A STRUGGLE FOR IDENTITY:

The Role of Landsmanshaftn in Preserving and Expanding Jewish American Culture

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BENJAMIN SHERMAN AND THE LANDSMANSHAFTN LEGACY

Benjamin Sherman was a poor Jewish immigrant when he arrived in Philadelphia in 1913. He was an Eastern European Jew from a small Ukrainian shtetl called Romanov, who had to flee his home to escape religious persecution. His ship docked in Philadelphia and he settled in the city, first working as a baker, then a tailor. Like many new immigrants, his life was a struggle. Upon joining the Bialystoker Landsmanshaft in 1915, his life changed.

Benjamin met older Jewish immigrants who were willing to help him learn English and find better employment. As a member of this group, he was able to form bonds with men he felt he could relate, neighbors from the old country; he found familiarity in an unfamiliar world. The group not only helped him, but his family as well, providing support during times of illness and financial assistance for whatever was needed. Years later, the Jewish immigrant who barely spoke English and had nothing when he arrived at the docks of Philadelphia helped establish Jewish schools in the city. He held stable employment, first as a baker, then as a tailor. He later was chairman of the United Hebrew Trades, and served as a business agent for the Jewish local of the Bakery and Confectionary Workers. Sherman came from an extremely orthodox family in Romanov; he studied in Chedar and received a Bar-Mitzvah. However, after joining this landsmanshaft group in America, he realized the value of passing not only these traditions down to his children, but modern American values as well. As a result, his children were successful, one son a doctor, another a research chemist, and his only
daughter a teacher. When interviewed in 1982-1983, he expressed the firm belief that it was the Bialystoker Landsmanshaft that helped his family find such success in America.¹

This story is not unlike many told by other Eastern European Jewish immigrants who traveled to America and joined landsmanshaftn, a term used to describe hometown associations. These groups gave the Jewish immigrants hope, comfort, support and guidance in their efforts to adjust to life in the new world. When Eastern European Jews immigrated to the United States, they faced the uncertainty of settling in an entirely different world. Most knew very little English, and had few skills that could be used in an urban environment. They had left their families and close friends in the Old Country often not by choice but for survival. Having recently settled in a foreign country, many of these Jews craved feelings of familiarity and companionship, namely, living amongst people like themselves. For many, the landsmanshaft's support and comfort helped these immigrants with their loneliness and longing for home.

A large number of historians believe that Eastern European Jews resisted assimilation after immigrating to the United States by joining landsmanshaftn. Michael R. Weisser discusses this in his book, A Brotherhood of Memory: Jewish Landsmanshaftn in the New World. He claims these Jews surrounded themselves with landsmanshaft members and services as a way to create an America that kept them surrounded by customs of the Old World. Irving Howe, another author, writes that these landsmanshaftn were ways for immigrant Jews to create miniature worlds isolated from outer society, “The old persisted, stubborn, rooted in the depths of common memory.”²

What many of these historians fail to recognize is that while these Jews may not have

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been quick to assimilate into American society, it did not stop them from acculturating into American society, an easier and much more successful transition. Weisser is quick to dismiss the fact that many landsmanshaft meetings started not only with the *hatikvah* (Israel’s national anthem and an old Jewish poem) but also the Star Spangled Banner, which everyone was forced to learn. This atmosphere that allowed for two cultures to mix helped ease these Jewish immigrants’ transition into American citizenship, and because landsmanshaft groups did not force Eastern European Jews to give up their identities entirely, there was little resentment towards American society. Therefore, acculturation, provided by landsmanshaft offered an easier transition for these Eastern European Jewish immigrants to become Jewish American citizens than any type of assimilation.

Most of the landsmanshaft created in the United States followed a constitution written by members that strictly adhered to democratic values and American ideals. Eastern European Jews learned very quickly how to adapt to American society and raise their children to be Jewish American citizens. These children were well educated, and many of those of the second generation held good jobs and surpassed the successes of their parents. There are many different theories as to why this happened, but I have concluded that landsmanshaft helped to encourage and emphasize a Jewish form of Americanization. They provided English classes for both adults and children, they taught Jews the meanings of the American Constitution, they exposed these immigrants to democratic values and principles. One example of this is the Constitution of the *Krakauer–Yampoler Beneficial Association*. Its bylaws laid out the qualifications one needed to hold higher office in the landsmanshaft. Unlike in the Old World in which a hierarchy decided one’s role in society, here all members and opportunities were equal,
any man could run for whatever office he chose. More examples will be provided below to demonstrate that landsmanshaftn were vital for these Jewish immigrants.

