
The Chosen Conflict

The Americanizing Effect of the Civil War on the Jewish Community

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Close to a decade ago I asked my mother, who holds both a doctorate and a rabbinical ordination, to give a lecture series on the nature of Jews in the Civil War. She agreed to do so. The lecture never happened. I am now happy my mother never delivered that lecture. I have been curious since that day about Jews in the Civil War. This work is dedicated to my mother, Susan Grossman, both for reading a draft and also for instilling me with a desire to delve deeper into the topics that are close to my heart. I also must thank my father, David Boder, for inspiring my love of history with his expansive knowledge and analytical skills. To Maddie, thank you for putting up with my frantic work over the past few weeks and thank you for your input and insights.

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Introduction

History, like music, has its greatest hits, recounted in later ages as indicative of an era almost to the exclusion of other examples. But such stories may not be representative; such is the case with the narrative of Jews in the Civil War. Tales of the “Brains of the Confederacy,” Judah P. Benjamin, and the anti-Semitism of Grant’s General Order No. 11 define the popular discussion of Jews in the Civil War. Yet, neither topic is emblematic of the massive transformation that took place in the Jewish American community during the war. Judah P. Benjamin, a wealthy Caribbean born Louisianan, was appointed the Attorney General by Jefferson Davis.¹ Later in the war he was appointed the Secretary of War and was known for his prowess and intelligence.² In almost any discussion of Jews in the Civil War, Benjamin’s name comes up. Yet, Benjamin did not associate himself as a Jew. While he never converted from Judaism and never denied his heritage, he married an affluent Christian New Orleanian and was buried in a Catholic cemetery.³ Certainly, Benjamin’s story is not emblematic of Jews in the Civil War. Nevertheless, his tale is consistently told as though it was.

The narrative of Grant’s General Order No. 11 is similarly divorced from the societal changes that affected Jews across America because of the outbreak of war. On December, 17, 1862, General Grant issued his infamous General Order No. 11 which expelled “The Jews, as a class...from the department [Tennessee and some of Kentucky] within twenty-four hours from the receipt of this order.”⁴ The Tennessee region had many bales of unsold cotton that were in demand in the North. Many opportunistic merchants came to the region to attempt to turn a

¹ Harry Simonhoff, *Jewish Participants in the Civil War*, (New York: Arco Publishing Company, 1963), 161.

² *Ibid.*, 161-171.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 145.

profit. In effect, Grant blamed all illegal trading on the few Jewish traders among the multitude of merchants who had traveled to the region. Within two weeks the order was rescinded by President Abraham Lincoln and Army leadership.⁵ Again, this story supersedes the narrative of change that defined the Jewish American experience during the Civil War.

Neither Judah P. Benjamin nor Grant's General Order No. 11 and its aftermath are emblematic of the Jewish American experience in the Civil War in either the North or the South. To find the fundamental nature of Jews in the Civil War, one has to look past these greatest hits of history. For two-thirds of the 150,000 Jews in the United States at the outbreak of war, America had only been their home for less than a decade.⁶ Furthermore, Jews streamed onto the shores of America, fleeing from political unrest in Europe and looking for opportunities closed to them in their countries of origin. Jews served valiantly in both the Union and Confederate armies and were perceived as patriotic citizens. While anti-Semitism existed, it was not significantly more virulent than at any other time of strife in the nation's history.⁷ Thus, the story of the Jews in the Civil War is more complex than the selective anecdotes of Judah P. Benjamin and General Order No. 11 reveal.

In fact, the story of Jews in the Civil War marked the increased visibility of Jews in the American public. The Jewish community took upon itself as a group to participate publicly in patriotic activities on a national level. Between 8,000 and 10,000⁸ Jews served in the armed

⁵ Ibid., 148-149.

⁶ Eli Evans, "Overview", in *Jews and the Civil War*, ed. Jonathan Sarna and Adam Mendelsohn (New York, NYU Press, 2010), 27.

⁷ Ibid., 28-29, 34.

⁸ Simon Wolf, in his book *The Jewish American as Patriot, Soldier and Citizen*, in which he attempts to account for all Jewish soldiers in the Civil War, states that there were 8,257 Jewish soldiers, 1,340 in the Confederacy and 6,917 in the Union. Wolf certainly omitted some Jews, as there are local records of Jews serving in units that he does not list. Robert Rosen, in *The Jewish Confederates*, quotes estimates from the time stating there were 10,000-12,000 in the Confederacy, but that is certainly an overstatement. Morris Schappes in his compilation, *Documentary History of the Jews in the United States*, quotes an anonymous letter from a Jewish soldier which estimates (see next page)

forces, both in the North and the South. Others contributed to their respective national causes through financial, philanthropic and political means. Jews' increased participation and visibility accelerated their process of Americanization. Recent Jewish immigrants, the majority of Jews in America, were thrust into a military conflict in which they took on the political ideals of their respective nations. For acculturated and assimilated Jews, who had resided in the United States for decades, the war offered new ways to integrate into society, such as petitioning for national Jewish political issues. Jews used the opportunities for political integration presented by the war to the best of their advantage. Thus, the Civil War marks an important moment in the development of the Jewish American community. For the first time, Jews *en masse*, not only the acculturated elite, entered American society. Through the experience of going to war and supporting the war effort, Jews in both the Confederacy and the Union shared a 'national' experience that brought them fully into the American landscape. As a result of their shared experience of Americanization, ironically in two warring "Americas," Jews were able to reintegrate after the war into a recognizable Jewish American community.

This paper hopes to chart the Americanization process of Jews during the Civil War, as well as the creation of a distinctive Jewish American community by focusing on a few key issues and overarching themes. Each of these topics was chosen to highlight the distinctive nature of Americanization and Jewish communal evolution present in the topics' narrative. The first chapter deals with the background of Jews in America. It serves to outline the previous research on the topic as well as describe the state of the Jews in America before the war. The second chapter discusses the realities of Jews in the Army of both the Union and the Confederacy during the war. It delves into how Jews served valiantly, yet also had to cope with integrating their

estimates 5,000 Jewish soldiers in the Union, which works approximately with Wolf's estimates even though it is a little low. Therefore, while there is no exact number, 8,000 to 10,000 is an acceptable estimate.

Jewish identity into a secular military setting. The experiences of Jews in the army served as a realm for heightened Americanization because of the intense nature of army life and the intertwining of Jewish private life with American ideals.

The third chapter tells the story of the chaplaincy debate in the Union, in which Northern Jews organized to request Jews be allowed to serve as army chaplains. This marks one of the first instances where Jewish Americans became a political force by organizing for legislative change in America. This politicization of Jewish Americans on a national level emphasizes the transformational affects of the Civil War, and how it drew Jewish Americans fully into the American political sphere. The fourth chapter deals with Jewish philanthropy during the war by examining the change in focus from aid given solely to Jewish causes to an impulse during the war to donate funds to one's respective side. The Civil War, as visible in the shift in philanthropy, led the Jewish American community to feel connected to not only to fellow Jewish Americans but to the larger American community. The final chapter discusses Jewish unity across battle lines during the war and evaluates stories of how the Jewish community of America considered their co-religionists across battle lines in the Union or the Confederacy to be part of the larger Jewish American community. Thus, while the war tore apart families across the nation, the Jewish American community remained remarkably intact and was able to reunite post-war. These chapters each deal with a moment at which Jewish Americans were transformed by the Civil War. In examining each of these moments, this paper shows how the Civil War, through military service, political mobilization, and social organizations, served to form the Jews of America into a patriotic Jewish American minority community: a minority whose members were able to fuse their Jewish heritage with their new American identity.

Chapter 1

Jewish Americans before the War

A year before the outbreak of war, the Jewish community in America was sharply divided. Isaac Mayer Wise, a well known rabbi in Cincinnati, wrote almost weekly in his influential newspaper *The Israelite* on fears about the splintering Jewish community in America. Indeed, the term “civil war” came up many times in his publication, but not about the war that would soon consume the nation. Wise wrote about his fears that the American Reform movement, the largest Jewish religious movement in America, would foment “civil war” in the Jewish community. On November 30th, 1860, a mere six months before the seizure of Fort Sumter, *The Israelite* discussed how a new liberal reform movement was undermining the unity that had defined the Jewish American Reform movement which had thrived in the US since the 1830s.⁹ Whenever he discussed the Jews in the South, he spoke of them in glowing terms, so long as they were not attempting to rip apart the Reform movement. Later, after the war began, Wise’s anti-war *The Israelite* argued sharply with the pro-war *Jewish Messenger* of New York. Yet, before the war began, both were mostly concerned with the war raging inside the Jewish community, not the sectional conflict engulfing the nation.

The internal pre-war Jewish conflict grew out of the demographic development of the Jewish American community. Although Jews first arrived in North America in the seventeenth century, it was not until the 1820s that there was a sizable community. Before the 1820s, the Jewish community in the United States numbered only 3,000 and was mainly from ‘Sephardic’ lands, that is, from North Africa, Spanish or Portuguese held lands. Yet, by the 1820s with a rise in German and Austro-Hungarian immigration to the US, “Ashkenazic,” or European, Jews

⁹ *The Israelite*, Nov 30, 1860, microform, VII, p. 132.

began to arrive as well. By 1850 there were approximately 50,000 Jews living in the US. Many were German Jews who began as peddlers and worked their way up to positions of prosperity. A sizable minority of the Jewish community were Central European Jews who had fled Europe after the revolutions of 1848 and were looking for a safe haven from the monarchies that regained power in Europe. The population again boomed between 1850 and 1860, when another 100,000 Jews entered America as part of the huge wave of Central European immigration. Thus, on the eve of the Civil War, there were 150,000 Jews in the US, most of whom were recent immigrants.¹⁰ The Civil War therefore came at a crucial moment in Jewish American history. It altered what would have been a standard immigration narrative, and instead set the stage for an accelerated Jewish Americanization because of the politically and ideologically charged nature of the conflict.

With the steep rise of the Jewish American population, new social structures began to grow. An American Reform movement was founded in the 1830s by individuals such as Wise, which preached Jewish traditions and practices in a more modernized, westernized and Americanized fashion. By the late 1850s, this movement began to be challenged by even more liberal and more radical reform groups which wanted to further modernize the Jewish American community. Some even went so far as to suggest that the Sabbath be moved from the traditional Friday night and Saturday to Sunday.¹¹

Notwithstanding these divisions within the Jewish community, there was also a sense of shared Jewish identity in America. Jews saw themselves as a distinct group; and, despite sectional divisions in American politics, as a unified group across geographical regions. Rabbi Bernard Illowy of Baltimore gave a sermon to his congregation in January 4th, 1861, referring to,

¹⁰ Korn, 1-17; Norman Finkelstein, *Jewish Americanish History* (Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society, 2007), 25-71.

