Immigrant Experience* (New York: Viking Press, 1976), 67-68. Originally appeared in the *Advertiser* (August 6, 1898).

5.03—EMMA LAZARUS, "THE NEW COLOSSUS," 1883

In 1875, Edouard René de Laboulaye (1811-1883) announced plans to commission a statue as a gift from the people of France to the United States to mark the following year's American centennial. The statue, formally named *Liberty Enlightening the World*, was not completed on time; only its right arm and hand were displayed at the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. Meanwhile, fundraisers in the United States began a campaign to build the pedestal that would support the statue. They enlisted Emma Lazarus (1849-1887), a Jewish poet, to help stir the strong emotional responses that organizers knew would encourage people to contribute to

the cause. The original version of "The New Colossus" was sold as part of a December 1883 fundraiser, but the effort ultimately failed to attract the funds necessary to build the statue in New York Harbor. With critical support from an 1885 Joseph Pulitzer newspaper campaign that raised \$102,000, construction on the statue continued until its opening in 1886. The words of "The New Colossus" lingered in obscurity until 1903, when the poem was placed on a wall inside the pedestal it helped create.

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame
With conquering limbs astride from land to
land;

Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand

A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes
command

The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame,
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries
she

With silent lips. "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-tossed to
me,

"I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Source: *AJW*, 328. From *The Poems of Emma Lazarus*
(Boston: Twayne, 1888), 2:14-15.

5.04—H. L. SABSOVICH, "THE WOODBINE SETTLEMENT OF THE BARON DE
HIRSCH FUND," DESCRIBING THE CREATION OF A JEWISH AGRICULTURAL
SETTLEMENT IN NEW JERSEY, 1891

Not all Jewish immigrants flocked to urban centers. In 1891, the Baron de Hirsch Fund, based in New York City, created the Woodbine Colony, a 5,300-acre Jewish agricultural settlement in New Jersey designed to ease the suffering of recent Eastern European immigrants to the United States, divert Jewish immigrants away from New York City and Philadelphia, and instill, according to Woodbine superintendent H. L. Sabsovich (1859-1915), "the true American spirit."

The Woodbine Settlement of the Baron de Hirsch Fund

By Prof. H. L. Sabsovich, Superintendent

Introduction.—The Woodbine Colony from a Social Student's standpoint can be considered as one of the successful attempts undertaken in this country to help the needy to help themselves, and stands as an example of what can be done to counteract the cityward tendency of the rural population.

The Aims.—The Baron de Hirsch Fund, of New York City, an organization composed of most prominent persons of the Jewish faith in New York and Philadelphia, called to life by the forced immigration into this country of the East European Jew—the Russian, Galician and

Roumanian—have founded Woodbine with a three-fold purpose in view: Firstly, to relieve the man—the co-religionist suffering from the most barbarous persecutions; secondly, to prevent the increase of over-crowdedness in the large cities, if not to drain the so-called Ghetto of New York and Philadelphia; and thirdly, to instill in the immigrant the true American spirit by providing him, and particularly his children, with the best American schools, and good, healthy housing facilities; by giving to the hungry the possibility of earning a decent living, to the homeless a home.

The Realization of the Aims.—Did the Trustees of the Baron de Hirsch Fund succeed in their undertaking? As a sociological experiment, to be followed by practical philanthropists as well as by the earnest students of the various problems resulting from the modern urban conditions of life, Woodbine has not disappointed them. This is best shown by the following figures:

In 1891, Woodbine represented a tract of 5,300 acres of waste land, covered with scrub-oak, stunted pine, intermixed with black and white oak. Three or four tumble-down structures sheltered a population of 10 or 12 railroad employees. Ten years passed. Thanks to the liberality

5.06—MARY ANTIN, SELECTION DESCRIBING THE AUTHOR'S JOURNEY
TO THE UNITED STATES, *From Plotzk to Boston*, 1899

Mary Antin (1881-1949), an immigration rights activist and author of the well-known autobiography The Promised Land, published a lesser known but still important volume, From Plotzk to Boston, in 1899. Though she actually emigrated from a different town, named Polotzk, her earlier work (the title of which was accidentally misspelled) offered a powerful narrative of her journey to the United States in 1894 and vividly described what it was like for her mother, herself, and her siblings to reunite with their husband and father, already in the United States.

