

Pageants of Sorrow, Celebration and Protest: The Public Culture of American Jews

Arthur Aryeh Goren

(COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY—THE HEBREW
UNIVERSITY)

Over a span of eight days during late November and early December 1905, three mass events took place in which hundreds of thousand of Jews participated and millions more read about in the general and Jewish press. Two of these events were commemorated throughout the United States; the third occurred in New York City alone. The first in time was the funeral of the popular Yiddish novelist and dramatist, Nahum Meyer Shaikevich (better known by his pseudonym, Shomer), which was held on November 26. Nearly 100,000 turned out to honor the writer, lining the funeral route and following the hearse through the streets of New York's Lower East Side and across the Williamsburgh Bridge to Union Hills Cemetery in Brooklyn. Four days later, on Thanksgiving Day, in scores of public meetings and synagogues across the land, American Jews celebrated the 250th anniversary of Jewish settlement in America. Governors, mayors and former U.S. president Grover Cleveland participated in the festivities. The celebrations were followed on December 4 with protest demonstrations mourning the victims of the October pogroms in tsarist Russia. Two hundred thousand participated in the New York protest march, with more modest demonstrations occurring in other cities and special memorial services conducted in Jewish communities throughout the U.S.

Taken together, these three episodes offer a paradigm of the public culture of American Jews. They were communal observances that were in part civic rituals of affirmation and self-definition and in part ideological and political statements in the guise of ethnic pageantry. These pageants of commemoration, celebration and protest provided opportunities for transcending cultural and class disparities and enmities. For the medium and the message of these public events—crafted with due deliberation—endeavored to embrace great numbers, new immigrants no less than old settlers, the religious and the secular. They were appeals to “the community” in its totality even though their sponsors were often party people with partisan designs. They took place, furthermore, in the city's main streets, public squares, concert halls and sports arenas so that the general public and the press would also take notice.¹

The Jews who gathered to mourn their luminaries, demand redress for brethren in peril, and invent an American Jewish past were creating a public culture that exists to this day, although the form and idiom have changed. American Jews continue to resort to similar devices and tactics as a means of providing some sense of collective identity. For an ethnoreligious community whose sense of self is increasingly marked by ambiguity if not vacuity, the incentive to nurture a Jewish public culture is compelling. The year-long tercentary celebration beginning in the fall of 1954 of the first Jewish settlement in America, the Israel Independence Day festivities with the parade up New York's Fifth Avenue as its centerpiece, the great 1987 "March on Washington" on behalf of Soviet Jewry, the opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 1993, and the memorial meetings on the thirtieth day of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's death are some well-known instances of this process. This study examines the three 1905 episodes that exemplify the early makings of this public culture, the separate strands that shaped it, and the collective memories that legitimized it.

Of the three events, the funeral of Shaikevich (Shomer) represented the most venerable expression of communal celebration. One can indeed argue that in traditional European Jewish society the public funeral of an illustrious scholar or communal leader was the most significant event in the life of the community. It was a time not only of mourning but of rededication, uplift and communal solidarity. All who could, accompanied the remains of the revered figure to the cemetery. Each detail of the ritual was charged with meaning: those chosen to maintain the final vigil, carry the coffin and deliver the eulogies; the public places where the procession paused for prayers; and at the cemetery, the location of the grave itself. The orchestration of the funeral ranked and classified the deceased among the community's worthies who had gone to their reward. In the popular mind, the ultimate indicator of esteem was the size of the crowd that accompanied the deceased to the grave. Though secularization breached the walls of the traditional, organic Jewish community of Eastern Europe, and the passage to America reduced them further, the need to rally forth on the death of a distinguished person in a communal act of solidarity and contrition remained intact. Time-honored religious custom still resonated in free-thinking America.²

Shomer, who came to the United States in 1889 with a considerable reputation, had made his name as the most prolific writer of his time. The author of more than two hundred novels and scores of plays (many of both genres adapted and popularized from the works of others), Shomer was the master of what we would call today low-brow literature. (His critics, among them Sholom Aleichem, called him the "father of *shund*," literary trash.) His was a popular, accessible literature, and the masses soaked up its social messages and stirring historical tales of Jewish heroism. Typical of the former was *Der yidisher poritz* (*The Jewish Mogul*), a novel Shomer later adapted for the stage, which was a devastating portrayal of the fanaticism, imperiousness and arid piety of the shtetl autocracy. An example of the latter was *Der letzter yidisher kenig* (*The Last Jewish King*), a drama of the Bar Kochba-led revolt against the Romans. His collaboration with the pioneers of the Yiddish theater began in Europe and continued in New York, where his plays on immigrant

life and current affairs became staples of the Yiddish stage. His novels were serialized in the *Morgn zhurnal* and *Tageblat*. David Blaustein, the director of the Educational Alliance, recalled reading Shomer's novels as a young boy: "I was one of many who was started on the road to culture (*bildung*) by Shomer's writings." When Shomer died, the Jewish immigrant quarter responded in the traditional way to the call to honor an important figure—a writer and teacher of the people, or a great *maggid*, a beloved preacher.³

Yet who in fact determined the degree of honors Shomer should receive?—Who planned the funeral—chose the honorees, the eulogists, the order of march, the procession's route? In a word, who defined the community's character and its self-image? In those towns the immigrants came from where the traditional community (the *kehillah*) was still in place the *kehillah* leadership, including its rabbis and learned men, made these determinations. Where the traditional leadership was challenged, an unresolved struggle for hegemony ensued. In New York, the Yiddish press decided, a press that spoke for distinct ideological camps. The day of Shomer's death (a Friday, which allowed more time for preparations, since the funeral could not be held until after the Sabbath), the publishers of the Yiddish dailies met at the Educational Alliance, the uptown-supported social and cultural center of the immigrant quarter. All Yiddish journalists, artists and intellectuals (*maskilim*), the publishers resolved, should join in making the funeral a "general one," that is, nonpartisan, and urge all Jews of New York to take part. Jacob Saphirstein, the publisher of the politically conservative and religiously Orthodox *Morgn zhurnal*, and David Blaustein of the Educational Alliance were charged with making the arrangements. To advise them, an executive committee of two representatives of each paper was appointed. The Educational Alliance was chosen for the memorial meeting. The proprietors of the Yiddish theaters, the various actors' unions and their chorus, and the typesetters union announced that they would come in organized contingents, and the choristers volunteered to sing at the services.⁴