¹¹ Jonatha Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2004), 194.

“our brethren of the South.” In the South itself, many Jews distinguished themselves from other German immigrants in many ways, one of which was by, “[favoring] slavery precisely because so many non-Jewish German immigrants opposed it.”¹² Jews made decisions that made them distinct from other German immigrants, and thus defined themselves as Jews. Even assimilated Jews like Judah P. Benjamin welcomed Salomon de Rothschild, the wealthy Jewish Parisian banker because Benjamin, “[he had] a Jewish heart,” and therefore, “took a great interest in [Rothschild].”¹³ What is equally important is that non-Jews also considered Jews as a distinct group. General Grant, in his infamous General Order Number 11, expelled the “Jews, as a class.” Jews both considered themselves a separate entity and were considered a separate minority by non-Jews as well. This shared identity helped Jews approach the Civil War in similar ways across state and national lines, leading to a shared experience of Americanization throughout the war.¹⁴

The Civil War, therefore, was an experience that led to the Jewish American community unifying internally and externally. The former occurred as Jewish support for the Civil War eclipsed and superseded internal struggles that plagued the Reform movement before the war and the latter as the Jewish community received greater recognition as a patriotic minority in the American cultural landscape. Many modern authors have commented on the societal changes that occurred as a result of the Civil War. Some, like Chandra Manning in her 2007 work *What This Cruel War Was Over*, highlights the formation of heightened beliefs about the causes the

¹² Robert Rosen, “The Jewish Confederates” in *Jews and the Civil War*, ed. Jonathan Sarna and Adam Mendelsohn (New York, NYU Press, 2010), 238. Jews also supported slavery because of financial interest. Families such as the Moses’ owned slaves, and many others were merchants involved in the slave trade. Sarna and Mendelsohn, 29.

¹³ “Salomon de Rothschild: The Irrepressible Conflict,” *Memoirs of Jewish Americans Volume Three*, ed. Jacob Rader Marcus (New York, Jewish Publication Society, 1955), 104.

¹⁴ Sarna and Mendelsohn, 183, 228, 37.; Korn, 122.; *General Orders #11 in the Jewish-American History Foundation*, <http://www.jewish-history.com/civilwar/go11.htm> (accessed April 2, 2011).

soldiers were fighting for, namely slavery.¹⁵ Melinda Lawson, in her book *Patriot Fires* of 2002 describes the formation of American nationalism during the Civil War.¹⁶ Other authors have dealt with the experiences of minorities during the war. Christian G. Samito's *Becoming American under Fire* tells the rousing story of Irish-Americans and African-Americans attempting to gain citizenship and acceptance by fighting for the Union during the war.¹⁷ Each of these histories plays a part in the story of Jews in the Civil War, they attest to the changing nature of inclusiveness in America and they speak to ways in which patriotism and identity were forged both in America as a whole and within individual ethnic groups. However, a few modern authors have also commented specifically on the experience of Jews during the Civil War, yet none have focused specifically on how Jewish Americanization in both the North and South helped form a recognizable Jewish American culture after the war.

The first sources that dealt with the story of Jews in the Civil War were published in the late 19th Century. These works were laced with a desire to highlight the loyalty of the Jews. The first book to do exhaustive research about the presence of Jews in the Civil War was Simon Wolf's 1895 tome, *The Jewish American as Patriot, Soldier and Citizen* which listed every Jewish soldier that Wolf could locate who fought in the Civil War.¹⁸ Wolf's principal aim was to prove that Jews were active citizens on both sides of the war who did not shirk away from their public duty.¹⁹ Wolf's narrative fit into the reconciliatory themes of the time. He highlighted shared patriotism and valor of Jews in both the North and South, much like non-Jewish historians were doing across America in order to help bridge the divide between the North and South. Wolf

¹⁵ Chandra Manning, *What this Cruel War was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War* (New York, Random House, 2007).

¹⁶ Lawson, Melinda, *Patriot Fires* (Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 2002).

¹⁷ Christian G. Samito, *Becoming American Under Fire: Irish Americans, African Americans, and the Politics of Citizenship During the Civil War Era* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2009).

¹⁸ Simon Wolf, *The Jewish American as Patriot, Soldier and Citizen* (Philadelphia, The Levytype Company Publishers, 1895).

¹⁹ Sarna and Mendelsohn, 4.

seemingly wanted to make sure that Jews were counted among the nation's patriots in this new climate of reconciliation.²⁰ However, Wolf and other early authors did not form a narrative, or discuss changes that occurred to the Jewish American community at the time. As such, it is a useful resource, but does not deal with the transformations that took place in the Jewish American community at the time.

The most important scholarship on the topic did not come till the 1950s. Starting in 1951, with Bertram Korn's *Jewish Americanry and the Civil War*, the field saw a new academic mindset come to the study. Korn's work was the first to address most of the major issues of Jews in the Civil War, including Jewish philanthropy, the Jewish home front, and the Jewish chaplaincy debate that marked a political awakening for many Northern Jews. As such, Korn's work had been the guide for many subsequent books and essays on the topic. He was the first to do major analysis of the chaplaincy debate, both in earlier articles and later in his book. Yet, he focused on the chaplaincy issue as a moment of elite Jews defending Jewish rights, rather than seeing the non-elite Jewish movement that led to tangible legislative change. Also during the 1950s, Jacob Rader Marcus' 1955 *Memoirs of Jewish Americans* and Morris Schappes' *Documentary History of the Jews in the United States* showed a deeper level of research and primary documentation that had ever before been compiled on Jews in America during the Civil War.²¹

Nevertheless, these works still left much to be researched. Korn admits that, "Severe limitations are inherent in this approach. It excludes some areas such as the individual

²⁰ David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2001), 172. Blight further points out that the impulse of reconciliation diminished the sacrifice and horrors of slavery, preferring to highlight American patriotism and diminish the importance of slavery in the conflict.

²¹ Jacob Rader Marcus, *Memoirs of Jewish Americans 177-1865 Volume Three* (Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955).; Morris Schappes, *Documentary History of the Jews in the United States* (New York, Citadel Press, 1952).

participation of Jews in the army...It is with the area of consciously-lived Jewish experience that we are here concerned...the expressed attitudes of their recognized leaders.” This is true with Marcus and Schappes as well; the authors of the era seemed to focus on elites and wrote top down histories. Furthermore, the works disregarded the experiences of non-elite Jews in the Army. They also focus on the North, and often draw distinctions between the Jews of the North and South, primarily by dealing with them in totally separate chapters and sections of their books, thereby missing the similarities of their acculturation.²² Unlike what this paper examines, these works also do not track the larger changes that were taking place in the Jewish community as a whole across America. This paper hopes to build on the strong foundation created by Korn, Schappes and Marcus, yet expand the scope to include similarities across battle-lines and look at ways at which Jews of the era were brought together.

For fifty years, barely any new research came out on the topic; Korn’s book remained the major text. In the past decade, there have been a few new works. In 2000, Robert Rosen published *The Jewish Confederates* which deals impressively with the Jewish experience in the South during the war. Yet, as it is solely focused on the South, it does not compare the acculturation of Jews in the North and South. Most recently, Jonathan Sarna and Adam Mendelsohn published *Jews and the Civil War: A Reader* in 2010. This current work is a compilation of many articles on a variety of topics from various authors. The work is useful and looks at multiple aspects of the Jewish experience of the war in new ways, including the home front and the lives of individual Jews on the frontier, in cities and on the battlefield.

This essay hopes to expand the understanding of the topic by exploring how the experiences of non-elite Jewish Americans helped create a similar Americanization process in both the Union and Confederacy during the Civil War that led to a unified Jewish American

²² Korn, xxix.

community. This Jewish Americanization is marked by the Jewish American community's rapid ability to identify with, selflessly aid, serve in, and be accepted by the national cause they were fighting for. These developments defined what Americanization meant for Jewish Americans and how they were fully brought into American society. In order to fully describe the Americanization of Jews during the Civil War, this paper will delve into some themes that have been only partially discussed in other works, such as the topic of Jews in the army and Jewish philanthropy. Furthermore, the paper also will reframe some common topics, such as the Jewish chaplaincy debate, to help form a narrative of the Americanization of the Jewish American population during the Civil War. By looking at the Civil War through the lens of Americanization, one can see how important the years 1861 to 1865 were to rapidly creating an explicitly Jewish American minority.

Chapter 2

Patriotism and Religion: The Transformative Experience of the Army

The Union and Confederacy found thousands of willing soldiers in the new wave of Jewish immigration of the 1840s and 1850s. Many of these new immigrants fled Germany to avoid military service only to come to the United States and volunteer for the Union or Confederate army within less than ten years, and sometimes less than ten months, of living in their newly adopted land.²³ Many felt compelled to enlist²⁴ by the freedom they found in their new home. Yet, they were often more enamored with their freedom from old world political repression than with fighting for a cause they did not feel historically connected to. Louis Gratz, a German Jew who arrived in New York as a peddler in early 1861, enlisted in the Union Army by the end of that year. While he was certainly proud to defend the country in which he found his liberty, he wasn't totally attached to America. Rather, on November 25, 1861, he wrote to his family in Germany that, "should I survive [the Civil War], well, I shall return to Germany and live with you."²⁵ However, over the course of the war, that view changed and he never returned to Germany.

For Gratz, being a soldier was a transformative experience. Jews in the military were expeditiously acculturated to American life. They became proud of America and American freedoms, be they soldiers of the Union or the Confederacy. The army was a place where politics, ideology and patriotism were heightened and shared between fellow soldiers. By being in units with native-born soldiers who had strong political feelings, Jewish American soldiers

²³ Robert Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates* (Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 50.

²⁴ Many Americans were drafted during the Civil War. While undoubtedly Jews must have been drafted along with their fellow Americans, most narratives that survive the war are of Jews who enlisted for patriotic reasons.