Some ethnic historians believe that one cannot Americanize without complete assimilation. However, a number of Jewish immigrants who were members of landsmanshaftn became model Americans, along with their children. How did members of these groups maintain a loyalty to their past while adopting new American traditions? While some experts may disagree, I will provide evidence that landsmanshaftn allowed these Jewish immigrants to acculturate, rather than assimilate into American society. I hope to prove that out of many ethnic adjustment theories on Americanization, the Community Theory, which is based on this idea of acculturation rather than assimilation, was adopted by these Jewish members of landsmanshaftn and that in the end, this process created Jewish Americans. After providing a history and analysis of these different theories of ethnic adjustment, I will provide a history of landsmanshaftn in America in addition to their role in Jewish American history. I will provide evidence from a number of different landsmanshaft groups which shows that their programs and structures encouraged Jewish immigrants to acculturate.

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3 Krakauer - Yampoler Constitution, "Krakauer - Yomper Beneficial Association," 1914, Box #945, Philadelphia Jewish Archives
THEORIES OF ETHNIC ADJUSTMENT

From the earliest stages of America’s development, the question has been asked, what makes an American. In 1814, John Quincy Adams declared that immigrants had to “cast off the European skin, never to resume it” while others, such as writer Israel Zangwill, author of The Melting Pot, felt that every new race and ethnicity helped to create America. In 1782 a Frenchman by the name of Hector St. John de Crevecoeur established what he believed to be the myth of Americanization, which had four separate claims. The first was that European immigrants wanted to discard their Old World ways and to become American. The second was that Americanization was quick and easy because there would be no impediments for immigrants; third that Americanization melted all immigrants into a single culture, and last that immigrants would experience Americanization as a release from their Old World constraints. Over the last hundred years, these claims have been contested and argued, yet they have endured. When studying landsmanshaftn and whether or not these groups helped Jewish immigrants adjust to American society, one must take into account the different theories of Americanization, as well as the definitions of the terms assimilation and acculturation. These theories of ethnic adjustment will be discussed below.

When scholars discuss immigrants and their gradual process of becoming American, most use the term assimilation. This term is defined as a process whereby a minority group gradually adopts the customs and attitudes of the prevailing culture while

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losing their past identity completely. As this theory grew and expanded, Robert Park, the
department head at the Chicago School of Sociology, developed a four stage “race-
relations” cycle that happened when two groups were forced to interact due to migration
of one or both groups. The four stages are contact, conflict, accommodation, and eventual
assimilation. In the final phase, “group members would acquire the memories,
sentiments, and attitudes of other persons or groups, and by sharing their experiences and
history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life.”

Park disagreed with Crevecoeur, and believed that immigrants struggled through a lengthy and painful
process of disengagement from European roots and assimilation into American society.
However, once the process began and these immigrants lived amongst a larger society
different from theirs, all minority identities would assimilate, or completely disappear. It
was also a process that could not be reversed as, “it eventually erased ethnic and racial
antagonisms and united all immigrants, minorities, and native-born Americans into a
single national community.”

Currently, assimilation is defined in the Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups as “referring to processes that result in greater
homogeneity within a society.”

Historians have used America, a democratic country molded by immigrants, as
the ideal model for explaining the assimilation of minority groups. However, I believe the
term assimilation, in which a minority group loses its entire identity to adapt to the larger
culture, is used too often to describe what in actuality is acculturation, which can mean
two things. First, it means conformity; the minority culture maintains some of its own

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9 Gerstle, 529.
customs and traditions, but incorporates them into their new identities within the larger society. This can be seen across the United States. For example, the Irish continue to celebrate St. Patrick’s Day along with their fellow Americans, but they have also adopted holidays such as Thanksgiving and the Fourth of July. Jews celebrate their Sabbath on Friday nights yet many will shut down their stores on Sunday. Few ethnic groups have completely disappeared, most wanting to preserve their culture while integrating American ideals. There is no other group, however, that demonstrates this more than Eastern European Jewish immigrants. Jews immigrating around the turn of the last century were escaping religious persecution and knew that they would never be able to return to their countries of origin. They could not go “home” because the countries they emigrated from, such as Russia or Poland, were hostile to Jews. Therefore, in order for their culture to survive, it would have to be relocated and resurrected in America. This is why Jews have tried so hard to incorporate their way of life into the American way of life.

