

# American Jews

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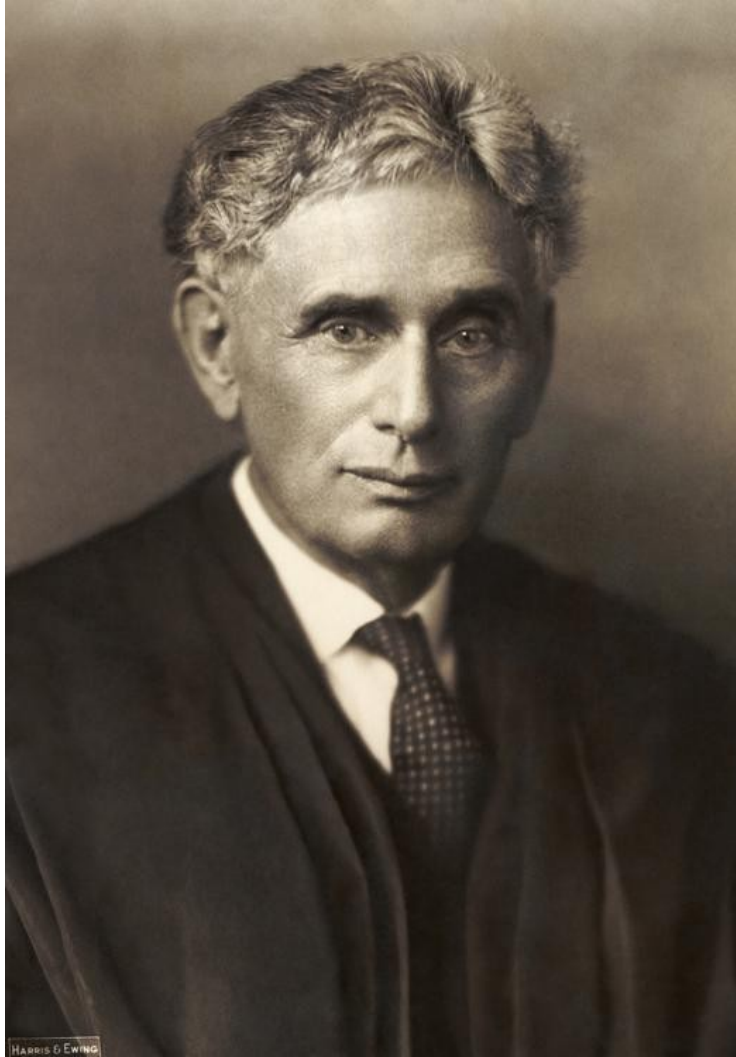
## American Jews

- *Today the Jewish community in the United States consists primarily of Ashkenazi Jews, who descend from diaspora Jewish populations of Central and Eastern Europe and comprise about 90-95% of the American Jewish population.*
- *The American Jewish community manifests a wide range of Jewish cultural traditions, encompassing the full spectrum of Jewish religious observance.*
- *American Jews, or Jewish Americans, are Americans who are Jews, whether by religion, ethnicity, or nationality.*

American Jews, or Jewish Americans, are Americans who are Jews, whether by religion, ethnicity, or nationality. Today the Jewish community in the United States consists primarily of Ashkenazi Jews, who descend from diaspora Jewish populations of Central and Eastern Europe and comprise about 90-95% of the American Jewish population. Most American Ashkenazim are US-born, with a dwindling number of now-elderly earlier immigrants, as well as some more recent foreign-born immigrants.

During the colonial era, prior to the mass immigration of Ashkenazim, Spanish and Portuguese Jews represented the bulk of America's then-small Jewish population, and while their descendants are a minority today, they, along with an array of other Jewish communities, represented the remainder of American Jews, including other more recent Sephardic Jews, Mizrahi Jews, various other ethnically Jewish communities, as well as a smaller number of converts to Judaism. The American Jewish community manifests a wide range of Jewish cultural traditions, encompassing the full spectrum of Jewish religious observance.

Depending on religious definitions and varying population data, the United States has the largest or second largest Jewish community in the world, after Israel. In 2012, the American Jewish population was estimated at between 5.5 and 8 million, depending on the definition of the term, which constitutes between 1.7% and 2.6% of the total U.S. population.



*Louis Brandeis*

## History

- *There were approximately 250,000 Jews in the United States by 1880, many of them being the educated, and largely secular, German Jews, although a minority population of the older Sephardic Jewish families remained influential.*
- *More recent waves of Jewish emigration from Russia and other regions have largely joined the mainstream American Jewish community.*
- *American Jewish writers of the time urged assimilation and integration into the wider American culture, and Jews quickly became part of American life.*

Jews have been present in the Thirteen Colonies since the mid-17th century. However, they were small in number, with at most 200 to 300 having arrived by 1700. Those early arrivers were mainly Sephardic Jewish immigrants, of Western Sephardic (also known as Spanish and Portuguese Jewish) ancestry, but by 1720 Ashkenazi Jews from Central and Eastern Europe predominated.

The English Plantation Act 1740 for the first time permitted Jews to become British citizens and emigrate to the colonies. Despite some being denied the ability to vote or hold office in local jurisdictions, Sephardic Jews became active in community affairs in the 1790s, after achieving political equality in the five states where they were most numerous. Until about 1830, Charleston, South Carolina had more Jews than anywhere else in North America. Large-scale Jewish immigration commenced in the 19th century, when, by mid-century, many German Jews had arrived, migrating to the United States in large numbers due to antisemitic laws and restrictions in their countries of birth. They primarily became merchants and shop-owners. There were approximately 250,000 Jews in the United States by 1880, many of them being the educated, and largely secular, German Jews, although a minority population of the older Sephardic Jewish families remained influential.

Jewish migration to the United States increased dramatically in the early 1880s, as a result of persecution and economic difficulties in parts of Eastern Europe. Most of these new immigrants were Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazi Jews, most of whom arrived from the poor diaspora communities of the Russian Empire and the Pale of Settlement, located in modern-day Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova. During the same period, great numbers of Ashkenazi Jews also arrived from Galicia, at that time the most impoverished region of the Austro-Hungarian empire with a heavy Jewish urban population, driven out mainly by economic reasons. Many Jews also emigrated from Romania. Over 2,000,000 Jews landed between the late 19th century and 1924, when the Immigration Act of 1924 restricted immigration. Most settled in the New York metropolitan area, establishing the world's major concentrations of Jewish population. In 1915 the circulation of the daily Yiddish newspapers was half a million in New York City alone, and 600,000 nationally. In addition thousands more subscribed to the numerous weekly papers and the many magazines.

At the beginning of the 20th century, these newly arrived Jews built support networks consisting of many small synagogues and Landsmanshaften (German and Yiddish for "Countryman Associations") for Jews from the same town or village. American Jewish writers of the time urged assimilation and integration into the wider American culture, and Jews quickly became part of American life. 500,000 American Jews (or half of all Jewish males between 18 and 50) fought in World War II, and after the war younger families joined the new trend of suburbanization. There, Jews became increasingly assimilated and demonstrated rising intermarriage. The suburbs facilitated the formation of new centers, as Jewish school enrollment more than doubled between the end of World War II and the mid-1950s, while synagogue affiliation jumped from 20% in 1930 to 60% in 1960; the fastest growth came in Reform and, especially, Conservative congregations. More recent waves of Jewish emigration from Russia and other regions have largely joined the mainstream American Jewish community.

Americans of Jewish descent have been disproportionately successful in many fields and aspects over the years. The Jewish community in America has gone from a lower class minority, with most studies putting upwards of 80% as manual factory laborers prior to

World War I and with the majority of fields barred to them, to the consistent richest or second richest ethnicity in America for the past 40 years in terms of average annual salary, with extremely high concentrations in academia and other fields, and today have the highest per capita income of any ethnic group in the United States, at around double the average income of non-Jewish Americans. In 2016, Modern Orthodox Jews had a median household income of \$158,000, while Open Orthodox Jews had a median household income at \$185,000 (compared to the American median household income of \$59,000 in 2016).

