

## Adam Mendelsohn | The Revolution in Jewish Life in America

- Good morning, everybody. Good evening. I'm going to now hand over to Adam who'll be talking about the revolution in America and Jewish life. Welcome back, Adam. It's always wonderful to have you with us. Thanks.

- Thank you. Thank you, Wendy. And hello to everyone. So I'm going to be speaking today and then tomorrow, and then Monday and Tuesday next week about really America in the late 18th and 19th century, which is in fact the time period which I write about myself. So this is familiar territory for me. And one of the more readily apparent features of American Jewry today, those of you who know American Jews is how different American Jewry and American Jewish life is from other Jewish communities around the world. It's not just that to the rest of us, American Jews seem so confident and so unabashed in expressing their Jewishness in public. It's not just that the American Jewish community dwarfs all other Jewish communities, with the exception of Israel. It's also that American Jewry does not fit the model of how Jewish communities elsewhere are organised, and how Jewish life is supposed to operate.

In place of the hierarchical and structured communities of much of the world, which have centralised and representative organisations, which have chief rabbis often and sometimes direct state involvement in Jewish life, there's the opposite in America. There's a mess of rival voices, competing organisations, an absence of authority, and 1,001, perhaps a million and one individuals claiming to speak for American Jews. Instead of a limited number of options when it comes to religious life, there is a proliferation of choices, a supermarket full of options for Jews to pick and choose, or not choose at all. This creativity and raucousness when it comes to religion and to community and to identity is nothing new. It shocked Jewish immigrants from Central Europe in the mid-19th century as much as it shocked those who arrived later from Eastern Europe. But where did all of this come from, this distinct American style?

Today I'll make the argument that the distinguishing features of American Jewry, its absence of structure and hierarchy, its creativity, and also its chaos were byproducts of the American Revolution. This might seem like a stretch. After all, there were fewer than 2,500 Jews in North America at the time of the revolution. Most of them lived in a handful of cities that dotted the Eastern seaboard. Only Newport in Rhode Island, New York City, Philadelphia, Charleston and Savannah had more than 200 Jews each. You can see this on the next slide how light the Jewish presence was in North America at the time. More Jews lived in the Caribbean in 1750 than in the colonies that would come to form together the United States. Judy, if you can move to the next slide, we'll see what America looked like in 1750. But as we'll see, the American Revolution was crucial, not because it affected large numbers of Jews, but because of the patterns it introduced into American Jewish life.

These patterns became evident almost as soon as the revolution ended. For Jews who were a tiny, tiny minority in the early republic, freedom turned out to be both liberating and to be

confounding. As individuals, they were now free to participate fully in the new nation's political and social life. However, for members of a group that sought to remain distinctive, as Jews often do, America's dawn also signalled the twilight of an earlier age. Constraints that had maintained social cohesion loosened, and once rigid boundaries became porous. Synagogues which were accustomed to enforcing discipline were challenged now after the revolution by indifference and by individualism. This revolution in Jewish life was speeded by the arrival in the 19th century, so after the revolution, by throngs of newcomers. Jews flocked to America's shores, driven from Europe by social rupture, by profound social change in Europe, by political upheaval in Europe, by the ongoing struggle for Jewish emancipation, and lured to America by the promise of economic opportunity and by religious freedom.

Over the course of 60 years, America's Jewish population grew from 2,500 in the year 1800 to at least 150,000 by the eve of the Civil War. So I'm going to be speaking about this period over my next four lectures. Today we'll focus on the impact of the Revolutionary War, specifically how it transformed Judaism and Jewish identity in the United States. As we'll see, the revolution played an unexpected role in how American Judaism went from monochrome and uniform in the 18th century, in the colonial period, exemplified by synagogues that clung closely and largely unwaveringly to tradition, to a Judaism in the 19th century that was characterised by secession, by schism, and by the multiplication of new styles of worship and of practise. In my lecture tomorrow, I'll discuss how Jews in the United States responded to the political, economic and social issue that divided American society from the revolution until the Civil War, the largest issue which divided American society, which was slavery.

We'll describe slavery in north and south, and how Jews in north and south responded to this deeply divisive issue. Next week we'll talk about the Civil War, focusing specifically on the experience of Jewish soldiers in that conflict. It's actually the subject of a book manuscript I'm now completing. And finally, we'll explore next Tuesday how Jews made it economically in America before and after the Civil War. So today we'll start by talking a little about the Revolutionary War before we move on to talking about the consequences and really the legacies of the Revolutionary War. So who did Jews side with during the Revolutionary War? Were they patriots who sided with the revolution, or were they loyalists who sided with Britain? You might imagine that Jews in particular would not be inclined to side with the revolution. Support of revolutionary change directly undermines what had been a long established Jewish pattern of political behaviour that had been entrenched since at least the Middle Ages. Jews had long sought protection from those in power.

This was a very sensible and realistic approach. The Crown provided a source of protection from the mob. There was certainty in the power of the crown. There was certainly much less certainty in the power of the mob. Jews had reason to fear the chaos of a revolution. Revolution in the case of America would be bad for business and instability might endanger their safety and their ability to live as Jews. As a community deeply invested in trade, they had reason to fear the loss of their livelihoods as merchants, particularly access to the Caribbean. And I think this is what Laura spoke about last week and last couple of weeks, is about how intertwined

American Jews or Jews in North America were with Jews in the Caribbean during the colonial period, and how much of a part Jews in North America were part of the Sephardi diaspora, part of a broader network. Yes, go ahead, Wendy.

- [Wendy] Sorry to jump in, but would you mind speaking a tiny bit slower?