²⁵ "Letters of Louis Gratz", *Memoirs of Jewish Americans Volume Three*, ed. Jacob Rader Marcus (New York, Jewish Publication Society, 1955), 226-229, 231.

absorbed the ideals of their respective side, be they the abolition or defense of slavery. By facing immeasurable hardships and death alongside their fellow American soldiers, Jewish Americans formed bonds with their new land and took American ideals upon themselves.²⁶

The Civil War also helped foster a vibrant minority Jewish American identity. To begin with, most Jewish soldiers came from cities with strong Jewish communities, in which Jews lived, worked and prayed amongst other Jews. But, during the war, they practiced Judaism in a secular or Christian setting for the first time. Furthermore, the thousands of Jewish soldiers were proud of the patriotism of their fellow Jews. Throughout the war, non-Jewish soldiers and officers recognized Jewish soldiers' patriotism and hard working nature. Finally, Jews, whether Union or Confederate, had similar Americanizing experiences because of the rigidity of military life, and as such were able to relate and unite with each other as a recognizable and unified Jewish American community after the war.

Although most Jews serving in the war were recent immigrants, there were some 3,000 Jews whose families had resided in the United States since the Revolution. Many of these individuals were part of the Southern aristocracy. There are numerous accounts of these individuals, many of whom were officers because of their affluent background. Individuals such as Captain Octavus Cohen of Georgia and Raphael J. Moses,²⁷ leading commissary²⁸ for the Confederacy, fit this profile. Both came from old Southern Jewish families who were thoroughly acculturated to American life and rarely associated with the "new" German Jewish immigrants. While these individuals were Jewish, and were included in the new Jewish American community that was forged in the war, they were only a small percent of the Jewish population. Obviously,

²⁶ Manning, 4-5.

²⁷ Rosen: 93, 127.

²⁸ An army official who obtains food and related supplies for the army. Rosen, 126.

because they were already thoroughly Americanized, they did not experience as drastic an Americanization experience as the overwhelming majority of Jewish Americans.

At the most basic level, the mere experience of serving in the military helped to fuse Jewish soldiers' Jewish identities with their American citizenship. Jews did not want to be perceived as too distinct from other Americans, they wanted to fight for the same country and ideals as their fellow soldiers. An anonymous letter from a Jewish Union soldier moving through Virginia reported what he considered to be an appalling idea.

A few months since, some Jewish soldiers suggested the idea of organizing all the Jewish soldiers in the army, into distinct regiments...The suggestion...was, however, disapproved of by wiser heads, which was altogether unnecessary...and we are quite satisfied to fight with our Christian comrades for one cause, one country, and THE UNION.²⁹

Jews in the south felt much the same way, wanting to be seen as loyal citizens rather than an isolated nationality or religious group.³⁰ These first generation immigrants fighting in the army wanted to be seen as patriotic and as “truly Americans.”

By refusing to form separate units, something other ethnic groups, such as the Irish and the Germans, had done, Jewish Americans thrust themselves into new situations. In general, units were formed region by region. As such, areas that had a greater proportion of Jews, such as Philadelphia and New Orleans, formed regiments that had larger numbers of Jews. Indeed, Clara Solomon, a prominent member of the New Orleans Jewish community, called the Washington Artillery Battalion of New Orleans “Our Battalion” because of its high number of Jews.³¹ Nonetheless, Jews never formed the majority or even an overwhelming minority in any Battalion in the Civil War. The Washington Artillery, for instance, had five companies of about one

²⁹ “Union Soldier’s Correspondence” in *Documentary History of the Jews in the United States*, ed. Morris Schappes (New York, Citadel Press, 1952), 468-469.

³⁰ Rosen, 164.

³¹ Rosen, 111.

hundred men each, a total of five hundred soldiers, of which only twenty five were Jewish.³²

Thus, Jewish soldiers who overwhelmingly came from strong urban Jewish centers found themselves in overwhelmingly Christian units without the support of a Jewish community. These Jewish soldiers sought out ways in which to balance their Jewish identities with the new realities of everyday life in the military among Christian American soldiers. This gave Jewish soldiers a unique acculturation experience in which their Jewish identities intertwined with their American patriotism.

For many soldiers in the Union and Confederate armies, religion had a central place in regimental life. Chaplains gave sermons and soldiers read and carried prayer books.³³ This was no different for Jewish soldiers. For those Jews who did not have a Rabbi as a chaplain³⁴ many carried prayer books, or *siddurim*, and specific prayers for their country, such as Rabbi Michelbacher's "The Prayer for the C.S. Soldiers" which combined Jewish prayers with pleas for the safety of the Confederacy.³⁵ Additionally, as an anonymous Union soldier wrote in a letter, "it is quite common for Jewish soldiers belonging to the same company, to meet together for worship on Sabbath."³⁶ As such, a Jewish soldier's life was interspersed with moments which affirmed his Jewish communal identity. For the four years of the war, these soldiers' Judaism and their American patriotism took place in the same sphere.

An anonymous Union soldier recounted a story which highlighted this fact. "I know a young soldier, who was on Kippore [sic] morning,³⁷ ordered to take part in a skirmish, near Harper's Ferry, which he had to go through, without having tasted food, and as soon as the

³² Wolf, 191-199, 375-378.

³³ Rosen, 209.

³⁴ See Chapter 3.

³⁵ Rosen, 211. Michelbacher was a major Rabbi in Richmond, VA.

³⁶ "Union Soldier", Schappes, 467-468.

³⁷ *Yom Kippur*-one of the holiest days for Jews, considered a 'High Holiday,' many Jews fast for the day.

enemy retreated, he retired to the woods, where he remained until sunset, reading his prayers.”³⁸
This fasting soldier was simultaneously fulfilling his patriotic duty while practicing Jewish religious acts. His American and Jewish identities were fully enmeshed because of the realities of the Army.

Other soldiers’ experiences were perhaps more subtle in their combination of Jewish and American identities. For example, Colonel Marcus Spiegel, a German immigrant who arrived in 1849 and fought for the 120th Ohio Infantry,³⁹ and Lewis Leon, a member of the Charlotte Grays of the 1st Carolina Regiment,⁴⁰ wrote constantly throughout the war, and neither forgot to mention *Rosh Hashana*, the Jewish New Year. Leon marked it every year stating, “September 27-Up to to-day, nothing new, only today is my New Year (the Jewish New Year).”⁴¹ Col. Spiegel remarked, “the 25th of this month is Rosh Hashonah and the 4th [of] next month Yom Cipur [sic].”⁴² Both soldiers, though they fought for different sides, made sure to mark when the most important Jewish holidays were even though their diaries and letters focused on their narratives of the war.

Union and Confederate soldiers had similar experiences trying to balance and combine their Jewish and American identities. Two parallel stories, one from the Union and one from the Confederacy, recounted how soldiers attempted to make a Passover *Seder*⁴³ while in the field. Isaac and Captain “Zeke” Levy, two brothers in the 46th Virginia Infantry, put together a Seder for each other while stationed at Adams Run, South Carolina and “purchased Matzot⁴⁴ sufficient

³⁸ “Union Soldier”, Schappes, 468.

³⁹ Marcus Letters, Frank Byrne and Jean Powers Soman, ed. *Your True Marcus* (Columbus, Kent State University Press, 1985), 17.

⁴⁰ Lewis Leon, *Diary of a Tar Heel Confederate Soldier* (Charlotte, Stone Publishing Company, 1913), 1.

⁴¹ Leon, 10.

⁴² Byrne and Soman, 163.

⁴³ An ordered meal during Passover which recounts the Exodus from Egypt.

⁴⁴ Unleavened bread. One cannot eat bread that has risen during Passover.

for the week.”⁴⁵ The story told by the Northern soldier is remarkably similar to the Levy brothers’ tale. J.A. Joel of the 23rd Ohio Regiment details how he and his Jewish comrades attempted to put together a Seder on short notice and without all the proper items. They sent out foragers, and fortunately:

The foragers arrived, having been quite successful. We obtained two kegs of cider, a lamb, several chickens and some eggs. Horseradish or parsley we could not obtain, but in lieu we found a weed, whose bitterness, I apprehend, exceeded anything our forefathers "enjoyed." We were still in a great quandary...we had the lamb, but did not know what part was to represent it at the table; but Yankee ingenuity prevailed, and it was decided to cook the whole and put it on the table.⁴⁶

Joel was happy to succeed in setting up the *Seder*, yet even while he was leading an explicitly Jewish action, he was still proud of his support of the Union. Therefore, when they figured out a solution to what part of the lamb to put on the table, he did not ascribe it to his intelligence or even “Jewish ingenuity,” but rather “Yankee ingenuity.” For J.A. Joel, the Levy Brothers, Col. Spiegel, Lewis Leon and many other Jewish soldiers, this marked a large step into the formation of a Jewish American identity. For the first time Passover occurred in a secular American context rather than around a table in a Jewish home. Prayers were said in a trench next to fellow Christian soldiers instead of in a synagogue. By setting the stage for Jews to perform Jewish religious acts in an “American” setting, the war served as an incubator for the fusion of their Jewish and American identities

The war further led Jewish soldiers to rapidly Americanize. Louis Gratz is a paradigmatic case. Gratz only immigrated to America for with one aim, “the single goal of becoming a rich man.”⁴⁷ However, he did not realize this goal. He toiled as a peddler making barely more than he needed to survive. Therefore, when the war broke out and he was recruited into the Union Army,

⁴⁵ Isaac Levy, *Confederate Passover* in the Jewish-American History Foundation, <http://www.jewish-history.com/civilwar/seder.html>, (accessed February 25, 2011).

⁴⁶ J.A. Joel, *Passover: A Reminiscence of the War* in the Jewish-American History Foundation, <http://www.jewish-history.com/civilwar/union.htm>, (accessed February 25, 2011).

⁴⁷ “Letter of Louis Gratz”, ed. Marcus, 228.

it is unclear whether he volunteered out of any sense of patriotism or simply because of the excitement of the time and his desire for a steady income.⁴⁸ Yet, after only a few months in the army, on November 25, 1861, his notions about America seem to have already been shifting. He wrote back to his family in Germany, asking them, “not to be angry because I have gone to war...And should it be my destiny to lose my life, well, I will have sacrificed it for a cause to which I am attached with all my heart, that is: the liberation of the United States.”⁴⁹ After a few months serving in the military, Gratz’s view of America had changed. He no longer was fighting simply for adventure or making a livelihood, he was fighting for a country he had grown to admire. Admittedly, he was not yet totally acculturated by his new country. As mentioned above, Gratz ended the letter by informing his family that if he survived the war he would return to Germany.⁵⁰ While this may have been a sentence designed to make his parents happy, the fact remains that by the end of the war he no longer made any such claim, and as such his devotion towards America seemingly changed drastically because of his experience in the army.