Assimilation and acculturation both fit into the larger theory of Americanization, as proposed by Crevecoeur. Theorists have long debated over the process of Americanization, especially in the past century as the population grew tremendously, with countless immigrants coming from dozens of different countries. They have questioned whether or not the principle of democracy was able to spread to those not native to the United States. Isaac B. Berkson introduces some general questions in his book, Theories of Americanization, that address Jewish immigrants but could be applied to any immigrant group. “What place has the Jewish group in our democracy? May it retain its identity or must it fuse entirely with the total group? Second, if it may retain its
identity, under what limitations and through what agencies may it do so?" He next goes on to address four possible theories of adjustment, two that look towards assimilation, or absorption into society, and two others that point towards a retention of group identity, similar to acculturation. These are not the only theories on ethnic adjustment that have been developed but I chose them because they cover many different aspects of this field. Unfortunately, I could not compare all the theories developed on this subject because the field is so vast.

Berkson wrote his book based on the four different ethnic adjustment theories in the 1960s, and while other prominent works on this subject have been published since then, many of the issues he addresses regarding assimilation remain the same, and since his theories encompass such a broad range of views, his book is pertinent today. For example, in the 1980s, there was a renewed interest in the topic of assimilation, but as Russell Kazal, an expert in this field, points out in an article, "what emerged, fitfully in the early 1980s but with gathering strength by the decade’s end, was a renewed interest in certain questions basic to the postwar assimilation studies." Many scholars began to study these immigration topics by referencing scholars from the 1960s, such as Berkson, Gordon, or Herberg. Using these four theories as a guide, I will demonstrate the process most likely to occur for Jewish members of landsmanshaftn upon arrival in America.

The first of Berkson’s models is the Americanization Theory. This point of view used to be the most accepted method of all the theories, and held in the highest regard by most theorists. I decided to incorporate this theory into the text so I could examine one of

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the most commonly held theories on assimilation. This theory maintains that America is already a homogeneous country of Anglo–Saxon Protestant background and that this culture is the real America.

The main point is that all newcomers from foreign lands must as quickly as possible divest themselves of their old characteristics, and through intermarriage and complete taking over of the language, customs, hopes, aspirations of the American type obliterate all ethnic distinctions.¹³

Basically, if immigrants arrive in America and they do not have a white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant background, they must mold themselves and reform their ways until they adjust accordingly. There is no middle ground, they have to change, and America will not change for them. According to Park, complete assimilation into American society is a positive and natural process, and immigrants are happy and willing to make this adjustment. Oscar Handlin, born into a Jewish immigrant family in 1915 and author of The Uprooted, disagreed with Park’s theories. He kept the first three stages of Park’s “race-relations” cycle (contact, conflict, accommodation), but felt that ethnic groups remained distinct and did not assimilate into the majority. “The climax of the immigrant experience was not the merging with other groups in a new race of men, but the creation of ‘group consciousness’.”¹⁴ In Handlin’s book Boston’s Immigrants, immigrants gradually adjusted to their new environment by building churches, joining mutual aid societies and entering politics. However they remained an isolated, separate society in the city. I agree with Handlin’s critique of Park’s theory. Complete assimilation by any ethnic group would be a difficult, painful process, and I think many groups acculturated into society rather than assimilated. However, Handlin goes to another extreme in his

¹³ Berkson, 55.
view by postulating that immigrants never joined the larger society. Many used mutual aid organizations and politics to do exactly that, become Americans.

Many scholars consider John Bodnar’s *The Transplanted* to be a critique of Handlin’s work, and the most useful theory. He takes an economic approach to immigration, stating that immigrants were “children of capitalism,” and made decisions based on economics. “Bodnar seemed to equate assimilation with a journey away from the culture of everyday life and into an acquisitive middle class that represented mainstream America. He argues that most immigrants and their children did not make that transition.” Bodnar tends to neglect assimilation, and believes that most immigrants did not adapt to America at all, arguing that only those in the middle to upper classes in America were able to become “American.” I question this theory because I believe Bodnar downplays the forces of Americanization, even for working-class immigrants. Bodnar believes that capitalism is the main factor in determining an immigrant’s choices and that it impacts whether or not one will adjust to American society. However, couldn’t immigrants behave in certain ways because of their unfamiliarity with America? Or perhaps because of their cultural background? These are all thoughts to consider.