- Sure, absolutely.

- [Wendy] Thank you.

- So the Sephardi diaspora was innately conservative. It was by disposition conservative. It was wedded to unbending adherence to traditions within synagogue and communal life. That was the glue that kept it together, the sense that everyone followed the same practises, the same basic habits. And I'll give you an example of exactly this, of how the Sephardi diaspora looked, one of the synagogues within this Sephardi network looked at the time, in the late colonial period. I'll give you an example from New York City as Shearith Israel. Shearith Israel was the only congregation or the only synagogue in New York City, and it continued to keep its minutes in Portuguese well into the 18th century. This was even though that almost no one in the synagogue could understand Portuguese at that point in time.

Almost no one could read Portuguese. It continued to keep its minutes in Portuguese, again, because this is what Sephardi Jews did. And if we go to the next slide, you'll actually get a sense of where and how this synagogue Shearith Israel fit into the skyline, literally into the skyline of New York City in 1771. So the next slide, which Judy will show us is of the skyline in 1771. You can see, you look very, very carefully marked with a number 12, on the left-hand side is the roof, the steeple of Shearith Israel. So not only did Shearith Israel continue to keep its minutes in Portuguese, but it continued to offer the prayer for the British King in Spanish until the revolution. So again, the strange irony here that these are people living within the British empire, but out of habit and custom and this reverence for the past and tradition, they say the prayer for the British King in Spanish.

They also, as I've suggested to you, they continued to stick quite rigidly to the Sephardi , to the Sephardi custom. Even though by already by 1720, so well before this point in time, Ashkenazim outnumbered Sephardim in Shearith Israel, they stuck to the Sephardi custom despite the fact that in fact, the leadership in many cases of the congregation were now Ashkenazi. For all these reasons, we might expect Jews in New York and elsewhere to side with the loyalists, or at least be very reluctant revolutionaries. Again, these are people who are invested in tradition. In reality, however, Jews were as divided as their neighbours on how to respond to the revolution. We go to the next image, I'll be talking about this man a fair amount. This is a man called Gershom Mendes Seixas. He was the hazan of Shearith Israel in New York. You can see him as a young man on the right. In fact, we're going to be talking about him as a young man. And on the left, this is a silhouette from 1813 as a slightly older man. You can see what he would look like, his profile would look like.

This is what a traditional hazan would look like in New York in the early 19th century, so very smarty attired. You can see his little bow tie at the back, his hair tied up and otherwise. So there was no rabbi in New York at this time, but Shearith Israel was led by Gershom Mendes Seixas. He's a very important figure. And before the revolution, he already was likening the British to Pharaoh. He talked about British tyranny and he talked about King George as being Pharaoh. And he described the colonists and compared them to the children of Israel, so again, these biblical motifs, metaphors that he was drawing on. Weeks before the invasion of New York by the British in 1776, Seixas publicly prayed to God.

There's a prayer which he pronounced, which he offered in Shearith Israel, and I'll read it to you. He said "Put in the heart of our sovereign Lord George III and in the hearts of his counsellors, princes and servants, to turn away their fierce wrath from North America," so again, praying against the British intention to invade New York. And when the British did arrive, he personally went to every member of the congregation and pleaded with them to leave New York rather than to remain behind. He didn't want Shearith Israel, his congregation, to be what he described as a Tory congregation, as a loyalist congregation. This apparently, according to what we know, this was fiercely contested. There were plenty of people within his congregation who opposed a dispute, and families split over this issue. And what Gershom Mendes Seixas then did himself was to leave New York carrying the synagogue's Torah scrolls, or at least most of them with him, and other valuables from the synagogue.

And he took them first to Stratford and Connecticut and then onto Philadelphia, where he spent much of the war. Others joined him in exile in Philadelphia. But not all Jews in New York followed his example. About 30 Jews chose to remain in New York during the British occupation. And their number included quite a significant share of the most well-to-do merchants in New York, Jewish merchants in New York. They had reason to stay. And we know again about their presence because they signed an address of loyalty to General Howe in New York expressing, and I'll read it to you, expressing their "gratefulness for his majesty's paternal goodness and pledging their true allegiance to the rightful sovereign George III." So again, you see this division over the Revolutionary War, division over the rebellion against Britain. In fact, worship services continued to be held at Shearith Israel when a minyan could be gathered. In fact, the British army considered using the sanctuary for a hospital, but is persuaded not to by again, the leadership of Shearith Israel, those who'd remained behind. In fact, again, an interesting little demonstration of what the British thought of Jews at the time is that there was an episode of vandalism at the synagogue, that two soldiers came in and defaced part of the synagogue, that might have started a small fire as well.

And they were severely punished for doing so by the British occupational authorities. So those who chose to go into exile, to mostly, as I said, to Philadelphia and most of them had left or left in 1776, they returned in 1783 when General Guy Carleton, the last British commander, loaded the final British troops and departing American loyalists and sailed for England. And you can see, in fact, the next image is of George Washington reentering New York in 1783, this

triumphant return to New York. And Jews, as I've described to you, rejoined those who had lived in occupied New York. So the community comes back together in New York in 1783. And there's clear indications of anger, as you'd imagine, between those who had left and those who had stayed behind. But there's also signs of reintegration within a relatively short space of time as well. The community is small enough that these people really have to do business with one another, have to get on with one another. That's an example in Gershom Mendes Seixas and those who left New York are people who mostly stayed on the sidelines. Certainly they chose exile to leave New York, but they chose not to sign up, chose not to fight.

