

Jews and the Civil War

JONATHAN D.
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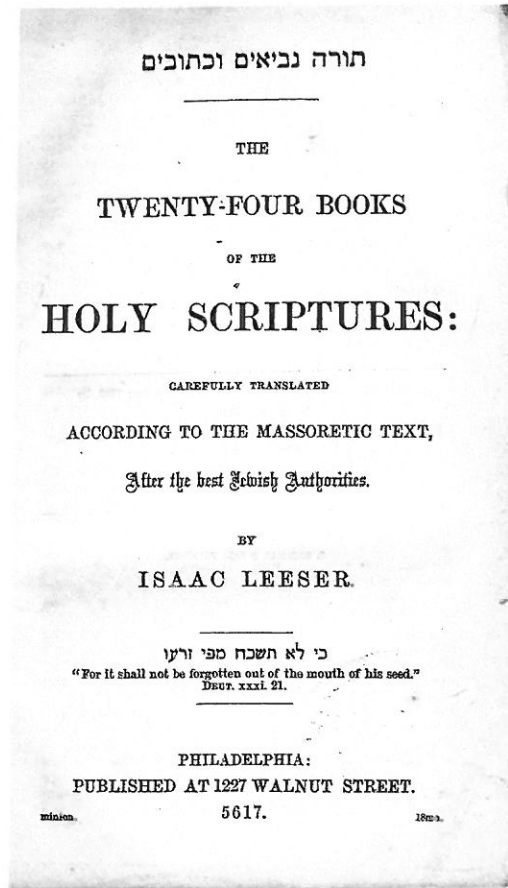
BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY

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The Civil War that divided the nation as a whole divided American Jewry as well. The bulk of America's 150,000 Jews, most of them new immigrants, lived in the North and supported the Union. The rest, something over 25,000 Jews, lived in the South and supported the Confederacy. Some on both sides, including the foremost Jewish religious leaders of the day, Isaac Leeser and Isaac Mayer Wise, would have compromised over slavery or acquiesced to secession rather than going to war in defense of principle. They sought to promote peace.

Jews, as this publication demonstrates, fought on both sides of the Civil War. Some 8,000 to 10,000 Jews, mostly recent immigrants, donned uniforms and at least fifty rose through the ranks to become officers. Religion generally posed no barrier to military promotion. Indeed, one Union officer actually won his position *because* he was a Jew. Observing that "we have not yet appointed a Hebrew," Abraham Lincoln in 1862 ordered the secretary of war to assign C. M. Levy, the son-in-law of Rabbi Morris Raphall of New York, to the post of assistant quarter-master, with the rank of captain.

In the Confederacy, of course, one of the most brilliant and accomplished Jews of the nineteenth century, Judah P. Benjamin, reached the



Previous Page, 1.
Photograph of Rabbi
Isaac Mayer Wise, Landy,
Cincinnati, Ohio.

Isaac Mayer Wise (1819–1899) immigrated to America from Bohemia in 1846. His first American pulpit, in Albany, N.Y., ended when he was punched by the congregation's president in front of the ark on Rosh Hashanah as he sought to lead services. The traditionalists in the congregation disapproved of his innovations, which included a mixed-sex choir and modifications to various rituals. A moderate within the Reform camp who preferred unity to radicalism, Wise became a leading exponent of Reform Judaism. Cincinnati proved more amenable than Albany; from 1854, he served as rabbi of B'nai Yeshurun Congregation there, and later founded Hebrew Union College, the first permanent rabbinical seminary in the United States.

Collection of Yeshiva University
Museum.

2.
Isaac Leeser, *The Twenty-Four Books of the Holy Scriptures*, 1853.

At the age of 18, Isaac Leeser (1806–1868) immigrated to America from Münster in Westphalia at the invitation of an uncle who had settled in Richmond. After an initial apprenticeship in the dry goods business, Leeser found his calling when he wrote a stirring rebuttal of a missionary's critique of Judaism. Invited to serve as cantor of Mikveh Israel in Philadelphia, Leeser soon began to use his pulpit extensively, becoming the leading public exponent of traditional Judaism in mid-nineteenth-century America. His *Twenty-Four Books of the Holy Scriptures* (begun in 1838 and published in 1853) was the first complete English-language translation of the Bible made for American Jewry. Leeser sought to provide an alternative to the then ubiquitous King James Version, substituting phrasing and interpretation that accorded with Jewish understandings of the text. Leeser's Bible, as it was called, soon became the standard Bible for English-speaking Jews in America.

American Jewish Historical Society.

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1864.