## Self identity

- *Scholars debate whether the favorable historical experience for Jews in the United States has been such a unique experience as to validate American exceptionalism.*
- *During this time contributors to the Menorah promoted a cultural, rather than a racial, religious, or other view of Jewishness as a means to define Jews in a world that threatened to overwhelm and absorb Jewish uniqueness.*

Scholars debate whether the favorable historical experience for Jews in the United States has been such a unique experience as to validate American exceptionalism.

Korelitz (1996) shows how American Jews during the late 19th and early 20th centuries abandoned a racial definition of Jewishness in favor of one that embraced ethnicity. The key to understanding this transition from a racial self-definition to a cultural or ethnic one can be found in the Menorah Journal between 1915 and 1925. During this time contributors to the Menorah promoted a cultural, rather than a racial, religious, or other view of Jewishness as a means to define Jews in a world that threatened to overwhelm and absorb Jewish uniqueness. The journal represented the ideals of the menorah movement established by Horace M. Kallen and others to promote a revival in Jewish cultural identity and combat the idea of race as a means to define or identify peoples.

Siporin (1990) uses the family folklore of ethnic Jews to their collective history and its transformation into an historical art form. They tell us how Jews have survived being uprooted and transformed. Many immigrant narratives bear a theme of the arbitrary nature of fate and the reduced state of immigrants in a new culture. By contrast, ethnic family narratives tend to show the ethnic more in charge of his life, and perhaps in danger of losing his Jewishness altogether. Some stories show how a family member successfully negotiated the conflict between ethnic and American identities.

After 1960, memories of the Holocaust, together with the Six-Day War in 1967 had major impacts on fashioning Jewish ethnic identity. Some have argued that the Holocaust provided Jews with a rationale for their ethnic distinction at a time when other minorities were asserting their own.



*David Levy Yulee*

## **Politics**

- *With the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt, American Jews voted more solidly Democratic.*
- *David Cicilline of Rhode Island was the only Jewish American who was newly elected to the 112th Congress; he had been the Mayor of Providence.*
- *(In 1980, Carter won 45% of the Jewish vote.*
- *Many American Jews disagreed with the Middle East policies of the Carter administration.*
- *In the 114th Congress, there are 19 Jewish U.S.*

In New York City, while the German Jewish community was well established 'uptown', the more numerous Jews who migrated from Eastern Europe faced tension 'downtown' with Irish and German Catholic neighbors, especially the Irish Catholics who controlled Democratic Party Politics at the time. Jews successfully established themselves in the garment trades and in the needle unions in New York. By the 1930s they were a major political factor in New York, with strong support for the most liberal programs of the New

Deal. They continued as a major element of the New Deal Coalition, giving special support to the Civil Rights Movement. By the mid-1960s, however, the Black Power movement caused a growing separation between blacks and Jews, though both groups remained solidly in the Democratic camp.

While earlier Jewish immigrants from Germany tended to be politically conservative, the wave of Jews from Eastern Europe starting in the early 1880s, were generally more liberal or left wing and became the political majority. Many came to America with experience in the socialist, anarchist and communist movements as well as the Labor Bund, emanating from Eastern Europe. Many Jews rose to leadership positions in the early 20th century American labor movement and helped to found unions that played a major role in left wing politics and, after 1936, in Democratic Party politics.

Although American Jews generally leaned Republican in the second half of the 19th century, the majority has voted Democratic since at least 1916, when they voted 55% for Woodrow Wilson.

With the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt, American Jews voted more solidly Democratic. They voted 90% for Roosevelt in the elections of 1940, and 1944, representing the highest of support, only equaled once since. In the election of 1948, Jewish support for Democrat Harry S. Truman dropped to 75%, with 15% supporting the new Progressive Party. As a result of lobbying, and hoping to better compete for the Jewish vote, both major party platforms had included a pro-Zionist plank since 1944, and supported the creation of a Jewish state; it had little apparent effect however, with 90% still voting other-than Republican. In every election since, except for 1980, no Democratic presidential candidate has won with less than 67% of the Jewish vote. (In 1980, Carter won 45% of the Jewish vote. See below.)

During the 1952 and 1956 elections, they voted 60% or more for Democrat Adlai Stevenson, while General Eisenhower garnered 40% for his reelection; the best showing to date for the Republicans since Harding's 43% in 1920. In 1960, 83% voted for Democrat John F. Kennedy against Richard Nixon, and in 1964, 90% of American Jews voted for Lyndon Johnson, over his Republican opponent, arch-conservative Barry Goldwater. Hubert Humphrey garnered 81% of the Jewish vote in the 1968 elections, in his losing bid for president against Richard Nixon.

During the Nixon re-election campaign of 1972, Jewish voters were apprehensive about George McGovern and only favored the Democrat by 65%, while Nixon more than doubled Republican Jewish support to 35%. In the election of 1976, Jewish voters supported Democrat Jimmy Carter by 71% over incumbent president Gerald Ford's 27%, but during the Carter re-election campaign of 1980, Jewish voters greatly abandoned the Democrat, with only 45% support, while Republican winner, Ronald Reagan, garnered 39%, and 14% went to independent (former Republican) John Anderson. Many American Jews disagreed with the Middle East policies of the Carter administration.[citation needed]

During the Reagan re-election campaign of 1984, the Republican retained 31% of the Jewish vote, while 67% voted for Democrat Walter Mondale. The 1988 election saw Jewish voters favor Democrat Michael Dukakis by 64%, while George H. W. Bush polled a respectable 35%, but during Bush's re-election attempt in 1992, his Jewish support dropped to just 11%, with 80% voting for Bill Clinton and 9% going to independent Ross Perot. Clinton's re-election campaign in 1996 maintained high Jewish support at 78%, with 16% supporting Bob Dole and 3% for Perot.

In the 2000 presidential election, Joe Lieberman was the first American Jew to run for national office on a major party ticket when he was chosen as Democratic presidential candidate Al Gore's vice-presidential nominee. The elections of 2000 and 2004 saw continued Jewish support for Democrats Al Gore and John Kerry, a Catholic, remain in the high- to mid-70% range, while Republican George W. Bush's re-election in 2004 saw Jewish support rise from 19% to 24%.

In the 2008 presidential election, 78% of Jews voted for Barack Obama, who became the first African-American to be elected president. Additionally, 83% of Jews voted for Obama compared to just 34% of white Protestants and 47% of white Catholics, though 67% of those identifying with another religion and 71% identifying with no religion also voted Obama.

In the February 2016 New Hampshire Democratic Primary, Bernie Sanders became the first Jewish candidate to win a state's Presidential primary election.

As American Jews have progressed economically over time, some commentators[citation needed] have wondered why Jews remain so firmly Democratic and have not shifted political allegiances to the center or right in the way other groups who have advanced economically, such as Hispanics and Arab-Americans, have.

For congressional and senate races, since 1968, American Jews have voted about 70–80% for Democrats; this support increased to 87% for Democratic House candidates during the 2006 elections.

The first American Jew to serve in the Senate was David Levy Yulee, who was Florida's first Senator, serving 1845–1851 and again 1855–1861.

In the 114th Congress, there are 10 Jews among 100 U.S. Senators: nine Democrats (Michael Bennet, Richard Blumenthal, Barbara Boxer, Benjamin Cardin, Dianne Feinstein, Al Franken, Carl Levin, Charles Schumer, Ron Wyden), and Bernie Sanders, who became a Democrat to run for President but returned to the Senate as an Independent.

In the 114th Congress, there are 19 Jewish U.S. Representatives. There were 27 Jews among the 435 U.S. Representatives at the start of the 112th Congress; 26 Democrats and one (Eric Cantor) Republican. While many of these Members represented coastal cities and suburbs with significant Jewish populations, others did not (for instance, Gabrielle Giffords of Tucson, Arizona; John Yarmuth of Louisville, Kentucky; Jared Polis of Boulder, Colorado; and

Steve Cohen of Memphis, Tennessee). The total number of Jews serving in the House of Representatives declined from 31 in the 111th Congress. John Adler of New Jersey, Steve Kagan of Wisconsin, Alan Grayson of Florida, and Ron Klein of Florida all lost their re-election bids, Rahm Emanuel resigned to become the President's Chief of Staff; and Paul Hodes of New Hampshire did not run for re-election but instead (unsuccessfully) sought his state's open Senate seat. David Cicilline of Rhode Island was the only Jewish American who was newly elected to the 112th Congress; he had been the Mayor of Providence. The number declined when Jane Harman, Anthony Weiner, and Gabrielle Giffords resigned during the 112th Congress.