Gratz served in the Union Army until mid-1865. He was promoted to captain and by late 1862 became a major and the regimental commander of the Sixth Regiment Kentucky Cavalry. He served valiantly in the bloody battle of Chickamauga in 1863. In December 1863, he was appointed to the staff of General Samuel Carter partially because of his valiant efforts at Chickamauga.⁵¹ By February 7, 1864, it was clear that Gratz’s whole view of the Union and America had changed. In a letter home, Gratz informed his family that, “while the South has mobilized men from sixteen to sixty-four...we have an army equal to this number, which

⁴⁸ Jacob Rader Marcus, “From Peddler to Regimental Commander in Two Years”, in *Jews and the Civil War*, ed. Jonathan Sarna and Adam Mendelsohn (New York, NYU Press, 2010), 254; “Letter of Louis Gratz”, ed. Marcus, 230.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 231.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Marcus, “From Peddler to Regimental Commander”, ed. Sarna and Mendelsohn, 258-259.

consists of men who left their homes and farms voluntarily... When nothing but poverty and famine characterized the South, Industry and prosperity were flourishing in the North.”⁵² Gratz no longer talked about returning to Germany, he had become enthralled with America. He talked of the country as his own; he referred to the people of the North as ‘we’ and took pride in its accomplishments that occurred before he even landed on its shores.

In 1864 Gratz was proud to announce that he had acculturated so well that, “many do not believe that I am European.”⁵³ Admittedly, his letters during the war years seem to suggest that his acculturation as an American was as a “Northerner”; he seemed to relish in denigrating the South. In reality he saw America and the Union as the same, loving it more and more as the war went on. For example, after the war he decided to make his home in Knoxville, Tennessee, a state that had seceded four years prior. Thus, Gratz’s time in the army did not lead him to despise the South and rather devoted him to America as a whole. The experience that Gratz had in the Union Army was certainly a rapid Americanization process. Other recent immigrants like Gratz may have felt the same Americanizing impulses that Gratz detailed during his time in the army. The Civil War helped cement these American ideals in Gratz, and showcases the acculturating and indoctrinating nature of the army during the war.

The fusion of Jewish soldiers’ American and Jewish identities, and its role in heightening Jews’ love for America, did not go unnoticed by the larger American community. Jewish military service made Jewish Americans a recognizable patriotic minority. One of the major instances of visible patriotism was when seven Jewish non-commissioned soldiers in the Union Army were given Medals of Honor during the Civil War for various acts of bravery on the

⁵² “Letter of Louis Gratz”, ed. Marcus, 233

⁵³ Ibid., 234.

battlefield.⁵⁴ All seven of the soldiers were recognizably Jewish if not solely by their names, also by the fact that Simon Wolf some thirty years later was able to identify them as Jewish by newspaper articles and local histories. Still, there were multiple other instances of the larger American community recognizing the patriotism of Jewish soldiers. When a controversy arose over chaplaincy in the Union, which is discussed at length below, several secular papers recognized the fervor with which Jews fought for the Union. Later, upon hearing of the appointment of a Jewish chaplain (Rev. Gotthelf), the *Louisville Journal* cited the large numbers of Jewish soldiers fighting in the army.⁵⁵ Jewish soldiers therefore helped raise the visibility of the larger Jewish American community and helped win Jews wider acceptance as an ethnic group worthy of recognition and equality.

The recognition of Jewish patriotism and bravery occurred in the South as well. One CSA soldier, Max Frankenthal (though his Colonel called him Fronthall), a Mississippi private, was reported by his Colonel A.T. Watts as never flinching under fire and as, “a little Jew...[with] the heart of a lion.”⁵⁶ Indeed, he was so recognized by the Southern community as a brave soldier that even at the turn of the twentieth century, Rabbi Henry Cohen in Galveston, Texas, reported that it was normal in the city to call a person with courage, “a regular Fronthall.”⁵⁷ General Thomas Waul of ‘Waul’s Texas Legion,’ which included a number of Jewish soldiers, wrote a few years after the war that Jewish soldiers, “were apparently willing and eager for the contest...I neither saw nor heard of any Jew shrinking or failing to answer to any call of duty...I jot down these recollection that you may have the testimony of one Gentile to attest to the

⁵⁴ Wolf, 106-108.

⁵⁵ Korn, 77, 97.

⁵⁶ Simnhoff, 264.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 263.

courage, endurance and patriotism of the Jew as soldier.”⁵⁸ Jewish soldiers thereby left a mark on the American community at large, which spoke to their patriotism. The newspapers, like the *Louisville Journal*, defended Jewish soldiers as patriotic Americans and fellow soldiers, like Waul, recognized Jews as brave fighters. In neither place did the writers attempt to deny the soldiers’ Jewish or American identities, rather, they pointed it out with zeal.

Although only a few Jewish soldiers’ experiences are recorded, what is remarkable is that there are common themes that appear in all of these historical vignettes. Both Union and Confederate Jewish soldiers sought to intersperse their experience in the army defending their land with moments of Jewish practices and pride. Neither Union nor Confederate soldiers wanted to be seen as un-American: they refused to serve in separate Jewish units apart from their Christian fellow citizens. At the same time, Jewish soldiers on the whole were also proud of their Judaism and took time off to celebrate Passover, the High Holidays and other Jewish events. Furthermore, by encouraging Jewish soldiers to merge their Jewish and American identities, military service during the Civil War helped foster a Jewish American community. This remarkably rapid transformation by the largely recent immigrants community was brought on by Jewish soldiers’ experiences in the army, and is a point of amazing Americanization brought on by the war.

⁵⁸ Wolf, 100-101.

Chapter 3

The Chaplaincy Debate: The Political Awakening of the Jewish Community

While new Jewish immigrants were quickly Americanized in the army, Jews who did not enlist were nonetheless wrapped up in the politically charged climate of the time. The transformative nature of the war may be seen in the very public mobilization of Jews around the demand for Jewish chaplains in the Union Army. The Jewish community waited for the chaplaincy issue to galvanize them into taking the first steps to becoming a national Jewish American community, one that could work together towards common national and minority goals. Through the chaplaincy issue, which made Jewish inclusion a national issue for one of the first times in the nation's history, the Jewish American community moved towards being a unified political force in America.

Unbeknownst at the time, the issue was set up on July 12th, 1861 when a new Volunteer Bill was proposed in the House of Representatives which addressed the nature of chaplains in the Union Army. Chaplains were religious officers with equal pay to a Cavalry Captain. Chaplains were elected from among each Company in each Regiment, gave weekly sermons and took care of other religious needs such as counseling and last rites. The bill was passed with little objection, including its clause which stated that a chaplain must be “a regularly ordained minister of some Christian denomination.”⁵⁹ The bill elicited little response from the Jewish community at the time, but the issue of Jewish chaplains in the Union quickly became a major issue that brought Northern Jews fully into the American political landscape, both by politically motivating

⁵⁹ Only Representative Clement Vallandigham from Ohio objected. He moved to strike the words, ‘Christian denomination’ for ‘religious society’ specifically in order to include Jews. His objection garnered no support. House of Representatives. *Cong. Globe*, 37th Cong., 2nd sess., 1861, 100, <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage> (accessed April 2, 2011).

them and making them identifiable as political actors and patriotic Americans to the non-Jewish public.

In part because there were few Jews in military service before the Civil War, the issue of Jewish chaplains was new. Yet, because of the influx of Jewish soldiers, the issue came to the fore specifically because of the climate of the Civil War. It is important to note that the question of Jewish chaplains was debated in the Union but not in the Confederacy. To begin with, there were far fewer Jews in the South. While the United States on the eve of the Civil War had over 150,000 Jews, only 20,000 to 25,000 lived in the South. Furthermore, Jews were more socially accepted in the South simply because they were white and were generally merchants and not manual laborers.⁶⁰ Consequently Confederate law regarding chaplains stated that a chaplain could be, “every minister of religion.”⁶¹ Nonetheless, no Jew ever served as a chaplain in the Confederate Army.⁶²

The lack of Confederate Jewish chaplains is possibly because of the different nature of war fought in the Confederacy. Whereas the Union fought an offensive war, in which Jewish soldiers were away from their communities and religious leaders for months at a time, the Confederacy fought a defensive war on their home territory. Therefore, Jewish Confederate soldiers were in closer proximity to their religious centers and rabbis. This possibly made a Confederate Jewish chaplain not as necessary as in the Union since local area congregational rabbis were able to attend to Jewish Confederate soldiers. Rabbi B. Nordlinger of Macon, Georgia ministered services to Jewish Confederate soldiers in F. H. Burghard’s Georgia Light

⁶⁰ Rosen, 31-32. Rosen remarks that while many contemporary commentators remarked on the social acceptance of Jews in the south because they were white, he ascribes it more to not being physical laborers such as the slaves or other immigrants.

⁶¹ Ibid, 209.

⁶² Ibid.

Artillery stationed in Macon.⁶³ Rabbi Max Michelbacher of Richmond, one of the major Reform rabbis in the South, composed a prayer that he passed out to the Jewish Soldiers present in Virginia. The prayer began with the traditional “*Shemang*⁶⁴ *Yisroel*,” which is a standard part of the Jewish prayer service, and continued to ask, “God of the Universe...give unto the officers of the Army and the Navy of the Confederate states, enterprise, fortitude and undaunted courage.”⁶⁵ Southern Jews in the Army and Southern Rabbis adapted to the realities of the time and changed their prayers and practices to accommodate the nature of the conflict. This was certainly a form of Americanization, yet it was not as drastic or as hard to attain as the appointment of a Jewish chaplain in the Union Army.

The chaplaincy debate in the North arose in a seemingly unintentional manner. An overzealous YMCA worker visited the 65th Regiment of the 5th Pennsylvania Cavalry. Known as Cameron’s Dragoon’s, the Regiment had an unusually high number of Jews for a 1,200 man regiment. The Regiment was also led by at least three Jewish officers, one of whom was Max Friedman, the Company’s Colonel.⁶⁶ As such, the Company had a large enough population of Jews to warrant a Jewish chaplain and thus in 1861, the 65th Regiment elected Michael Allen, a non-ordained Jewish soldier, as their Regimental Chaplain. The YMCA worker notified the press and soon enough Michael Allen was threatened by the Assistant Adjunct General of the Army with discharge for, “being mustered into the service as a chaplain,” because he was not, “a

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ The *Shema*, one of the holiest parts of the Jewish liturgy. Alternate spellings include *Shema*, *Shma*, *Shemang* and *Shemos*. It announces belief in God and that God is one. It is traditional to say it before one dies.