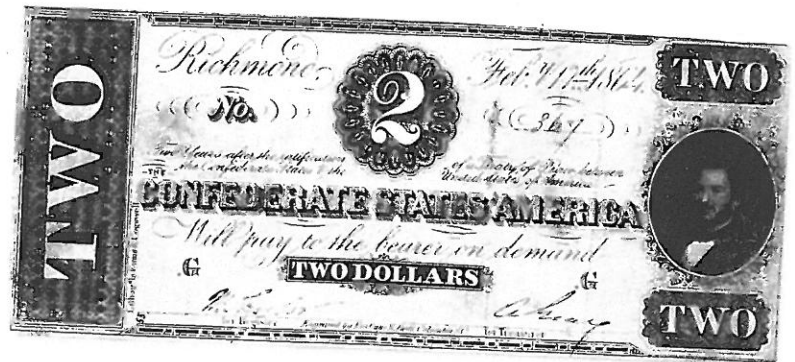
is note pictures
dah P. Benjamin, who
rved as Confederate
ttorney general, secretary
f war, and secretary of state
from 1861 to 1865. That a
Jew in this period could
serve in an official cabinet
position (let alone three) was
remarkable; that his visage
should adorn the currency
of a would-be state was
unprecedented. Of course,
Benjamin was the subject of
much antisemitic invective.
He never denied his Jewish
identity and sometimes
proudly defended it. In a
famous exchange when
Benjamin served in the U.S.
Senate, the abolitionist
senator Benjamin Wade
of Ohio denounced
Benjamin as an "Israelite
with Egyptian principles,"
to which Benjamin
reportedly responded: "It
is true that I am a Jew,
and when my ancestors
were receiving their Ten
Commandments from the
immediate Deity, amidst the
thundering and lightnings
of Mt. Sinai, the ancestors
of my opponent were
herding swine in the forests
of Great Britain."

From the collection of Rabbi
Joseph S. Topek.

pinnacle of power. He served at different times as the Confederacy's attorney general, secretary of war, and secretary of state; despite his intermarriage and complete lack of personal religious observance, Benjamin always acknowledged his Judaism and always was known as a Jew. Indeed, Senator Benjamin F. Wade of Ohio once memorably described him as an "Israelite with Egyptian principles."

On the home front, too, Jews across the country actively supported their comrades in arms. Men contributed thousands of dollars to relief activities. Women sewed clothes, prepared bandages, tended the wounded, staffed booths and tables at "sanitary fairs," and collected funds for the needy.

Whatever pride Jews took in the military and civilian achievements of their fellow Jews was offset by the sadness, anger, and bewilderment engendered by the sectional cleavage, especially as it pitted Jew against Jew and family members against one another. As the invading Northern armies moved into the South, such problems multiplied. One Southern Jew found his house guarded by two Jewish soldiers from Ohio. "They felt very sorry for us," he recalled, "but could afford us no help." Another memoirist related the stir that took place when Northern soldiers attended worship services at the synagogue in Natchez, Mississippi. Still another account, this one in a contemporary letter, described how frightened some local Jews in Memphis, Tennessee, became when Colonel Spiegel



of Ohio, dressed in full Northern military regalia, wished them a "Happy Sabbath" and inquired as to where he might find a kosher lunch.

Maintaining traditional Jewish observances under wartime conditions proved immensely difficult, though commensurately satisfying for those who lived up to the challenge. Two brothers named Levy who fought for the Confederacy reputedly "observed their religion faithfully . . . never even eating forbidden food." The awe with which this was recounted at the time that one of the brothers was killed suggests that such scrupulousness was extremely rare. The same was true of the Northern soldier who described for readers of the *Jewish Messenger* how Jewish men in his outfit met for worship each Saturday on the outskirts of their camp in the Virginia forests. More commonly, Jewish soldiers strove to observe Judaism's major annual holidays, notably Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur in the fall as well as Passover in the spring. One Jewish soldier planned to journey twelve miles to attend High Holiday services in Norfolk, then in Union hands. Two years later, Jews stationed near Vicksburg elected a young rabbi, Max del Banco, to conduct High Holiday services especially for them (the unfortunate rabbi was killed in a steamboat accident on his way back home). Many other soldiers received passes for the holidays. General Robert E. Lee, himself a committed Christian, pledged in 1864 to do all in his power "to facilitate the observance of the duties of their religion by the Israelites in the army," and to allow them "every indulgence consistent with safety and discipline."

We possess two lengthy accounts, one from the Union and one from the Confederacy, concerning the observance of Passover in 1862—a sure sign of how significant commemoration of the holiday of freedom was to Jews on both sides of the struggle. The Southern soldiers purchased the requisite matzo in Charleston and cooked a fine traditional dinner, complete with "a pound and a half of fresh kosher beef." The Northern soldiers, stationed in West Virginia, obtained from Cincinnati some of the supplies that they needed for their seder, and then went out and foraged for the rest. "We consecrated and offered up to the ever-loving God of Israel our prayers and sacrifice . . .," one of the participants recalled four years later, "there is no occasion in my life that gives me

Address of Colonel Spiegle.

COLONEL SPIEGLE'S ADDRESS TO THE 120th REG.
 I have to-day been informed that some soldiers of this Regiment have, at different times, expressed sentiments unbecomingly liberal and unbecomingly a soldier of the Union Army, who is about the latter end of the 19th century, saying that if the Regiment should ever have to go into battle or some event, not half of the men would draw a gun for their duty—abolition war, etc. When I heard of this I thought it almost impossible that any soldier of the 120th Regiment, which so nobly stood up at the battle of Vicksburg and Fort Adams, would do this. You may see the stars and stripes flag planted by the 120th, were so proudly, succeeding the flag of the 120th, were born banners of Fort Adams, would make use of language disgraceful to the Regiment, disloyal to the cause which we are enlisted. If there is one man in the Regiment who would refuse to shoot at a rebel, in an engagement, let him step three paces to the front to order that a traitor, such talk will only strengthen the rebels, disgrace the Regiment, and further defer that for which we are all longing, an honorable Peace. If any of our policy of the administration, let us hope that those at every is wrong will in time, by the American people, be worldwide and noble reputation of the American Volunteer Soldier, who stands clanked with the most illustrious and brave in the brave world—our's in the picture of Union—tranquillity, peace and happiness to our country—knowing and appreciating our position were not the most hard and high-minded thoughts and expressions can emanate from your hearts and lips. Men! be true, your country, your friends at home, your own and my sake, do not, either by thought, expression, or willful action, disgrace yourselves, but by the Government, right or wrong. You may see do so honorable life and, which, by correct use of some may be approved, but from assured it will see long come every day in shame and disgust over your own acts of violating your soldier's oath. While you are in the service, be soldiers in every sense of the word, so that while in private life, you can ever be respected and honorable citizens.