There are other reasons I do not believe this theory appropriately describes the process of the Eastern European Jews I am studying. This point of view interprets American citizenry as one single race, something that was already solidly established when people from other countries appeared on its shores. Yet, America is a nation of immigrants. Since the birth of this nation, the United States has been the gateway for millions of people from countries across the globe, some of Anglo-Saxon stock, others

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16 Kazal, 456.
from different backgrounds. Yes, the British founded this country, and as a result, many of its original members were white Anglo-Saxons. However, before any permanent identity was affixed to this nation, immigrants from places across Europe began arriving in America and transforming the country. There has been no one culture that has shaped America, only the blending of many different ones. Many scholars dispute the Americanization Theory on its definition of American culture. Russell Kazal offers his own definition: "as that particular variant of assimilation by which newcomers or their descendants come to identify themselves as ‘American’ however they understand that identity." As a result, many scholars have turned away from this kind of theory, but still believe that these immigrants assimilated by adopting whatever they understand to be American culture. However, I believe that Jews who joined landsmanshaftn did not only adopt what they believed to be American, but kept some of their old identity as well.

Another problem I find with the Americanization Theory is the demands it makes on immigrants. Berkson points out that America is above all a democracy. "But, since the democratic faith looks upon the living forces in human nature as primary and respects personality above all else, standardization of men must be recognized as a cardinal sin." Many immigrants who came to America were fleeing persecution, whether it was religious, political, or cultural. They came to America because they would have the freedom to pray as they wanted, vote as they wanted, and live as they wanted. Forcing these people to change would be the same as the tyrannical regimes these people had escaped from. Though they were not encouraged to, even Jews in Russia were free to

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17 Kazal, 440.
18 Berkson, 71.
speak their own language. However, according to the Americanization Theory, these rights should be taken from these immigrants, and they should be forced to conform completely to the Anglo-Saxon “American culture.”

My last reason for not considering the Americanization Theory is its take on Americanization in general. The process of developing into an American citizen does not necessarily have to be negative. One does not need to forget his language to learn another, or cease following his traditions to add others. Americanization is a process of understanding, developing, and respecting democratic ideals, as well as understanding American forms of government, laws, and institutions. Why can’t an Eastern European Jew recite the Bill of Rights in Yiddish? Some other culture’s traditions may even be similar to American ideals. “May not understanding of another tradition be an aid rather than a hindrance?”

The second theory I will discuss called the “Melting Pot Theory.” This point of view, just like the previous theory, leads to assimilation into American society as a result of a clean break from the immigrants’ past cultures. However, this theory interprets Americanism as a culture that has not been fully formed yet, “a new life to which all can contribute.” Unlike the Americanization Theory, this premise allows for incorporating new cultures and new races into American society, and by combining these cultures America will develop a superior civilization. This theory does not assume there is a ‘typical American’ that is of Anglo-Saxon background, but respects all immigrants of different ethnic groups. Israel Zangwill, author of The Melting Pot, published in 1909, writes “America is God’s Crucible, the great Melting-Pot where all the races of Europe

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19 Berkson, 62.
20 Berkson, 68.
21 Berkson, 78.
are melting and reforming!...Germans and Frenchmen, Irishmen and Englishmen, Jew and Russians, into the Crucible with you all!" America was seen not as a place to maintain one’s old culture, but to begin an entirely new, superior American culture, full of mixed races, ethnicities, and nationalities.

One man who disagreed with the Melting Pot Theory was Frank Thistlewaite, an Englishman who wrote an article in 1960 discrediting this interpretation of immigration. He felt that many who had immigrated to the United States were merely capitalizing on the opportunities in America and had no desire to become American. In writing about British immigrants, he states that they “preserved the folk customs, speech patterns, the food and drinks, music and sports of those...villages whence they came, to a second and even third generation.” Thistlewaite makes an excellent point, yet many immigrants wanted to maintain their Old World customs and traditions. He then goes on to discuss the large number of immigrants that returned to Europe. This does not correlate with the circumstances related to Jewish immigrant groups.

While the process of becoming an American citizen is a gradual one, one of respect and patience, it is still a process towards complete assimilation. “...self--annihilation is the price that the Melting Pot theory demands while permitting the foreign groups to contribute to the life of the new country.” Therefore, while these smaller cultural groups are allowed to integrate some of their cultural ways into the larger American culture, they still have to shed their entire past identity to become American citizens. As a result, this theory is unacceptable for those who wish to retain their past

22 Zangwill in Gary Gerstle, 524.
24 Berkson, 76.
while working on their future. Consider today’s immigrants. While they would be able to contribute certain foods or phrases to the dominant American culture, they would be unable to contribute enough to maintain their heritage before it died out through assimilation. For many who wish to keep their past identity, this is not enough. As a result, Jews belonging to a landsmanshaft for the purposes of maintaining a dual loyalty would not fall under this category.