As of January 2014[update], there are five openly gay men serving in Congress and two are Jewish: Jared Polis of Colorado and David Cicilline of Rhode Island.

In November 2008, Cantor was elected as the House Minority Whip, the first Jewish Republican to be selected for the position. In 2011, he became the first Jewish House Majority Leader. He served as Majority Leader until 2014, when he resigned shortly after his loss in the Republican primary election for his House seat.

In 2013, Pew found that 70% of American Jews identified with or leaned toward the Democratic Party, with just 22% identifying with or leaning toward the Republican Party.

## Participation in civil rights movements

- *A number of American Jews have also been active figures in the struggle for gay rights in America.*
- *In the mid-20th century, there were American Jews who were among the most active participants in the Civil Rights Movement and feminist movements.*
- *Members of the American Jewish community have included prominent participants in civil rights movements.*

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Joachim Prinz, president of the American Jewish Congress, stated the following when he spoke from the podium at the Lincoln Memorial during the famous March on Washington on August 28, 1963: "As Jews we bring to this great demonstration, in which thousands of us proudly participate, a twofold experience—one of the spirit and one of our history. ... From our Jewish historic experience of three and a half thousand years we say: Our ancient history began with slavery and the yearning for freedom. During the Middle Ages my people lived for a thousand years in the ghettos of Europe. ... It is for these reasons that it is not merely sympathy and compassion for the black people of America that motivates us. It is, above all and beyond all such sympathies and emotions, a sense of complete identification and solidarity born of our own painful historic experience."



## The Holocaust

- *Proponents of a Jewish state and Jewish army agitated, but many leaders were so fearful of an antisemitic backlash inside the U.S. that they demanded that all Jews keep a low public profile.*
- *During the World War II period, the American Jewish community was bitterly and deeply divided and was unable to form a common front.*

During the World War II period, the American Jewish community was bitterly and deeply divided and was unable to form a common front. Most Jews from Eastern Europe favored Zionism, which saw a return to their historical homeland as the only solution; this had the effect of diverting attention from the persecution of Jews in Germany. German Jews were alarmed at the Nazis but were disdainful of Zionism. Proponents of a Jewish state and Jewish army agitated, but many leaders were so fearful of an antisemitic backlash inside the U.S. that they demanded that all Jews keep a low public profile. One important development was the sudden conversion of most (but not all) Jewish leaders to Zionism late in the war. The Holocaust was largely ignored by American media as it was happening. Reporters and editors largely did not believe the atrocity stories coming out of Europe.

The Holocaust had a profound impact on the community in the United States, especially after 1960, as Jews tried to comprehend what had happened, and especially to commemorate and grapple with it when looking to the future. Abraham Joshua Heschel summarized this dilemma when he attempted to understand Auschwitz: "To try to answer is to commit a supreme blasphemy. Israel enables us to bear the agony of Auschwitz without radical despair, to sense a ray [of] God's radiance in the jungles of history."



*Winston Churchill and Bernard Baruch converse in the back seat of a car in front of Baruch's home.*

## International affairs

- *The American Jewish community was divided over whether or not they agreed with the Israeli response; the great majority came to accept the war as necessary.*
- *Jewish Americans organized large-scale boycotts of German merchandise during the 1930s to protest Nazi rule in Germany.*
- *This attention initially was based on a natural and religious affinity toward and support for Israel in the Jewish community.*

Zionism became a well-organized movement in the U.S. with the involvement of leaders such as Louis Brandeis and the British promise of a homeland in the Balfour Declaration of 1917. Jewish Americans organized large-scale boycotts of German merchandise during the 1930s to protest Nazi rule in Germany. Franklin D. Roosevelt's leftist domestic policies received strong Jewish support in the 1930s and 1940s, as did his anti-Nazi foreign policy and his promotion of the United Nations. Support for political Zionism in this period, although growing in influence, remained a distinctly minority opinion among German Jews until about 1944–45, when the early rumors and reports of the systematic mass murder of the Jews in German-occupied Europe became publicly known with the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps and extermination camps. The founding of Israel in 1948 made the

Middle East a center of attention; the recognition of Israel by the American government (following objections by American isolationists) was an indication of both its intrinsic support and influence.

This attention initially was based on a natural and religious affinity toward and support for Israel in the Jewish community. The attention is also because of the ensuing and unresolved conflicts regarding the founding of Israel and Zionism itself. A lively internal debate commenced, following the Six-Day War. The American Jewish community was divided over whether or not they agreed with the Israeli response; the great majority came to accept the war as necessary. A tension existed especially for some Jews on the left who saw Israel as too anti-Soviet and anti-Palestinian. Similar tensions were aroused by the 1977 election of Menachem Begin and the rise of Revisionist policies, the 1982 Lebanon War and the continuing occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Disagreement over Israel's 1993 acceptance of the Oslo Accords caused a further split among American Jews; this mirrored a similar split among Israelis and led to a parallel rift within the pro-Israel lobby, and even ultimately to the United States for its "blind" support of Israel. Abandoning any pretense of unity, both segments began to develop separate advocacy and lobbying organizations. The liberal supporters of the Oslo Accord worked through Americans for Peace Now (APN), Israel Policy Forum (IPF) and other groups friendly to the Labour government in Israel. They tried to assure Congress that American Jewry was behind the Accord and defended the efforts of the administration to help the fledgling Palestinian Authority (PA), including promises of financial aid. In a battle for public opinion, IPF commissioned a number of polls showing widespread support for Oslo among the community.

In opposition to Oslo, an alliance of conservative groups, such as the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), Americans For a Safe Israel (AFSI), and the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA) tried to counterbalance the power of the liberal Jews. On October 10, 1993, the opponents of the Palestinian-Israeli accord organized at the American Leadership Conference for a Safe Israel, where they warned that Israel was prostrating itself before "an armed thug", and predicted and that the "thirteenth of September is a date that will live in infamy". Some Zionists also criticized, often in harsh language, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres, his foreign minister and chief architect of the peace accord. With the community so strongly divided, AIPAC and the Presidents Conference, which was tasked with representing the national Jewish consensus, struggled to keep the increasingly antagonistic discourse civil. Reflecting these tensions, Abraham Foxman from the Anti-Defamation League was asked by the conference to apologize for bad mouthing ZOA's Morton Klein. The conference, which under its organizational guidelines was in charge of moderating communal discourse, reluctantly censured some Orthodox spokespeople for attacking Colette Avital, the Labor-appointed Israeli Consul General in New York and an ardent supporter of that version of a peace process.

## Demographics

- *The American Jewish Yearbook population survey had placed the number of American Jews at 6.4 million, or approximately 2.1% of the total population.*
- *According to the Jewish Agency, for the year 2017 Israel is home to 6.5 million Jews (49.3% of the world's Jewish population), while the United States contained 5.3 million (40.2%).*

The Jewish population of the United States is either the largest in the world, or second to that of Israel, depending on the sources and methods used to measure it.

Precise population figures vary depending on whether Jews are accounted for based on halakhic considerations, or secular, political and ancestral identification factors. There were about 4 million adherents of Judaism in the U.S. as of 2001, approximately 1.4% of the US population. According to the Jewish Agency, for the year 2017 Israel is home to 6.5 million Jews (49.3% of the world's Jewish population), while the United States contained 5.3 million (40.2%).

In 2012, demographers estimated the core American Jewish population (including religious and non-religious) to be 5,425,000 (or 1.73% of the US population in 2012), citing methodological failures in the previous higher estimates. Other sources say the number is around 6.5 million.

The American Jewish Yearbook population survey had placed the number of American Jews at 6.4 million, or approximately 2.1% of the total population. This figure is significantly higher than the previous large scale survey estimate, conducted by the 2000–2001 National Jewish Population estimates, which estimated 5.2 million Jews. A 2007 study released by the Steinhardt Social Research Institute (SSRI) at Brandeis University presents evidence to suggest that both of these figures may be underestimations with a potential 7.0–7.4 million Americans of Jewish descent. Those higher estimates were however arrived at by including all non-Jewish family members and household members, rather than surveyed individuals.