⁶⁵ Korn, 104-106.

⁶⁶ Wolf, 345, 351.; *American Civil War Regiments: 5th Cavalry Regiment Pennsylvania* in the Ancestry Library Edition, <http://search.ancestrylibrary.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&=&ti=5542%20ad&db=hdsregiment&f0=2033&f11=Union&gss=angs-d&pcat=39&fh=0&h=5209&recoff=> (accessed April 2, 2011).

regularly ordained clergyman of a Christian denomination.”⁶⁷ Allen resigned before he could be discharged.

Allen was certainly an able clergyman for both Jews and Christians. His diaries recount how he gave sermons to everyone in the regiment, Jews and Christians alike. He focused his sermons on general religious and moral topics. For example, on Sunday, September 8th, 1861 he, “lectured on ‘Peace and Harmony’ [to] all the officers and companies...under command of Lieut. Col. Becker.” Becker was one of the non-Jewish officers in the regiment and Allen recounts that Becker had, “a very pleasant time.”⁶⁸ Furthermore, Allen had studied standard Jewish theological texts for years and had acted as a lay leader for synagogues in the past.⁶⁹ Allen, because of the new role he found himself in, needed to adjust his learning to fit his interfaith audience, which he did remarkably well, showing his ability to acculturate and adapt. Nevertheless, even though Allen was seemingly removed because he was not from a “Christian denomination,” he was also not an “ordained minister.” As such, after Allen was mustered out of the service, Colonel Max Friedman resolved to try again with a qualified Jewish candidate.

The candidate chosen was the Rev. Arnold Fischel. A learned and well respected lecturer, he sought a commission from the 65th Regiment specifically to test the chaplaincy law.⁷⁰ On October 23, 1861, he got the fight he was looking for. Simon Cameron, the Secretary of War, wrote him a personal note that informed Rev. Fischel that, “it is provided that the Chaplains appointed... must be a regular ordained minister of some Christian denomination... Were it not for the impediments thus directly created by the provision of these two Acts, the Department

⁶⁷ *Philadelphia Sunday Dispatch*, October 20, 1861 quoted in Korn, 68.

⁶⁸ Ed. D. De Sola Pool, “Diary of Chaplain Michael Allen,” *Publications of the Jewish American Historical Archives*, XXXVIII (September 1948-June 1949): 180.

⁶⁹ Korn, 69.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 73.

would have taken your application into its favorable consideration.”⁷¹ While the letter was polite, it clearly stated the statute that only a Christian minister could become a chaplain in the Union Army. This series of events set up a yearlong campaign by both the Jewish ruling elites and the larger Northern Jewish community. Most had previously not been involved in any mass political movements concerning their role as Jews in North America.

While the chaplaincy controversy eventually became an issue hotly debated in the secular press and the American political sphere, it is not surprising that the Jewish press was the first to take up the issue wholeheartedly. Rabbi Wise of Cincinnati, a major figure in the Reform movement who was vehemently anti-war, published scathing articles about the unconstitutionality of the law and how the current leadership was perpetuating this abrogation of freedoms.⁷² Others, such as Samuel and Myer Isaacs who ran the pro-war *Jewish Messenger* based in New York, did not spew as much vitriol against the administration yet still attacked the unjust law. After detailing the death of D’Ancona, a young private in New York’s 73rd Regiment, the Excelsior Brigade, they informed the readers that he, like other Jewish soldiers dying in the field of battle, “perish among strangers to their faith, no Israelite near them to cheer their final moments, or bear their parting message to the loved ones at home.” They go on to state that, “Unfortunately, poor D’Ancona’s case is not an isolated one; we hear of others who have met the same fate-and no one of our faith to administer to soothing consolations of religion.”⁷³ These articles helped bring the issue to the Jewish public, and would help form the basis for the first unified Jewish response to a national issue concerning the Jewish community. Most remarkably, in the first months after the War Department refused Fischel’s commission as a chaplain, there

⁷¹ The War for the Union, *The New York Daily Tribune*, December 18, 1861, microform.

⁷² *The Israelite*, Nov. 15, 1861, microform, VIII, p. 157.

⁷³ *The Jewish Messenger*, May 16, 1862, microform, XI, p. 144.

was an explosion of articles about the chaplaincy debates in the non-Jewish press. Jews were becoming the center of a national political debate.

The first shots in this nationwide political debate were taken by those groups who were vehemently against Jewish inclusion in the chaplaincy. The major Presbyterian paper, *The Presbyterian*, made the first public statements in late 1861 arguing against the national Jewish position. It stated, “Jews regard Jesus of Nazareth as an imposter, a deceiver, and one worth of every term of reproach. And yet, (should this bill become a law, which God forbid that it should,) the government would, in effect, say that one might despise and reject the Savior of men...and yet be a fit minister of religion!”⁷⁴ Continuing the campaign to keep all chaplains Christian, in early December 1861, a group of men from the YMCA came to meet with various Senators and Representatives about the state of chaplains in the Army while a new chaplain bill was being debated on the floor. While the new bill would have allowed for chaplains of, “any religious society in the United States,” Robert McKnight, a member of the House of Representatives⁷⁵ called for, “the House to take no hasty action on the subject,” as he knew that the YMCA would object to allowing any Jewish, or non-Christian, chaplains.⁷⁶

In response to these groups attempting to block reform of the chaplaincy law, secular newspapers took up the standard of the Jewish newspapers, calling the law unfair and unconstitutional. The *Philadelphia Sunday Dispatch* argued that, “so soon as it becomes a settled point that a *native born American* is disqualified, by his peculiar religious belief, from filling any position under government, we need boast no longer of our vaunted liberty, freedom, and

⁷⁴ *The Presbyterian* quoted in *The Israelite*, March 28, 1862, microform, VIII, p. 308.

⁷⁵ *McKnight, Robert* in the Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=M000531> (accessed February 21, 2011).

⁷⁶ *Cong. Globe*, 37 Cong., 2 Sess., 157, <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage> (accessed April 2, 2011).; Korn, 76.

equality.”⁷⁷ Other newspapers, such as the *New York Journal of Commerce*, cited the large numbers with which Jews signed up for the Union Army, and concluded that it was only just for Jews to also have chaplains.⁷⁸ By far the most influential paper to comment on the topic was Horace Greeley’s *New York Tribune*. On December 18th, the paper reiterated many of the same sentiments as the *Dispatch*, but disseminated them to a much wider audience. The paper also reprinted the request of the Board of Delegates of American Israelites⁷⁹ to the House Committee on the Judiciary to remove the laws which “are oppressive, inasmuch as they establish a prejudicial discrimination against a particular class of citizens, on account of their religious belief.”⁸⁰ The Jewish chaplaincy issue thereby transcended the confines of the Jewish community. Thus, in late 1861, for one of the first times in American history, a debate over Jewish inclusion became a national issue.

This burgeoning chaplaincy debate highlighted the new visibility and importance of the Jewish American community. Yet, even more important than whether Jewish Americans were seen as politically significant, was whether the Jewish American community at large would politically mobilize around the chaplaincy debate that focused on their participation in the war. Therefore, the real mark of Americanization that the chaplaincy debate left on the Jewish American community was its ability to motivate Jewish Americans into organizing for a mutual cause. In October 1861 only the Jewish elites, such as Rabbi Wise in his *Israelite* or the Board of Delegates took up the cause. However, by the end of 1861 and the beginning of 1862, the entire Jewish community across the whole Union mobilized and petitioned to try to get Jewish

⁷⁷ *Sinai*, November, 1861, 3211 quoted in Korn, 77.

⁷⁸ Korn, 77.

⁷⁹ A board of rabbis from prominent synagogues across the nation, it was created in 1859 in to send aid from the US Jewish Community to help the prosecution in the Edgardo Mortara Case in which a young Jewish boy was kidnapped from his family by Papal authorities when it was discovered he was given an emergency baptism while seriously ill. The Board of Delegates’ purpose was to organize Jewish communal responses to issues concerning the community. Sarna, 110.

⁸⁰ The War for the Union, *Daily Tribune*, Dec. 18, 1861, microform.

chaplains appointed for the Jewish soldiers serving in the Union army.⁸¹ The flood of petitions began at the end of 1861. The first real call for petitions came from Rabbi Wise in an issue of *The Israelite* in late November. He called on Jews to, “draw up a petition to abolish that unconstitutional law, have it signed by every neighbor you find disposed to do so, and send it to your representative or senator in congress.”⁸²

By early December Jews and non-Jews from across the nation were petitioning their government to allow Jewish chaplains in the Army. Between December 9 and December 16, three senators presented seven petitions on the Senate floor.⁸³ One of the largest was from F. Friedenreich in Baltimore, whose petition included over 700 signatures from Christians. Other petitions included thirty eight signatures from members of the Maryland legislature, and ones from small towns such as Columbus, Iowa and Edinburgh, Indiana.⁸⁴ This mass of signatures was far beyond the scope of Rabbi Wise’s influence or even the Board of Delegates. Jews from across the country, from Iowa to New York, felt the need to band together for a common goal. Furthermore, Jews reached out to the non-Jewish members of their communities to help address this grievance. Christians perhaps felt compelled to aid the Jews they knew were fighting valiantly for the Union, and Jews were committed to using every resource to gain support for their cause. Rabbi Wise in *The Israelite* had begged the populace to do many things, from being better Jews to supporting Douglas against Lincoln. Yet, Jewish Americans did not band together across the whole country and across political lines to do any of those requests. Only in the face of the chaplaincy issue did Jewish Americans truly unite as political actors towards a common goal.

⁸¹ Wolf, 424.

⁸² *The Israelite*, November 15, 1861, VIII, p. 157 quoted in Korn, 77.

⁸³ Schappes, 463.

⁸⁴ *Jewish Messenger*, November 15, 1861, microform, X, p. 72.; Korn, 78.

With the plethora of documents and petitions sent to Washington, DC, the Board of Delegates decided to send an emissary to ensure that a change of the chaplaincy law was enacted. They sent none other than Rev. Arnold Fischel. On December 13, 1861 he met with President Lincoln and received his full support. Only a week later, on December 20, 1861, the first resolution to change the chaplaincy law was proposed in the House of Representatives.⁸⁵ By March 12, 1862 the Senate had passed the resolution to allow any member of the clergy, regardless of religion, to become a chaplain. On July 17, 1862 the bill passed the House. The new law read, “No person shall be appointed a chaplain in the United States Army that is not a regularly ordained minister of some religious denomination.”⁸⁶ Jewish Americans had succeeded. Through a tireless petition campaign, representatives in Washington, DC could no longer ignore the injustice of the original volunteer bill. Jewish Americans for the first time acted as a politically unified Jewish American community. Jews in the Union had prevailed in obtaining for themselves the same rights that their brethren in the South had since 1861.