From Plotzk to Boston

By

Mary Antin

Second Edition

Boston, Mass

W. B. Clarke & Co., Park Street Church

1899

In the year 1891, a mighty wave of the emigration movement swept over all parts of Russia, carrying with it a vast number of the Jewish population to the distant shores of the New World—from tyranny to democracy, from darkness to light, from bondage and persecution to freedom, justice and equality. But the great mass knew nothing of these things; they were going to the foreign world in hopes only of earning their bread and worshipping their God in peace. The different currents that directed the course of that wave cannot be here enumerated. Suffice it to say that its power was enormous. All over the land homes were broken up, families separated, lives completely altered, for a common end.

The emigration fever was at its height in Polotzk, my native town, in the central western part of Russia, on the Dvina River. "America" was in everybody's mouth. Business men talked of it over their accounts; the market women made up their quarrels that they might discuss it

from stall to stall; people who had relatives in the famous land went around reading their letters for the enlightenment of less fortunate folks; the one letter-carrier informed the public how many letters arrived from America, and who were the recipients; children played at emigrating; old folks shook their sage heads over the evening fire, and prophesied no good for those who braved the terrors of the sea and the foreign goal beyond it;—all talked of it, but scarcely anybody knew one true fact about this magic land. For book-knowledge was not for them; and a few persons—they were a dressmaker's daughter, and a merchant with his two sons—who had returned from America after a long visit, happened to be endowed with extraordinary imagination, (a faculty closely related to their knowledge of their old countrymen's ignorance), and their descriptions of life across the ocean, given daily, for some months, to eager audiences, surpassed anything in the Arabian Nights. One sad fact threw a shadow over the splendor of the gold-paved, Paradise-like fairyland. The travelers all agreed that Jews lived there in the most shocking impiety.

Driven by a necessity for bettering the family circumstances, and by certain minor forces which cannot now be named, my father began to think seriously of casting his lot with the great stream of emigrants. Many family councils were held before it was agreed that the plan must be carried out. Then came the parting; for it was impossible for the whole family to go at once. I remember it, though I was only eight. It struck me as rather interesting to stand on the platform before the train, with a crowd of friends weeping in sympathy with us, and father waving his hat for our special benefit, and saying—the last words we heard him speak as the train moved off—

"Good-bye, Polotzk, forever!"

[...]

... At this time, cholera was raging in Russia, and was spread by emigrants going to America

in the countries through which they travelled. To stop this danger, measures were taken to make emigration from Russia more difficult than ever. I believe that at all times the crossing of the boundary between Russia and Germany was a source of trouble to Russians, but with a special passport this was easily overcome. When, however, the traveller could not afford to supply himself with one, the boundary was crossed by stealth, and many amusing anecdotes are told of persons who crossed in some disguise, often that of a mujik who said he was going to the town on the German side to sell some goods, carried for the purpose of ensuring the success of the ruse. When several such tricks had been played on the guards it became very risky, and often, when caught, a traveller resorted to stratagem, which is very diverting when afterwards described, but not so at a time when much depends on its success. Some times a paltry bribe secured one a safe passage, and often emigrants were aided by men who made it their profession to help them cross, often suffering themselves to be paid such sums for the service that it paid best to be provided with a special passport.

[...]

We enjoyed everything offered for breakfast, two matzos and two cups of tea apiece—why it was a banquet. After it came the good-byes, as we were going soon. As I told you before, the strangers became fast friends in a short time under the circumstances, so there was real sorrow at the partings, though the joy of the fortunate ones was, in a measure, shared by all.

About one o'clock (we didn't go to dinner—we couldn't eat for excitement) we were called. There were three other families, an old woman, and a young man, among the Jewish passengers, who were going with us, besides some Polish people. We were all hurried through the door we had watched with longing for so long, and were a little way from it when the old woman stopped short and called on the rest to wait.