The next two theories deal with the opposite end of the spectrum, and focus on the retention of a group identity. The first of the two is called the Federation of Nationalities Theory. This point of view considers that one’s race predetermines his or her end. Therefore, the ethnic group is the largest influence on one’s life in America, and as a result all of these ethnic groups work together to form the larger society. As Horace S. Kallen wrote in 1915, “Men may change their clothes, their politics, their wives, their philosophies to a greater or lesser extent; they cannot change their grandfathers.”

Kallen believed that America was a creation of all the different ethnic groups that came to the New World. Race and ethnicity are the central part of one’s life, and therefore the purpose of government is to cooperate with these different ethnicities and allow for freedom of expression for all those of different backgrounds. In America, one has to learn English, not because it is part of American culture, but because it will bring politico-economic unity. To continue to express one’s own culture, each group should depend on its own language, customs, and religion, as well as provide an education for its youth.

The Federation of Nationalities Theory also cannot represent the group of Jews discussed in this paper. While I agree that immigrants should maintain their cultural identity, this theory is extreme in trying to preserve ethnic groups. However, this is quite

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difficult to maintain in the United States. First, America is very different from other countries around the world. There are many different ethnicities in America, with more and more continuing to come every day. With so many different kinds of people, one needs more than a language to unite such a large population. To stay intact, a country has to be more than many different groups living together in peace. Without some type of uniting force, it would be too easy to pull the country apart. Without any type of unifier, America would be very unstable, a mess of many different peoples having nothing in common, sharing only language.

Different Jews had different approaches to Americanization. Some fell under this Federation of Nationalities Theory. For example, Chaim Zhitlowsky, a Russian born Jewish thinker, felt that Jewish children in America should attend separate Yiddish institutions, all the way from elementary school to university.

We contend that our national cultural existence [in America] will be built on the foundation of the Yiddish language...[In order that the Jewish people be preserved under present circumstances,] we need a power capable of binding all Jews into one entity...26

However, raising their children to speak only Yiddish would completely isolate these Jews from the larger American society. In general, with so many different ethnic groups in the United States, there would be too many different schools; the government would have no mandate over what was being taught. Each ethnic group would decide what was important to teach their children and for how long their children should attend school.

What about financial means? Ethnic groups with large populations would be able to fund their schools, but smaller groups might not. Different standards would apply and different

levels of education would vary. There would be no basis on which to judge students for the purpose of higher education. Would colleges select students based on what ethnic group they came from? Would there be a place for everyone? There are too many variables in this equation.

Lastly, I believe that race or ethnicity does not have to predetermine any human being's cultural destiny. While they are very important, they do not have to define a person. For example, what about adopted children who learn their parent's customs and traditions? A Jew by birth can be raised as a Roman Catholic, and Asian parents can raise a black child. As a result, the child raised as a Roman Catholic may have nothing in common with his Jewish ancestors, and the black child will grow to celebrate and treasure his Asian culture. Then there is the mixing and overlapping of cultures. This is especially relevant in America, where there are so many different ethnic backgrounds and many children are the products of intermarriage. "It may be argued...that the important differences are those of emotional reaction and desire..."27 I believe that environmental influences can have as large, or larger an impact sometimes, than biological influences. As a result, environment can influence one's cultural identity.

I believe the last theory is the most appropriate to accurately describe the process of Jewish members of landsmanshaften. It is called the Community Theory, and like the Federation of Nationalities Theory, it posits the ethnic group is a permanent fixture in American society. However, unlike the Federation of Nationalities Theory in which the emphasis was on race and that one's destiny is predetermined by background, the Community Theory believes that culture is environmental, something that "must be acquired through some educational process, and is not inherited in the natural event of

27 Berkson, 85.
being born. This theory also assesses the value of maintaining an ethnic identity in the United States, that people of different groups should spread out, and not isolate themselves within segregated communities. Scholars of this theory, such as Berkson, believe that it is possible to preserve groups without segregation, and that there are ways to remain loyal to one’s cultural life and also to the larger society. Berkson proposes complementary schools, which are run during hours separate from schools set up by the state, in which children can attend to learn of their religious or cultural backgrounds. Many Jews attend these types of schools in the late afternoons a few days a week after public schools have dismissed. Solomon Schechter, a Rumanian-born Rabbi, believed that Jewish children needed to learn both English and Hebrew. “There is no future in this country for a Judaism that resists either the English or the Hebrew language.” He understood that Jews could not isolate themselves by resisting the language of America, but at the same time could continue their traditions in Hebrew. Other cultural groups have set up social networks, for example there are church youth leagues for basketball, or even cooking classes for Italians. These types of institutions can be used to maintain a cultural identity while being American citizens. Berkson explains this in his book.

