

INTRODUCTION

Each year I teach a course in American Jewish history, and almost without fail, at some point during the semester, the class discussion takes a familiar detour. We might be discussing the mass migration of Jews to the United States or perhaps the various political expressions of American Jews, and invariably, a hand goes up. "Judaism teaches democracy," a student says, in an attempt to explain historical developments ranging from immigrant acculturation to social activism to labor organizing. Heads nod. More often than not, I am the sole detractor, pointing out that Judaism and democracy have never been synonymous, except, as this book will argue, in the narratives created by American Jews. Nevertheless, the students who populate my classes, particularly those who have grown up in Jewish households, hold fast to their convictions. As the debate continues, I press the issue further: "What about Judaism is inherently democratic?" One student replies with assurance, "The Bible teaches democratic values." Another student, a religious studies major, disagrees: "The Bible is a theocracy and has nothing to do with democracy." As the discussion unfolds, it becomes abundantly clear that while some students believe that the Bible itself teaches democratic values, others have broadened the discussion, arguing that both American and Jewish culture share a core set of beliefs.

The class debate continues, with students supporting both sides of the argument, but many, especially the Jewish students, clinging furiously to the belief that democracy lay, in one way or another, at the heart of Jewish values. As the conversation develops, the issues at stake begin to extend far beyond a highly selective reading of the Bible. Students were using the Bible, the essential text of Judaism, to make a claim about the nature of American Jewish identity. By insisting that Jewish and American cultures converged seamlessly, these college

INTRODUCTION

students were asserting—perhaps without appreciating the bold nature of their claim—that Jews belonged in the United States, that they were unequivocally and organically part of the country's social and cultural fabric.

Most of these students had no idea that they were repeating, almost verbatim, the dictums about American Jewish culture that had been consciously constructed by previous generations of American Jews. During the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, American Jews from all sorts of backgrounds grappled with what life in the United States would mean for Jews, Judaism, and Jewish culture. Although unanimous conclusions never emerged and sharp disagreements indeed took place, the majority of American Jews found ways to stitch together their two cultures, even if they could not always hide the seams. Despite occasional uncertainties about what might lie ahead in their adopted homeland, American Jews participated in an array of public events and produced and consumed a vast corpus of popular literature that championed the possibilities for Jewish life in the United States. In speeches, newspapers, textbooks, public celebrations, and institutional proclamations, Jews regularly asserted the compatibility, similarity, shared values, and parallel trajectories of Jewish and American cultures. As I listened to my students faithfully articulate almost the same notions and participated in many similar discussions while delivering public lectures, I began to realize just how firmly these axioms about American Jewish culture had become entrenched in popular consciousness. Over the years, the repeated and eager declarations of my students, who are the latest in the long line of Americans to create narratives about their pasts, sparked my interest in exploring the formation and perpetuation of American Jewish heritage and examining the creation of popular notions about American Jewish history and culture. The invention of these narratives both eased Jewish adjustment to American life and created a distinct ethnic history compatible with American ideals.

The regularity with which American Jews continue to articulate the convergence and compatibility of Jewish and American ideals reveals just how thoroughly this maxim has penetrated American Jewish culture. Indeed, in American Jewish history, no theme resounds as loudly or as consistently as the perceived symbiosis between Judaism and

American democracy. Yet, as one scholar has noted, “the synthesis of Judaism and Americanism is a historical fiction.”¹ There is nothing inherent in either American culture or Jewish tradition to render them fundamentally compatible. Rather, it was American Jews themselves who created this construction of American Jewish culture and gradually cemented it in books, communal celebrations, and a variety of public proclamations. In a creative process of collective self-fashioning, Jews reinterpreted their own culture and history to fit the circumstances of American Jewish life. In so doing, they laid the foundation for an American Jewish heritage that fused the Jewish past with the American future and shaped the paradigms of Jewish religious and ethnic culture in the United States.