The population of Americans of Jewish descent is demographically characterized by an aging population composition and low fertility rates significantly below generational replacement.

The National Jewish Population Survey of 1990 asked 4.5 million adult Jews to identify their denomination. The national total showed 38% were affiliated with the Reform tradition, 35% were Conservative, 6% were Orthodox, 1% were Reconstructionists, 10% linked themselves to some other tradition, and 10% said they are "just Jewish." In 2013, Pew Research's Jewish population survey found that 35% of American Jews were Reform, 18% were Conservative, 10% were Orthodox, 6% belonged to other sects, and 30% did not identify with a denomination.

## Location

- *According to a study published by demographers and sociologists Ira Sheskin and Arnold Dashefsky, the distribution of the Jewish population in 2015 is as follows:*
- *The Ashkenazi Jews, who are 90-95% of American Jews, settled first in and around New York City; in recent decades many have moved to South Florida, Los Angeles and other large metropolitan areas in the South and West.*

The Ashkenazi Jews, who are 90-95% of American Jews, settled first in and around New York City; in recent decades many have moved to South Florida, Los Angeles and other large metropolitan areas in the South and West. The metropolitan areas of New York City, Los Angeles, and Miami contain nearly one quarter of the world's Jews.

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## Significant Jewish population centers

- *Although the New York City metropolitan area is the second largest Jewish population center in the world (after the Tel Aviv metropolitan area in Israel), the Miami metropolitan area has a slightly greater Jewish population on a per-capita basis (9.9% compared to metropolitan New York's 9.3%).*
- *According to the 2001 undertaking of the National Jewish Population Survey, 4.3 million American Jews have some sort of strong connection to the Jewish community, whether religious or cultural.*

Although the New York City metropolitan area is the second largest Jewish population center in the world (after the Tel Aviv metropolitan area in Israel), the Miami metropolitan area has a slightly greater Jewish population on a per-capita basis (9.9% compared to metropolitan New York's 9.3%). Several other major cities have large Jewish communities, including Los Angeles, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco and Philadelphia. In many metropolitan areas, the majority of Jewish families live in suburban areas. The Greater Phoenix area was home to about 83,000 Jews in 2002, and has been rapidly growing. The greatest Jewish population on a per-capita basis for incorporated areas in the U.S. is Kiryas Joel Village, New York (greater than 93% based on language spoken in home), City of Beverly Hills, California (61%), Lakewood Township, New Jersey (59%), two incorporated areas, Kiryas Joel and Lakewood, have a high concentration of ultra-Orthodox Jews and one incorporated area, Beverly Hills, having a high concentration of non-Orthodox Jews.

The phenomenon of Israeli migration to the U.S. is often termed Yerida. The Israeli immigrant community in America is less widespread. The significant Israeli immigrant communities in the United States are in the New York City metropolitan area, Los Angeles, Miami, and Chicago.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development calculated an 'expatriate rate' of 2.9 persons per thousand, putting Israel in the mid-range of expatriate rates among the 175 OECD countries examined in 2005.

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## Distribution of Jewish Americans

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## Assimilation and population changes

- *While not all Jews disapprove of intermarriage, many members of the Jewish community have become concerned that the high rate of interfaith marriage will result in the eventual disappearance of the American Jewish community.*
- *In addition to this, when compared with the general American population, the American Jewish community is slightly older.*
- *About half of the American Jews are considered to be religious.*

These parallel themes have facilitated the extraordinary economic, political, and social success of the American Jewish community, but also have contributed to widespread cultural assimilation. More recently however, the propriety and degree of assimilation has also become a significant and controversial issue within the modern American Jewish community, with both political and religious skeptics.

While not all Jews disapprove of intermarriage, many members of the Jewish community have become concerned that the high rate of interfaith marriage will result in the eventual disappearance of the American Jewish community. Intermarriage rates have risen from roughly 6% in 1950 and 25% in 1974, to approximately 40–50% in the year 2000. By 2013, the intermarriage rate had risen to 71% for non-Orthodox Jews. This, in combination with the comparatively low birthrate in the Jewish community, has led to a 5% decline in the Jewish population of the United States in the 1990s. In addition to this, when compared with the general American population, the American Jewish community is slightly older.

A third of intermarried couples provide their children with a Jewish upbringing, and doing so is more common among intermarried families raising their children in areas with high Jewish populations. The Boston area, for example, is exceptional in that an estimated 60% of

children of intermarriages are being raised Jewish, meaning that intermarriage would actually be contributing to a net increase in the number of Jews. As well, some children raised through intermarriage rediscover and embrace their Jewish roots when they themselves marry and have children.

In contrast to the ongoing trends of assimilation, some communities within American Jewry, such as Orthodox Jews, have significantly higher birth rates and lower intermarriage rates, and are growing rapidly. The proportion of Jewish synagogue members who were Orthodox rose from 11% in 1971 to 21% in 2000, while the overall Jewish community declined in number. In 2000, there were 360,000 so-called "ultra-orthodox" (Haredi) Jews in USA (7.2%). The figure for 2006 is estimated at 468,000 (9.4%). Data from the Pew Center shows that as of 2013, 27% of American Jews under the age of 18 live in Orthodox households, a dramatic increase from Jews aged 18 to 29, only 11% of whom are Orthodox. The UJA-Federation of New York reports that 60% of Jewish children in the New York City area live in Orthodox homes. In addition to economizing and sharing, many Ultra Orthodox communities depend on government aid to support their high birth rate and large families. The Hasidic village of New Square, New York receives Section 8 housing subsidies at a higher rate than the rest of the region, and half of the population in the Hasidic village of Kiryas Joel, New York receive food stamps, while a third receive Medicaid.

About half of the American Jews are considered to be religious. Out of this 2,831,000 religious Jewish population, 92% are non-Hispanic white, 5% Hispanic (Most commonly from Argentina, Venezuela, or Cuba), 1% Asian (Mostly Bukharian and Persian Jews), 1% Black and 1% Other (mixed race etc.). Almost this many non-religious Jews exist in United States, the proportion of Whites being higher than that among the religious population.

## Subgroups

### American Jews and race

- *Some American Jews identify as white, while other American Jews solely identify as Jewish.*
- *American white nationalists view Jews as non-white.*

Some American Jews identify as white, while other American Jews solely identify as Jewish. Several commentators have observed that "many American Jews retain an ambivalence about whiteness". Karen Brodtkin explains this ambivalence as rooted in anxieties about the potential loss of Jewish identity, especially outside of intellectual elites. Similarly, Kenneth Marcus observes a number of ambivalent cultural phenomena noted by other scholars, and concludes that "the veneer of whiteness has not established conclusively the racial construction of American Jews". The relationship between American Jews and white majority identity continues to be described as "complicated". American white nationalists view Jews as non-white.



In 2013, the Pew Research Center's Portrait of Jewish Americans found that more than 90% of Jews who responded to their survey described themselves as non-Hispanic whites, 2% as black, 3% as Hispanic, and 2% of other racial or ethnic backgrounds.

### **African American Jews and other American Jews of African descent**

- *Jews of African descent belong to all of American Jewish denominations.*
- *The American Jewish community includes African American Jews and other American Jews of African descent, a definition which excludes North African Jewish Americans, who are currently classed by the U.S. Census as white (although a new category has been recommended by the Census Bureau for the 2020 census).*
- *Relations between American Jews of African descent and other Jewish Americans are generally cordial.*

The American Jewish community includes African American Jews and other American Jews of African descent, a definition which excludes North African Jewish Americans, who are currently classed by the U.S. Census as white (although a new category has been recommended by the Census Bureau for the 2020 census). Estimates of the number of American Jews of African descent in the United States range from 20,000 to 200,000. Jews of African descent belong to all of American Jewish denominations. Like their white Jewish counterparts, some Black Jews are atheists.

Notable African-American Jews include Lisa Bonet, Sammy Davis, Jr., Rashida Jones, Yaphet Kotto, Jordan Farmar, Taylor Mays, and rabbis Capers Funnye and Alysa Stanton.