For three days, the conservative *Tageblatt* and *Morgn zhurnal* and the socialist *Varhayt* and *Forward* sang Shomer's praises. The *Forward*, a harsh critic of Shomer in the past, remarked: "Whatever one might say of the literary worth of his works, they were of great value for a large part of the Jewish people. Through Shomer's novels many thousands learned to read." Furthermore, he had imbued them with a thirst for *bildung*—education, culture, self-improvement. The *Forward*, like the other papers, urged all classes to attend and outlined the funeral route.⁵

In reporting the funeral, the Yiddish press struck an inspirational and ecumenical note. The *Tageblat* began its account: "Where else can one find a city like New York and where else can one find such Jews as in New York. In no country, and in no city, and at no time in history has one witnessed such an exalted expression of *Judenthum* (Jewishness) as at Shomer's funeral." The *Forward* proclaimed: "Young and old, religious and freethinkers, Jews of all hues and types came to honor and accompany the deceased to the grave." The *Tageblat* estimated that at least a hundred thousand crowded into the side streets near the Educational Alliance and along the route of the cortege.⁶ As the hearse traversed the East Side, the *New York Times* reported, "Jacob P. Adler, the tragedian," walked to the left of the hearse and by his side Saphirstein of the *Morgn zhurnal*. At each synagogue along the way

“the procession stopped and the rabbi and congregants came out and sang a hymn for the dead.”⁷

Traditional in form, the funeral was arranged with great care. The planners stressed inclusiveness and aesthetics, taking into account both the sensibilities of the acculturating, “modern” Jews and the curiosity of non-Jewish observers. The arrangements committee announced through the Yiddish press that notables and family friends wishing to pay their respects prior to the funeral should appear at the Educational Alliance for an identity button allowing them into the Shomer home. At the appointed time, writers, actors and representatives of the theater and typsetters unions carried the coffin to the hearse, and a combined choir of the Yiddish theaters, chanting psalms, marched before the hearse over the short distance to the Educational Alliance. Admission to the memorial service was by invitation only. The list of eulogists represented the range of Jewish political and cultural life: Adolf Radin, rabbi of the Alliance’s People’s Synagogue (who spoke in German), David Blaustein, the Alliance’s director, socialist Abe Cahan of the *Forward*, John Paley of the *Tageblat*, Joseph Barondess, Zionist leader and radical, Boris Thomashafsky, the actor and stage director, and the Orthodox preacher Hirsh Tsvi Masliansky. Between speeches the theater choristers alternated with the downtown cantors’ choir in chanting psalms from the funeral service. Downtown’s renowned cantor, Pinkhas Minkovsy, concluded the service with the memorial prayer *El male rahamim*. All of the accounts stressed the sense of exaltation that permeated the meeting and the perfect order that marked the procession.⁸

In its editorial the day of the funeral, the *Tageblat* offered some interesting reflections on the event’s wider significance. The column was subtitled: “The Future City of Historical Jewish Funerals.” Shomer’s funeral, the paper predicted, would be the third funeral of historic proportions that New York Jews had participated in, if size and feelings were the criteria. First had come the unforgettable mass funeral in 1902 of Jacob Joseph, the eminent Vilna preacher who was invited to serve as “chief rabbi” in the abortive experiment to strengthen the communal life of New York’s Orthodox Jews. At least 100,000 took part. And in January 1905, Kasriel Sarasohn, publisher of the *Tageblat* and patron of downtown charities, was similarly honored. In both cases, not only the Yiddish but the general press gave detailed coverage in laudatory, even reverential, terms. And now, all within a mere three years, the third historic funeral was about to begin. “In no other city in the world,” the *Tageblat* declared,

have there been such grand funerals. Our generation and the next to come will have the task of rendering final tributes to the illustrious figures of the Jewish world when their time will come to take leave. New York is at present the greatest Jewish center in the world. Within the next five years all the distinguished Jews in Russia will have settled among us.⁹

During the lifetime of the immigrant generation, religious, cultural and political associations organized funeral pageants for their luminaries, providing the Jewish public for a moment with a sense of uplift and communal solidarity. For instance, the funeral of the great Yiddish humorist, Sholom Aleichem, in May 1916 brought 250,000 Jews into the streets, with the New York Kehillah (aspiring to be the

coordinating agency of the Jewish community) planning and directing the ceremony with the essential help of the Yiddish press. Conducted with the grandeur of a Jewish state funeral, the procession passed through three New York boroughs, pausing before representative Jewish institutions for memorial prayers and eulogies, and attracting Jews from all ranks and circles. In expressing their affection for their beloved cultural hero, Jews were also demonstrating their solidarity with the "old home" Sholom Aleichem wrote about, which was now ravaged by war.¹⁰

A commemorative event of a different order was the celebration of the 250th anniversary of the first Jewish settlement on the North American continent. In 1654, twenty-three Jews had arrived in New Amsterdam aboard the *Sainte Catherine*, expelled from the Dutch colony of Recife in Brazil after its conquest by the Portuguese. The proposal to commemorate the establishment of the first settlement originated among the elitist circles of the established Jewish community. Their intention was to enshrine the event—heretofore hardly noticed, let alone celebrated—in the nation's pantheon of founding myths. Turning the anniversary into a nationwide commemoration offered a superb opportunity to achieve several goals: prove the venerable lineage of America's Jews; reiterate once more the presumed affinity of Americanism and Judaism; and have others—mainly the non-Jewish notables and newspaper editorialists—praise both the rectitude and civic virtues of the Jews and their material and cultural contributions to the nation.¹¹

Historians have explained the mind-set of the planners as stemming from the conflicted soul of the ambitious and insecure. Eminently successful in business and the professions (their success achieved in a single generation), fervently American and craving for acceptance, they faced the social impediments of a pervasive anti-Semitism. They were barred from the proper clubs, boards of trustees, and philanthropies; their children were blocked from attending the desired private schools; their sons and daughters were excluded from some colleges and from the better fraternities; and they suffered from the intellectual antisemitism common in literary and academic circles. To add to their disquiet, like a plague from Egypt came the Jews from Russia. Their correligionists' startling distinctiveness (Jewish but so alien) and their utter poverty made the responsibilities that kinship imposed especially burdensome—an obstacle in the pursuit of social inclusion. Understandably, the Jewish elite became preoccupied with a dignified refutation of those antisemitic canards of parasitism, duplicity and disloyalty that were cast at them.¹²