Anyone with a passing knowledge of American Jewish history, or of immigrant history for that matter, will recognize in the narratives of American Jews the familiar refrains of minority groups of all stripes declaring their belonging in America through the rhetoric of compatibility. The cultural landscape of America became defined, in part, by the enormous number of immigrant and minority groups proclaiming the similarity, even syncretism, between their traditions and values and the American ideals of liberty, equality, and democracy. Yet, the pervasiveness of such rhetoric should not suggest that the recasting of immigrant identity in American terms was an automatic or unconscious process or that all immigrant groups engaged in that process in the same way. Even within the Jewish community, different political and social groups articulated distinct ideas about why Jews and Jewish culture could so easily find a place in American society, though almost all agreed on the fundamental principle. Jews proclaimed faith in America confidently and repeatedly, often as much in hope as with certitude. It may have been a construction, but the invented harmony between Judaism and Americanism persisted for generations and emerged as an enduring axiom of American Jewish culture.

This book explores the construction of a Jewish collective past in the United States from the late nineteenth through the mid-twentieth century. These years represented a formative period within American Jewish life, beginning at a time when immigrants from Central Europe began to build a flourishing Jewish community and lasting through the arrival and communal maturation of the wave of migrants from

INTRODUCTION

Eastern Europe. Along the way, this study examines the myriad ways that American Jews simultaneously narrated their own history in the United States and wove themselves into the narratives of the nation. The “history lessons” chronicled in this book were not the work of professional historians but rather emerged gradually in both formal and informal settings. American Jews found seemingly endless means to create a useful sense of the past, both in print and in public. Visions of American Jewish history found life in the planning and production of Jewish public celebrations and in the sermons and speeches delivered by rabbis and communal leaders. Countless Jewish families passed on a sense of ethnic and religious history to their children around dinner tables, and many Jewish students acquired an understanding of their shared past through formal Jewish schooling that complemented the American education they received in public schoolrooms across the country. Similarly, the past was plumbed for meaning in the abundant and active Jewish press, in newspapers and journals of every ideological persuasion, as well as in the pages of popular histories and children’s literature. The result is an abundance of narratives, a term that I use broadly to encompass the various retellings of the American Jewish past, whether written or spoken, that posited an understanding of the development of Jewish life in America.

As they celebrated American civic holidays and commemorated Jewish service in America’s wars, as they highlighted Judaism’s contributions to democracy and their own communal contributions to the culture, American Jews affirmed that they belonged as citizens in their adopted homeland. But these occasions were more than advertisements of Jewish loyalty and a chance to champion Jewish contributions to the nation (though they certainly were intended for these purposes as well). These articulations of the past also provided an opportunity for Jews to trace the path of Jewish history and interpret the meaning of America within it. Popular retellings helped to craft a script that lent Jews a central place in the nation’s history while also making sense of America in the context of Jewish history. That script was codified in popular American Jewish history texts and particularly in the literature written for Jewish children that transmitted these “lessons” to future generations.

Although the American Jews chronicled in this book devoted substantial effort to crafting the history of their people in the United

States, this does not mean that they created histories in the traditional, academic sense of the term. Instead, what they produced was not history but heritage. This broader, and far more encompassing, term highlights the ways that American Jews designed their Jewish past as an expression of their own interests and expectations for Jewish life in the United States. Heritage, a term first used to refer to the succession of property among individuals and families, had become by the twentieth century a notion that defined collective identity among ethnic, religious, and national groups. Through heritage, David Lowenthal explains, “we tell ourselves who we are, where we came from, and to what we belong.”²

Jews, like other Americans, had just begun to use the term “heritage” during the period covered in this book. The idea of collective heritage became increasingly common in the 1930s, alongside burgeoning attempts at historic preservation and an interest in transmitting a sense of shared history to rising generations. It then came into widespread usage in the decades following World War II, as efforts to popularize national history multiplied.³ The eager reception of *American Heritage* magazine, for example, which began publication in 1954 and has remained a widely read magazine for decades, constitutes just one illustration of the growing cultural currency of the notion of heritage.⁴ Although the subjects of this book may not have always invoked the term, because it had not yet become quite so fully ingrained in popular parlance, American Jews indeed actively engaged in the process of creating a shared heritage from the late nineteenth century through the middle of the twentieth.