Delivered on Drews Parade, Monday, Feb. 22, 1863.
 This patriotic address of Col. Spiegle has been followed by others of a like character, and the 120th Ohio now have the commendations of their Division Commander, Gen. Austerlitz, as one of the best disciplined and most soldier-like Regiments in his Division. For intelligence and bravery, the soldiers of the 120th have ever stood as high as any Regiment in the army, and we have always had the most unbounded confidence in their patriotism, integrity, gallantry and heroism. Bad and dark days have they seen, but we believe a bright and brilliant future is before them.



4. Speech of Marcus Spiegel, February 22, 1863.

In this speech, Marcus Spiegel exhorted his troops disgruntled by the Emancipation Proclamation to serve the Union cause with zeal; it was published in its entirety in the *Wooster [Ohio] Republican*, May 7, 1863:

If there is one man in the Regiment who would refuse to shoot at a rebel . . . let him step three paces to the front in order that he can be marked as a coward and receive the

reward of a traitor. Such talk: will only strengthen the rebels, disgrace the Regiment, and further defer that, for which we are all longing, an honorable Peace. . . . Men! for God's, your country's, your friends at home, your own and my sake, do not, either by thoughts, expressions, or willful actions, disgrace yourselves. . . . [B]e soldiers in every sense of the word. . . .

Courtesy of the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio (AmericanJewishArchives.org), with the permission of Jean Powers Soman.

5. Photograph of Colonel Marcus M. Spiegel, 1862.

Marcus M. Spiegel, a German Jewish immigrant, would rise to the rank of full colonel before dying from combat wounds inflicted at the Red River campaign in May 1864. Spiegel's extensive letters, mostly addressed to his wife

and family, provide rare and poignant insight into the daily life of a Civil War Jewish soldier and documents the author's growing belief that the abolition of slavery should be the purpose of the war. Original photograph is owned by Jean Powers Soman and is in the private collection of Jean Powers Soman.

more pleasure and satisfaction than when I remember the celebration of Passover of 1862."

Given the strong Evangelical character of some Civil War units and the rapidity with which some Jews had abandoned Jewish practices following their immigration, it comes as no surprise that the Civil War also found many Jews who, while serving as soldiers, hid their Jewish identities, maintaining no Jewish rituals whatsoever. Isaac Leeser, who in 1864 visited soldiers recovering from wounds, found that some "would scarcely confess their Jewish origin" and "even refused prayer-books when tendered to them." In the military as in civilian life, American Judaism thus covered a broad spectrum, embracing the meticulously observant, the totally nonobservant, and all points in between.

Two extraordinary episodes distinguished the Northern Jewish experience during the Civil War, both of long-lasting significance. The first was the battle to amend the military chaplaincy law, passed in 1861, that stipulated that a regimental chaplain be "a regular ordained minister of some Christian denomination." An amendment to substitute the more inclusive phrase "of some religious society" had been voted down; significantly, the Confederate law, which employed the phrase "minister of religion," was more inclusive.

Protestant chaplains, and, to the extent that they could, Catholics, made the most of their opportunity to influence warring troops religiously. At their best, these chaplains tended to soldiers' spiritual needs,

6.
Felix Koshers Dining Saloon
token, 1863.

With the war, coins were hoarded and became scarce. Privately issued tokens, with both patriotic and advertising messages, soon filled the gap. Civil War tokens were profitable to the issuer as they were widely accepted as pennies. More than 10,000 varieties of tokens have been recorded for everything from undertakers to bars. Tokens appeared in several languages, but even though many Jewish merchants issued them, only the Felix Koshers Dining Saloon tokens have Hebrew letters. The "Felix," located at 256 Broadway in New York, may have been named for the French Jew Rachel Felix, the world's foremost tragic actress. Collection of Robert Marcus.



