

# The Promised Land?

## Jews in the U.S.

Religion in America

### Ashkenazi Jews Arrive

- ▶ German Jews: 1830-80 over 200,000 arrive
  - ▶ Legacy of Napoleonic emancipation
    - ▶ U.S. as land of Enlightenment principles
    - ▶ German Ashkenazi swamp Sephardim, who look down on them
  - ▶ In industrial cities; follow Germans to Midwest
    - ▶ Spread out, with little community consciousness
    - ▶ Self-conscious as Jews; identify with German culture
  - ▶ Great social mobility: peddlers to merchants

### Americanization of Judaism

- ▶ Reform Judaism
  - ▶ Desire to "modernize" & "Americanize"
  - ▶ Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise of Cincinnati
    - ▶ Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1873
  - ▶ Vernacular; mixed sexes; organs and choirs
  - ▶ No dietary laws or special outfits
  - ▶ Equal women: bat mitzvah 1922; rabbis 1972

### Tidal Wave, 1880-1920

- ▶ 2,250,000 immigrants, 73% from Russia
  - ▶ Yiddish shetl culture in the Pale of Settlement
  - ▶ Oppression & pogroms, 1880-1914

### To New York and urban areas

- ▶ Yiddish culture transplanted
  - ▶ Theater, publishing, arts, humor
- ▶ Poverty, exploitation in clothing trades
- ▶ Tension with German Jews
- ▶ Americanization

### Three Branches of American Judaism

- ▶ Reform Judaism (now largest)
- ▶ Conservative Judaism, 1887 (formerly largest)
  - ▶ Jewish law essential, but some laws adaptable
  - ▶ Women rabbis since 1985
- ▶ Orthodox, 1890s
  - ▶ Traditions and Jewish law cannot change

### Rising Anti-Semitism

- ▶ Grand Union Hotel, Saratoga Springs, NY, denies Joseph Seligman a room, 1877
- ▶ Doors close, 1880-1920
  - ▶ Excluded from social clubs, social registers, hotels, resorts
  - ▶ Restrictive covenants in real estate
- ▶ Demand for immigration restriction
  - ▶ Immigration Act, 1924

## Social and political activism

- ▶ Political and social activism
  - ▶ Radicalism
  - ▶ Labor activism
  - ▶ Democratic Party
- ▶ Philanthropy
  - ▶ Support for black causes