There was also a more sanguine face to the importance assigned by Americanized Jews to the 250th anniversary. An authentic interest in historical roots and processes was astir in America. Kindled by an energetic secularizing nationalism sometime in the 1870s, Americans began celebrating their past with unprecedented zeal. History became the medium for defining their national identity and glorifying what they perceived to be the moral superiority of the republic. On a local level, commemoration of the anniversaries of Revolutionary War battles, Civil War heroes and pioneer settlements became widespread. Cities observed the bicentennial or centennial of their founding in festivities that sometimes lasted as long as a week. Nationwide, the Centennial Exposition of American Independence held at Philadelphia in 1876 and the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago stand out. A patrician expression of

this phenomenon, initiated by the first professionally trained historians (the new guardians of the past), was the formation of the American Historical Association in 1884. Dedicated to a "scientific" reconstruction of the past, the association drew to its ranks Brahman amateur practitioners as well as the new breed of academic historian.¹³

Six years later the American Jewish Historical Society was established for some of the same reasons by a similar mix of professionals and interested patricians. At the first "scientific meeting" of the society, founding president Oscar Straus, scion of the great mercantile family and author of a book on Old Testament influences on the origins of republican government in America, declared: "The objects of our Society . . . are not *sectarian*, but *American*—to throw an additional ray of light upon the discovery, colonization, and history of our country." For Straus, that "additional ray of light"—the exploration of the part Jews played in the early settlement of the colonies—was a way not only of contributing "to the general history of our country" but of uncovering for Americans and Jews the authentic identity of American Jewry. Straus and others of the founders would play a central role in the 250th anniversary celebration.¹⁴

Among America's ethnic groups, Jews were not alone in displaying a self-consciousness and assertiveness that developed in tandem with the nation's intensified reverence for its past. Ethnic associations participated in the local celebrations, marching in the parades dressed in their ethnic costumes and often mounting historical floats. At the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, six ethnic and religious groups had their "days"—a parade culminating in the unveiling of a monument on the fairground. The Jewish monument, commissioned by the B'nai B'rith and executed by the American Jewish sculptor Moses Ezekiel, represented "religious freedom": "The statue of a woman, symbolizing religious liberty, dominates the monument, her right arm sheltering a boy holding a flaming lamp representing faith in a higher power, her left arm pointing to the scroll of the constitution." Interestingly, the German, Irish, Italian and African American monuments depicted ethnic heroes: Wilhelm Humboldt, Father Matthew (an Irish temperance advocate), Christopher Columbus and Richard Allen (an ex-slave who founded the African Methodist Episcopal Church).¹⁵

Perhaps the most impressive event of the sort anticipating the 250th American Jewish celebration was the German American celebrations of 1883. Marking the bicentennial of the founding of Germantown, Pennsylvania, by thirteen families from the Rheinisch town of Krefeld, German cultural and social associations staged impressive pageants in the major centers of German American population. The central feature of the day was the parade, which included floats depicting the history of German Americans—the founding of Germantown, German participation in America's wars, and German American economic contributions—in addition to marching rifle companies and bands. (In a number of cities, the 1883 bicentennial inaugurated an annual "German Day.") Five years later Swedes, concentrated in the Midwest, celebrated the 250th anniversary of the founding of the first Swedish settlement at Fort Christina on the Delaware River. In both cases, tentative steps were taken to establish historical societies. Thus ethnic Americans promoted their own founding myths, insisting on equality of place.¹⁶

In February 1905, the proposal to observe the 250th anniversary of Jewish settlement on a nationwide scale was broached by two separate bodies: New York's Congregation Shearith Israel (the oldest Jewish congregation in the United States) and the American Jewish Historical Society at its annual conference. By spring, a joint ad hoc committee had appointed an executive committee to direct "the Committees in Charge of the General Celebration"—which gives one a notion of the scope of the planning. The executive committee, a mix of wealth and intellect, was headed by the bankers Jacob Schiff (chairman) and Isaac N. Seligman (treasurer) and included other leading establishment personages such as Cyrus Adler, Daniel Guggenheim, Adolph Lewisohn, Louis Marshall, Oscar Straus and Judge Mayer Sulzberger. All of the states as well as Alaska, Puerto Rico and the Indian Territory were represented on the two-hundred member general committee, which was apparently a purely honorary body. No Russian Jews served on the executive committee, though eight Russian Jews, including the editors of the Yiddish dailies and several prominent rabbis, were appointed to the general committee.¹⁷

The executive committee chose Thanksgiving Day as the appropriate occasion for the celebration, and launched an educational campaign to make Jews conscious of their American origins. Lecturers spoke on the topic and lengthy articles appeared with regularity in the Anglo-Jewish press. In early May the Anglo-Jewish press published long excerpts from papers delivered at a meeting of the "Judaicans," a social-literary society of the New York Jewish elite. In June, the Boston [Jewish] *Advocate* reported on the first of a series of celebrations that would continue until the "general celebration" on Thanksgiving Day. In the issue of the *Advocate* that appeared following the 4th of July, the lead banner read: "On Thanksgiving-Day next, the Hebrew Communities of the United States will commemorate fittingly the 250th anniversary of the arrival of their Pilgrim Fathers," and readers were informed that the Boston committee had chosen Faneuil Hall, "the cradle of liberty," as the site of the Thanksgiving Day convocation.¹⁸

In a widely reprinted lecture, Louis Marshall captured the mixture of apologetics and self-assertiveness that became the leitmotif of the anniversary:

It has been a popular fallacy, that the Jew has been a latecomer on American soil; that he has been unwilling to undergo the hardships of the pioneer, or to create new paths for industry and commerce; that his admittance within our gates has been a matter of grace and bounty, and that his rights are inferior in antiquity to those of our population who have other racial and religious affinities. But when we remember that the settlement at Jamestown, Virginia, was in 1607, that of the Dutch at New Amsterdam in 1614, that of the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock in 1620 and that the first settlement of the Jews in New York occurred in 1655, the latter are to be regarded as of equal rank with the most ancient American settlers.¹⁹