2nd

of our staying here. Would you ^{2nd} or me? Tell dear at this
time must at any rate make arrangements of
sending me your Picture of my dear
Hamlin, Lizzie, Mosey & Hattie. The news
we rec^d from the seat of War this evening
is very flattering and if true, will help a
great deal to our cause, would to God
it were true, I would really like to see
this war to an End & once more be per-
mitted to enjoy the peaceful bliss & happiness
of enjoying the company of my dear wife
and sweet children.
I met to day a Lt Bishop a

7.
Letter from Marcus Spiegel,
Suffolk, Virginia, to his wife,
Caroline, September 1, 1862.

The letter reads in part:

I met to day a Lieutenant
Biroker [?], a Yehuday from
Alzei [Alzey, a German town
near Abenheim], who shed
tears when he heard my
name. He and his father were

great friends of my dear
father. He told me that the
25th of this month is Rosh
Hashonah and the 4th [of]
next month Yom Cipur. He
says there is a Synagoge in
Norfolk 12 miles from here.
I shall go at all events. You
and the children must keep
both; keep the children out
of School the 25 and 26 and
3rd and 4th for my sake and

let us pray to the Lord God of
Israel for the deliverance of
this once happy Country and
the Peaceful enjoyment of our
family Circle at the End of this
unhappy War. God Bless you
all. Ever Your Marcus

Courtesy of the Jacob Rader Marcus
Center of the American Jewish
Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio
(AmericanJewishArchives.org), with
the permission of Jean Powers Soman.



8.
**Photograph of Arnold
Fischel, n.d.**

In July 1861, the U.S. Congress adopted legislation permitting the officers in each regiment of the Union army to designate as chaplain "a regularly ordained minister of some Christian denomination." When it was discovered that a Pennsylvania regiment had elected as its chaplain Michael Allen, who was not only a Jew but also not an ordained minister, Allen was pressured to resign. The defiant regiment then elected an ordained rabbi, Rev. Arnold Fischel of New York's Congregation Shearith Israel, whose subsequent rejection by the authorities created a test case on religious grounds. Fischel lobbied President Lincoln directly, resulting in the president's intervention to open the military chaplaincy to ordained non-Christian clerics.

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helped them to overcome personal and family problems, and modeled virtuous and courageous behavior under fire. Jewish chaplains, by contrast, were officially barred from the field, greatly disadvantaging Jewish soldiers and, in effect, delegitimizing the Jewish faith.

At least two elected Jewish chaplains (one of whom was not "regularly ordained") were rejected on account of the discriminatory law, setting off a national debate involving Christians and Jews alike. Although many supported a change in the law, one Evangelical paper complained that if the law were changed, "one might despise and reject the Savior of men . . . and yet be a fit minister of religion." It warned that "Mormon debauchees, Chinese priests, and Indian conjurors" would stand next in line for government recognition—a tacit admission that the central issue under debate concerned the religious rights of non-Christians.

To further the Jewish cause, one of the rejected chaplains, Rev. Arnold Fischel, went to Washington at the behest of the Board of Delegates of American Israelites to lobby personally on behalf of a change in the chaplaincy law, and President Lincoln promised him support. After substantial wrangling, a revised bill that construed "some Christian denomination" in the original legislation to read "some religious denomination" became law on July 17, 1862. This represented a major political victory for the Jewish community and remains a landmark in the legal recognition of America's non-Christian faiths. In this case, as in so many others, American religious liberty was broadened by the demands of those who stood outside the American religious mainstream.

The second episode involving Jews was far uglier. On December 17, 1862, a general order went out from the headquarters of General Ulysses S. Grant, who at the time was commander of the Department of the Tennessee moving south toward Vicksburg, which read as follows:

1. The Jews, as a class, violating every regulation of trade established by the Treasury Department, and also Department orders, are hereby expelled from the Department.
2. Within twenty-four hours from the receipt of this order by Post Commanders, they will see that all of this class of people are

furnished with passes and required to leave, and any one returning after such notification, will be arrested and held in confinement until an opportunity occurs of sending them out as prisoners unless furnished with permits from these Head Quarters.

3. No permits will be given these people to visit Head Quarters for the purpose of making personal application for trade permits.

By Order of Maj. Gen. U.S. Grant

Known as "the most sweeping anti-Jewish legislation in all American history," General Orders No. 11, as it came to be called, blamed "Jews, as a class" for the widespread smuggling and cotton speculation that affected the entire area under Grant's command. Numbers of Jews in northern Mississippi and Paducah, Kentucky, were forcibly expelled as a result of the order; some were refused rail transportation and had to travel on foot, and at least one was briefly jailed.

Historians have since determined that, as Stephen V. Ash concluded, "Jews were neither the most numerous nor the most iniquitous of the legion of sharpers following the army: their peccadilloes were certainly no greater than the misdeeds of any number of crooked Yankees, Treasury agents and army officers." Indeed, a group of Cincinnati Jewish merchants formed a cotton speculating partnership with Grant's own father, Jesse Grant. At the time, however, Jews were "easily identifiable by their manners, accents, and surnames," and also stigmatized by age-old stereotypes, so that they came to symbolize *all* who were attempting to profit from wartime speculation and cross-border trading. The tensions and frustrations of war, which elsewhere found their outlet in persecutions of Catholics and African Americans, were directed in this case at "Jews as a class."

For their part, Jews lost no time in protesting Grant's order. Not only did they send letters and telegrams to the White House, but one of those expelled, Cesar Kaskel of Paducah, rushed down to Washington and, accompanied by Cincinnati's Congressman John A. Gurley, went directly to President Lincoln's office. The president turned out to know nothing of

9.

Letter from Rabbi Arnold Fischel in New York to Rabbi Sabato Morais in Philadelphia, June 1860.