Reverend Fischel went on to become a civilian chaplain in the Potomac region, yet he left the area when there were no more funds to support him. Only three Jews were ever truly appointed Army Chaplains. The first was Rev. Jacob Frakel who was appointed an Army Hospital Chaplain⁸⁷ on September 18, 1862 and served in the Philadelphia region. The only Jewish Regimental Chaplain was Rev. Ferdinand Sarner who served from April 10, 1863 until the end of the war with the 54th New York Volunteer Infantry. The most difficult appointment was Rev. Bernhard Henry Gotthelf, who was appointed only after Jews in Kentucky endlessly petitioned for a Jewish chaplain to take care of the Jewish sick in the hospitals. Perhaps they felt politically motivated after the petitions of 1861 and early 1862. Whatever the reason, on May 6,

⁸⁵ Korn, 81-85.

⁸⁶ *Cong. Globe*, 37th Cong., 2nd Sess., 299, <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage> (accessed April 2, 2011).

⁸⁷ Which is equivalent to a Regimental Chaplain and was similarly previously closed to Jews.

1863, their petitions were answered and Rev. Gotthelf became the last Jew to be appointed chaplain during the Civil War.⁸⁸

The chaplaincy debate marked a moment of rapid Americanization for the Jewish American community, especially for those living in the North. To begin with, by the end of 1861 the question of Jews in the chaplaincy, and by extension Jews in general, was a central media and political debate raging in newspapers and the Capital. It was recognized in the debate that Jews were patriotic citizens. Multiple publications noted how Jews were fighting and dying for the Union,⁸⁹ and by doing such the debate recognized Jews as a minority, but also as a particularly American and patriotic minority. Yet, even more importantly, the chaplaincy debate demanded the political unity and mobilization of Jewish Americans. The debate moved from the theoretical outrage of Rabbi Wise and Myer Isaacs to Jews all over the nation petitioning their representatives towards the same political goal. Only after non-elite Jews petitioned Congress did it seem like change would occur, and as such only then did Rev. Fischel go to Washington. The chaplaincy debate sparked by the Civil War helped make the Jewish American community a recognizable, unified and motivated political actor in the American political landscape.

⁸⁸ Korn, 92, 97, 99.

⁸⁹ *Sinai*, November, 1861, No. 10, p. 3211 quoted in Korn, 77.; Ibid.

Chapter 4

Jewish Philanthropy during the War: Funding the Fight

Only about seven percent of Jewish Americans served in the armed forces. The petitions to Congress concerning the chaplaincy controversy contained thousands of signatures, most of them from Jews; yet again they did not represent the majority of the Jewish community. Most Jewish Americans were not directly involved in those two defining moments of Jewish communal transformation during the Civil War. However, Jews on the home front during the war in both the Union and the Confederacy were intimately involved in the war in a variety of ways. Many in the North contributed money to the Sanitary Fairs which raised money for the war effort. Three Jewish firms in San Francisco each donated \$1,000 as private donations to the Sanitary Fairs.⁹⁰ In the South, individual Jews similarly aided the Confederate cause. M.C. Mordecai of Charleston was one of the main donors to the “Free Market of Charleston,” which supported families of soldiers.⁹¹ These actions were taken by individual Jews to aid the war effort of their respective side.

Individual Jews had been aiding United States war efforts since the Revolutionary War. Haym Salomon, a Polish-born financial broker in New York City who helped fund the cash strapped Continental Congress, is perhaps the most famous.⁹² The patriotic M.C. Mordecai, San Francisco Jews, and countless others were simply continuing the tradition that Salomon had begun over eight decades prior. Yet, the Civil War marked an evolution in the organization and

⁹⁰ Korn. 117.

⁹¹ Ibid., 118.

⁹² Bob Blythe, *Haym Salomon* in the National Parks Service, http://www.nps.gov/revwar/about_the_revolution/haym_salomom.html (accessed March 6, 2011).

purpose of Jewish philanthropic organizations that helps punctuate the creation of a strong and patriotic Jewish American minority community.

For the first time in American history, Jews used solely Jewish organizations on a large scale to aid and support secular and national causes. It was visible early on in the war that a drastic change had occurred. In August, 1862, the Jewish community of Chicago, about 1,000 individuals, met “for the purpose of making a united effort in support of a vigorous prosecution of the war.”⁹³ They resolved to raise ten thousand dollars for the cause and also attempt to recruit a company of soldiers. What is remarkable is not that the citizens felt a desire to aid the Union war effort, but rather that this was the first time that the Chicago Jewish community organized for a secular purpose since its founding in 1847.⁹⁴

Pre-war Jewish organizations were remarkably centered on the Jewish community. There were a variety of benevolent societies which had been created since the 1820s with the sole purpose of aiding fellow Jews. In 1844 the Hebrew Benevolent Society in New York was founded to aid poor German-Jewish immigrants. The Young Men’s Hebrew Benevolent Association, listed in a registry of Jewish aid organizations in 1854, was created to distribute fuel to Jews in winter. One of the largest organizations was the B’nai Brith, founded in 1843, which grew into one of the main institutions that overlooked the welfare of the immigrant German Jewish population.⁹⁵ Yet, all of these institutions mobilized singularly for the purpose of aiding fellow Jews. The Civil War changed this trend irrevocably. For the first time a multitude of Jewish organizations felt the need to branch out and aid secular causes. Jews in both the North and the South, even though most of them were not fighting on the battlefields, organized their

⁹³ “Company C, 82nd Illinois Infantry: Report in the Chicago Journal, August 14, 1862,” *A Documentary History of the Jews in the United States*, ed. Morris Schappes (New York, The Citadel Press, 1952), 471.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 470.

⁹⁵ Jick, Leon, *The Americanization of the Synagogue* (London, Brandeis University Press, 1992), 106-108.

local communities to aid the greater fight for their respective patriotic causes. This was a totally new impulse in the Jewish community.

Like in many churches, fundraising in synagogues was a central aspect of the welfare of the local and international religious community. The first major Jewish fundraising efforts in America centered on the synagogue. Like the first Jewish aid organizations, synagogue philanthropy was mainly focused on aiding the poor in its specific Jewish community.⁹⁶ The Civil War led to a reversal of this trend of exclusivity. Prior to the Civil War, rabbis and communal organizations often declined to take a stand on American political issues.⁹⁷ Early on in the war it was clear that this inclination was changing and that Jewish American communal organizations felt that it was their duty to take part in the larger American struggle. In 1861 during the holiday of *Shavuot*, the day commemorating the giving of the *Torah*,⁹⁸ an announcement was made from the pulpit of the Anshi Chesed Congregation in New York which asked the congregation to donate to the Volunteer Relief Fund. The outcome of the announcement was declared proudly in the May 24th edition of *The Jewish Messenger*, which stated that, “over \$200 were subscribed to that patriotic effort,” and furthermore that, “our co-religionists are thus manifesting their loyalty in every tangible way.”⁹⁹

The South saw similar efforts taken up in the synagogue. Rabbi Bernard Illowy, who began as a rabbi in Baltimore but became an ardent secessionist and moved to a pulpit in New Orleans, gave a sermon on secession in January, 1861. He remarked, “who can blame...the South for their being inclined to secede from a society...whose union is kept together, not by the good sense and good feelings of the great masses of the people, but by an ill-regulated balance of

⁹⁶ Ibid, 19.

⁹⁷ Avraham Barkai, *Branching Out* (New York, Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1994), 109.

⁹⁸ Pentateuch or the Five Books of Moses which comprise Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

⁹⁹ *The Jewish Messenger*, May 24, 1861, microform, IX, No. 20, p. 157.

power and heavy iron ties of violence and arbitrary force?”¹⁰⁰ Illowy continued the war in New Orleans. He constantly called for the financial support of various Confederate relief efforts from his new pulpit in Shaari Hased in New Orleans and at various Confederate fundraisers run by Jewish philanthropic organizations, such as the Association for the Relief of Jewish Widows and Orphans.¹⁰¹ Thus, for both the North and the South, the Civil War marked a new merger of Jewish religious life in the synagogue with the issues of the larger American society.

There are many other examples of Jewish religious societies supporting the war effort. At the annual *Purim* ball in 1864, the ladies organizing refreshments sold them for, “a moderate fee for the benefit of the Sanitary Fair.”¹⁰² However, it was not solely established Jewish benevolent societies and synagogues who felt compelled to aid their respective national causes. Many new Jewish organizations were formed for the sole purpose of aiding the war effort. The Ladies Hebrew Association for the Relief of Sick and Wounded Soldiers was one such organization. Founded in Philadelphia on May 11, 1863, it stated its purpose as providing, “sick and wounded soldiers, irrespective to religious creed...with delicacies and clothing while they lie in the army hospitals.”¹⁰³ The organization went onto send thousands of supplies to soldiers of all religions in the hospitals, including shirts, sponges, biscuits, soap and reams of letter paper to allow the soldiers to write home to their families.¹⁰⁴ Multiple other organizations cropped up like the Philadelphia’s Ladies Hebrew Association. In Pittsburgh, the Hebrew Ladies’ Soldiers’ Aid Society was created in mid-1863 and an organization called Alert! was formed to create needle

¹⁰⁰ Bernard Illowy, *Fast Day Sermon* in the Jewish-American History Foundation, <http://www.jewish-history.com/Illowy/sermon.html> (accessed March 7, 2011).; Rosen, 244.

¹⁰¹ Rosen, 244.

¹⁰² The Sanitary Commission was a Union institution which focused on raising money for the Union war effort. Over the course of the war it raised tens of millions of dollars for the Union especially through the Sanitary Fairs which were city wide events that extolled the Unions and raised money by playing on patriotic themes. Lawson, 22-24.; *Messenger*, March 25, 1864, microform, XV, No. 12, p. 98.

¹⁰³ *Sinai*, July, 1862, VII, No. 6, p. 172 quoted in Korn, 120.

¹⁰⁴ Korn, 120.

work that would be sold at the Sanitary Fairs¹⁰⁵ to benefit the soldiers. For the first time in the history of the Jewish American community, Jews felt compelled to create organizations that were identifiably Jewish yet were working solely to aid participants in a larger national issue regardless of religious creed.