In October, the committee distributed a pamphlet, "Notes Relating to the Celebration," which included guidelines for observing the approaching jubilee. Congregations were instructed to hold special services on the Saturday or Sunday preceding Thanksgiving Day, and an "Order of Service" for that Sabbath was attached. The service was prepared by a committee of eminent rabbis representing the various denominations that included the Orthodox Dr. H. Pereira Mendes, the Conservative Professor Solomon Schechter, head of the Jewish Theological Seminary, and Re-

form's Dr. Kaufman Kohler, head of the Hebrew Union College. A reprint of Cyrus Adler's history of the Jews in America from the recently published *Jewish Encyclopedia* and an annotated bibliography were included. In addition, long accounts of the history of American Jews were featured in major newspapers and periodicals.²⁰

November was not a good month for festivities. Details of the death and devastation of the October pogroms (400 Jews were killed in Odessa alone) and further outbreaks in the first week of November galvanized the established community as well as the immigrant community to an unprecedented outburst of activity. Relief committees were formed, protest meetings held, and memorial services called. Under these circumstances, some communities—Chicago, Milwaukee, Cincinnati, Philadelphia—abandoned plans for mass celebrations and held their anniversary meetings in the larger synagogues. The national anniversary committee announced that the subscriptions it had solicited for a memorial statue to mark the 250th anniversary would be directed “to the immediate relief of the distress of our unfortunate brethren there.” However, despite the pall of the pogroms, the national committee went ahead with the central event of the country-wide celebration, which took place in New York's Carnegie Hall.²¹

The “great celebration” in Carnegie Hall, the *Times* reported, “resolved itself into a demonstration likely to become historic in the annals of that famous meeting place.” The setting was indeed an august one. The exercises began with the honored guests and members of the executive committee, led by Jacob Schiff, marching into the hall single file to the strains of Mendelsohn's “March of the Priests” from *Athalie*, played by the New York Symphony Orchestra. To the thunderous applause of a packed house of 5,000, the dignitaries took their places on a stage already crowded with the People's Choral Union and the Downtown Cantors' Association. The lavish decor of the hall added to the majesty of the occasion. The lower boxes were draped in bright red decorated with the coats of arms of the different states; green hangings “embossed with golden bucklers emblematic of Jerusalem,” according to the *Times*, adorned the second tier; and “festoons of American flags” bedecked the galleries and stage. Befitting the aura of an affair of state, the speakers included ex-president Grover Cleveland, Governor Frank Higgins of New York, and New York City's mayor, George B. McClellan; and a letter from President Theodore Roosevelt was read. The committee had chosen the other speakers with a shrewd diplomatic eye. Temple Emanu-el's rabbi opened the meeting and Shearith Israel's rabbi closed it; the Episcopal Bishop of New York spoke; and the “oration” was delivered by Judge Mayer Sulzberger of Philadelphia, a rising figure in Jewish communal life and a Jewish scholar of some breadth. The capstone of the musical program—the program itself included choruses from Mendelssohn's *Elijah* and Bruch's *Kol Nidre*—was the singing of *Adon 'olam* by the Downtown Cantors. “The solemn hymn,” the *Times* remarked, “was beautifully sung. . . . Their voices would have done credit to the Metropolitan Opera House.” For the planners, the cantors symbolized the Jewish immigrant presence in the ecumenical homage to the Jews of America.²²

Two of the recurring themes in the anniversary addresses deserve special attention. The first linked the twenty-three Jews who had landed in New Amsterdam in

1654 on the *Sainte Catherine* with the band of Pilgrims who had arrived at Plymouth Rock on the *Mayflower* thirty-four years earlier. In impressive historical detail, speaker after speaker spun out the remarkable interlocking fate of Pilgrim and Jew. Persecuted and hunted because of their religious faith, both had found haven in tolerant Holland. Soon after the Pilgrims left for the New World, the Jews left Holland for the Dutch colonies in Brazil and, when expelled by the Portuguese, found refuge in New Amsterdam. Philadelphia's Rabbi Joseph Krauskopf declared (in words echoed by other orators): "Within the cabins of the *Mayflower* and the *Sainte Catherine* were those principles conceived that gave birth to the battle cry of 1776." Oscar Straus embellished the Pilgrim/Puritan-Jewish-Dutch connection by pointing out that at the very time that the Dutch West Indies Company deliberated over the petition to grant Jews leave to remain in New Amsterdam, Rabbi Menasseh Ben Israel of Amsterdam met with Oliver Cromwell to negotiate the resettlement of the Jews in England. Among the supporters of readmission was Roger Williams, founder of the colony of Rhode Island and defender of religious liberty ("Soul-freedom"), who was completing a stay in London on the eve of the negotiations. Thus, Straus and his fellow speakers stressed, from America's earliest history, the Jews were linked with the champions of religious liberty.²³

"Columbus," the other motif, provided two inspiring images. Speakers cited historians and quoted sources that coupled the launching of Columbus' expedition with the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. As Columbus sailed out of the harbor of Palos with his little fleet to discover the New World, the audiences were told, he passed ships laden with Jews being expelled from Spain: as one great center of Jewish life lay in ruins, another was being prepared to replace it. Providentially, the passing of the ships occurred on the Ninth Day of Av, the day of fasting and lamentations over the destruction of the Temple and the day, according to Jewish legend, that the Messiah would come.²⁴

There was also a more direct tie between the end of Spanish Jewry and the discovery of America. To escape from the Inquisition, some Jews had joined Columbus' expedition. The physician, the overseer of the crew and the translator, it was claimed, were of Jewish origin. Moreover, Isabella's financial advisers, who made the expedition possible, were of Jewish lineage. These conclusions were based on the latest research on Columbus by the Budapest Jewish historian Meyer Kayserling. Commissioned by Oscar Straus in 1891, Kayserling's *Christopher Columbus and the Participation of the Jews in the Spanish and Portuguese Discoveries* appeared in 1894. By 1905, its findings were accepted in Jewish circles as historical truth. When, for example, Rabbi Krauskopf of Philadelphia addressed the New York 92nd Street YMHA on the occasion of the 250th anniversary, the *Times* carried this banner-line: "A Jew First to Land of Columbus's Party."²⁵ The *Tageblatt* presented the same "historical facts" to the Yiddish-reading public: "In the archives of Seville are listed, black on white, the sums of money that the Jew, Luis de Santangel, gave for Columbus' expedition." Probably "half a *minyán* of Jews" were in the discoverer's crew—including the first white man, Luis de Torres, to step on the shores of the New World. "Consequently," the *Tageblatt* concluded, "we Jews have a full claim to America and we should not be ashamed to call America our home. . . . We have an [American] ancestry older than all other nationalities, even antedating

the English and Dutch.”²⁶ Partaking in the very discovery of America, the Jews were indeed “present at the creation.”

