

THE JEW IN THE MODERN WORLD

A Documentary History

Second Edition

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executive and judicial officers, both of the United States and of the several states, shall be bound by oath or affirmation to support this constitution; but no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.

Amendment 1. Congress shall make no

law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

NOTE

1. The Constitution and its First Amendment guaranteed the legal equality of all citizens of the United States regardless of religion. Although Article VI of the Constitution abolished any religious test "as a qualification to any office," at least two states, Maryland and North Carolina, continued to restrict the right of Jews and Christian dissidents to hold public office, arguing that the Constitution referred only to federal positions. The

two states removed these restrictions in 1826 and 1868, respectively. The situation today, under which the First Amendment is explicitly applied to the laws of the various states, did not come about until the twentieth century when the Supreme Court, in the 1940 Cantwell decision, interpreted the Fourteenth Amendment as imposing the Bill of Rights on the states.

THE HEBREW CONGREGATION OF NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND

7. Message of Welcome to George Washington (August 17, 1790)¹

Sir:

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 with our fellow-citizens in welcoming you to New Port.

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 that the same Spirit, who rested in the bosom of the greatly beloved Daniel, enabling him to preside over the provinces of the Bab-

ylonish Empire, rests, and ever will rest upon you, enabling you to discharge the arduous duties of Chief Magistrate in these states.

Deprived as we have hitherto been of the invaluable rights of free citizens, we now, with a deep sense of gratitude to the Almighty Disposer of all events, behold a 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 every one, of whatever nation,

Source: Lewis Abraham, "Correspondence Between Washington and Jewish Citizens," *Proceedings of the American Jewish Historical Society* 3 (1895), pp. 90-91. Reprinted by permission of the American Jewish Historical Society.

tongue, or language, equal parts of the great governmental machine. This so ample and extensive 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 whatsoever seemeth him good.

For all the blessings of civil and religious liberty which we enjoy under an equal and benign administration, we desire to send up our thanks to the Ancient of Days, the great Preserver of Men, beseeching him that the

angel who conducted our forefathers through the wilderness into the promised land may graciously conduct you through all the dangers and difficulties of this mortal life. And when like Joshua, full of days and full of honor, you are gathered to your fathers, may you be admitted into the heavenly paradise to partake of the water of life and the tree of immortality.

Done and signed by order of the Hebrew Congregation in New Port, Rhode Island.

August 17, 1790.
Moses Seixas, Warden

NOTE

1. When George Washington, who was inaugurated the first president of the fledgling Republic in April 1789, visited Newport on August 17,

1790, the warden of the local synagogue addressed this message of welcome to him. Washington's reply follows in document 8.

GEORGE WASHINGTON

8. A Reply to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport (c. August 17, 1790)

Gentlemen:

While I receive with much satisfaction your address replete with expressions of affection and esteem, I rejoice in the opportunity of assuring you that I shall always retain a grateful remembrance of the cordial welcome I experienced in my visit to New Port from all classes of citizens.

The reflection on the days of difficulty and danger which are past is rendered the more sweet from a consciousness that they are succeeded by days of uncommon prosperity and security. If we have wisdom to make the best use of the advantages with which we

are now favored, we cannot fail, under the just administration of a good government, to become a great and a happy people.

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 govern-

Source: Lewis Abraham, "Correspondence Between Washington and Jewish Citizens," *Proceedings of the American Jewish Historical Society* 3 (1895), pp. 91-92. Reprinted by permission of the American Jewish Historical Society.

ment 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.

It would be inconsistent with the frankness of my character not to avow that I am pleased with your favorable opinion of my administration and fervent wishes for my felicity.

May the children of the stock of Abraham

who dwell in this land continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other inhabitants, while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig-tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid.

May the Father of all mercies scatter light and not darkness in our paths, and make us all in our several vocations useful here, and, in his own due time and way, everlastingly happy.

G. Washington

MORDECAI MANUEL NOAH

9. Proclamation to the Jews (September 15, 1825)¹

Whereas, it has pleased Almighty God to manifest to his chosen people the approach of that period when, in fulfillment of the promises made to the race of Jacob, and as a reward for their pious constancy and triumphant fidelity, they are to be gathered from the four quarters of the globe, and to resume their rank and character among the governments of the earth;

And Whereas, the peace which now prevails among civilized nations, the progress of learning throughout the world, and the general spirit of liberality and toleration which exists together with other changes favorable to light and to liberty, mark in an especial manner the approach of that time, when "peace on earth, good will to man" are to prevail with a benign and extended influence, and the ancient people of God, the first to proclaim his unity and omnipotence, are to be restored to their inheritance, and enjoy the rights of a sovereign independent people;

Therefore, I, Mordecai Manuel Noah, citizen of the United States of America, late Consul of the said States to the City and

Kingdom of Tunis, High Sheriff of New York, Counsellor at Law, and by the grace of God, Governor and Judge of Israel, have issued this my Proclamation, announcing to the Jews throughout the world, that an asylum is prepared and hereby offered to them, where they can enjoy that peace, comfort and happiness which have been denied them through the intolerance and misgovernment of former ages; an asylum in a free and powerful country remarkable for its vast resources, the richness of its soil, and the salubrity of its climate; where industry is encouraged, education promoted, and good faith rewarded, "a land of milk and honey," where Israel may repose in peace, under his "vine and fig tree," and where our people may so familiarize themselves with the science of government and the lights of learning and civilization, as may qualify them for that great and final restoration to their ancient heritage, which the times so powerfully indicate.