The creation of American Jewish heritage involved much more than excavating historical memory. As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has argued, “heritage is not lost and found, stolen and reclaimed,” but rather represents “a mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse to the past.” As American Jews selectively culled from their history and invented a sense of their collective past, they fashioned a heritage designed to bolster Jewish identity and ensure group survival. Decades before the explosion of the heritage “industry” and the ethnic revival of the late twentieth century, American Jews had already begun piecing together popular renditions of their past in ways that could be transmitted to future generations.⁵

INTRODUCTION

By its very nature, heritage is always a partisan effort. Expressions of American Jewish heritage regularly idealized the Jewish past and aggrandized Jewish service to the nation, as Lowenthal cogently puts it, in order “to generate and protect group interests.”⁶ This is not to say that American Jews intentionally falsified facts in their textbooks or misled audiences in their public celebrations. To the contrary, like other groups in the United States, American Jews searched relentlessly for the threads within existing historical narratives that emphasized their belonging in America, their contributions to the nation, and their right to maintain distinct religious and cultural traditions.

The history they told could be self-congratulatory, often embellished, and sometimes a blend of fact and fiction, but it also contributed vitally to the formation of American Jewish culture. Elements of pride, along with a few strands of falsehood or exaggeration, combined with historical truth in the creation of heritage. This curious mixture makes American Jewish narratives all the more fascinating and offers further proof of Jews’ eagerness to carve a place for themselves in America. Historian Michael Kammen has observed that societies “reconstruct their pasts rather than faithfully record them.” Furthermore, “they do so with the needs of contemporary culture clearly in mind—manipulating the past in order to mold the present.”⁷ American Jews engaged in precisely this creative process as they crafted their heritage in the United States.

It is not my purpose in this book to attempt to disentangle history from heritage. Although I will indicate when and how Jewish narratives take license with the historical record, I am more concerned with exploring the paradigms created by American Jews than with demonstrating the relative truths of their claims. Moreover, I do not regard history and heritage as distinct, diametrically opposed categories. David Lowenthal argues that the two enterprises possess radically different traits and sharply divergent motivations, insisting that “[h]istory explores and explains pasts grown ever more opaque over time; heritage clarifies pasts so as to infuse them with present purposes.” This stark delineation not only ignores the ways that professional history, too, reflects and grows out of present-day concerns but also fails to consider the more complex content of and impulses behind popular heritage, particularly in the case of America’s minority groups. In the late nineteenth century through the

first half of the twentieth, ethnic and religious minorities seldom found their experiences reflected in formal histories of the United States. These groups cobbled together their own histories from amateur accounts and the few professional works available, selectively choosing material from both. The narratives they created may indeed have constituted a “mythic past crafted for some present cause that suppress[ed] history’s impartial complexity,” but such “manipulations” do not invalidate their significance. Quite the opposite, the pervasiveness of historical creations, found across all ethnic groups, speaks to the necessity for each community to find a history that acknowledges its presence in the American nation and assigns it a meaning absent from mainstream historical accounts.⁸

The creation of a shared, usable Jewish past on American soil has been largely ignored by both American Jewish historians and scholars of Jewish memory, who often consider the United States a country too young to have built a Jewish collective past beyond the memories of Europe and the legacies of migration.⁹ The subject of Jewish memory and historical consciousness has received considerable treatment by scholars of European Jewry and by Zionist historians, but the heritage and sense of history created by Jews in the United States remains largely unexamined.¹⁰ Yosef Yerushalmi’s seminal work *Zakhor*, a path-breaking treatment of the relationship between Jewish history and collective memory, discusses American Jewish culture only fleetingly; in a brief reference to the shared Jewish past of the characters in Philip Roth’s fiction, Yerushalmi dismisses it as “only as meager as the span of a generation or two,” and “trivial” when compared to the more weighty historical dilemmas that preoccupied European Jews.¹¹ American Jews indeed possessed a significantly shorter past in their adopted homeland than did their co-religionists in most other countries, but Jews in the United States nonetheless created a shared history that helped to lend meaning to their experience in a new nation.

This study relies upon the considerable scholarship on collective memory and historical consciousness and will contend that both developed within American Jewish society and played crucial roles in the formation of American Jewish heritage. Since the publication of Maurice Halbwachs’s pioneering study of collective memory, scholars have been inspired to explore how societies and groups create and transmit a sense of their own origins and development. This has led to a flourishing

INTRODUCTION

literature examining monuments, commemorations, memorials, holiday celebrations, and a variety of other popular expressions that both reflect and convey group histories and identities, allowing them to be passed from one generation to another. According to Halbwachs and the French scholar Pierre Nora, collective memory operates as an organic and unconscious process that stands in opposition to the critical discourse of history.¹² Newer scholarship, however, has resisted this dichotomy and suggested a more fluid relationship between collective memory and historical writing. Given that historians are products of the societies in which they live, popular conceptions about the past and group identity inevitably shape their approaches.¹³ At the same time, “[c]ollective memory continuously negotiates between available historical records and current political and social agendas.”¹⁴ Thus, collective memory influences the writing of history, and likewise, historical narratives make their way into shared memory.