The Yiddish press split along class lines in reporting the Carnegie Hall meeting. For the *Tageblat*, “the jubilee celebration was the most magnificent and radiant gathering ever held by Jews in America.” All sections and strata of Jewry were present in the packed hall—bankers, merchants, workers, craftsmen, rabbis, statesmen—“and all united in giving thanks for this place of refuge for our homeless and plundered nation.” The *Tageblat* in fact printed the texts of the main addresses in the “English Department” of the paper.²⁷ In contrast, the *Forward* concluded its account with this observation: “The festivities did not impress one as a people’s celebration; besides the wealthy Jewish classes no other class was present. It was a festival for wealthy Jews who gathered to praise God for his benevolence to them.” In a long essay, Benjamin Feigenbaum, the socialist firebrand, elaborated on the class theme, turning on end the compliments that Grover Cleveland and others had showered upon the Jews. “The Jewish contributions so praised by the speakers [their enriching of the American economy, their individual success and their respect for the law] had served to strengthen an unjust order that benefited the millionaires.” He continued, “A time will come in America when in speaking of what Jews have accomplished, people will no longer have in mind the great Jewish merchants and bankers but the Jewish masses, the tailors and operators who played a critical role in freeing America from the capitalist yoke.” The *Varhayts’s* editorial, “Jubilee of the Jewish Bankers,” was written the same vein. It attacked “the people from Wall Street, Madison Avenue, Lexington Avenue, Fifth Avenue, West End Avenue and Riverside Drive” for declaring their celebration “a holiday of the Jewish people” while ignoring the “Jews of Hester Street, Norfolk Street, Ridge Street, Houston Street and East Broadway.” More grievous was the festive character of the exercises: “The Jewish masses are not actors. They cannot go out one day with trumpets, cymbals and dance, give thanks to God, and then the next day march in the streets bemoaning the victims of the pogroms.” In fact, the *Tageblat* and the Anglo-Jewish press did report those anniversary celebrations held in the more established, immigrant synagogues. The *Times* described an anniversary meeting at the Rumanian congregation Shaarei Shamayim on Eldgridge Street, which featured festive speeches and 800 Talmud Torah children carrying American flags marching in a procession led by the band of the Hebrew Sheltering Orphan Asylum.²⁸

For days the Yiddish press prepared the public for “der groyser troyer marsh” (the great mourning march) to be held on December 4. Shomer’s funeral was a street pageant in the tradition of an East European Jewish community honoring a great personage; the 250th anniversary was held in elegant halls and imposing temples, an American creation; and the “troyer marsh,” a mass demonstration of unity drawing on modern politics and Jewish religious ritual, returned the act of communal bonding to the city’s streets. In fact, in early November, the *Forward* set the tone for what would become repeated calls for popular activism. In a front-page banner headline the paper called, “To Washington! Thousands to Washington! March to the White House! Let the Blood of Our Dead Be Heard.” “The greatest catastrophe in Jewish history” had taken place, the *Forward* editorialized. “If [President] Roose-

velt so wished, America could help. How can we make the Jewish voice heard? Demonstrate in Washington." Little came of Cahan's call, though later in November several mass marches did take place. In one case, it was the theater unions that organized the demonstration, which concluded with a benefit performance of the play *Khurbn Kishinev (The Destruction of Kishinev)*. In the other instance, the Odessa *landsmanshaft* (hometown) associations sponsored the march, and in Philadelphia there were organized street demonstrations.²⁹

The principal demonstration took place in New York, planned and directed by the newly established Jewish Defense Association. Founded in the beginning of November with the purpose of raising funds to buy arms for clandestine Jewish self-defense groups being formed in Russia, the Association succeeded in gaining the participation of broad segments of the downtown Jewish political spectrum. It also had the support of some establishment leaders. From the start of the preparations, the Association spoke in the name of Jewish pride, "manhood" and unity. In addition to protest and fund-raising, the Association provided the means for fulfilling the mitzvah of remembering and honoring the dead—sisters, brothers, parents—and to shed tears over graves they could not visit.³⁰

Critical to the success of the undertaking was the collaboration of the Yiddish press. For six continuous days preceding the march, the Yiddish newspapers published what were in effect "orders of the day," long columns of notices from societies to their members and from the arrangements committee to the societies. All organizations—lodges, labor unions, political parties, *landsmanshaftn* associations and synagogues—intending to participate were instructed to designate an assembly point for their members and to inform the arrangements committee. Musicians and choral groups wishing to offer their services were to contact the committee. Owners of halls and meeting rooms were asked by the arrangements committee to provide them gratis; businesses were ordered to close on the day of the march, and workers were urged to leave their shops and take part. On the morning of the "troyer marsh," the papers published final instructions informing the participating groups where each would gather before joining the march.³¹

The several hundred participating organizations were divided into eight divisions to assure order and efficiency, each headed by a "marshal" who was subordinate to the parade's "grand marshal." The march began at Rutgers Square, facing newspaper row in the heart of the Lower East Side, followed a familiar route through the Jewish quarter and then turned north on Broadway to Union Square. Residents were urged to hang black bunting from windows and fire-escapes along the line of march. The Yiddish press also announced that meetings would be held at eight designated theaters at the conclusion of the march. The published list of speakers, as one would expect, reflected the spectrum of downtown ideologies.³²