The asylum referred to is in the State of New York, the greatest State in the American confederacy. New York contains forty-

Source: M. J. Kohler, "Some Early American Zionist Projects," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 8 (1900), pp. 106-13. Reprinted by permission of the American Jewish Historical Society.

ignorant as I. We are still in power, after a fashion. Our sway over what we call society is undisputed. We keep Jews far away, and the anti-Jew feeling is quite rabid. We are anti-everything and we are will up-lifters; yet we somehow seem to be more Jewish every day. This is not my own diagnosis. I

make none. I care not a straw what happens provided the fabric lasts a few months more; but will it do so? I am uneasy about you. I judge you to be worse than we. At least you are making almost as much howl about it. . . .

NOTE

1. Henry Adams (1838–1918), a grandson of John Quincy Adams, and a distinguished American historian.

CONFERENCE OF REFORM RABBIS

14. The Pittsburgh Platform (1885)¹

In view of the wide divergence of opinion and of the conflicting ideas prevailing in Judaism today, we, as representatives of Reform Judaism in America, in continuation of the work begun at Philadelphia in 1869, unite upon the following principles:

First: We recognize in every religion an attempt to grasp the Infinite One, and in every mode, source or book of revelation held sacred in any religious system the consciousness of the indwelling of God in man. We hold that Judaism presents the highest conception of the God-idea as taught in our holy Scriptures and developed and spiritualized by the Jewish teachers in accordance with the moral and philosophical progress of their respective ages. We maintain that Judaism preserved and defended amid continual struggles and trials and under enforced isolation this God-idea as the central religious truth for the human race.

Second: We recognize in the Bible the record of the consecration of the Jewish people to its mission as priest of the One God, and

value it as the most potent instrument of religious and moral instruction. We hold that the modern discoveries of scientific researches in the domains of nature and history are not antagonistic to the doctrines of Judaism, the Bible reflecting the primitive ideas of its own age and at times clothing its conception of divine providence and justice dealing with man in miraculous narratives.

Third: We recognize in the Mosaic legislation a system of training the Jewish people for its mission during its national life in Palestine, and to-day we accept as binding only the moral laws and maintain only such ceremonies as elevate and sanctify our lives, but reject all such as are not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilization.

Fourth: We hold that all such Mosaic and Rabbinical laws as regulate diet, priestly purity and dress originated in ages and under the influence of ideas altogether foreign to our present mental and spiritual state. They fail to impress the modern Jew with a spirit of priestly holiness; their observance in our

Source: Yearbook of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, 45 (1935), pp. 198–200. Reprinted by permission of the Central Conference of American Rabbis.

days is apt rather to obstruct than to further modern spiritual elevation.

Fifth: We recognize in the modern era of universal culture of heart and intellect the approach of the realization of Israel's great Messianic hope for the establishment of the kingdom of truth, justice and peace among all men. We consider ourselves no longer a nation but a religious community, and therefore expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the administration of the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state.

Sixth: We recognize in Judaism a progressive religion, ever striving to be in accord with the postulates of reason. We are convinced of the utmost necessity of preserving the historical identity with our great past. Christianity and Islam being daughter-religions of Judaism, we appreciate their mission to aid in the spreading of monotheistic and moral truth. We acknowledge that the spirit of broad humanity of our age

is our ally in the fulfillment of our mission, and therefore we extend the hand of fellowship to all who cooperate with us in the establishment of the reign of truth and righteousness among men.

Seventh: We reassert the doctrine of Judaism, that the soul of men is immortal, grounding this belief on the divine nature of the human spirit, which forever finds bliss in righteousness and misery in wickedness. We reject as ideas not rooted in Judaism the belief both in bodily resurrection and in Gehenna and Eden (Hell and Paradise), as abodes for everlasting punishment or reward.

Eighth: In full accordance with the spirit of Mosaic legislation which strives to regulate the relation between rich and poor, we deem it our duty to participate in the great task of modern times, to solve on the basis of justice and righteousness the problems presented by the contrasts and evils of the present organization of society.

NOTE

1. German Jews who came to the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century brought with them Reform Judaism, although some congregations, such as the Charleston Reform Movement of 1825, were initiated and led by native-born Jews. By the time of the Civil War many Reform congregations had been established. The tendency in the practice of Judaism was to radical Reform and by 1885, when the Pittsburgh conference of

Reform Rabbis was convened, it was the dominant position, as is expressed in the platform adopted by the conference. At its founding in 1889, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the principal Reform rabbinical organization, adopted the Pittsburgh Platform with few reservations. It remained the basic statement of the tenets of Reform in America until the Columbus Conference in 1937. See document 41 in this chapter.

15. The Orthodox Jewish Congregational Union of America (June 8, 1898)¹

A convention of Orthodox Congregations met in New York, Wednesday, June 8, 1898. A resolution favoring Zionism was adopted.

The principles of the convention adopted are as follows:

Source: *The American Jewish Year Book* 5660 [September 5, 1899 to September 23, 1900] (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1899), pp. 99-100.