Relations between American Jews of African descent and other Jewish Americans are generally cordial.[citation needed] There are, however, disagreements with a specific minority of Black Hebrew Israelites community from among African-Americans who consider themselves, but not other Jews, to be the true descendants of the ancient Israelites. Black Hebrew Israelites are generally not considered to be members of the mainstream Jewish community, since they have not formally converted to Judaism, nor are they ethnically related to other Jews. One such group, the African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem, emigrated to Israel and was granted permanent residency status there.[citation needed]

### **Socioeconomics**

- *And while 27% of Americans have had 4 year university or postgraduate education, fifty-nine percent (66% of Reform Jews) of American Jews have, the second highest of any religious group after American Hindus.*
- *Much of the Jewish American community lead middle class lifestyles.*
- *This reflects Jewish traditions of supporting social services as a way of living out the dictates of Jewish law.*

Education plays a major role as a part of Jewish identity; as Jewish culture puts a special premium on it and stresses the importance of cultivation of intellectual pursuits,



scholarship and learning, American Jews as a group tend to be better educated and earn more than Americans as a whole. Jewish Americans also have an average of 14.7 years of schooling making them the most highly educated of all major religious groups in the United States.

Forty-four percent (55% of Reform Jews) report family incomes of over \$100,000 compared to 19% of all Americans, with the next highest group being Hindus at 43%. And while 27% of Americans have had 4 year university or postgraduate education, fifty-nine percent (66% of Reform Jews) of American Jews have, the second highest of any religious group after American Hindus. 75% of American Jews have achieved some form of post-secondary education if two-year vocational and community college diplomas and certificates are also included.

31% of American Jews hold a graduate degree, this figure is compared with the general American population where 11% of Americans hold a graduate degree. White collar professional jobs have been attractive to Jews and much of the community tend to take up professional white collar careers requiring tertiary education involving formal credentials where the respectability and reputability of professional jobs is highly prized within Jewish culture. While 46% of Americans work in professional and managerial jobs, 61% of American Jews work as professionals, many of whom are highly educated, salaried professionals whose work is largely self-directed in management, professional, and related occupations such as engineering, science, medicine, investment banking, finance, law, and academia.

Much of the Jewish American community lead middle class lifestyles. While the median household net worth of the typical American family is \$99,500, among American Jews the figure is \$443,000. In addition, the median Jewish American income is estimated to be in the range of \$97,000 to \$98,000, nearly twice as high the American national median. Either of these two statistics may be confounded by the fact that the Jewish population is on average older than other religious groups in the country, with 51% of polled adults over the age of 50 compared to 41% nationally. Older people tend to both have higher income and be more highly educated. By 2016, Modern Orthodox Jews had a median household income of \$158,000, while Open Orthodox Jews had a median household income at \$185,000 (compared to the American median household income of \$59,000 for 2016).

As a whole, American and Canadian Jews donate more than \$9 billion a year to charity. This reflects Jewish traditions of supporting social services as a way of living out the dictates of Jewish law. Most of the charities that benefit are not specifically Jewish organizations.

While the median income of Jewish Americans is high, there are still small pockets of poverty. In the New York area, there are approximately 560,000 Jews living in poor or near-poor households, representing about 20% of the New York metropolitan Jewish community. Most affected are children, the elderly, immigrants from the former Soviet Union and Orthodox families.

According to analysis by Gallup, American Jews have the highest well-being of any ethnic or religious group in America.

The great majority of school-age Jewish students attend public schools, although Jewish day schools and yeshivas are to be found throughout the country. Jewish cultural studies and Hebrew language instruction is also commonly offered at synagogues in the form of supplementary Hebrew schools or Sunday schools.

From the early 1900s until the 1950s, quota systems were imposed at elite colleges and universities particularly in the Northeast, as a response to the growing number of children of recent Jewish immigrants; these limited the number of Jewish students accepted, and greatly reduced their previous attendance. Jewish enrollment at Cornell's School of Medicine fell from 40% to 4% between the world wars, and Harvard's fell from 30% to 4%. Before 1945, only a few Jewish professors were permitted as instructors at elite universities. In 1941, for example, antisemitism drove Milton Friedman from a non-tenured assistant professorship at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Harry Levin became the first Jewish full professor in the Harvard English department in 1943, but the Economics department decided not to hire Paul Samuelson in 1948. Harvard hired its first Jewish biochemists in 1954.

Today, American Jews no longer face the discrimination in higher education that they did in the past, particularly in the Ivy League. For example, by 1986, a third of the presidents of the elite undergraduate final clubs at Harvard were Jewish. Rick Levin was president of Yale University from 1993 to 2013, Judith Rodin was president of the University of Pennsylvania from 1994 to 2004 (and is currently president of the Rockefeller Foundation), Paul Samuelson's nephew, Lawrence Summers, was president of Harvard University from 2001 until 2006, and Harold Shapiro was president of Princeton University from 1992 until 2000.

## American Jews at American higher education institutions



*US military and civilian personnel light Menorahs in observance of Hanukkah*

## Religion

- *Jewishness in the United States is considered an ethnic identity as well as a religious one.*

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See Ethnoreligious group.

## Observances and engagement

- *The 2008 American Religious Identification Survey found that around 3.4 million American Jews call themselves religious – out of a general Jewish population of about 5.4 million.*
- *The number of Jews who identify themselves as only culturally Jewish has risen from 20% in 1990 to 37% in 2008, according to the study.*
- *Jewish religious practice in America is quite varied.*
- *About one-sixth of American Jews maintain kosher dietary standards.*

Jewish religious practice in America is quite varied. Among the 4.3 million American Jews described as "strongly connected" to Judaism, over 80% report some sort of active engagement with Judaism, ranging from attendance at daily prayer services on one end of the spectrum to as little as attendance Passover Seders or lighting Hanukkah candles on the other.

A 2003 Harris Poll found that 16% of American Jews go to the synagogue at least once a month, 42% go less frequently but at least once a year, and 42% go less frequently than once a year.

The survey found that of the 4.3 million strongly connected Jews, 46% belong to a synagogue. Among those households who belong to a synagogue, 38% are members of Reform synagogues, 33% Conservative, 22% Orthodox, 2% Reconstructionist, and 5% other types. Traditionally, Sephardic and Mizrahis do not have different branches (Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, etc.) but usually remain observant and religious. The survey discovered that Jews in the Northeast and Midwest are generally more observant than Jews in the South or West. Reflecting a trend also observed among other religious groups, Jews in the Northwestern United States are typically the least observant.

In recent years, there has been a noticeable trend of secular American Jews returning to a more observant, in most cases, Orthodox, lifestyle. Such Jews are called *baalei teshuva* ("returners", see also Repentance in Judaism).[citation needed]

The 2008 American Religious Identification Survey found that around 3.4 million American Jews call themselves religious – out of a general Jewish population of about 5.4 million. The number of Jews who identify themselves as only culturally Jewish has risen from 20% in 1990 to 37% in 2008, according to the study. In the same period, the number of all US adults who said they had no religion rose from 8% to 15%. Jews are more likely to be secular than Americans in general, the researchers said. About half of all US Jews – including those who consider themselves religiously observant – claim in the survey that they have a secular worldview and see no contradiction between that outlook and their faith, according to the study's authors. Researchers attribute the trends among American Jews to the high rate of intermarriage and "disaffection from Judaism" in the United States.

About one-sixth of American Jews maintain kosher dietary standards.

## Religious beliefs

- *A 2013 Pew Research Center report found that 1.7 million American Jewish adults, 1.6 million of whom were raised in Jewish homes or had Jewish ancestry, identified as Christians or Messianic Jews but also consider themselves ethnically Jewish.*
- *Another 700,000 American Christian adults considered themselves "Jews by affinity" or "grafted-in" Jews.*

American Jews are more likely to be atheist or agnostic than most Americans, especially so compared with Protestants or Catholics. A 2003 poll found that while 79% of Americans believe in God, only 48% of American Jews do, compared with 79% and 90% for Catholics and Protestants respectively. While 66% of Americans said they were "absolutely certain" of God's existence, 24% of American Jews said the same. And though 9% of Americans believe there is no God (8% Catholic and 4% Protestant), 19% of American Jews believe God does not exist.

A 2009 Harris Poll showed American Jews as the religious group most accepting of evolution, with 80% believing in evolution, compared to 51% for Catholics, 32% for Protestants, and 16% of born-again Christians. They were also less likely to believe in supernatural phenomena such as miracles, angels, or heaven.