The *Times* called the march "one of the largest parades this city has ever seen." Thirteen hundred policemen were required to keep order, although all observers emphasized the decorum of the crowd. According to the *Times*, 125,000 were in the line of march, and a similar number crowded the sidewalks. What stands out in the press descriptions and photographs is the mix of bereavement and protest—of a "phantom funeral" and a military formation—that was symbolized by the flags carried at the head of the parade. The *Forward* described the red and black banners

waving in the wind, the workers' flag and the flag of mourning. (The *Times*' account differed on the last point: "A corps of men carried black banners, American flags and what has become known as the Jewish flag—the banner of Zion—with the blue, six-pointed star of David in the centre." Where the *Forward* saw red, the *Times* reported blue and white.) Behind the flagbearers came a fifty-person band. Other marching bands were placed at intervals in the line of march. Those who marched in the procession wore black or a crepe around their sleeve or hat, except for the detachments of the Zion Guards from New York and New Haven and the Manhattan Rifles. Banners identified organizations, and large placards in Yiddish—"Mourn Our Dead," or slogans denouncing the tsar—were held aloft.³³

The general press coverage expressed empathy for the demonstration, as the following quote from a *Times* report indicates:

The bands between the sections rang out in funeral strains the note of grief [which were] accentuated by similar strains further down the line. Men and women burst into tears, some moved by their losses, others by the dramatic intensity of sound and scene. Occasionally, at a concerted signal, the bands would stop playing. Above the murmur of the moving throng would arise softly at first then swelling to full tone, the voices of the synagogue boy choirs in a hymn for the peace of the dead.³⁴

And when the main column approached the synagogues on Norfolk and Rivington Streets, "the procession halted. Bearded rabbis appeared in the little alcoves under the lights and the strangely carved doorways, clasped their hands, prayed for a moment, and then chanted a solemn dirge." When the first division reached Union Square, it filled the park, and it became necessary to proceed with reading the resolutions before all the demonstrators had arrived. One of the resolutions (which carries an uncanny contemporaneity) reads:

We call upon the Government of the United States and upon all the Governments of enlightened lands to enter their protest against the criminal slaughter of innocent persons, against the brutal massacres which violate all laws of humanity. . . . In the present state of chaos [in Russia] . . . it is the duty of a power like that of the United States to put a halt to the fiendish atrocities.³⁵

None of the establishment leaders took part in the "troyer marsh." A letter to the editor of the *American Hebrew*, the weekly they all subscribed to, deplored the absence of uptown Jews in the line of march. Their presence "would have gone far to break down the barriers of caste and class." It was regrettable, the writer stated, that her fellow Jews were unable to overcome those constraints of their middle class mores that found street demonstrations repugnant and dangerous.³⁶

However, the "uptowners" sought other ways of identifying with the protest. Across the land they gathered in their temples on December 4 for memorial services, addresses and condemnations, and calls for extending ever more aid to the afflicted. Furthermore, the Schiffs, Marshalls and Strauses were working diligently to alleviate the suffering of Russian Jews—lobbying in Washington for diplomatic intervention or sanctions, raising large funds for relief, and coordinating their efforts with world Jewish leaders. Tacitly, the establishment leaders approved of the "troyer marsh" as the justifiable "manly" expression of anger of Russian immigrants for kin fallen victim to tsarist hooligans or in imminent danger of new excesses.

Moreover, the demonstration was a “success”—massive and orderly—winning the approbation of the general press. In fact, the “troyer marsh” complemented the establishment’s political and financial efforts.³⁷

One should take note that the “troyer marsh” borrowed much from its American setting. True, the parade had a distinctive Russian Jewish texture. In one respect, it recalled the European funeral procession of a famous personage with eulogies and pauses at synagogues along the route of the procession. In another respect, the flags, slogans and speeches reminded some spectators of the radical rallies (such as the May Day demonstrations) that, by the late 1890s, were taking place—clandestinely to be sure—in the centers of Jewish socialist activity in the Pale of Settlement. However, the arrangements, structure and pace of the 1905 “troyer marsh” derived from American practice. The “divisions” and “marshals,” the marching bands and flags, the holiday dress of the participants, and the culminating speeches and resolutions in the public square were borrowed from the recently invented May First demonstration, which leaned on the German American flair for pageantry. In the first May Day labor demonstration in 1890 (part of the eight-hour day movement), 9,000 Jewish workers participated in the New York parade in what became an annual event. At preliminary meetings in Lower East Side halls, the Jewish cloakmakers, dressed in their finest, listened to speeches and to bands playing revolutionary songs before joining the German and American contingents in the march to Union Square. At the square, separate speaker’s stands for the German, English and Yiddish-speaking orators were set up in different areas to enable the demonstrators to hear the addresses in their own language. By 1903, the United Hebrew Trades had organized its own supplementary march on the day following the general demonstration, with marshals heading divisions and the parade ending at Hamilton Fish Park to hear a battery of Yiddish speeches. Two and a half years later, the experience gained by Jewish radicals in celebrating the international workers’ May Day would be added to the experience of the religiously traditional immigrants who mounted the great public funerals in 1902 and 1905 of “Chief Rabbi” Jacob Joseph and the *Tageblat*’s Kasriel Sarasohn.³⁸

How shall we understand these communal rites that encompassed hundreds of thousands of Jews? In the first place, a handful of notables and communal functionaries and, concurrently, the editors of the Yiddish dailies, orchestrated the commemorative events to meet the needs and sentiments of the Jewish multitudes. At a time when a diffuse and divided American Jewry had no organizational core and informal committees of the wealthy and well connected filled the vacuum in times of crisis, the dimension and scope of the 1905 celebrations of solidarity advanced the belief in a holistic community. Moreover, it promoted the movement for communal collaboration and the related demand for a publicly recognized leadership.³⁹ A second, crucial revelation of the 1905 events deserves notice. However dissimilar the public commemorations and demonstrations were—reflecting cultural, ideological, regional and class differences and disparate goals—they demonstrated a degree of collective self-assurance that was remarkable. The organizers staged their pageants in the public place in order to activate, uplift and educate maximum numbers of Jews; and they paraded Jewish culture, Jewish accomplishments and Jewish

remonstrations before the American people to win its sympathy and respect. This was true even in the most parochial of the three events described above, Shomer's funeral. The immigrant community united in order to display for all the cultural values it honored. In fact, the *Times* remarked that the immigrant Jews lamented the passing of one of its literary heroes with the same passion and in the same numbers that it had the victims of the pogroms in a protest march only days earlier.⁴⁰ Taken together, these pageants of celebration, protest and sorrow formed overlapping orbits. Made up of Jews with varied pasts who had come at different times to so singular a nation, these overlapping orbits constituted the building blocks of the public culture of American Jews.