But we know of at least 100 Jews who did actually serve as soldiers. Most of those who signed up, signed up for the state militia. But a handful also signed up for the Continental Army. And the most famous of those who served was Francis Salvador. I'll talk a little bit about this fascinating figure. Francis Salvador was born in London in 1747, and he was a son of a very wealthy Sephardi family. He moved to South Carolina in 1773. So again, he's in his mid to late twenties when he moves to South Carolina, and he leaves his family behind. He has a wife and he has got four young children. He leaves them behind in London. He really came to North America out of desperation. He'd lost most of his inheritance and his fortune to earthquake in Lisbon. A major earthquake devastated Lisbon, and the family still had investments in Lisbon and much of that was lost. But also there was a major failure within the Dutch East India company, again, which really wrecked his fortune. So he decides to take a gamble to come to North America. And what he did is he invested his remaining fortune in a property, in a vast plantation of 7,000 acres, and a very large property, but also containing large numbers of slaves, a topic we'll talk about tomorrow. This property was in upstate South Carolina.

If we go to the next page, the next slide, you'll see a bank note with his signature on very, very faintly. You can just make out his signature. Again, he was dealing in larger amounts of money than this, but this is the very few direct records of him. I couldn't find, for example, an image of Francis Salvador. What's fascinating about him, so he arrives in 1773, and by 1774, just a year after he arrives, he's really becoming involved in the first stirrings in South Carolina against British control. He is barely there before he's elected to the first provincial Congress of South Carolina, perhaps, some historians speculate, the first Jew ever to hold elective office in the Americas, to ever win office in the Americas, quite something. But when active rebellion broke out, he, unlike many others, became involved again in the state militia. So again, he's involved in politics, he's a major landowner, and he joins the state militia as a soldier. By 1776, what this entailed was participation in what had become a vicious guerilla war in South Carolina. There are raids, there are ambushes and there are reprisals in the Carolina backcountry. And again, we can speculate about his motives, but much of this action was taking place precisely in the area where his plantation was.

This is in the upstate, and this is very unstable area where he's living, where his plantation is. So he has certainly an incentive becoming involved, but also he's clearly politically committed to the revolution as well. This area inland from the coast had become lawless and dangerous as the British and their local supporters had instigated an uprising by the Cherokee against the

rebels. And this was a way of fighting war on the cheap, of getting proxies to fight on behalf of the British. And again, as I said, it's really guerilla war which is going on and continues to go on for several years hereafter. And in late July of 1776, Salvador joined a military expedition against the Cherokee. And I'll read you an account very quickly and in a second about what happened next. So it's an account which is present in a memoir by someone who is present. And it describes quite a dramatic military encounter. So in fact, if you go to the next slide, you can read this yourselves. I'll read selectively from it. So it describes how Major Williamson, who's the commanding officer of this expedition, he takes 330 men with them, and they are hoping to raid a Cherokee camp. It describes the first part about their plan. They're working, this is very early in the morning.

They arrive, they cross a river, they enter into an area where there are houses and they are promptly ambushed. Now, I'll just read the section of the text, which is bolded. And they're fired upon and some people are hit. So by this fight, by this gunfight, "Major Williamson's horse was shot down, but he received no hurt. And Mr. Francis Salvador who's riding alongside of the major, was shot through the body and left leg: and falling among the bushes, he was unfortunately discovered by the Indians immediately and scalped. This might have been prevented. For on Major Williamson's horse being shot down under him, Lieutenant Farar of Captain Prince's company dismounted from his own, remounted the Major upon it, and at the Major's request he went in search of Mr. Salvador. But before he could find him in the dark, the keen-handed Indian had taken off his scalp and left him weltering in his blood. And what added to the misfortune- after the action, it appeared that Captain Smith, son of the late Captain Aaron Smith, who had been murdered with his family by the Indians, saw the Indian while he was in the act of taking off the scalp; but supposing it was Mr. Salvador's servant assisting his master, he did not interfere.

Otherwise he might have prevented it and killed the Indian." So a very grizzly scene described in this account. So this so ended the life of Francis Salvador, the first recorded Jewish casualty in the American Revolution. Whatever side they joined, Jews were particularly impacted by the war. Why was this the case? For one thing, geography worked against the Jewish community in America at the time of the revolution. Before the war, they had clustered in just a handful of cities, as I described earlier. Really, the Jewish population was centred primarily in Savannah, in Charleston, in Philadelphia, New York, and in Newport, Rhode Island. Three of those cities, Charleston, Newport, and New York, all with sizable Jewish populations, were shattered by the war. During the British occupations, these cities were badly damaged and the pre-war populations scattered, as we saw with Gershom Seixas.

To compound matters for the Jewish population, the war and its aftermath initiated a period of profound economic crisis, and you'll see this played out on the next slide. The next slide is a chart which will demonstrate the economic effects of the war. The top line, again, you can see how income changes, per capita income changes during exactly this period of time. And if you look at the top line, 1774, these are, and again, gross personal income per capita, these are estimates averaged out per person, you can see how effectively people's income declines quite

significantly between 1774 and the year 1800 in all of these regions of what will become the United States. It picks up again by 1840, something we'll speak about next week, but this is again just to give you a sense of how economically devastating this war is, that people's livelihoods are ruined. Their occupations and their homes and their businesses are often destroyed. They're left to rebuild after the war. Jews in particular were affected by the disruption of trade. The Jews before the war, in many cases had made their livings as merchants, as traders, and as retailers. And many of them were also dependent on strong connections with the Caribbean and on access to Britain and its colonies. This was the nature of their business, their people importing goods, selling goods, and sometimes exporting goods as well. Before the war, even before the war started, boycotts and by local campaigns have been very bad for business for Jews.