In this letter, Arnold Fischel (1830-1894), rabbi of New York's Shearith Israel Congregation, writes to urge Philadelphia's Rabbi Sabato Morais (1823-1897) to inform Jacob Raphael de Cordova (1808-1868), who was about to give a lecture "on the present condition of Jews in Civilised Countries," about conditions in Italy. Fischel's successful fight to gain the right for Jews to serve as chaplains in the Union Army lay two years in the future. Jamaican-born de Cordova was one of the founders of the city of Waco, Texas, and a tireless promoter of migration to that state.

Shapell Manuscript Collection (shapell.org).

New York June 1860.

My dear Sir,

My friend, Mr. R. de Cordova, is preparing a lecture on the present condition of Jews in civilized countries, in which he intends to give a truthful account of their social and political position in Europe as well as in America. As I himself have not had an opportunity of learning what their condition is in Italy, you will confer a personal favor on me by affording him the required information in regard to your country.

Believe me very truly

Arnold Fischel
Wishes

Rabbi Morais

Fischel

Approved
Report of Rev. Dr. Proctor

Washington April 3. 1862

Dear Sir,

I send you herewith a brief report of my mission with the request to lay it before the Board of Directors. In accordance with the wishes expressed at their Meeting in December 1861, I undertook the hazardous task of officiating as Chaplain to the Jewish soldiers on the Potomac, and agitating the repeal of the Act of Congress by which Jewish Ministers are excluded from the office of Chaplain in the U. S. Army. Shortly after my arrival in Washington, I had an interview with the President, delivered to him the letter of the Board, and requested him to use his influence for the repeal of the law, which excluded from office a class of citizens, who by the constitution are entitled to complete political equality. The President did not hesitate to express his full concurrence in my views, and promised that he would take the matter into serious consideration. A day or two after, he sent me a note in which he stated that he would recommend Congress to modify the law to which the Treaty objected, and subsequently submitted to the Military Committee of the Senate and the House the two following articles for their adoption, viz.

1. That so much of section nine of Chapter nine, approved July 22, 1861, and of section 7 Chapter 42 approved August 3, 1861 as require Army Chaplains to be of some "Christian denomination" be, and they are hereby repealed.
2. That in such of the permanent hospitals as the President may deem it necessary he may appoint one or more Chaplains of different denominations.

10.
**Report of the Reverend
Dr. Arnold Fischel to the
Board of Delegates of
American Israelites,
April 3, 1862.**

Lincoln promised Rev. Arnold Fischel at their meeting and in their subsequent correspondence that he would submit a new law to Congress "broad enough to cover what is desired by you in behalf of the Israelites." In this report to the Board of Delegates of American Israelites, Fischel writes that the bill will enable the president to appoint an adequate number of Jewish chaplains. Lincoln was as good as his word. On July 17, 1862, after a lobbying campaign by Fischel and the American Jewish community, Congress adopted Lincoln's proposed amendments to the law to allow "a regularly ordained minister of some religious denomination" to serve as chaplain, removing the former restriction to admit Christian clergy only.
American Jewish Historical Society.

the order, which he had never seen. According to a revealing but unverifiable later tradition, he resorted to biblical imagery in his interview with Kaskel, a reminder of how steeped Lincoln was in the Bible and how many nineteenth-century Americans linked Jews to Ancient Israel, and America to the Promised Land:

LINCOLN: And so the children of Israel were driven from the happy land of Canaan?

KASKEL: Yes, and that is why we have come unto Father Abraham's bosom, asking protection.

LINCOLN: And this protection they shall have at once.

Even if no such conversation actually took place, Lincoln did instantly command the general-in-chief of the Army, Henry Halleck, to countermand General Orders No. 11. "If such an order has been issued," Halleck telegraphed Grant on January 4, "it will be immediately revoked." In a follow-up meeting with Jewish leaders, including Rabbis Wise and Lilienthal, who had rushed to Washington to support Kaskel, Lincoln reiterated that "to condemn a class is, to say the least, to wrong the good with the bad. I do not like to hear a class or nationality condemned on account of a few sinners." After a few weeks of recriminations and a failed move by congressional opponents to censure Grant, the whole issue blew over.

Its implications, though, were profound. On the one hand, the episode reminded Jews that hoary prejudices against them remained alive—even in America. In fact, a dramatic upsurge in many forms of anti-Jewish intolerance, in the North as well as in the South, characterized the Civil War era, Grant's order being the most notorious but far from the only example. On the other hand, the episode also empowered Jews with the knowledge that they could fight back against bigotry and win—even against a prominent general. The overturning of Grant's order, especially on top of the victory in the chaplaincy affair, appreciably strengthened the Jewish community and increased its self-confidence. The successes also validated an activist Jewish communal policy that based claims to

Among his most admired discourses were those of 1861, when he spoke so earnestly, and in such a patriotic spirit, upon the duties of Jewish citizens toward the Union.

Shortly after 1862, he returned to Holland where he continued to reside with his mother, and there he died.