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## Buddhism

- *Jews are overrepresented in American Buddhism specifically among those whose parents are not Buddhist, and without Buddhist heritage, with between one fifth and 30% of all American Buddhists identifying as Jewish though only 2% of Americans are Jewish.*
- *Notable American Jewish Buddhists include: Robert Downey, Jr. Allen Ginsberg, Linda Pritzker, Jonathan F.P.*

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Nicknamed Jubus, an increasing number of American Jews have begun adopting Buddhist spiritual practice, while at the same time continuing to identify with and practice Judaism. Notable American Jewish Buddhists include: Robert Downey, Jr. Allen Ginsberg, Linda Pritzker, Jonathan F.P. Rose, Goldie Hawn and daughter Kate Hudson, Steven Seagal, Adam Yauch of the rap group The Beastie Boys, and Garry Shandling. Film makers the Coen Brothers have been influenced by Buddhism as well for a time.

## Contemporary politics

- *"Jews have devoted themselves to politics with almost religious fervor," writes Mitchell Bard, who adds that Jews have the highest percentage voter turnout of any ethnic group (84% reported being registered to vote).*
- *In the 2012 United States presidential election, 69% of Jews voted for the Democratic incumbent President Obama.*
- *Today, American Jews are a distinctive and influential group in the nation's politics.*

Today, American Jews are a distinctive and influential group in the nation's politics. Jeffrey S. Helmreich writes that the ability of American Jews to effect this through political or financial clout is overestimated, that the primary influence lies in the group's voting patterns.

"Jews have devoted themselves to politics with almost religious fervor," writes Mitchell Bard, who adds that Jews have the highest percentage voter turnout of any ethnic group (84% reported being registered to vote).

Though the majority (60–70%) of the country's Jews identify as Democratic, Jews span the political spectrum, with those at higher levels of observance being far more likely to vote Republican than their less observant and secular counterparts.

Owing to high Democratic identification in the 2008 United States Presidential Election, 78% of Jews voted for Democrat Barack Obama versus 21% for Republican John McCain, despite Republican attempts to connect Obama to Muslim and pro-Palestinian causes. It has been suggested that running mate Sarah Palin's conservative views on social issues may have nudged Jews away from the McCain–Palin ticket. In the 2012 United States presidential election, 69% of Jews voted for the Democratic incumbent President Obama.

## Foreign policy

- *American Jews have displayed a very strong interest in foreign affairs, especially regarding Germany in the 1930s, and Israel since 1945.*
- *Though some critics charged that Jewish interests were partially responsible for the push to war with Iraq, Jewish Americans were actually more strongly opposed to the Iraq War from its onset than any other religious group, or even most Americans.*

American Jews have displayed a very strong interest in foreign affairs, especially regarding Germany in the 1930s, and Israel since 1945. Both major parties have made strong commitments in support of Israel. Dr. Eric Uslaner of the University of Maryland argues, with regard to the 2004 election: "Only 15% of Jews said that Israel was a key voting issue. Among those voters, 55% voted for Kerry (compared to 83% of Jewish voters not concerned with Israel)." Uslander goes on to point out that negative views of Evangelical Christians had a distinctly negative impact for Republicans among Jewish voters, while Orthodox Jews, traditionally more conservative in outlook as to social issues, favored the Republican Party. A New York Times article suggests that the Jewish movement to the Republican party is focused heavily on faith-based issues, similar to the Catholic vote, which is credited for helping President Bush taking Florida in 2004. However, Natan Guttman, The Forward's Washington bureau chief, dismisses this notion, writing in Moment that while "[i]t is true that Republicans are making small and steady strides into the Jewish community ... a look at the past three decades of exit polls, which are more reliable than pre-election polls, and the numbers are clear: Jews vote overwhelmingly Democratic," an assertion confirmed by the most recent presidential election results.

Though some critics charged that Jewish interests were partially responsible for the push to war with Iraq, Jewish Americans were actually more strongly opposed to the Iraq War from its onset than any other religious group, or even most Americans. The greater opposition to the war was not simply a result of high Democratic identification among U.S. Jews, as Jews

of all political persuasions were more likely to oppose the war than non-Jews who shared the same political leanings.

## Domestic issues

- *Jews were viewed most positively by fellow Jews, followed by white Evangelicals.*
- *Jews in America also overwhelmingly oppose current United States marijuana policy.*
- *On the other hand, Orthodox American Jews have domestic political views that are more similar to their religious Christian neighbors.*
- *Reform, Reconstructionist and, increasingly, Conservative, Jews are far more supportive on issues like gay marriage than Orthodox Jews are.*

A 2013 Pew Research Center survey suggests that American Jews' views on domestic politics are intertwined with the community's self-definition as a persecuted minority who benefited from the liberties and societal shifts in the United States and feel obligated to help other minorities enjoy the same benefits. American Jews across age and gender lines tend to vote for and support politicians and policies supported by the Democratic Party. On the other hand, Orthodox American Jews have domestic political views that are more similar to their religious Christian neighbors.

American Jews are largely supportive of LGBT rights with 79% responding in a 2011 Pew poll that homosexuality should be "accepted by society". A split on homosexuality exists by level of observance. Reform rabbis in America perform same-sex marriages as a matter of routine, and there are fifteen LGBT Jewish congregations in North America. Reform, Reconstructionist and, increasingly, Conservative, Jews are far more supportive on issues like gay marriage than Orthodox Jews are. A 2007 survey of Conservative Jewish leaders and activists showed that an overwhelming majority supported gay rabbinical ordination and same-sex marriage. Accordingly, 78% of Jewish voters rejected Proposition 8, the bill that banned gay marriage in California. No other ethnic or religious group voted as strongly against it.

In considering the trade-off between the economy and environmental protection, American Jews were significantly more likely than other religious groups (excepting Buddhism) to favor stronger environmental protection.

Jews in America also overwhelmingly oppose current United States marijuana policy. Eighty-six percent of Jewish Americans opposed arresting nonviolent marijuana smokers, compared to 61% for the population at large and 68% of all Democrats. Additionally, 85% of Jews in the United States opposed using federal law enforcement to close patient cooperatives for medical marijuana in states where medical marijuana is legal, compared to 67% of the population at large and 73% of Democrats.

A 2014 Pew Research survey titled "How Americans Feel About Religious Groups", found that Jews were viewed the most favorably of all other groups, with a rating of 63 out of 100.



Jews were viewed most positively by fellow Jews, followed by white Evangelicals. Sixty percent of the 3,200 persons surveyed said they had ever met a Jew.

## Jewish American culture

- *Since the time of the last major wave of Jewish immigration to America (over 2,000,000 Jews from Eastern Europe who arrived between 1890 and 1924), Jewish secular culture in the United States has become integrated in almost every important way with the broader American culture.*
- *Many aspects of Jewish American culture have, in turn, become part of the wider culture of the United States.*

Since the time of the last major wave of Jewish immigration to America (over 2,000,000 Jews from Eastern Europe who arrived between 1890 and 1924), Jewish secular culture in the United States has become integrated in almost every important way with the broader American culture. Many aspects of Jewish American culture have, in turn, become part of the wider culture of the United States.



*A typical poster-hung wall in Jewish Brooklyn, New York*

## Language

- *Argentina is the Latin American country with the largest Jewish population.*



- *A variety of other languages are still spoken within some American Jewish communities, communities that are representative of the various Jewish ethnic divisions from around the world that have come together to make up America's Jewish population.*

Most American Jews today are native English speakers. A variety of other languages are still spoken within some American Jewish communities, communities that are representative of the various Jewish ethnic divisions from around the world that have come together to make up America's Jewish population.

Many of America's Hasidic Jews, being exclusively of Ashkenazi descent, are raised speaking Yiddish. Yiddish was once spoken as the primary language by most of the several million Ashkenazi Jews who immigrated to the United States. It was, in fact, the original language in which *The Forward* was published. Yiddish has had an influence on American English, and words borrowed from it include *chutzpah* ("effrontery", "gall"), *nosh* ("snack"), *schlep* ("drag"), *schmuck* ("an obnoxious, contemptible person", euphemism for "penis"), and, depending on idiolect, hundreds of other terms. (See also Yinglish.)