Even more remarkably, it was not only new Jewish organizations that cropped up to fill the need for Jewish patriotic philanthropy. Jewish aid organizations that had been in existence for years felt compelled to change their focus of donations from aiding local Jews in need to the soldiers on their respective side. Meyer Isaacs, the editor of the *Jewish Messenger*, described this trend in a letter to the President of the New York Sanitary Commission, Rev. H. W. Bellows, in 1863. Isaacs asserted that, “The Hebrew Ladies of this city possess many organizations, by means of which they extend judicious and liberal relief to their indigent coreligionists. At the breaking out of war, several of these associations were converted into Soldiers’ Aid Societies and undertook the duty of cooperating in the good work proposed by the Commission.”¹⁰⁶ *En masse*, Jewish aid organizations felt the cause of the Union and Confederacy was greater and of more immediate concern than the Jewish poor of their cities who historically had been the sole recipients of the organizations’ aid.

While there was no centralized philanthropic vehicle in the South equivalent to the North’s Sanitary Commission, Southern Jewish aid organizations followed a similar path to that of their counterparts in the North. It had been common before the war for Southern Jewish women, like Southern Christian women, to meet in sewing circles to make clothes for the local poor of their communities. When the war broke out, their focus changed immediately. In June,

¹⁰⁵ *Jewish Record*, Jan 8, 1864 quoted in Korn, 121.; *Jewish Messenger*, June, 24, 1864, microform, XV, No. 24, p. 190.

¹⁰⁶ “Women Aid the Soldiers: Letter from Myer S. Isaacs,” *A Documentary History of the Jews in the United States*, ed. Morris Schappes (New York, The Citadel Press, 1952), 492.

1861, “the ‘Jewess ladies’ of the town [Charlotte, NC] raised \$150 to assist the volunteers,” of the Charlotte Grays, a Company created in April of the same year.¹⁰⁷ Similar efforts were made across the South. In Richmond, the women of Congregation Beth Shalome and Beth Ahabah met daily to make clothes for the soldiers.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, for the Jews at home in the North and South, the Civil War seemed to mark a change in the identity of organized Jewry. Jews strove to show that their philanthropic associations were representative of their new status as a Jewish American community rather than just a Jewish community in America.

The new Jewish communal status inside America was marked perfectly by the transformation of the Jews’ Hospital of New York during the war. The Hospital was founded in 1852 for the sole purpose of serving New York Jewry in order to improve Jewish social welfare. Indeed, until the Civil War only Jews were helped in the hospital besides the occasional emergency case which did not have time to get to another hospital.¹⁰⁹ However, in April 1861, the Board of Directors of the Hospital was aware of the shortage of decent medical facilities for troops and as such informed the government that it was willing to open the hospital to soldiers regardless of religious affiliation. The military bureaucracy evidently moved very slowly and it was not until 1862 that it decided to accept the Board’s offer. Between 1862 and 1864, military patients exceeded the number of civilian patients. To signal the change from a solely Jewish institution to one that aided the efforts of the nation and any patient regardless of religion, the Hospital changed its name to Mount Sinai Hospital in 1866.¹¹⁰

This change of focus that the Jews’ Hospital of New York epitomized occurred throughout all levels of Jewish communal life. Synagogue functions became infused with pleas

¹⁰⁷ Schappes, 707.

¹⁰⁸ Rosen, 226.

¹⁰⁹ Korn, 125-127.

¹¹⁰ Korn, 125-127.

to support the nation, local sewing clubs started knitting for soldiers of all religions rather than just the Jewish communal poor, new and old Jewish philanthropic organizations began to focus their fundraising on the war effort and Jewish institutions that were the pride and joy of their community looked to broaden their scope from aiding solely Jews to those fighting for the cause. Jewish organizations that were identifiably Jewish became wrapped up in the causes of the Union or the Confederacy.

Even though there was an outpouring of patriotic support from explicitly Jewish groups, Jews at home, like their brethren in the army who refused to have solely Jewish units, were afraid of separating themselves too much from the secular aid organizations. Meyer Isaacs, in the same letter to the President of the Sanitary Commission, was fearful of Jews forming their own tables at the Sanitary Fairs. When the idea was proposed, he was vehemently against it. He stated, “There should be no discrimination as to creed, in selecting the ladies to be honored with the duty of aiding your Committee when Christian and Israelite are working zealously side by side on the battle field.”¹¹¹ While Isaacs was proud that multiple Jewish organizations were working tirelessly to help the national cause, he wanted to make sure that in public events Jewish philanthropists stood side by side with their fellow Christian patriots. It was an ironic request as the Sanitary Fair in New York eventually had tables staffed by Ladies Aid Societies from Episcopalian and Catholic churches,¹¹² yet Isaacs was determined to integrate Jewish patriotic outpouring within the larger American efforts.

The trend of Jewish philanthropy tells a similar Americanizing story to what occurred to Jewish soldiers in the field. The Civil War helped galvanize the community. Jews at home were proud of being Jewish, Jewish aid organizations during the war always identified as Jewish. Yet,

¹¹¹ “Women Aid Soldiers,” ed. Schappes, 492.

¹¹² Ibid.

these Jews at home felt compelled to no longer focus only on the Jewish community. They felt committed to not only to their fellow Jews in their close-knit communities but also to the larger Union or Confederate cause to which they were dedicated. Jewish organizations shifted from aiding solely Jews to aiding the soldiers regardless of religion. New organizations were formed for the expressed purpose of doing so. Jewish functions and religious services were interspersed with pleas to support the cause of their respective land. Furthermore, when it was suggested that Jewish aid organizations should have separate tables at large fundraising events, Jewish organizations expressly asked to be mixed together with Christian fundraisers at the event rather than be perceived as separate. The Civil War led the Jewish community to work within its communal structures to join in and support the larger American struggle that was erupting around the country. For the first time, Jewish Americans were able to stay identified in their own Jewish American communities yet still Americanize by taking upon themselves full participation in the patriotic American impulse to aid their respective side. Perhaps the Civil War altered the thinking of Jewish Americans; no longer were they solely responsible to their community, but also to the larger American community.

Chapter 5

Jewish Unity across the Battlefields

An anonymous Jewish Union soldier wrote a letter telling a very odd story about one of his fellow soldiers. “One of these soldiers...was very religious, and whenever he fired off his gun, he cried out *Shma Israel*...On being asked why he said it so often, he relayed that ‘it may be some Yehudee¹¹³ gets killed by him, and he could never pardon himself, if any one of his brethren should, through him, go out of the world without *Shemos*.’”¹¹⁴ The soldier was in the heat of battle. He may have despised the South like so many of his fellow soldiers who lived only to defend the Union. Yet, in a moment of total compassion he cried out one of the holiest prayers of Judaism to make sure that his co-religionist would not die without hearing the words they both cherished so much. He was thinking not only of his cause, but also of his community.

This vignette is emblematic of the relations between Jews in the North and South during the war. Jews were patriots, and strong ones at that. Yet, Jews did not simply abide by the regional divides that separated much of the country. Much like families on the border states who were split between the Union and the Confederacy, Jews who came to America had relatives living across the East Coast. Furthermore, they were tied together by a shared heritage of religion and immigration.¹¹⁵ Jews in both the North and the South therefore identified and reached out to Jews on the other side throughout the war. Thus, not only did Jews in the North and South have similar experiences during the war, they were also able to keep a degree of communal cohesion across battle lines during the war. This sense of larger belonging possibly allowed Jews to come together easier than the rest of the country after the war.

¹¹³ Jew in Hebrew and Yiddish, alternate spelling includes Yehudee.

¹¹⁴ “Union Soldier’s Correspondence,” ed. Schappes, 469.

¹¹⁵ Rosen, 277.

There are many accounts that highlight the cross-line unity that existed between Jews during the Civil War. Many of these stories involve Union soldiers in the South. Generally, as the Union Army was an invading force, it was seen by Southerners as a foreign and destructive force coming to the Confederacy. Most remarkably, while the stories of Jewish Union soldiers often include some apprehension on the part of the Southerners, in the end the soldiers are welcomed in as fellow Jewish Americans. One of the most amazing stories came from Colonel Marcus Spiegel. Writing to his wife from a Navy vessel on the Mississippi River in December 1862, Spiegel recounted his time in Memphis after invading the city with Grant's Army and a remarkable story that occurred to him while walking along the riverbank.

I...saw a Yehudah and his wife. I remembered the Sabbath and decided to have a kosher lunch. So, as my friend and his wife came closer, I said, "Happy Sabbath, dear people," frightening the gentleman and probably his wife, being offered "Happy Sabbath" by a man in uniform with sword, spurs, and so forth and so forth. I asked where one could eat a kosher lunch. The gentleman said I could go with him, or to Mr. Levy who was holding a Jewish boarding house. I went to Levy and found him and 30 Jews very surprised when I asked if I could have a Chanukah lunch...But when I sat at the table and Levy took a good look at me he said... 'Dear God, a son of Rabbi Mosche of Abenheim, a Lieutenant Colonel.'¹¹⁶

Spiegel, an invading soldier, felt comfortable reaching out to the local Jewish population. The Union General Benjamin Butler in New Orleans, called 'Beast' Butler, was loathed by the general population of the city and could have never had such a pleasant conversation with a resident of the city.¹¹⁷ Yet, Spiegel, a high ranking officer in the army that invaded Memphis, was able to reach out to a citizen of Memphis specifically because that person was "a Yehudah." Furthermore, even though the man and his wife were startled at being addressed by a Union officer, they were welcoming and even invited him to their house because he was a fellow Jew. Finally, Mr. Levy, another resident of Memphis was proud that a Jew rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, even though he was an officer of the enemy. This cross battle-line

¹¹⁶ Ed. Byrne and Soman, *Your True Marcus*: 202.

¹¹⁷ Rosen, 249-250.

benevolence between Jews helped give a sense of a single Jewish American community throughout a war that was slowly breaking up the American nation.