In his letter of December 11, 1861, to Mr. Henry I. Hart, President of the Board, Dr. Fischel writes:

Having obtained important letters of introduction to Senators, I started for Washington, where I arrived on Tuesday evening, and went at once to work to obtain an interview with the President. All the influential gentlemen with whom I spoke on the subject, assured me that it would be impossible for me to get an audience, as the President's time was altogether taken up with public business. The same opinion was expressed by Mr. Nicolay, his private Secretary, who even told me that Mr. Lincoln would not have time to read the letter in which I solicited an interview, and that there would be little chance for me to see him before the adjournment of Congress; that, in fact, none but Cabinet Ministers, Senators and army officers could be admitted. Seeing that I could not obtain admission by the usual process, I had to devise a plan whereby the subject could be at once brought under the notice of the President, and in this I was perfectly successful. I called this morning at ten o'clock at the White House, where hundreds of people were anxiously waiting for admission, some of whom told me that they had been for three days awaiting their turn. I was, nevertheless, at once invited to his room and was received with marked courtesy. After having read the letter of the Board and delivered to him several letters of introduction, he questioned me on various matters connected with this subject and then told me that he fully admitted the justice of my remarks, that he believed the exclusion of Jewish chaplains to have been altogether unintentional on the part of Congress, and agreed that something ought to be done to meet this case. I suggested that he might do for Jewish, what he had done for the Christian volunteers, and take upon himself the responsibility of appointing Jewish chaplains for the hospitals. He replied that he had done that at a time when Congress was not in session, deeming the subject to require immediate attention, but that, after the meeting of Congress, he would not be justified in taking the responsibility upon himself. Finally, he told me that it was the first time this subject had been brought under his notice, that it was altogether

new to him, that he would take the subject into serious consideration, that I should call again to-morrow morning, and if he had five minutes to spare he would receive me and let me know his views. I thanked him for his kind reception, and expressed to him my best wishes for his welfare. In the course of my remarks I gave him clearly to understand that I came to him not as an office-seeker but to contend for the principle of religious liberty, for the constitutional rights of the Jewish community, and for the welfare of the Jewish volunteers, which he seemed fully to appreciate.

This afternoon I shall visit the hospitals and camps and as soon as I have anything of importance to communicate, I will write to you at once. In the meantime, you will agree with me that the two days I have been at work here have not been without useful results.

On December 13, he writes to Mr. Hart:

You have no doubt received my first letter in which I gave the substance of my interview with the President. As he wished me to call again on the following day, I readily availed myself of his invitation, but, much to my regret, he was unable to see me, as he had important public business to transact with the Governor of Indiana and foreign ambassadors. He sent me, however, a note in which he stated that "he is not forgetting my case and will lay it before the Cabinet to-day (Friday)." It may be that some days will elapse before I know the result of their deliberations. At all events, I have succeeded in obtaining the favorable consideration of the President, which I entirely attribute to the excellent letters of introduction submitted to him. All the public officers, from the President down to the Members of Congress, have too much to occupy their attention, so that unless an extraordinary amount of political influence is brought to bear upon them, you may for weeks solicit an interview without obtaining it. Under these circumstances, I consider myself fortunate in having accomplished so much in a few days.

On December 14, the President addressed Dr. Fischel as follows:

EXECUTIVE MANSION, Dec. 14, 1861.

REV. DR. A. FISCHEL.

My Dear Sir—I find there are several particulars in which the present law in regard to chaplains is supposed to be deficient, all which I now design presenting to the appropriate Committee of

11. Letter from Arnold Fischel recounting his conversation with President Lincoln, December 11, 1861.

The strong protest in the Jewish press to the chaplaincy restriction led the YMCA and other organizations to pressure Congress to keep the chaplaincy restricted only to Christian clergy. The Board of Delegates of American Israelites engaged Rev. Arnold Fischel to persuade Abraham

Lincoln to reverse the law. Fischel and Lincoln met on December 11, 1861. Fischel explained that his purpose was to "contend for the principle of religious liberty, for the constitutional rights of the Jewish community, and for the welfare of the Jewish volunteers." He reported back to the board that Lincoln asked questions and "agreed that something ought to be done." American Jewish Historical Society.

12. Letter from B'nai B'rith Missouri Lodge to President Lincoln protesting Grant's General Orders No. 11, 1863.

News of Grant's General Orders No. 11 galvanized Jews around the country into protest, such as this letter from the Missouri Lodge of B'nai Brith: "In the name of the thousands of our Brethren and our children who have died and are now willingly sacrificing their lives and fortunes for the

Union and the suppression of this rebellion...we enter our solemn Protest against this Order, and ask of you [the President]...to annul that Order and to protect the liberties of your humblest constituents: Jews were by no means alone in protesting the law. Many Northern towns, fearing restrictions on religious liberty, sent petitions supporting a change in the law. American Jewish Historical Society.

United Order of One Brotherhood Missouri Lodge
St. Louis, Jan 5, 1863.
To His Excellency
Abraham Lincoln
President U. S.

Sir

An Order, Expelling and ostracising all Jews, as a class has been issued by Maj. Genl U.S. Grant and has been enforced at Holly Springs, Trenton, Cornith, Paducah, Jackson and other places.

In the name of that class of loyal citizens of these U. S. which we in part represent.

In the name of hundreds, who have been driven from their homes, deprived of their liberty and injured in their property without having violated any law or regulation.

In the name of the thousands of our Brethren and our children who have died and are now willingly sacrificing their lives and fortunes for the Union and the suppression of this rebellion.