[...]

We got on a little steamer (the name is too big for it) that was managed by our conductor alone.

Before we had recovered from the shock of the shrill whistle so near us, we were landing in front of a large stone building.

Once more we were under the command of the gendarme. We were ordered to go into a big room crowded with people, and wait till the name of our ship was called. Somebody in the little room called a great many queer names, and many passengers answered the call. At last we heard, "Polynesia!"

We passed in and a great many things were done to our tickets before we were directed to go outside, then to a larger steamer than the one we came in. At every step our tickets were either stamped or punched, or a piece torn off of them, till we stepped upon the steamer's deck. Then we were ordered below. It was dark there, and we didn't like it. In a little while we were called up again, and then we saw before us the great ship that was to carry us to America.

[...]

... And when at last the wheels overhead began to turn and clatter, and the ripples on the water told us that the "Polynesia" had started on her journey, which was not noticeable from any other sign, I felt only a sense of happiness. I mistrusted nothing.

[...]

Nobody expected seasickness as soon as it seized us. All slept quietly the whole night, not knowing any difference between being on land or at sea. About five o'clock I woke up, and then I felt and heard the sea. A very disagreeable smell came from it, and I knew it was disturbed by the rocking of the ship. Oh, how wretched it made us! From side to side it went rocking, rocking. Ugh! Many of the passengers are very sick indeed, they suffer terribly. We are all awake now, and wonder if we, too, will be so sick. Some children are crying, at intervals. There is nobody to comfort them—all are so miserable. Oh, I am so sick! I'm dizzy; everything is going round and round before my eyes—Oh-h-h!

I can't even begin to tell of the suffering of the next few hours. Then I thought I would feel better if I could go on deck. Somehow, I got down

(we had upper berths) and, supporting myself against the walls, I came on deck. But it was worse. The green water, tossing up the white foam, rocking all around, as far as I dared to look, was frightful to me then. So I crawled back as well as I could, and nobody else tried to go out.

By and by the doctor and the steward came. The doctor asked each passenger if they were well, but only smiled when all begged for some medicine to take away the dreadful suffering. To those who suffered from anything besides seasickness he sent medicine and special food later on. His companion appointed one of the men passengers for every twelve or fifteen to carry the meals from the kitchen, giving them cards to get it with. For our group a young German was appointed, who was making the journey for the second time, with his mother and sister. We were great friends with them during the journey.

The doctor went away soon, leaving the sufferers in the same sad condition. At twelve, a sailor announced that dinner was ready, and the man brought it—large tin pails and basins of soup, meat, cabbage, potatoes, and pudding (the last was allowed only once a week); and almost all of it was thrown away, as only a few men ate. The rest couldn't bear even the smell of food. It was the same with the supper at six o'clock. At three milk had been brought for the babies, and brown bread (a treat) with coffee for the rest. But after supper the daily allowance of fresh water was brought, and this soon disappeared and more called for, which was refused, although we lived on water alone for a week.

[...]

Oh, the sad mistake! For six days longer we remain in our berths, miserable and unable to eat. It is a long fast, hardly interrupted, during which we know that the weather is unchanged, the sky dark, the sea stormy.

The morning was glorious. It was the eighth of May, the seventeenth day after we left Hamburg. The sky was clear and blue, the sun shone brightly, as if to congratulate us that we had

safely crossed the stormy sea, and to apologize for having kept away from us so long. The sea had lost its fury; it was almost as quiet as it had been at Hamburg before we started, and its color was a beautiful greenish blue. Birds were all the time in the air, and it was worth while to live merely to hear their songs. And soon, oh joyful sight! we saw the tops of two trees!

What a shout there rose! Everyone pointed out the welcome sight to everybody else, as if they did not see it. All eyes were fixed on it as if they saw a miracle. And this was only the beginning of the joys of the day!

What confusion there was! Some were flying up the stairs to the upper deck, some were tearing down to the lower one, others were running in and out of the cabins, some were in all parts of the ship in one minute, and all were talking and laughing and getting in somebody's way. Such excitement, such joy! We had seen two trees!