There are many other amazing examples like Colonel Spiegel's that tell of the Southern Jewish community welcoming its Union brethren. Simon Brucker, a Lieutenant of the 39th Illinois Volunteer Regiment, was in Suffolk, Virginia during the High Holidays after capturing the region. He looked for a synagogue in the region and went to services.¹¹⁸ In a quote from the *Israelite* article about his experiences he said, "Oh! It made me feel as though I were at home among friends once more."¹¹⁹ Even though he was surrounded by enemies, he felt as if he was at home. Admittedly, he went on to say that, "All the Yehudin in Norfolk are embittered against the northern soldiers."¹²⁰ Nonetheless, the members of the congregation welcomed him and treated him well because he was a fellow Jew.¹²¹

Jacob C. Cohen of the 27th Ohio Infantry had a very similar experience. While in Memphis in June, 1863 he wrote a letter to the *Jewish Messenger* stating, "Since our encampment here we have one desirable advantage, *i.e.* the opportunity to visit the synagogue on Shabbos and holydays."¹²² Cohen was excited to go to synagogue and pray with his religious brethren, even in enemy territory. Another illuminating story came from Myer Levy, a Union soldier from Philadelphia. His regiment had just captured a Virginia town around the time of Passover and he saw a boy eating *Matzah*. He asked the boy for a piece, yet the boy yelled out, "Mother! There's a 'damnyankee' Jew outside!" The mother immediately invited him in for *Seder*.¹²³ The boy, upon seeing the soldier, belittled him for being an enemy soldier but also

¹¹⁸ Korn, 109.

¹¹⁹ *Israelite*, October 17, 1862, IX, No. 15, p. 195 quoted in Korn, 110.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Korn, 110.

¹²² Jacob C. Cohen, *An Expedition "Outside the Lines"* in the Jewish-American History Foundation <http://www.jewish-history.com/civilwar/jcc06.html> (accessed March 9, 2011).

¹²³ Korn, 110.

recognized him as a fellow Jew. The mother, who may have helped teach the child that language for referring to Union soldiers, nevertheless had no problem welcoming Myer in to share the religious ceremony with their family. The willingness of the Jewish members of the South to welcome in Jewish Union soldiers, even to the point of inviting them into their homes to partake of their holiday meals, is one indicator that Jewish American identity superseded regional divides.

There are many stories of Union soldiers being accepted into Southern Jewish communities. There are similarly examples of when Northern Jews aided the Southern Jewish community. Dr. Mayer, a Surgeon for a Virginia Regiment, was in Cincinnati early in the war. While there, he went to see local rabbis, such as Isaac Mayer Wise and Max Lilienthal. Both offered to send him aid if his patients were ever in need of basic necessities of hospitalization.¹²⁴ Not only did Wise and Lilienthal welcome in a fellow Jew, they even offered to help him patch up enemy soldiers. Later, in 1863, Isaac Mayer Wise received a letter from a Jewish Confederate prisoner of war, Max Neugas, in Delaware asking for Wise to help him get released so he could simply return home as a civilian. Wise jumped at the opportunity to help the Jewish soldier. He ran a letter in his *Israelite* stating that he supported the cause and, “sent the letter [of Neugas] and our remarks appended to Washington...OFFICE COMMISSARY GEN. OF PRISONERS.”¹²⁵ A year later, a few other Jewish Confederate prisoners of war wrote to Wise hoping for the same aid.¹²⁶ Perhaps Wise supported his case because Neugas promised to leave the military if released. Nevertheless, Wise actively tried to get an enemy combatant released, solely because he was a fellow Jew. Furthermore, Neugas wrote to Wise specifically because he wanted to reach out to a Jewish leader who he trusted. Evidently, Southern Jews were able to

¹²⁴ *Israelite*, July 29, 1864, XI, No. 5, p. 37 quoted in Korn, 113.

¹²⁵ *Israelite*, October 16, 1863, p. 122 quoted in Rosen, 208.

¹²⁶ Rosen, 208.

find the same hospitality and Jewish camaraderie across battle-lines as Jewish Union soldiers did in the South.

These various stories help show the sense of community between Jews that existed across the lines that divided the Union from the Confederacy. Southern Jews were welcomed by their co-religionists in the North as were Northern Jews in the South. This acceptance was not based on similar political or national allegiances. Indeed, in many cases they possibly despised and loathed the cause that the displaced Jew represented. Nevertheless, Jews in both the North and South felt connected to one another because of a common heritage and religion. This cross line unity helped maintain Jewish Americans' place among the national Jewish American community during the four years of the conflict. Even while Southern Jews were fighting for the Confederacy they believed in, and Northern Jews were attempting to restore the Union, they still felt connected to those Jews in the other half of the country. Thus, while Jews in both the North and South were Americanizing in similar ways, the existence of a sense of shared responsibility to one's Jewish brethren across battle-lines helped strengthen the Jewish American community became visible in the Civil War.

Conclusion

After four years of war, the face of America drastically changed. The South was in shambles; it had neither the infrastructure nor the economic developments that the North created during the war, such as a national bank or a more industrialized economy. Therefore, even besides losing the war, Southerners had more than enough reasons to loath the outcome of the Civil War. The idea of the “Lost Cause” even became a central focus of Southern ideology. This was no different for Southern Jews. Southern Jews, who fought and worked bravely for their land, focused on their lost sons and on their trampled cause.¹²⁷ Union Jews, while ecstatic alongside their fellow Northerners with their victory, did not have the same bitterness or sense of crushing defeat as the community in the South. Southern Jews commiserated with their fellow former Confederates over the loss of their great nation.¹²⁸ In almost every regard, Southern Jews were in the same dire straits as the rest of the South: their land was burned, their cities were laid to waste and their morale was totally destroyed.

The Jews of the South needed financial aid and a means to rise up out the ashes that engulfed them. Many Southerners turned to homespun and whatever other foreign or Southern based aid they could garner.¹²⁹ Yet, Jews in the South felt that they had another group to turn to for aid: Northern Jews. Less than one month after the end of the Civil War, the Jewish community of Savannah, Georgia, was in a terrible situation. The previously wealthy community lost all of their funds in the war and was coming close to the holiday of Passover with no means of cooking *Matzah* for themselves. This terrible possibility of lacking *Matzah* for the festival was

¹²⁷ Sarna, 124.

¹²⁸ Rosen, 336-337.

¹²⁹ “Chatherine Edmondston Reflects on the Situation of the Confederacy,” in *The Civil War and Reconstruction: A Documentary Collection*, ed. William Gienapp, (New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 296.

unthinkable to the Jewish inhabitants of Savannah and as such they appealed to the Jews of the North through the *Jewish Messenger* in early May 1865. The paper reported that:

An appeal has been made...on behalf of the Jewish residents of the city [Savannah]. It is desired to procure for them about five thousand pounds of Matzoth. Many inhabitants, formerly wealthy, are now in extremely strained circumstances; and besides, they have entirely lost the means of baking for the emerging Passover...let us not be backwards now in not cheering their hearts with this remembrance.¹³⁰

The Southern Jewish community was compelled to contact their Northern Jewish brethren to aid them in their search for a return to normalcy. The Northern Jews did not disappoint. In less than a month, Northern Jewish communities donated over 5,000 pounds of *Matzah* along with four hundred and twenty three dollars in philanthropic aid.¹³¹

Even though they were on different sides of a divisive war for four years, and even though they had not had formal communication during that time, when the Jews of the South needed aid, they immediately turned to their fellow Jews in the North. The Northern Jews responded with absolute benevolence, seeing their Southern co-religionists not as former enemies but as brethren in need. Before 1865 was over, *The Jewish Record* called on all Jews in New York to voluntarily aid Southern Jews in their rebuilding effort.¹³² This was not done because Southern Jews requested help, but simply because Northern Jews felt an unbreakable bond with their Southern counterparts. Clearly, a strong and unified Jewish American community came out of the war that sought to tear apart the United States.

The patriotic Jewish American minority that was forged in the Civil War grew out of an amalgamation of various forces. Tens of thousands of recent Jewish immigrants were thrust into a politically and ideologically charged atmosphere that defied the standard immigrant experience. Jews in the army experienced an accelerated Americanization process; deriving

¹³⁰ *Jewish Messenger*, March 3, 1865, microform, XVII, No. 9, p. 71.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, March 24, 1865, microform, No. 12, p. 98.

¹³² Korn, 133.

strong patriotic and nationalistic sentiments from their brothers-in-arms. Yet, besides simply infusing the Jewish American community with American ideals, the Civil War served to mobilize Jews to become a politically active minority. Jews for the first time looked beyond their Jewish community in their philanthropy. Tens of thousands of dollars poured out from various Jewish philanthropic organizations in order to aid specifically non-Jewish national causes. Jews, because of the chaplaincy issue brought to the fore by the conflict, rallied for a Jewish American political cause on a national level for the first time. Truly, the Civil War Americanized the Jews in America. Regardless of the side of the war, Jews became identified with their national cause, worked towards the success of their respective side and were accepted as members of the American community through the context of the Civil War.

While Jews fought for the success of both the Union and the Confederacy, they did not disregard their fellow Jews on the other side of the war. Jews in the North reached out to Jews in the South, and Jews in the South welcomed in their displaced co-religionists when they came through town with an invading army. Thus, the story of Jews in the Civil War represents an inherent tension. Jews worked towards becoming Americans during the war, they became loyal citizens and strong political actors. Yet, Jews also maintained a degree of separation throughout the war, as visible in Southern Jews who accepted in a Jewish Union soldier for a holiday but still despised the North. This inherent tension defines the Jewish American place in America. Nevertheless, Jews were still remarkably Americanized by their experience in the Civil War, becoming an active, politicized and ideological member of the American landscape.

By the late nineteenth century the Jewish American community grew dramatically. From the end of the nineteenth century through the beginning of the twentieth century, over a million Jews streamed into the United States from Eastern Europe. These Jews did not always find open

arms from the more entrenched German Jewish community who had proved their patriotism in the Civil War. Nevertheless, the immigrants knew that there was a strong Jewish Community in America. German Jews also knew that these Eastern Europeans coming onto America's shores were brethren, and therefore built up societies that created a form of social welfare and infrastructure for the incoming community. These organizations were not perfect, but they spoke to a sense of shared heritage and the knowledge that these new immigrants could also become a part of the strong and patriotic Jewish American minority. Today, most Jews in America are descended from the Eastern European immigrants of a century ago. Many Jewish Americans' grandparents tell stories of the *shtetl* in Poland or Lithuania rather than talking about their emigration from Berlin or Hamburg. Nevertheless, proud Jewish Americans should not forget who began to make the Jewish American community a vibrant and visible minority which is imbedded in American society. For those Jews who lived through the Civil War, the experience was life changing. Yet, the community they forged because of the war years sparked the growth and solidified the strength and identity of the Jewish American community one sees today.

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