Together with other nationalities, they engage in commerce, in political and social life; they take advantage of all opportunities for educational and cultural development offered by the state, they fulfill whatever responsibilities citizenship implies even as understood by those who have no other loyalty than to the American ethos, and they contribute in whatever way they can to the development of America, in all phases, economic, political, and cultural.

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28 Berkson, 98.
30 Berkson, 107.
Berkson talks about the idea of Multiple Cultural Loyalty in his book, which he adds as an aspect of the Community Theory. This loyalty is when a person has a double allegiance, and as a result, aspects of each culture that are incompatible with the other are eliminated until both can exist together in harmony. Lawrence H. Fuchs, author of The American Kaleidoscope, published in 1990, agrees with this Multiple Cultural Loyalty Theory. He did not believe that any tension existed between Americanization and ethnic persistence. "Immigrant settlers and their progeny were free to maintain...loyalty to their ancestral religions and cultures while...claiming an American identity by embracing the founding myths and participating in the political life of the nation." He felt that immigrants became American when they understood and believed in the civic culture of the United States, such as the Constitution or the Bill of Rights. However, personal decisions on religion, morals, customs, and traditions should be left completely up to the individual. This allegiance to more than one social group allows one to have a broader outlook on life, because it requires more knowledge, and sympathy, as well as an appreciation for others of different backgrounds. It actually defines our American democracy.

Many Jewish immigrants felt that in order to become productive American citizens, they would be able to adopt American values while maintaining their own traditions. Rabbi Judah L. Magnes, an American-born rabbi who served a number of reform congregations around the turn of the Twentieth Century, agreed with a term called

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32 Gerstle, 540.
33 Berkson, 129.
the Multiple Loyalty Theory, understanding that to have a political allegiance to America does not mean one must repudiate one's religion or their ethnicity. In “A Republic of Nationalities,” he wrote

Our language is English, our history, our literature, our laws, our institutions, our ideals are almost entirely English... This does not however, imply that therefore a man’s traditional national culture must be abandoned... Such a parallelism is desirable both from the point of view of the individual and for the sake of the developing culture of this country.35

Magnes understood early on that having both a political and ethnic allegiance was an asset to the American culture, not a threat.

In conclusion, out of these four possible theories, I believe only one accurately explains the process of ethnic adjustment in the United States for these Jewish immigrants. The first, the Americanization Theory, expects one to conform to Anglo-Saxon standards. The Melting Pot Theory is more democratic, however, it still expects the complete disappearance of separate ethnic identities. The Federation of Nationalities Theory is far too impractical, considering separate educational systems and allowing for segregated groups to exist within the country. It also relies on the belief that race predetermines one’s destiny, a conclusion which has been disproved. The Community Theory however, rejects this “doctrine of predestination”36 and complies with the democratic ideals of leaving individuals free to develop however they want. While the number of differences, and the degree of differences that exist between and within theories, points to a flexibility and a wealth of information in this field, I believe that when discussing Eastern European Jewish immigrants involved in landsmanshaft organizations, the Community Theory is the most accurate.

36 Berkson, 118.
Lawrence Fuchs believed that Americans did not have to worry about any existing cultural tensions in the United States. "The long history of intergroup relations in America showed that immigrants who practiced their ethnic traditions were, despite appearances to the contrary, becoming American." However, many Americans worried about whether or not immigrants would be able to adjust to American culture. Jews knew they had no other alternative than the United States. It was a country full of democratic ideals and personal freedoms, a place where they could live in peace and actively participate in society. Therefore, Jewish immigrants set out to adopt America as their home country.

While Jews had much to gain by immigrating to America, such as religious freedom, they also had much to fear, the loss of their culture and identity. Unlike other ethnic groups that could depend on their old societies to care for their culture, Jews were not welcome back in Eastern Europe. America, and later Israel, would become vital to Jewish survival. As a result, Jews had to work very hard to keep their culture alive while becoming Americans. Landsmanshaftn were an ideal environment for this process. Surrounded by those with the same ethnic history, Jews could learn about and adapt to a new culture while being able to maintain their old customs. Friends and family helped to ease the transition. Landsmanshaft programs encouraged Jews to acculturate. As Berkson says in his Community Theory, landsmanshaft helped to set up separate schools where Jewish immigrants could learn English, but at the same time, these immigrants also sent their children to classes to learn Hebrew or Yiddish. They founded secular programs in which Jews could organize outside the synagogue, which eased the tension that existed between the Old World and the New World. This made the transition among friends and

\[37\] Fuchs, 540.
family easier. Jews learned about the Constitution and democracy through landsmanshaftn rules. Groups addressed voting, the rights to free speech, and the roles of a President. Yet they continued to speak Yiddish and teach their children to read Hebrew.