The importation and sale of luxury goods, again, an area where we see lots of Jews involved, was politicised. Again, it created problems for these Jewish business people. During the war, they'd been affected by the lengthy naval blockade, again, this terrible disruption to trade if you are a merchant. And matters didn't improve after the war. The US was involved in an undeclared naval war with France in the late 1790s, again, which created further disruption. So just as you're beginning to get back onto your feet as a merchant, there's further disruption to your trade patterns and your trade practises, and your partnerships and all these things. As I've already suggested to you, these important connections for Jews between the Caribbean and United States were also disrupted by the war. Again, as Laura described last week, before the war, the Jewish communities of North America had depended on economic and religious and social relationships with Jews in the Caribbean.

They had imported kosher meat from the Caribbean. They had turned to Jewish communities in the Caribbean in times of need. They did business with relatives in the Caribbean, and they moved between Charleston and Newport, New York and Philadelphia and Kingston, and Sint Eustatius and Bridgetown. There's a real circulation of people during the colonial period. All of this, again, is made more complicated by the war and its aftermath. Because even after peace was secured, the status quo ante, the pre-war environment was not restored. Once the war was over, Jewish communities that had once been part of the same empire, all part of the same British empire, were now members of two initially hostile nations, again, creating all sorts of complications. More importantly, the war also initiated a shift of trade patterns northwards. America increasingly looked to the interior and to westward expansion as its new frontier, no longer as much to the Caribbean, again with consequences, in particular for Jews.

The result was that over time, Jewish communities that had previously looked to the Caribbean and to the Sephardi diaspora as their lodestar, as their direction, shifted their gaze elsewhere. And this trend was reinforced in the 19th century by the arrival of Jewish immigrants from central Europe, again, had no connection with the Caribbean or with the Sephardi diaspora. The effect was that American Jewry began a reorientation away from its roots in the Caribbean and the Sephardi world, really a turn in a different direction. The end of war also forced Jews to work out what their place would be in the new republic that was beginning to take shape. Revolution

is profoundly destabilising. Norms and old ways of doing business are disrupted, and momentarily anything seems possible. Jews and other minorities had particular reason to be uncertain about their position in the new republic.

Again, they didn't know what the future held for them. They had been relatively well treated by the British, but they had no historical precedent to turn to for understanding how to operate in a democratic society. This is all new to them. It's new to all Americans, but particularly minorities feel vulnerable at that point in time. Hence, Jews did what was familiar to them. They pledged their loyalty to the most powerful officer of the new republic. And again, if you turn to the next slide, you'll see one example of exactly at this. Synagogues in Savannah, in Charleston, in Philadelphia and New York City sent letters independently to George Washington. And this is a letter from Gershom Seixas who we encountered earlier. He writes to George Washington. And on the left-hand side is Seixas' letter.

On the right-hand side is George Washington's reply. As I said, there are lots of letters which are sent by Jews and other groups to George Washington. The most famous and consequential of these letters were sent by the Jews of Newport to George Washington before his first visit to the city as president. His visit was largely ceremonial, part of what was a goodwill tour on behalf of the new government. Let's go to the next slide and I'll show you exactly. We'll read this parts of this text, and now. So this is the letter which the Jews of Newport send. Some of the lines should be familiar to you because you'll see that George Washington's more famous response to them echoes back at parts of us. Judy, if you could go to the next slide so everyone can read the text, it says, "Permit the children of the Stock of Abraham to approach you with the most cordial affection and esteem for your person and merits, and to join our fellow citizens in welcoming you to Newport. With pleasure we reflect on those days, those days of difficulty and danger when the God of Israel who delivered David from the peril of the sword, shielded your head in the day of battle.

And we rejoice to think the same spirit who rested in the bosom of the great beloved Daniel, enabling him to preside over the providence of the Babylonish Empire, rests and ever will rest upon you, enabling you to discharge the most arduous duties of chief magistrate in these states." Now comes the interesting part after all of the flummery to begin with, the flattery. "Deprived as we heretofore have been of the invaluable rights of free citizens, we now with a deep sense of gratitude to the Almighty, disposer of all events, behold the government erected by the majesty of the people, a government which to bigotry gives no sanction, to persecution no assistance, but generously affording to all liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship, deeming everyone of whatever nation, tongue or language equal parts of the great governmental machine.

This is so simple and extensive, a federal union whose basis is philanthropy, mutual confidence, and public virtue, we cannot but acknowledge to be the work of the great God who ruleth in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the Earth doing whatever seemeth him good." And you can read the last part yourself. You can see that there's a certain style of address which



is typical of the times. It's very flowery language. The address uses this biblically resonant language, again, speaking to a president who's also immersed in a world where the Bible is familiar, very familiar to him. But also perhaps you might see in some of these lines signs that perhaps these people believe they're living in a messianic age. Or again, this talk about Daniel and the Babylonish empire, and otherwise, there's certainly a sense of wonder at this moment in time. They really do understand that they are living through amazing times. But also what this letter astutely reflects is an appreciation of the radical new form of government that has taken root in America. Rights were no longer granted by kings, but to use their words, "erected by the majesty of the people."