Historian Amos Funkenstein argued precisely this point in his critique of Yosef Yerushalmi’s *Zakhor*. Yerushalmi maintains that since ancient times Jewish collective memory was primarily liturgical, comprised of rituals, hymns, and prayers that evoked “not the historicity of the past, but its eternal contemporaneity.” But in the nineteenth century, the emergence of critical Jewish scholarship gave rise to historical assessments of the Jewish condition that precipitated “the ever-growing decay of Jewish group memory.”¹⁵ Offering a useful corrective, Funkenstein argues that historical consciousness (a “mediating category” that he distinguishes from historiography proper) always existed within Jewish culture. Long before the modern period, he contends, historical consciousness permeated Jewish society, and, moreover, even after the rise of critical Jewish historical writing in the nineteenth century, “historical consciousness and collective memory were never alien to each other.”¹⁶ This was certainly the case within American Jewish culture, and even within this comparatively young Jewish society, historical claims merged frequently with enduring collective ideas about the Jewish past.

Never monolithic and often hotly contested, Jewish heritage in the United States reflected the diversity of the American Jewish community. Jews frequently disagreed about which facets of both Jewish and American culture deserved to be highlighted and celebrated. The pages of the many different Jewish newspapers alone reveal the varying

interpretations and meanings that Jews assigned to their experience in America. This book aims to capture a range of Jewish voices and movements, pointing to divergent readings of American Jewish culture. Focusing on the period from the late nineteenth century until the Second World War, with a few salient examples taken from earlier and later years, the book covers the era when the foundations of American Jewish heritage took shape. When this study begins, Jews who had arrived from Central Europe in the mid-nineteenth century were actively building the key organizations and institutions of American Jewish life and when it concludes, East European immigrants and their children had become firmly established and had added new dimensions to American Jewish culture. These years witnessed the sharpest political and ideological differences within the Jewish community and resulted in widely disparate outlooks on both American and Jewish culture. When the era drew to a close, the differences had become far less pronounced. Although complete consensus has never prevailed in American Jewish life, by the middle of the twentieth century, the central components of American Jewish heritage had largely been codified.

This book takes the popular presentation of group heritage seriously. While the history told may have been self-serving and may often have exercised considerable license in its retellings, it nonetheless lent meaning to Jewish experience in the United States. The creation of these narratives helped Jews weave themselves into the fabric of American life. At the same time, celebrating Jewish accomplishments fostered group cohesion, affirming the legitimacy of ethnic and religious distinctiveness in the United States. In fact, these dual agendas emerged consistently within American Jewish expressions, one stressing the seamlessness of Jewish belonging in the United States, and the other providing a rapidly acculturating population with a rationale to retain allegiance to Jewish identity.

Divergent readings of both American and Jewish culture remained a part of the heritage Jews created, even as some basic areas of consensus emerged. Most American Jews did not—and do not—derive their understanding of American Jewish experience primarily from scholarly works, and this was particularly the case in the approximately sixty-year period covered in this book, when professional treatments of American Jewish history hardly existed. American Jews fashioned a sense of

INTRODUCTION

their history on their own terms, and they did so in the public arena—during communal celebrations, within their organizations, and in the pages of popular histories and the Jewish press. The invention of a distinct American Jewish heritage, complete with historical legends, heroic figures, and narratives of Jewish patriotism and cultural contributions, must be understood as a crucial element in the acculturation process and a key component in the formation of American Jewish identity. American Jewish heritage emerged gradually and from a variety of sources, as American Jews stitched together a collective past in the interests of ensuring a viable ethnic future.