In the next section of this paper, a history of these landsmanshaftn will be presented, followed by evidence showing examples of how these landsmanshaftn helped these Jews acculturate rather than assimilate, thus proving that the Community Theory can explain the process of creating Jewish Americans from Eastern European Jewish immigrants.

A LOOK THROUGH HISTORY USING PHILADELPHIA

When Jews immigrated to the United States around the turn of the last century, they realized that voluntary organizations played a large role in American society. Alexis de Tocqueville said during a visit to America in 1831,

Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions constantly form associations...They have not only commercial and manufacturing companies, in which all take part, but associations of a thousand other kinds, religious, moral, serious, futile, general or restricted, enormous or diminutive.\(^3^8\)

Jews understood the vitality of these types of organizations as immigrants and created a larger number of these groups than any other ethnic group during this period. Twelve

young German-speaking Jewish immigrants created the first of these fraternal orders, B’nai B’rith, in 1843 in New York, which by 1880 had over 25,000 members.

This section of the paper will attempt to define landsmanshaften in greater detail, as well as explain the history and purpose behind these institutions. Specifically, I will discuss the functions of the landsmanschaft organization and detail the reasons the Jewish immigrants were assisted by them in their quest to adapt to their new country. A greater understanding of the framework of the landsmanschaft will bolster my theory that these groups helped Jewish immigrants acculturate into the greater American landscape.

The majority of my primary research on different landsmanshaft groups comes from the city of Philadelphia. From the time of its founding in 1682, Philadelphia has been both an immigrant port and a city of immigrants. It has a rich Jewish history, and in 1900, boasted one of the largest Jewish populations in America, comparable to cities such as Boston and Baltimore. The only city with a substantially higher population was New York. Therefore, Philadelphia is a perfect setting to help discover the typical experience of these Jewish immigrants who joined Eastern European landsmanshaftn. The following few paragraphs will give a short synopsis of Jewish history in Philadelphia.

Philadelphia’s Jewish history began before the Revolutionary War, with a large number of Sephardic Jews settling in the city. Records show that the first Jewish immigrant to the city was Jonas Aaron, arriving in Philadelphia in 1703. A famous Jewish immigrant, Nathan Levy, was a leader of the Philadelphia Jewish community. He formed the Mikveh Israel Congregation in 1740, one of the oldest synagogues in the

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United States, which is still in existence today. About a century later, a prominent German Jewish population began establishing itself in Philadelphia, living around Broad Street, and slowly moving towards the north end of the city. Then, in the 1880s, a wave of Eastern European Jewish immigrants began to settle in the south end of the city. This influx of Jewish immigrants began with the first ship carrying Russian Jews that reached Christian Street Wharf on February 23, 1882. These Eastern European Jews stuck relatively close to the wharfs, most living just a few miles from the shoreline. By 1907, the Jewish population in South Philadelphia was 55,000 and by 1920 it had reached almost 100,000.

...South Philadelphia became a densely populated neighborhood with Yiddish as the familiar language. Newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets published in Yiddish expressed different political and social philosophies. Small synagogues, chedars, bookstores, kosher snack bars, cafes, Russian bath houses abounded in the area around South Street from 2nd to 10th Streets. Families lived upstairs and the business existed on the first floor. Fourth Street became "Pushcart Lane" reminiscent of Petticoat Lane in London or Rivington Street in New York.

Most Jews settled in this area because of its proximity to employment opportunities. Many worked in the garment factories or at the wharfs, some were peddlers, others worked in the cigar factories or owned small shops in Jewish neighborhoods. There was a synagogue on every corner, and kosher butcher shops in between. Living in such a congested area, the Jewish neighborhood really only extended from Market Street to South Street; it was very easy for Jews from the same places in Eastern Europe to come into contact with each other and to form a number of large landsmanshaftn. The oldest

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landsmanshaft group in Philadelphia was created in 1861, and called *Chevra Bikur Cholim* (a group named for its synagogue); its original members consisting of only 15 men. Still in existence in 1961, it celebrated its 100th anniversary.
BACKGROUND:

SEPARATE BUT EQUAL: DIFFERENT TYPES OF LANDSMANSHAFTN

There were three different types of landsmanshaftn that developed in America circa 1900. The first type was religiously oriented, and often formed around synagogues. They were called *ansheys*, meaning “people of”, or *chevras*, meaning a kind of society. The second type of landsmanshaftn were political groups, and these tended to have secular titles, while the third type, cultural groups, were almost always named after a hometown in Eastern Europe. Usually the title of a landsmanshaft group demonstrated whether it was religious, political, or cultural. However, while these characteristics usually help to determine the type of landsmanshaftn, sometimes they overlap, and different groups may share some similarities. This will be shown later in this section.