They weren't quite sure how to address Washington, the head of this new form of government. Hence their decision to refer to him as Chief Magistrate in these states. Again, there's all this experimentation going on. Nothing is quite set or certain yet. My interpretation is that the letter masks a nervousness on the part of the Jews of Newport. They wanted assurances that the new constitution really would protect their rights, and therefore they carefully reminded Washington of their service and support for the patriot cause during the revolution. They were crucially requesting toleration. They were thanking Washington for being afforded rights by the government. Let's go to the next letter. This is really a very famous letter, but we'll read just a portion of it. This is Washington's reply, responding to the Jews of Newport. In fact, a number of historians speculate, even though it's signed in Washington's name, the letter actually probably was written by Thomas Jefferson. And there are a variety of signs that this might be the case. In fact, some of those signs are the fact that it improves on the diction of the the original letter, that in fact it sounds much more poetic, in Washington or Jefferson's hand. It also contains what some see as a subtle rebuke to the Jews of Newport.

Let's just read a section of it again. We won't read the first, the initial address, which thanks the Jews of Newport for writing and again, speaks a little bit about the new republic. Let's skip ahead to the section which begins, "The citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy, a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily the government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support." And you can as again read the rest of it. It has really this lovely again biblically resonant language that Washington or Jefferson uses. Washington promised unconditional equality, not just toleration. Here's the rebuke. He rebuked the Jews of Newport for their supplicating tone. He reminds them that they are full and equal citizens. Full and equal citizens don't need to ask for acceptance and toleration.

They should accept it and expect it. And I'll read you that line is "No more that toleration is spoken of as if it was, but the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the inherent natural rights." He's saying to them you are like everyone else, like all, well, at least all

other men who are white and who earn enough money to have voting rights, you should enjoy inherent natural rights. In truth, the Jews were now equal citizens of a new nation. Not all restrictions were immediately lifted. In fact, in Maryland and New Hampshire and North Carolina, there was a lengthy delay of decades before Jews would enjoy voting rights. But the pattern is set after the revolution. For our remaining time, let's pivot slightly so we can talk about the legacy of the war for American Jews. And this is where really we begin to see the outlines of American Jewish life beginning to emerge. What is important to recall is that during the colonial period, synagogues exercised tremendous power within Jewish communal life, again, a subject that Laura spoke about. The synagogue controlled access to key communal functions. The synagogue had the power to bury a Jew in its graveyard, the power to solemnise marriages, the power to supply kosher meats and other essentials necessary for an observant life, the power to distribute charity, the power to decide who was part of the community and who was not. What's important to remember here is that each community only had a single synagogue.

There's one synagogue in Charleston, one synagogue in New York, one in Newport, one in Philadelphia, which means that these synagogues have a monopoly, which was central to the synagogue's ability to discipline those who transgress. In other words, it has the power to give and to deny at the same time. It could and did demand that all Jews belong to and pay membership dues to the synagogues. If you lived in New York, you were expected to be a member. You didn't have any choice, or at least if you just decided not to pay, again, you could be punished or denied access to any of these privileges. There were different tiers of membership in the synagogue and an expectation of noblesse oblige, that is, the synagogue and its affairs would be run by the rich and powerful. As we have discussed, all the synagogues in colonial America were Sephardi in ritual and unbending when it came to tradition. This was the hallmark of these synagogues. Customs were to be observed and passed down from generation to generation. So this system which was hierarchical and centralised and coercive, worked in a colonial world that was hierarchical, centralised and coercive. But what happened when a system that made no pretence of being democratic found itself in a world that suddenly privileged the individual?

What happens when this colonial system encounters the new republic? The revolution, after all, enshrined individual liberties, enshrined free choice and made any sort of involuntary religious compulsion improper. It doesn't fit within the new republic. According to the spirit of the age, the revolutionary fervour of the time, Jewish men, like all other men who are white, should not be compelled into paying dues to a religious body. Again, this is about individual freedom. There's privileging of individual liberties. In revolutionary times when seemingly ancient and immovable systems suddenly gave way, anything seemed possible. So who was to say then what Judaism meant? Much as citizens now demanded a say in their government, why could Jews not do the same when it came to their synagogues and to their religious practises? Again, this expectation that you should have choice in your religious life. You shouldn't be governed by an unbending and seemingly ancient religious structure. We see the first stirrings of this revolt against synagogue control in an obscure case from Philadelphia involving Benjamin Moses Claver. And the next slide is of the synagogue which it involves.

This is Mikveh Israel in Philadelphia. And the person I'm talking about, as I said, is someone called Benjamin Moses Claver. He's a merchant who lived outside of Philadelphia. He fell in love and married a non-Jewish woman. Again, there's a scattering of Jews outside of these major centres. And again, in many cases they will intermarry. And he and his wife had two children together. We don't know her name. Otherwise I would tell you what her name is. Later in life, Benjamin Moses Claver became blind and was cared for by his wife. The Jewish community sometimes sent him kosher food. When he died in 1785, the leadership of the Philadelphia synagogue, of the single, the only synagogue in Philadelphia, Mikveh Israel determined that Benjamin Claver could be buried in a corner of their cemetery, this was a concession, but without ritual cleansing, without a burial shroud and without a burial ceremony. They wanted to demonstrate their disapproval of the fact that he'd married a non-Jewish woman. In fact, it went on. They also said that his coffin was to be carried to the grave by four boys who were also to bury him, so again, all these ways of demonstrating their disapproval of the fact that he'd married a non-Jewish woman. We'll pick up next from a letter that describes what happens. And this is a letter which the synagogue actually sends off to Amsterdam.