American Jews believed wholeheartedly that their adopted homeland had given rise to a unique chapter in Jewish history. Chapter 1 examines the political and social conditions in the United States that helped to foster that belief. By exploring American Jewish experience in comparative perspective and considering the ways that the frameworks for Jewish life in the United States differed from what Jews had known in Europe, this chapter focuses on how the American setting shaped Jewish heritage. While I do not argue that American Jewish life was entirely exceptional, there is little doubt that the United States provided an environment for Jews that differed significantly from Jewish experience in most European countries. America not only offered Jews citizenship without any prolonged debate over emancipation (as did England, Holland, and other nations), but also lacked a medieval past and a legacy of Jewish persecution. America's emphasis on individual rights and the guarantee of separation between church and state afforded Jews an unprecedented sense of security. Although they certainly harbored occasional doubts about the promises of America, the overwhelming majority of Jews came to believe that the nation had indeed ushered in a new epoch in Jewish history. While Jewish historians continue to debate whether the United States truly represented a departure from all previous Jewish experience, American Jews heartily championed the notion at every turn, as they measured America against their European past. American Jews often described their immigration to the United States as transformative and claimed that the American environment allowed individual Jews and Jewish culture to flourish in ways that had been impossible in Europe. The mantra that "America is different" emerged as perhaps the most fundamental axiom of American Jewish life.

In addition to examining the American Jewish experience in comparative perspective, the opening chapter also considers the prevailing myths of American Jewish culture, particularly the notion that the Hebrew Bible inspired America's political system. The Puritans first put forward the vision of a New Israel, endowed with providential blessings, to be built on colonial shores. Although that conception of America emerged initially among devout Protestants, it quickly became a defining paradigm of American culture. This chapter explores the eager Jewish embrace of America's claim to a biblical legacy, as American Jews used the notion of a new Zion to insert themselves as central players in the nation's origins. Through the biblical idiom, Jews established their formative connection to America's democratic tradition. Time after time, American Jews insisted that "the Hebrew Commonwealth was held up as a model, and its history as a guide for the American people in their mighty struggle for the blessings of civil and religious liberty."¹⁷ This formula played on America's central myths and used them to substantiate the claim that the nation's ideals had their origins in Jewish teachings, setting in motion an enduring assertion of Judeo-American symbiosis that survives to this day. The book's initial chapter lays the groundwork for this study by establishing the two prevailing assumptions that shaped American Jewish culture, namely, the distinction between American and European Jewish experiences and the parallels and convergences between Jewish and American ideals.

Chapter 2 examines Jewish celebrations of American national holidays. Jewish communities throughout the United States regularly celebrated civic holidays such as Thanksgiving and the Fourth of July within the context of synagogues and Jewish organizations. Like other American ethnic groups, Jews used patriotic displays both to demonstrate loyalty to the nation and to articulate a sense of ethnic pride. Jewish celebrations of national holidays repeated a standard litany of Jewish devotion to the country that became a canon of American Jewish history, establishing a collection of heroes and defining an idealized version of the Jewish past. In these narratives, Jews portrayed themselves as model American citizens, often as the true and most vigilant keepers of the democratic ideal. American Jews marked public holidays in their schools, synagogues, and communal organizations and offered commentary in the pages of the Jewish press, lending Jewish meaning to the festivals

INTRODUCTION

even while joining with other Americans in civic celebrations. As much as holiday celebrations served to underscore Jewish patriotism, which certainly remained a paramount and ongoing purpose, they proved to be more than cloying moments for Jewish self-congratulation. Rather, civic occasions offered the opportunity for American Jews to imagine the nation they desired, to criticize aspects of American culture, and to claim ownership of national ideals. The book's second chapter looks closely at Jewish celebrations of American holidays, uncovering the narratives that Jews created about their own culture and the visions they put forward for America.

The third chapter focuses on efforts to memorialize Jewish soldiers and commemorate Jewish war service. The desire to create a record of Jewish military contributions emerged from several different sources. To be sure, attacks on Jewish loyalty and accusations that Jews lacked a willingness to serve their country precipitated many attempts to document Jewish participation in American wars. But while defensive tones permeated the various chronicles of Jewish war service, particularly the statistical projects conducted by Jewish organizations during the two world wars, documenting military contributions also served an internal purpose. American Jews marshaled the record of their military service not only to prove devotion to their adopted homeland but also to underscore how much they had overcome their European Jewish past. Discussions of Jewish participation in America's wars regularly reflected back toward Europe, noting the ways that Jews, especially Jewish men, had been reborn as brave, loyal patriots in the American environment. Accounts of Jewish military contributions emphasized the transformative power of American freedom, supporting the notion that the United States had fundamentally altered Jewish behavior and experience.