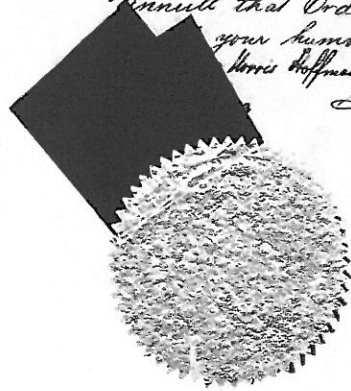
In the name of religious liberty, of justice and humanity, we enter our solemn Protest against this Order, and act of you - the Defender & Protector of the Constitution - to annul that Order and to protect the liberties

your humblest constituents

Horris Hoffman

Henry Kuttner

President





13.
Bust of General Robert E. Lee by Moses Jacob Ezekiel.

Moses Ezekiel (1844–1917), from a poor Richmond, Virginia, family, attended the Virginia Military Institute (VMI) as its first Jewish cadet. He fought at the Battle of New Market and in the trenches defending his native city. After the war Ezekiel came to the attention of Robert E. Lee, then president of Washington College, who encouraged his artistic talents. ("I hope you will be an artist," Lee wrote to Ezekiel, "as it seems to me you are cut out for one.") Ezekiel worked for much of his career as a sculptor in Rome, but also designed several monuments memorializing the Confederacy. This rare small version of his bust of Lee reflects the romantic style that brought Ezekiel great success, his deep loyalty to Virginia, and the gratitude he felt toward the subject.

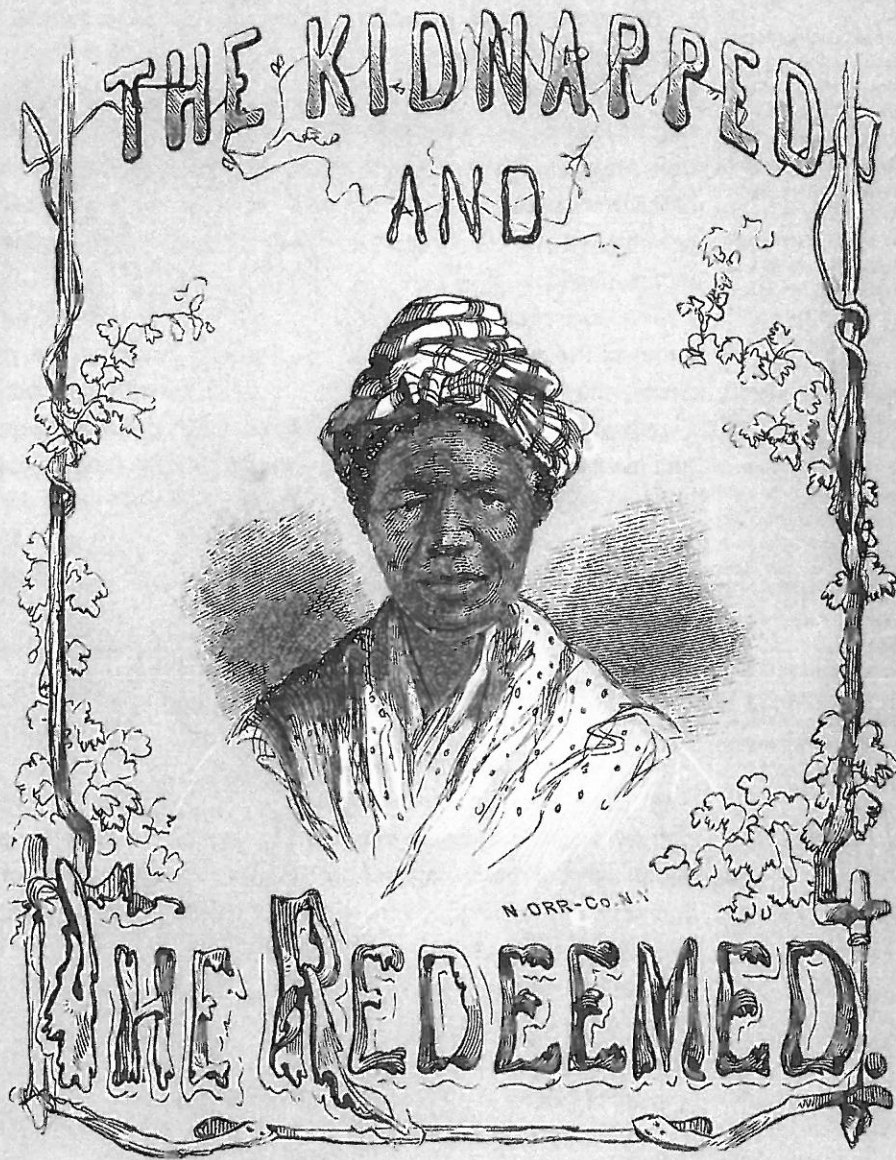
American Jewish Historical Society; photograph by Bilyana Dimitrova.

equality on American law and values, while relying on help from public officials to combat prejudice and defend Jews' minority rights.

The surrender of Confederate General-in-Chief Robert E. Lee at Appomattox Court House on April 9, 1865, coincided with final preparations for the eight-day Jewish holiday of Passover. Throughout the North that Passover, Jews gave thanks for the redemption of their ancestors from slavery in Egypt and for the restoration of peace to the inhabitants of the United States. The calendrical link between the anniversary of the biblical Exodus and the victory of the Union forces seemed to the faithful almost providential.