And it comes from a longer letter, but I'll just read you these parts. And again, they're actually appealing to a religious authority in Amsterdam for advice what to do in this circumstance. Now, the president of the synagogue, again, notice that language, they picked up the word president, "went to the place where the body was kept to see whether there were any irresponsible people who would attend the body." This is again at the cemetery, "in disregard of our decision," again, to deny Benjamin Claver any of these of the rituals of burial. And the president of the congregation "found there several irreverent and irresponsible men, among them Moses Mordecai," a troublemaker from their point of view. "The president warned the men in the presence of Mordecai not to attend the body, but Mordecai paid no attention to his words, and on the contrary, quoted rabbinic laws against him," against the president. "And they washed the body and clothed it in shrouds. That is to say, the president anticipated that and cut the shrouds almost completely into pieces. But they, the malcontents did what they wanted. The congregation will shortly decide what to do to these men. All this goes to show the conduct of Mordecai, who was ready to destroy good ordinances that were made to meet the needs of the moment, because of the great lack of discipline that prevails in our generation.

Now, those unrespectful men who attended the body unlawfully claim that the decision was improper. We therefore request of you to answer about this decision, whether it was properly made to meet the need of the hour." So here in microcosm was the problem that confronted the synagogue after the revolution. Defiance of religious authority was not a new phenomenon, but how to punish transgressors in an age when hierarchy itself was under attack. The synagogue could have once punished Moses Mordecai and got away with it, but now he and others laughed them off. They, these transgressors had decided themselves what was acceptable and were openly flouting the authority of the synagogue. So this is in microcosm a sign of what is to come, a sign of what was to follow, the ways in which undemocratic practises became very difficult to defend it. So the synagogue was trying to impose its authority, using, again, centuries

of practise. And these people, instead of being cowed, being frightened and following the synagogue's instructions, do as they please.

Soon after the revolution, a slow process of democratisation took hold within this synagogue and many other synagogues across the United States. We see the introduction of elections, the removal of tiered membership within synagogues, in other words, removal of the ways in which the old elites held onto power. The drafting of synagogue constitutions, itself an idea borrowed from the times. The idea that you should have a constitution, and that in fact you called it a constitution, borrows directly from revolutionary America, and as well as the creation of the post of synagogue president, as I've described to you, again, borrowed from the times that they're living in. Beyond these largely cosmetic changes, the synagogue began to lose its grip on the Jewish community. Soon unsynagogued Jews, Jews who don't affiliate with synagogues, outnumbered those who were members of congregations as affiliation became voluntary. Again, after the revolution, it becomes impossible to enforce the sort of measures which had once forced people to join the synagogue. The spirit of the age, however, also emboldened other members of the Jewish community who wished to remain actively involved in religious life. Now, instead of being beholden to the particular traditions and customs of the Sephardi synagogue, they pushed to make their own decisions about their religious lives.

With religious freedom and individual liberty came the option to break away, to secede and to start anew. And here inspiration came from the wider society. Just as in the first decades of the 19th century America was undergoing a market revolution, a transformation of the American economy from one rooted in agriculture to one driven by commerce and by industry, so too did this market revolution infuse religious life. Beginning tentatively in the 1820s, American Judaism began its own market revolution. Since religious affiliation, the decision to join a synagogue was now voluntary, there was nothing to stop Jews who disliked their existing synagogue from leaving and setting up their own rival congregation. This began a pattern of schism and splintering in American Judaism. Whenever Jews disliked their synagogues, they are free to secede and create a new one that appeals more closely to their desires. This in turn generated competition between synagogues for members and differentiation within the market. In other words, synagogues began to compete, to offer a more pleasant experience, a better choir, a more comfortable sanctuary, a shorter sermon, in fact, sermons in English as opposed to in Portuguese, for example, a tastier brachah, all the sorts of ways that synagogues still compete today. The result was that the pattern that had dominated Jewish life in America gave way spectacularly in the 1820s.

In Charleston, for example, and we go to the next slide here, a split in 1824 established the first Reform congregation in North America. In 1825 in New York City, there's another breakaway, again, a break of the monopoly held by Shearith Israel. Shearith Israel had been the only synagogue in New York City until 1825, perhaps with a slight exception for a moment, but there's a breakaway in 1825. And from there, the market principle took over. By 1835, there were four synagogues in New York City. By 1845, there were 10 synagogues in New York City. And by 1855, there were over 20 synagogues. You can see this proliferation of synagogues, but

again this principle that if you dislike what your synagogue is doing, you're free to go and set up your own one. And this, again, competition between synagogues begins to take off. And we see the same process in other larger communities too. So this process of splintering was a product of uniquely American circumstances and ideas. Indeed, this pattern of creative distraction, a tendency to fissure and secede within American Jewish life became a hallmark of American Judaism. The revolution, in other words, introduced a century of profound creativity within American Judaism.

As synagogues and rabbis were forced to compete for the attention of Jews, again, they had to worry about getting Jews into the pews. You couldn't, again, just rely on any way to coerce Jews to join your particular synagogue. Instead you have to lure them in. Before the revolution, in theory, no Jew had a choice but to join a synagogue. After the revolution, getting Jews into the pews became a business of survival. If you wanted your synagogue to survive, if you wanted to earn a salary as a rabbi, you needed to ensure that you had a congregation, a willing congregation. Jews after all could choose to affiliate or not to do so.

Now they had to be persuaded to join. As a consequence, multiple shades of Judaism emerged in America in the 19th century, various shades of Orthodoxy, of Reform, modernising, traditional, you name it, each hoping to carve out a niche within the broader Jewish community. In many ways, the revolution made American Jewish life what it is today. It destroyed an older model of how Jewish communities were organised, hierarchical, centralised, coercive, and replaced it with a blank canvas. Out of crisis came innovation. In its scramble to adapt to the freewheeling circumstances of a liberal society, American Judaism underwent a revolution of its own. Thank you.