Public culture is no substitute for the communal web of religious observance, institutional loyalty, ideological commitment and ethnic fellowship. At best, it supplements a sense of community through participation in the occasional rites of community. But where the community's institutional life often produced more divisiveness than solidarity, the triad of communal observances that took place in late November and early December 1905 disclosed the unifying quality of a public culture in the making. The communal rites and civic pageants considered here, arranged and directed by communal powers, brought American Jewry together, bound it with its past and defined its collective identity at least for the moment. Fragile and fluid as it has been, the public culture of American Jews has provided an important arena for self-definition. Since 1905, there have been highs and lows in this process that have paralleled the complex interweaving of social and cultural change. Uncovering this history, which requires looking beyond the conventional boundaries of institutional life, should contribute to our perspective on the dynamics of the communal life of American Jews.

Notes

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1. For an exemplary study of the phenomenon discussed here, see Kathleen Conzen, "Ethnicity as Festive Culture: Nineteenth Century German America on Parade," in *The Invention of Ethnicity*, ed. Werner Sollors (New York: 1989), 44–76. For important conceptual insights, see Susan G. David, *Parades and Power: Street Theater in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Berkeley: 1986), 1–22, 67–72, 166–173.

2. Arthur A. Goren, "Sacred and Secular: The Place of Public Funerals in the Immigrant Life of American Jews," *Jewish History* 8, nos. 1–2 (1994), 269–273.

3. *Leksikon fun yidishn tiater*, ed. Zalmen Zylbercweig (New York: 1959), vol. 3, 2078–2104; Rose Shomer-Bachelis, *Unzer Foter Shomer* (first part written by Miriam Shomer-Zunzer) (New York: 1950), 122–186; *Tageblat*, 27 Nov. 1905 (p. 1).

4. *Tageblat*, 26 Nov. 1905, (p. 1); *Forward*, 26 Nov. 1905 (p. 1). For an account of the "elaborate precautions to prevent trouble" see the *New York Times*, 26 Nov. 1905 (p. 12).

5. See *Forward* and *Varhey* for 24, 25, 26 and 27 Nov. 1905; and the *Tageblat* for 24, 26 and 27 Nov. 1905.

6. *Tageblatt*, 27 Nov. 1905 (pp. 1, 8); *Forward*, 27 Nov. 1905 (p. 1).
7. *New York Times*, 27 Nov. 1905 (p. 9).
8. *Tageblatt*, 27 Nov. 1905 (pp. 1, 8); Shomer-Bachelis and Shomer-Zunzer, *Unzer foter Shomer*, 188; *New York Times*, 27 Nov. 1905 (p. 6).
9. *Tageblatt*, 4 Nov. 1905 (p. 4); Goren, "Sacred and Secular," 272–278.
10. Ellen Kellman, "Sholom Aleichem's Funeral (New York, 1916): The Making of a National Pageant," *YIVO Annual* 20 (1991), 277–304. On the secularization and politicization of the public funeral, see Goren, "Sacred and Secular," 290–297, where the funerals of the Jewish socialist leaders Meyer London (1926), Morris Hillquit (1933) and Baruch Vladeck (1938) are discussed.
11. *The Two Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary of the Settlement of the Jews in the United States* (published as *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 14 [1906]), v–x.
12. See Nathan M. Kaganoff, "AJHS at 90: Reflections on the History of the Oldest Ethnic Historical Society in America," *American Jewish History* 91, no. 4 (June 1982), 467–472; Jeffrey S. Gurock, "From *Publications* to *American Jewish History*, The Journal of the American Jewish Historical Society and the Writing of American Jewish History," *American Jewish History* 81, no. 2 (winter 1993–1994), 158–162, 167–171; Naomi Cohen, *Encounter with Emancipation: The German Jews in the United States, 1830–1914* (Philadelphia: 1984), 249–85.
13. See Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: 1991), 93–162, 194–227; John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: 1992), 33–35; David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: 1990), 9–34; John Higham, *History* (Englewood Cliffs: 1965), 6–25.
14. Oscar S. Straus, "Address of the President," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, no. 1 (Papers Presented at the First Scientific Meeting, Philadelphia, December 15, 1892), 1–4; *idem*, *The Origin of Republican Form of Government in the United States of America* (New York: 1885). On Straus' historical writings, see Naomi Cohen, *A Dual Heritage: The Public Career of Oscar S. Straus* (Philadelphia: 1969), 15, 71–73. For interpretations of the origins of the Society that emphasize the American historiographical context, see Ira Robinson, "The Invention of American Jewish History," *American Jewish History*, 81 nos. 3–4 (spring–summer 1994), 309–320; and Robert Liberles, "Postemancipation Historiography and the Jewish Historical Societies of America and England," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, vol. 10, *Reshaping the Past: Jewish History and the Historians*, ed. Jonathan Frankel (New York: 1994), 45–65.
15. See Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 134–145; Hasia R. Diner, *A Time for Gathering: the Second Migration, 1820–1880* (Baltimore: 1992), 201–202; Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "From Cult to Culture: Jews on Display at World's Fairs," in *Tradition and Modernization* (NIF Publications 25 [Turku: 1992]), 80–81; Joseph Guttman, "Jewish Participation in the Visual Arts of Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century America," *American Jewish Archives* 15, no. 1 (April 1963), 44; Richard B. Nicolai, *Centennial Philadelphia* (Bryn Mawr: 1976), 69, 81; Jonathan Sarna, "Columbus and the Jews," *Commentary* 94 (Nov. 1992), 38.
16. Conzen, "Ethnicity as Festive Culture" 66–69, wherein she cites the *New York Times*, 8 Oct. 1883 (p. 5), and 9 Oct. (p. 2), for accounts of the parades; Frank Trommler and Joseph McVeigh (eds.), *America and the Germans: An Assessment of a Three-Hundred Year History* (Philadelphia: 1985), vol. 1, xi–xiv; H. Arnold Barton, "Swedish-American Historiography," *Immigration History Newsletter* 15, no. 1 (May 1983), 2; Thomas J. Schlereth, "Columbia, Columbus, and Columbianism," *Journal of American History* 79, no. 3 (Dec. 1992), 995–960; John Appel, "Immigrant Historical Societies in the United States, 1880–1950" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1960), 277–88, 329–34.
17. *The Two Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary of the Settlement of the Jews in the United States*, v–x, 258–261. Although the first twenty-three Jews arrived in New Amsterdam in September 1654, the following year was chosen as the anniversary year, as it was then that