The assassination of Abraham Lincoln, five days after the surrender, came on the eve of the fifth day of Passover (coinciding that year with Good Friday) and was harder for Jews to reconcile with the holiday spirit. Synagogues the next morning were filled with grief-stricken worshippers, and mournful melodies replaced the customary Passover ones. In subsequent sermons, delivered in Lincoln's memory by rabbis across the United States, the president was compared to the patriarch Abraham, to King David, and above all to Moses, who died without entering the Promised Land.

Southern Judaism became increasingly distinctive during the post-Civil War decades. As an example, Jews in Southern cities turned out together as a community to celebrate Confederate Memorial Day and set aside special sections of their cemeteries for Confederate War victims. The distinguished Jewish sculptor Moses Ezekiel, himself a Confederate veteran and a loyal Southerner (even though he lived in Rome), abetted this cult of martyrdom. He produced a whole series of "Lost Cause" monuments, including the "New South" monument to the Confederate War dead at Arlington National Cemetery, five busts of Robert E. Lee, a large bronze statue of Stonewall Jackson, and a monument entitled *Virginia Mourning Her Dead*. In his autobiography, Ezekiel described the latter in religious terms ("one of the most sacred duties in my life"), and explained that he wanted it to serve as a memorial to his fallen comrades, "sounding their heroism and Virginia's memory down through all ages and forever." While Northern Jews put the war behind them and moved



Opposite & Following Page, 14.

The Kidnapped and the Redeemed. . . . Being the Personal Recollections of Peter Still and His Wife "Vina," after Forty Years of Slavery, 1856.

This book, one of many slave narratives published in the 1850s that described the horrors of the Southern system of bondage, appeared when the debate about the future of slavery within the United States had become rancorous and increasingly bloody. Peter Still purchased his freedom from Joseph Friedman, a sympathetic Jewish businessman in Tuscumbia, Alabama, for \$500 in April 1850. Joseph and his brother Isaac remained in contact with Peter once he and his family had relocated to the North.

New York Public Library.

on, Southern Jews, like their neighbors, thus made the Lost Cause the centerpiece of their faith. Focusing on the martyrdom of lost sons, they insisted that the cause that so many had fought and died for was right.

Today, only a small percentage of Jews in the United States boast ancestors who fought in the Civil War. The vast majority of America's Jews arrived later, mostly in the twentieth century. The war's impact, however, affected all Jews whenever they arrived on the nation's shores. The Civil War shaped American Jewish life in at least six ways.

First, it taught Jews that following in the ways of their neighbors could sometimes lead them astray. In the South, as historian Bertram W. Korn showed, "any Jew who could afford to own slaves and had need for their services, would do so." In the North, meanwhile, Jews divided over the question of slavery: Some advocated abolition, others sought peace above all else, even if that meant acquiescing to Southern slavery. Many Jews simply remained silent. To be sure, Jews formed far less than 1 percent of the national population, and their contribution to the overall institution of slavery was negligible. Still, notwithstanding their ancestors' slavery in Egypt and their own celebration of freedom on Passover, Jews as a group (unlike, say, the Quakers) did not oppose slavery, something that many Jews later regretted.

Second, the Civil War accorded Jews the opportunity to fight as equal citizens and to rise through the ranks, something not granted them by most of the world's great armies at that time. Jews won military honors during the Civil War and fought side by side with non-Jews. They established a pattern of taking military obligations seriously.

Third, Jews displayed regional loyalty during the war. For the most part, Northern Jews sided with the North and Southern Jews with the South. Knowing that some of their neighbors doubted their loyalty, many Jews went out of their way to display it. They then boasted of their loyalty—to their section of the country and to their hometowns—for many years afterward.

Fourth, the Civil War taught Jews that they could fight for their rights and win. The fact that they responded powerfully when the original chaplaincy bill discriminated against them, and then again when General

Grant expelled "Jews as a class" from his war zone, established a pattern of communal defense that continued long after the war ended. Repeatedly, Jews fought for their rights in the United States, confident that they could achieve victory.

Fifth, the Civil War established the principle of Jewish equality. Notwithstanding considerable wartime antisemitism, Jews achieved equal status on the battlefield, and Jewish chaplains won the right to serve alongside their Christian counterparts. As presidents, Abraham Lincoln and, later, Ulysses S. Grant, underscored the principle of Jewish equality. In time, that principle became a reality.

Finally, the Civil War set the stage for the development of the clothing trade in America, a critical engine of Jewish economic growth. "The most significant impact of Jews on the war and the war on Jews came not on the battlefield but in outfitting the Union Army," historian Adam Mendelsohn has shown. The "dramatic widening" of Jewish participation in the ready-made clothing business during the war paved the way for the postwar growth of the Jewish garment industry, so critical to East European Jews and their upward mobility.

For all that the Civil War divided American Jews, commemorations of the war have united them. This sesquicentennial commemoration—highlighted by the publication of two books, numerous scholarly articles, the documentary film *Jewish Soldiers in Blue and Gray*, and now *Passages Through the Fire: Jews and the Civil War*—testifies to the war's ongoing significance. It provides a welcome opportunity to study American Jewry's past and appreciate its timeless lessons.



"Well Peter, this yer's your road, and yon's mine. See page 236.

PASSAGES THROUGH THE FIRE

JEWS and the CIVIL WAR

FOREWORD BY KEN BURNS

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