- Thanks, Adam. That was excellent, absolutely excellent. Have you got time for questions?

- Sure, absolutely. Go right ahead. Shall I pick from the?

- Can you find them yourself?

Q&A and Comments:

Q: Sure. So how many Jews remain in the Caribbean?

A: I'm not sure today, but certainly what we see happening is that the heyday of Jewish life in the Caribbean really is in the 18th century. And then already there's a decline in the 19th century for a whole variety of reasons, partly because of the decline, economic decline of the Caribbean as well. Some of this is connected with the emancipation of slaves in the Caribbean. Certainly it has sorts of consequences, for example, with the Jamaican economy. Likewise, in America, as I said, reorientation westward affects the Caribbean and Jewish life in the Caribbean. But again, Jews have had a presence there for centuries and remain in the Caribbean to this day. But already we see by the 1820s, 1830s, that there are more Jews in North America. And North

America obviously becomes the key and preferred destination for Jews. But there's still circulation between the Caribbean and North America, that there's still American Jewish newspapers are being sent to Jamaica and to Barbados and elsewhere. Likewise, Jamaican newspapers are being read by Jews in New York and elsewhere. And the circulation of our people too, that rabbis often start in the Caribbean. If they're successful, they come to America and vice versa. There's a tremendous amount of movement into the 19th century. But again, that Sephardi dominance disappears already by the 1820s and 1830s.

Q: There's a question here about someone who says that the Jews of Newport built an escape hatch under the bema in the Touro Synagogue.

A: The Touro Synagogue is a synagogue, the oldest operational synagogue in the United States. Although someone who's in Newport might be able to correct me there. And the claim is or various claims are made about this trap door beneath the bema. I'll talk perhaps tomorrow a little bit about this too, that one of the claims is that it was used for, this was a stop on the underground railroad, for railway in extracting slaves from the south. There's talk that it was an escape hatch, all such things. Almost certainly it was a storage room instead. I obviously prefer those other two stories, but unfortunately unlikely that it was either of those cases.

Q: There's a question as well about the burial issue in Philadelphia.

A: It took place in 1785. So again, if you think about the timeline here, that Philadelphia and the Jewish community in Philadelphia grows dramatically during the Revolutionary War because Jews from New York and elsewhere were effectively being exiled in Philadelphia. That's the haven for Jews during the war. And there's a dramatic growth, in fact in the size of the Jewish population. And in fact, there are grand building plans for Mikveh Israel during the Revolutionary War. And they start. They make the mistake of starting to build a larger synagogue. And of course the problem is that in 1783, Jews go back to New York and go back to other places. And the synagogue is then left with a far larger sanctuary than it needs, and it has decades of financial problems afterwards, and also other problems as I described to you, that these other issues are perhaps interrelated as well, that this is a community which suddenly has economic crisis, which is again, trying to find its place in the United States. There are lots and lots of questions. I'm just going to pick somewhat randomly from the list.

Q: Where and when did separate seating for men and women start in the US?

A: It's a fascinating question. And what you see first is actually what's called family style seating as opposed to men and women. So they're what are called family pews which start initially. It's associated with the Reform movement, but not all of the initial Reform synagogues actually have either family style pews or mixed seating. It comes later and over time. In fact, there's one example I know of where an Orthodox congregation also has mixed seating too. It's something which will become what's called a wedge issue which separates Orthodox and Reform. And there's a very good book about the subject, if anyone is interested. It again interrelates with

gender as well, the where are women going to be in the synagogue, things of this kind. And there's a book by Carla Goldman now at the University of Michigan, which writes about seating matters and how so many fights around seating. Let me just find another question.

Q: So when did Jewish communities open up on the West coast?

A: I'll talk about that I think next week because we're going to talk a little bit about the Gold Rush and about the economic expansion or the new roles of Jews in the American economy. And as we'll see, Jews move westward along with everyone else. And for a moment in time, really in the 1850s and 1860s, San Francisco has the second largest Jewish population in the United States. Again, gives you a sense of its economic importance and the opportunities available therefore for Jews. And San Francisco will seed all sorts of other Jewish communities on the west coast as well. It's a very interesting and a very important point. There's more to it than I have time to describe now.

Q: There's this question, a very good question about did Jews provide financial support for the revolution?

A: Absolutely. So again, it's one of those areas in which Jews are involved. And in fact, again, anyone who's interested, you're welcome to write to me about it. I can tell you more about this question, that it's probably the largest contribution of Jews to the Revolution is again, in selling debt for the revolutionary cause. And as I said, Jews play quite a significant role with this. But there're a whole variety of legends around this which are more complicated. And then they seem, again, as I said, it's too complicated to describe in just a moment. Again, there's a very good question about changes for women which occur at this time. And this, I'll talk to it for a moment because again, it's a fascinating question. Not initially after the revolution. In other words, there isn't a sudden change in the position of women, but it does happen over the course of the 19th century. Already by the 1820s, 1830s, 1840s, we begin to see dramatic changes. And it's perhaps partly created by the revolution, but there are other things going on as well. And one of those is that what we see, what scholars call the feminization of religion in America. It's not just Judaism. We see it particularly within Protestantism as well, that men, for a variety of reasons will stop going to the synagogue, will go to the synagogue in lower numbers and women go in larger numbers.