The Persian Jewish community in the United States, notably the large community in and around Los Angeles and Beverly Hills, California, primarily speak Persian (see also Judeo-Persian) in the home and synagogue. They also support their own Persian language newspapers. Persian Jews also reside in eastern parts of New York such as Kew Gardens and Great Neck, Long Island.

Many recent Jewish immigrants from the Soviet Union speak primarily Russian at home, and there are several notable communities where public life and business are carried out mainly in Russian, such as in Brighton Beach in New York City and Sunny Isles Beach in Florida. 2010 estimates of the number of Jewish Russian-speaking households in the New York city area are around 92,000, and the number of individuals are somewhere between 223,000–350,000. Another high population of Russian Jews can be found in the Richmond District of San Francisco where Russian markets stand alongside the numerous Asian businesses.

American Bukharan Jews speak Bukhori, a dialect of Persian, and Russian. They publish their own newspapers such as the *Bukharian Times* and a large portion live in Queens, New York. Forest Hills in the New York City borough of Queens is home to 108th Street, which is called by some "Bukharian Broadway", a reference to the many stores and restaurants found on and around the street that have Bukharian influences. Many Bukharians are also represented in parts of Arizona, Miami, Florida, and areas of Southern California such as San Diego.

Classical Hebrew is the language of most Jewish religious literature, such as the Tanakh (Bible) and Siddur (prayerbook). Modern Hebrew is also the primary official language of the modern State of Israel, which further encourages many to learn it as a second language. Some recent Israeli immigrants to America speak Hebrew as their primary language.

There are a diversity of Hispanic Jews living in America. The oldest community is that of the Sephardic Jews of New Netherland. Their ancestors had fled Spain or Portugal during the Inquisition for the Netherlands, and then came to New Netherland. Though there is dispute over whether they should be considered Hispanic. Some Hispanic Jews, particularly in Miami and Los Angeles, immigrated from Latin America. The largest groups are those that fled Cuba after the communist revolution (known as Jewbans), Argentine Jews, and more recently, Venezuelan Jews. Argentina is the Latin American country with the largest Jewish population. There are a large number of synagogues in the Miami area that give services in Spanish. The last Hispanic Jewish community would be those that recently came from Portugal or Spain, after Spain and Portugal granted citizenship to the descendants of Jews who fled during the Inquisition. All of the above listed Hispanic Jewish groups speak either Spanish or Ladino.

### Jewish American literature

- *Although American Jews have contributed greatly to American arts overall, there remains a distinctly Jewish American literature.*
- *Jewish American literature often explores the experience of being a Jew in America, and the conflicting pulls of secular society and history.*

Although American Jews have contributed greatly to American arts overall, there remains a distinctly Jewish American literature. Jewish American literature often explores the experience of being a Jew in America, and the conflicting pulls of secular society and history.

### Popular culture

- *Many of the early Hollywood moguls and pioneers were Jewish.*
- *The field of American comedy includes many Jews.*
- *Many individual Jews have made significant contributions to American popular culture.*
- *There were 110 Jewish players in Major League Baseball between 1870 and 1881.*
- *Many Jews have been at the forefront of women's issues.*

Yiddish theater was very well attended, and provided a training ground for performers and producers who moved to Hollywood in the 1920s. Many of the early Hollywood moguls and pioneers were Jewish. They played roles in the development of radio and television networks, typified by William S. Paley who ran CBS. Stephen J. Whitfield states that "The Sarnoff family was long dominant at NBC."

Many individual Jews have made significant contributions to American popular culture. There have been many Jewish American actors and performers, ranging from early 1900s actors, to classic Hollywood film stars, and culminating in many currently known actors. The field of American comedy includes many Jews. The legacy also includes songwriters and authors, for example the author of the song "Viva Las Vegas" Doc Pomus, or Billy the Kid composer Aaron Copland. Many Jews have been at the forefront of women's issues.

There were 110 Jewish players in Major League Baseball between 1870 and 1881. The first generation of Jewish Americans who immigrated during the 1880–1924 peak period were not interested in baseball, and in some cases tried to prevent their children from watching or participating in baseball-related activities. Most were focused on making sure they and their children took advantage of education and employment opportunities. Despite the efforts of parents, Jewish children became interested in baseball quickly since it was already embedded in the broader American culture. The second generation of immigrants saw baseball as a means to celebrate American culture without abandoning their broader religious community. After 1924, many Yiddish newspapers began covering baseball, which they had not done previously.

## Government and military

- *The Civil War marked a transition for American Jews.*
- *The number of Jews elected to the House rose to an all-time high of 30.*
- *At least twenty eight American Jews have been awarded the Medal of Honor.*

Since 1845, a total of 34 Jews have served in the Senate, including the 14 present-day senators noted above. Judah P. Benjamin was the first practicing Jewish Senator, and would later serve as Confederate Secretary of War and Secretary of State during the Civil War. Rahm Emanuel served as Chief of Staff to President Barack Obama. The number of Jews elected to the House rose to an all-time high of 30. Eight Jews have been appointed to the United States Supreme Court, of which three (Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Stephen Breyer and Elena Kagan) are currently serving. Had Merrick Garland's 2016 nomination been accepted, that number would have risen to four out of nine.

The Civil War marked a transition for American Jews. It killed off the antisemitic canard, widespread in Europe, to the effect that Jews are cowardly, preferring to run from war rather than serve alongside their fellow citizens in battle.

At least twenty eight American Jews have been awarded the Medal of Honor.

## World War II

- *About 60 percent of all Jewish physicians in the United States under 45 years of age were in service as military physicians and medics.*
- *About 50,000 other decorations and awards were given to Jewish military personnel, for a total of 52,000 decorations.*
- *During this period, Jews were approximately 3.3 percent of the total U.S. population but constituted about 4.23 percent of the U.S. armed forces.*

More than 550,000 Jews served in the U.S. military during World War II; about 11,000 were killed and more than 40,000 were wounded. There were three recipients of the Medal of Honor; 157 recipients of the Army Distinguished Service Medal, Navy Distinguished Service Medal, Distinguished Service Cross, or Navy Cross; and about 1600 recipients of the Silver

Star. About 50,000 other decorations and awards were given to Jewish military personnel, for a total of 52,000 decorations. During this period, Jews were approximately 3.3 percent of the total U.S. population but constituted about 4.23 percent of the U.S. armed forces. About 60 percent of all Jewish physicians in the United States under 45 years of age were in service as military physicians and medics.

Many Jewish physicists, including project lead J. Robert Oppenheimer, were involved in the Manhattan Project, the secret World War II effort to develop the atomic bomb. Many of these were refugees from Nazi Germany or from antisemitic persecution elsewhere in Europe.

### American folk music

- *The influential group The Weavers, successor to the Almanac Singers, led by Pete Seeger, had a Jewish manager, and 2 of the 4 members of the group were Jewish (Gilbert and Hellerman).*
- *Nobel Prize winner Bob Dylan is also Jewish.*
- *By the 1940s Jews had become established in the American folk music scene.*

Jews have been involved in the American folk music scene since the late 19th century; these tended to be refugees from Central and Eastern Europe, and significantly more economically disadvantaged than their established Western European and Sephardic coreligionists. Historians see it as a legacy of the secular Yiddish theater, cantorial traditions and a desire to assimilate. By the 1940s Jews had become established in the American folk music scene.

Examples of the major impact Jews have had in the American folk music arena include, but are not limited to: Moe Asch the first to record and release much of the music of Woody Guthrie, including "This Land is Your Land" (see The Asch Recordings) in response to Irving Berlin's "God Bless America", and Guthrie wrote Jewish songs. Guthrie married a Jew and their son Arlo became influential in his own right. Asch's one-man corporation Folkways Records also released much of the music of Leadbelly and Pete Seeger from the '40s and '50s. Asch's large music catalog was voluntarily donated to the Smithsonian.

Three of the four creators of the Newport Folk Festival, Wein, Bikel and Grossman (Seeger is not) were Jewish. Albert Grossman put together Peter, Paul and Mary, of which Yarrow is Jewish. Oscar Brand, from a Canadian Jewish family, has the longest running radio program "Oscar Brand's Folksong Festival" which has been on air consecutively since 1945 from NYC. And is the first American broadcast where the host himself will answer any personal correspondence.