Moreover, by detailing their service to the nation, Jews crafted a story about their belonging in America, one that started with the Revolution. As Jews traced their roots to the nation's founding, they rendered themselves authentic Americans from the moment the country was created. Celebrating participation in America's wars and memorializing Jewish war dead also provided occasions for ethnic gatherings and opportunities to reinforce the message that Jews had always been loyal Americans. Some of the earliest public monuments built by American Jews honored Jewish sacrifices in war, as Jews joined other minority groups

in creating tangible markers of their devotion to the country. Documenting war service, therefore, constituted another means for Jews to articulate their ethnic heritage, to set themselves apart from their European past, and to narrate their own history on American soil.

Chapter 4 examines Jewish children's literature, particularly the textbooks and stories produced for use in Jewish supplementary schools. Created by adults to impart lessons about the Jewish past and to teach the values of American Jewish life, children's literature provides a useful tool for exploring different versions of Jewish heritage and changes in emphasis over time. These texts contain some of the most ideologically potent interpretations of American Jewish history and culture. Particularly during the interwar years, socialists, Yiddishists, and Zionists joined the various religious denominations in publishing literature for children and sponsoring schools that offered dramatically different readings of American Jewish experience. The various versions of the Jewish past and the political and social messages delivered to children shed light on areas of both consensus and disagreement among American Jews. This chapter also explores the creation of a litany of heroic figures in American Jewish history whose legacies were shaped and fixed in the pages of Jewish children's texts. By elevating and often embellishing the lives of historical figures and highlighting their deeds and personality traits, Jewish children's books codified key narratives of American Jewish history. Jewish educators found individual stories particularly conducive to spark the interest of their young readers and used tales about leading Jewish figures as object lessons in Jewish contributions to American life. Because of the didactic nature of Jewish children's literature, the portrayals of American Jewish experience put forward in its pages are particularly revealing. In the books produced for children, Jewish educators identified and crystallized the most basic lessons about the American Jewish experience, lessons that they hoped would instill pride and inspire the next generation to remain committed to Jewish life.

The final chapter of this book chronicles the evolution of a single Jewish historical figure, the Revolutionary hero Haym Salomon. Focusing on the many efforts to honor Salomon and the sometimes contentious battles over his legacy, this chapter serves as a case study in the formation of American Jewish heritage and the many avenues used to create it. A successful financial broker who secured vital loans that

INTRODUCTION

supported the troops during the Revolutionary War, Haym Salomon later garnered the title “financier of the Revolution.” Salomon’s legend began to emerge after his death, when he left his family penniless, supposedly as a result of his personal purchases of government debt and his refusal to accept remuneration for his services. In the nineteenth century, his descendants unsuccessfully lobbied Congress to obtain belated compensation and thus kept the myth alive in public consciousness. Over the course of more than a century, American Jews came to celebrate Salomon as a patriot whose sacrifices for his country were never repaid. As Salomon’s legend grew, he became a fixture in popular works of American Jewish history and children’s literature. By the mid-twentieth century, a controversial project to erect a monument of Haym Salomon exposed both the reverence for Salomon and the exaggerated terms of his legend. The chapter follows various efforts in several cities to build monuments honoring Salomon, some successful and others not. The enduring myth of Haym Salomon, the many different mediums in which he was memorialized, and the communal debates that surrounded his legacy point to the power of his image in American Jewish history. The desire to own and control the legend of Haym Salomon constitutes a potent example of the importance that Jews assigned to shaping their heritage in America.

The creation of a people’s heritage emerges slowly; meaning accrues over time, reinforced by the repeated rehearsal of key myths and the constant recounting of pivotal historical moments. Therefore, many of the same stories and themes appear throughout the book, as Jews articulated narratives about their history and culture in different settings and across many decades. Jewish contributions to the nation’s founding emerged as perhaps the most pervasive theme. Time after time, American Jews repeated tales about the biblical foundations of the country, the Jewish role in Columbus’s voyage, and Jewish participation in the Revolution. Within these retellings, Jews compared themselves to the Puritans and the Pilgrims, rendering themselves pioneers and founding participants in American society. These sorts of narratives were recounted during celebrations of national holidays, in commemorations of war service, and throughout Jewish children’s books. In fact, it was the continuous reiteration of the central myths of American Jewish culture that gradually created a lasting heritage.