So in fact, there are these complaints in the 1840s, 1850s that the woman's section of the synagogues are packed and there are almost no men in the gallery beneath, in the rows beneath. And so again, this is a source of, becomes quite controversial at the time, but this is part of this broader pattern of change. What changes much more slowly is a woman gaining authority within the synagogue. But what we do see happening is women taking over a variety of other roles, both in Jewish life and in the synagogue. Particularly we see women taking over roles in education. The classic example of this is the Sunday school movement, which begins initially in Philadelphia. This is Rebecca Gratz plays a crucial role in this, and this is again in the 1840s and 1850s. One of the reasons that sermons are introduced, for example, in synagogue

is that the idea is that you need to educate women, and sermons in English are a way of doing this.

Newspapers, Jewish newspapers, which are started in the 1840s, 1850s, again, a large part of what they're trying to do is to educate Jewish women. There's a sense that they're the ones who're interested and also they're the ones who need to be taught. They are passing Jewish customs on to their children as well. So again, this process of, as I said, what's called the feminization of religion, we see it very much in Judaism. But much later, it takes a long time, unfortunately, for women to gain positions of authority within the synagogue. Often again, there are, for example, sisterhoods, which are created particularly in Reformed synagogues. But often the head will still be a male, still be a man. Someone's husband often will take the titular role even though the work is actually being done by women.

Q: And let me pick out one or two more questions. There's again question, good question about the migration of Jews in the wake of the Revolutionary War.

A: Absolutely so, that Jewish loyalists, those who are worried about what's likely to happen to them, they don't know what's going to happen to them, some of them will make their way to Canada. Or alternatively they make their way to the Caribbean. And in fact, there's some fascinating examples of exactly this. Judah Touro who becomes immensely wealthy, who lands up in New Orleans, his father had left New York because as a loyalist landed up in the Caribbean and again had been worried, I think, for his safety, and the family, his son then made his way to New Orleans. But that's one example amongst many of exactly this kind. They are Jews again who worry for their future and make a choice, which many other New Yorkers or people in Newport or otherwise who believe that there might be a price to pay for their actions during the revolution all believe that America is done for will go elsewhere. Let me find, I apologise to those whose questions I'm not answering.

Q: There's a question here about the Reform movement. So the question is, will the Reform movement start in Germany in the early 19th century?

A: It's pretty much the case. I was surprised it didn't start first in America post-revolution. This is the debate amongst historians about the Reform movement in Charleston. To what extent are they aware of what's going on in Germany at that time, at least the German states at the time. There are already moves in the German states towards early forms of Reform. And certainly they're probably reading about it in the newspaper. But in a way, the Charleston phenomenon is its own beast, its own creation, that there's very little sign that they've seen the prayer books which are being produced at this time in Germany. And they're responding, if you read their literature, they're responding specifically to the Charleston environment, what's going on in Charleston. Charleston is a very wealthy place at this point in time. It's a very sophisticated and cultured place, despite what we'll talk about tomorrow with slavery.

Or perhaps partly because of that, it's a very wealthy place. It's the centre, had been the centre



of the slave trade. And so a lot of what's going on in Charleston is local. And there's a very then complicated history in Charleston of secession in 1824. And then thereafter, they rejoined the breakaway congregation for a variety of reasons, within a decade, has rejoined the Orthodox congregation. And then there's a later and very, very dramatic split a little bit later which isn't repaired. And it's over the use of an organ within the synagogue. Can you have organ music within the synagogue? And the Orthodox say no. The reformers say yes. And that leads to a permanent split between the two. But again, there's a whole and fascinating history around Reform. And the classic text on this is by Michael Meyer, who's at Hebrew Union College, a "Response to Modernity". And it's, again, a very good book which talks both about the United States and the German example. Let me just pick, again, a handful of more questions.

Q: So the question here from Sigmund Minestein is, why didn't the rabbis use their knowledge of halacha, of Jewish law, in the case of marriages and burials? And this is a whole factor which I haven't spoken about, which is the level of not just, it's not so much observance, but of familiarity with Jewish law within this North American community, both before the revolution and after it. Remember I said that Gershom Mendes Seixas wasn't a rabbi. The first rabbi, the first ordained rabbi will only come to North America, to the United States in 1840. That's Abraham Rice, goes to Baltimore. Prior to that point in time, there is no ordained rabbi. And instead you rely on what at the time are called hazans. It's different from a hazan as we think of them today. It's someone who would lead the service, but also provide a certain amount of expertise when it comes to religious matters.

So I'm just, sorry, being interrupted over here. So I'm going to have to sign off in a second. So these hazans have a certain amount of expertise, but a limited amount of expertise and hence the relatively low level of religious expertise within the Jewish population in the United States and this reliance on Jewish communities elsewhere. So unfortunately, I think on my end, I'm going to have to end in a second. I have a rival Zoom talk which my wife is about to begin next door. So I might have to log off. Sorry to do so precipitately.

- No, Adam, thank you. I just want to say that really that was absolutely excellent, and I actually have been picked out by one of the participants for asking you to slow down. I'm sorry that I did that, but there are a number of our followers who sent us email saying please ask Adam to slow down a little bit, because there's so much content to take in and it's a different accent. So I apologise if that threw you off kilter. But thank you for a really excellent presentation. We look forward to seeing you tomorrow. And just to say to those participant hosts. We're delighted to have Kathy Manning, who's a Democratic senator speaking to us at two o'clock New York time. But thank you very much, Adam, as always.

- Yeah, thanks.

- This is an informal Zoom family.

- Absolutely, sorry to sudden interruption on my end. As I said, it's by total coincidence, I have a

.

- See you tomorrow. Bye.