Then steamers and boats of all kinds passed by, in all directions. We shouted, and the men stood up in the boats and returned the greeting, waving their hats. We were as glad to see them as if they were old friends of ours.

Oh, what a beautiful scene! No corner of the earth is half so fair as the lovely picture before us. It came to view suddenly,—a green field, a real field with grass on it, and large houses, and the dearest hens and little chickens in all the world, and trees, and birds, and people at work. . . .

It was about three hours since we saw the first landmarks, when a number of men came on board, from a little steamer, and examined the passengers to see if they were properly vaccinated (we had been vaccinated on the "Polynesia"), and pronounced everyone all right. Then they went away, except one man who remained. An hour later we saw the wharves.

Before the ship had fully stopped, the climax of our joy was reached. One of us espied the figure and face we had longed to see for three long years. In a moment five passengers on the "Polynesia" were crying, "Papa," and gesticulating, and laughing, and hugging one another, and going wild altogether. All the rest were roused by our

excitement, and came to see our father. He recognized us as soon as we him, and stood apart on the wharf not knowing what to do, I thought.

What followed was slow torture. Like mad things we ran about where there was room, unable to stand still as long as we were on the ship and he on shore. To have crossed the ocean only to come within a few yards of him, unable to get nearer till all the fuss was over, was dreadful enough. But to hear other passengers called who had no reason for hurry, while we were left among the last, was unendurable.

Oh, dear! Why can't we get off the hateful ship? Why can't papa come to us? Why so many ceremonies at the landing?

[...]

Still the ceremonies went on. Each person was asked a hundred or so stupid questions, and all their answers were written down by a very slow man. The baggage had to be examined, the tickets, and a hundred other things done before anyone was allowed to step ashore, all to keep us back as long as possible.

Now imagine yourself parting with all you love, believing it to be a parting for life; breaking

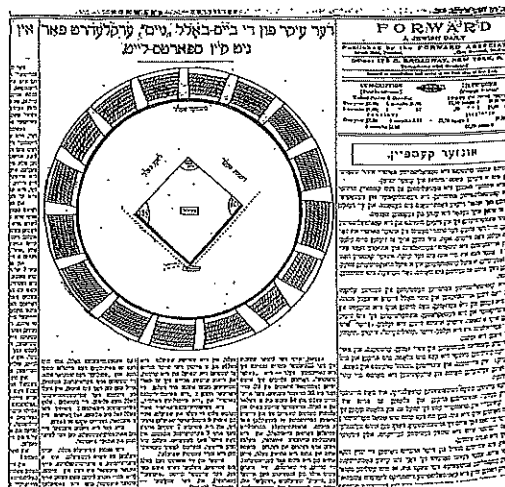
up your home, selling the things that years have made dear to you; starting on a journey without the least experience in travelling, in the face of many inconveniences on account of the want of sufficient money; being met with disappointment where it was not to be expected; with rough treatment everywhere, till you are forced to go and make friends for yourself among strangers; being obliged to sell some of your most necessary things to pay bills you did not willingly incur; being mistrusted and searched, then half starved, and lodged in common with a multitude of strangers; suffering the miseries of seasickness, the disturbances and alarms of a stormy sea for sixteen days; and then stand within a few yards of him for whom you did all this, unable to even speak to him easily. How do you feel?

Oh, it's our turn at last! We are questioned, examined, and dismissed! A rush over the planks on one side, over the ground on the other, six wild beings cling to each other, bound by a common bond of tender joy, and the long parting is at an END.

Source: SC-349, AJA.

5.07—BASEBALL, *Forward*, AUGUST 27, 1909

In a 1909 issue of the Yiddish-language socialist Der Forverts (Forward), the most important and widest circulating newspaper among American Jews, editors included an image of an American baseball diamond, with each of the fielding positions annotated in Yiddish. By learning the rules of America's pastime, immigrant Jews furthered their acculturation to the United States, strengthening their American identities by rallying around their local sports franchises.



Source: *Forward*, August 27, 1909. Reprinted courtesy of the publisher.