The influential group The Weavers, successor to the Almanac Singers, led by Pete Seeger, had a Jewish manager, and 2 of the 4 members of the group were Jewish (Gilbert and Hellerman). The B-side of "Good Night Irene" had the Hebrew folk song personally chosen for the record by Pete Seeger "Tzena, Tzena, Tzena".

The influential folk music magazine *Sing Out!* was co-founded and edited by Irwin Silber in 1951, and edited by him until 1967, when the magazine stopped publication for decades. Rolling Stone magazine's first music critic Jon Landau is of German Jewish descent. Izzy Young who created the legendary Folklore Center in NY, and currently the Folklore Centrum near Mariatorget in Södermalm, Sweden, which relates to American and Swedish folk music.

Dave Van Ronk observed that the behind the scenes 1950s folk scene "was at the very least 50 percent Jewish, and they adopted the music as part of their assimilation into the Anglo-American tradition which itself was largely an artificial construct but none the less provided us with some common ground".

Nobel Prize winner Bob Dylan is also Jewish.

## Finance and law

- *As late as 1950 there was not a single large Jewish law firm in New York City.*
- *Jews have been involved in financial services since the colonial era.*
- *American Jews in the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries played a major role in developing America's financial services industry, both at investment banks and investment funds.*
- *However, by 1965 six of the 20 largest firms were Jewish; by 1980 four of the ten largest were Jewish.*

Jews have been involved in financial services since the colonial era. They received rights to trade fur, from the Dutch and Swedish colonies. British governors honored these rights after taking over. During the Revolutionary War, Haym Solomon helped create America's first semi-central bank, and advised Alexander Hamilton on the building of America's financial system.

American Jews in the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries played a major role in developing America's financial services industry, both at investment banks and investment funds. German Jewish bankers began to assume a major role in American finance in the 1830s when government and private borrowing to pay for canals, railroads and other internal improvements increased rapidly and significantly. Men such as August Belmont (Rothschild's agent in New York and a leading Democrat), Philip Speyer, Jacob Schiff (at Kuhn, Loeb & Company), Joseph Seligman, Philip Lehman (of Lehman Brothers), Jules Bache, and Marcus Goldman (of Goldman Sachs) illustrate this financial elite. As was true of their non-Jewish counterparts, family, personal, and business connections, a reputation for honesty and integrity, ability, and a willingness to take calculated risks were essential to recruit capital from widely scattered sources. The families and the firms which they controlled were bound together by religious and social factors, and by the prevalence of intermarriage. These personal ties fulfilled real business functions before the advent of institutional organization in the 20th century. Antisemitic elements often falsely targeted them as key players in a supposed Jewish cabal conspiring to dominate the world.

Since the late 20th century, Jews have played a major role in the hedge fund industry, according to Zuckerman (2009). Thus SAC Capital Advisors, Soros Fund Management, Och-

Ziff Capital Management, GLG Partners Renaissance Technologies and Elliott Management Corporation are large hedge funds cofounded by Jews. They have also played a pivotal role in the private equity industry, co-founding some of the largest firms in the United States, such as Blackstone, Cerberus Capital Management, TPG Capital, BlackRock, Carlyle Group, Warburg Pincus, and KKR.

Very few Jewish lawyers were hired by White Anglo-Saxon Protestant ("WASP") upscale white-shoe law firms, but they started their own. The WASP dominance in law ended when a number of major Jewish law firms attained elite status in dealing with top -ranked corporations. As late as 1950 there was not a single large Jewish law firm in New York City. However, by 1965 six of the 20 largest firms were Jewish; by 1980 four of the ten largest were Jewish.

## Federal Reserve

- *Since then, several Jews have served as chairmen of the Fed, including the prior chairmen Ben Bernanke, Alan Greenspan and Janet Yellen.*
- *Paul Warburg, one of the leading advocates of the establishment of a central bank in the United States and one of the first governors of the newly established Federal Reserve System, came from a prominent Jewish family in Germany.*

Paul Warburg, one of the leading advocates of the establishment of a central bank in the United States and one of the first governors of the newly established Federal Reserve System, came from a prominent Jewish family in Germany. Since then, several Jews have served as chairmen of the Fed, including the prior chairmen Ben Bernanke, Alan Greenspan and Janet Yellen.

## Science, business, and academia

- *Within the Jewish American cultural sphere, Jewish Americans have also developed a strong culture of entrepreneurship as excellence in entrepreneurship and engagement in business and commerce is highly prized in Jewish culture.*
- *Of the United States top 200 most influential intellectuals, 50% are fully Jewish with 76% of Jewish Americans overall having at least one Jewish parent.*

With the Jewish penchant to be drawn to white collar professional jobs and having excelled at intellectual pursuits, many Jews have also become been remarkably successful as an entrepreneurial and professional minority in the United States. Jewish culture has a strong tradition, emphasis and respect for money and a deep emphasis on financial acumen, business shrewdness, and entrepreneurial savvy have resulted in many Jews starting their own businesses that have become major economic growth engines that shape much of the U.S. economy. Many Jewish family businesses that are passed down from one generation to the next serve as an asset, source of income and layer a strong financial groundwork for the family's overall socioeconomic prosperity. Within the Jewish American cultural sphere,

Jewish Americans have also developed a strong culture of entrepreneurship as excellence in entrepreneurship and engagement in business and commerce is highly prized in Jewish culture.

American Jews have also been drawn to various disciplines within academia such as physics, sociology, economics, psychology, mathematics, philosophy and linguistics (see Secular Jewish culture for some of the causes), and have played a disproportionate role in numerous academic domains. Jewish American intellectuals such as Saul Bellow, Ayn Rand, Noam Chomsky, Thomas Friedman, and Elie Wiesel have made a major impact within mainstream American public life. Of the United States top 200 most influential intellectuals, 50% are fully Jewish with 76% of Jewish Americans overall having at least one Jewish parent. Of American Nobel Prize winners, 37 percent have been Jewish Americans (18 times the percentage of Jews in the population), as have been 61 percent of the John Bates Clark Medal in economics recipients (thirty-five times the Jewish percentage).

In the business world, while Jewish Americans only constitute less than 2.5 percent of the U.S. population, they occupied 7.7 percent of board seats at various U.S. corporations.

American Jews also have a strong presence in NBA ownership. Of the 30 teams in the NBA, there are 14 Jewish principal owners. Several Jews have served as NBA commissioners including prior NBA commissioner David Stern and current commissioner Adam Silver.

Since many careers in science, business, and academia generally pay well, Jewish Americans also tend to have a higher average income than most Americans. The 2000–2001 National Jewish Population Survey shows that the median income of a Jewish family is \$54,000 a year and 34% of Jewish households report income over \$75,000 a year.

## Notable people

### See also

- *American Jewish cuisine*
- *List of Jewish political milestones in the United States*
- *National Museum of American Jewish Military History*

American Jewish cuisine

Antisemitism in the United States

Israeli Americans

List of Jewish political milestones in the United States

National Museum of American Jewish Military History

Timeline of women rabbis in the United States

## Notes and references

### Footnotes

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## External links

- *American Jewish Historical Society*
- *Jews in America from the Jewish Virtual Library*.
- *Full text resources include the American Journal of Jewish Communal Service back to 1902, archives of the American Jewish Yearbook, as well as population estimates, surveys, and analyses on American Jewish communities and political behavior.*

What is new in American Judaism? Conversation with Prof. Jack Wertheimer

American Jewish Historical Society

Berman Jewish Policy Archive @ NYU Wagner. Full text resources include the American Journal of Jewish Communal Service back to 1902, archives of the American Jewish Yearbook, as well as population estimates, surveys, and analyses on American Jewish communities and political behavior.

Feinstein Center. Comprehensive collection of links to Jewish American history, organizations, and issues.

American Jewish Archives – The Larger Task, Rabbi Jacob Rader Marcus on American Jewry

United Jewish Communities of North America. Also site of population survey statistics.

Jews in America from the Jewish Virtual Library.

Jewish-American Literature

Jewish-American History on the Web

2000–01 National Jewish Population Survey