the Dutch West India Company overruled Governor Peter Stuyvesant and granted "a leave of settlement" to the Jews. For an example of the broad support for holding an anniversary celebration, see *Jewish Exponent*, 14 April 1905 (p. 7), and 21 April 1905 (p. 4.). For criticism that no Russian Jews were appointed to the executive committee, see *Jewish Criterion*, 19 May 1905 (p. 12); *Hebrew Standard*, 5 May 1905 (p. 8), and 12 May (p. 9); *The American Israelite*, 16 Nov. 1905 (p. 4); *Jewish Exponent*, 24 Nov. 1905 (pp. 3, 4).

18. *American Hebrew*, 5 May 1905 (pp. 725–731); *Boston [Jewish] Advocate*, 19 May 1905 (p. 1), 2 June (p. 1) and 7 July (p. 1).

19. *American Hebrew*, 5 May 1905 (p. 725).

20. *American Hebrew*, 6 Oct. 1905 (p. 517); *The Two Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary of the Settlement of the Jews in the United States*, v–x, 242–258. See *ibid.*, 199–232, where excerpts from eleven newspapers appear, and the listing in *American Jewish Year Book* 8 (5667–1906/7), 148–166.

21. *American Israelite*, 16 Nov. 1905 (p. 3); 30 Nov. (p. 6); *Reform Advocate*, 2 Dec. 1905 (p. 2); *Jewish Exponent*, 3 Nov. 1905 (pp. 3, 4), 24 Nov. 1905 (pp. 3, 4), 1 Dec. (pp. 4, 8).

22. *Two Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary*, ix. For general accounts, see the *New York Times*, 1 Dec. 1905 (pp. 1, 4), *Jewish Exponent*, 8 Dec. 1905 (p. 9).

23. *Two Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary*, 34–35, 72–73, 96, 122–123, 127; Emil Hirsh, "Concordance of Judaism and Americanism," *Reform Advocate*, 9 Dec. 1905 (pp. 471–474). In his study *Roger Williams, The Pioneer of Religious Liberty* (New York: 1894), Straus presented the historical case for Williams' support for the readmission of the Jews to England; see 3rd ed. (New York: 1936), 174–178. Letters of congratulations were exchanged between Jacob Schiff and H. Gollancz, president of the Jewish Historical Society of England, on the simultaneous celebrations of 250 years of the Whitehall Conference (where the legal basis for the readmission of Jews to England was established) and the 250th anniversary of the New Amsterdam settlement. See *American Hebrew*, 1 Dec. 1905 (p. 13).

24. *New York Times*, 17 Nov. 1905 (p. 6).

25. *The Two Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary*, 107–108, 122–127; *New York Times*, 27 Nov. 1905 (p. 6). On Kayserling, see Sarna, "Columbus and the Jews," 38–41.

26. *Tageblatt*, 19 Nov. 1905 (p. 4).

27. *Tageblatt*, "English Department," 1 Dec. 1905 (p. 1).

28. *Forward*, 1 Dec. 1905 (pp. 1, 4); *Varheyit*, 1 Dec. 1904 (pp. 1, 4); *Tageblatt*, 27 Nov. 1905 (pp. 1, 4); *New York Times*, 27 Nov. 1905 (p. 6).

29. *Forward*, 7 Nov. 1905 (pp. 1, 4), 23 Nov. (p. 1); *Varheyit*, 23 Nov. (p. 1).

30. See Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862–1817* (Cambridge: 1981), 487–492.

31. *Forward*, 2, 3, 4 Dec. 1905. See also *Tageblatt* 29, 30 Nov. (p. 1); *New York Times*, 29 Nov. (p. 6).

32. *Varheyit*, 4 Dec. 1905 (p. 1); *Forward*, 4 Dec. (p. 1).

33. *New York Times*, 5 Dec. 1905 (p. 6); *Forward*, 5 Dec. 1906 (p. 1).

34. *New York Times*, 5 Dec. 1905 (p. 6).

35. *Ibid.*

36. *American Hebrew*, 15 Dec. 1905 (p. 136).

37. See *New York Times*, 5 Dec. 1905 (p. 7) for an account of the Temple Emanu-el meeting, and *ibid.* (p. 6) for a report of the National Committee for Russian Relief's second million-dollar campaign and the report of Jacob Schiff on his diplomatic efforts.

38. Aaron Antonovsky and Elias Tcherikower (eds.), *The Early Jewish Labor Movement in the United States* (New York: 1961), 322–327; N. Goldberg, "Amerikes beytrog zum ershtn mai," *Zukunft* 49 no. 5 (May 1944), 270–271; *Forward*, 2 May 1903 (p. 1); Ezra Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale: The Formative Years of the Jewish Workers Movement in Tsarist Russia* (Cambridge: 1970), 137–140.

39. A close examination of the American Jewish public response to the Kishinev pogrom in late April and May of 1903 brings into sharper relief the new phase of collaboration that characterizes the 1905 commemorations. In 1903, the notables of the established community

initiated seventy-seven protest meetings in fifty cities across the nation. They were nominally sponsored by "general" committees and featured non-Jewish public figures. (See Cyrus Adler, *The Voice of America on Kishineff* [Philadelphia: 1904], xvii.) But the Jewish immigrant public failed to unite in organizing protest meetings, marches and fund-raising drives. See the *Forward*, 28 April 1903 (p. 1); 30 April (p. 1); 9 May 9 (p. 4).

40. *New York Times*, 27 Nov. 1905 (p. 7).