Landsmanshaftn that developed for traditional Jewish practice included the synagogue’s title in their name, such as Chevra Beth Elohim, or Chevra Bikur Cholim. Many religious landsmanshaftn in Philadelphia began as only a chevra, and then eventually developed into other more social organizations. For example, the Krakauer Chevra Beth Elohim, which is studied in this paper, was created in 1876, for former citizens of Krakow to get together and pray. Later, in 1879 the Krakauer Beneficial Society was created. In Philadelphia, three large synagogues were established in the original quarter in the 1880s: B’nai Abraham, with a Russian congregation; B’nai Jacob, which is now Kesher Israel; and Rodfey Tsedek. All were orthodox congregations, and they were among the first *ansheys*, or religious landsmanshaftn, to form around synagogue congregations.
As time passed, names of these religious landsmanschaftn were changed to English, usually dropping the synagogue title. Since these landsmanschaftn were typically orthodox in nature, they were very popular when immigrants first arrived, but as Jews settled down in America, they began to look for cultural landsmanschaftn that would give them more than just a place to pray. Therefore, these groups had to adapt, and often developed into mutual aid societies, while continuing to keep the religious background.

Another type of landsmanshaft was for radical Jews, those of a socialist or Jewish nationalist background, usually "reflecting party divisions of the Russian revolutionary movement." These political organizations became very popular when Jews from the Russian Empire began immigrating to the United States right after the turn of the century. The oldest of these groups was the Workmen's Circle, which was focused on material aid in times of need, fellowship to counteract the loneliness of immigrants, and also a radical alternative to more conventional orders. They rejected Jewish religious ritual, and their branches were usually secular in nature. However, many of these groups, when they spread to different cities along the east coast of America, organized according to their hometown in Eastern Europe. This is where some overlap takes place, and political organizations take on some of the roles of these hometown associations. For example, the group that Benjamin Sherman joined upon arrival in Philadelphia was the first Workmen's Circle in this city, the Gershuny Branch. Others were named after individual cities or towns, such as the Bialystoker branch, a well-known landsmanshaft, as well as the Rovner branch, both named for cities in Eastern Europe. These groups, which were all established in Philadelphia between 1904 and 1910, not only discussed socialist

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42 Soyer, 55.
43 Soyer, 57.
principles, but also gave their members a place where they could learn among friends. For example, Benjamin Sherman, upon joining the Gershuny branch of the Workmen's Circle in 1915, changed from a socialist party to the democratic party to support Franklin Roosevelt in local New York elections, as many landsman did at this time. Yet, they continued to exist within this "socialist" organization. The Gershuny branch also opened a children's school in which both the Yiddish and English languages were taught, as well as Jewish and American history. This is a quick example to show that every different type of landsmanshaft organization pushed Jewish immigrants to acculturate.

The last group of landsmanshaft was cultural, and their top priority was providing a place for members to go to feel at home. Their name was most likely a town from back in Eastern Europe, such as the Krakauer-Yampoler Beneficial Association, or the Zitomer Beneficial Association. Unlike the religious or political organizations, these landsmanshaft were always named after a hometown. Another difference is that these cultural groups placed a large emphasis on helping out neighbors, financially and emotionally. They also contributed to a number of American charities, and eventually charities overseas as well. These groups provided not only a place to form bonds, but also social venues with balls and other events. For example, many women formed ladies' auxiliaries to the men's organizations, and carried out social and charitable functions, such as donating Torah scrolls to poor congregations, or giving aid to charities that benefited sick immigrant children.

Each of these groups had different, but effective ways of helping to acculturate Jewish immigrants into American society. Some provided funding for educational

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44 Benjamin Sherman, 1982 - 1983, interview, "Benjamin Sherman 1896 -," Pennsylvania Historical Society
45 Soyer, 48.
facilities, both for children and adults, in which dual languages and traditions were taught. Other landsmanshaftn provided the necessary assistance to help these Jews become successful, “Like members of the American organizations, young men joined Brith Abraham with the hope of advancing their business or professional careers, and in so doing furthered the order’s image as American, “progressive,” and successful.” Fraternal leaders stressed that their organizations trained their members to be both citizens of the Jewish community and the American polity. Even chevras and ansheys helped Jewish immigrants acculturate by establishing safe environments within their synagogues where Jews could not only pray, but create a network in which immigrants could meet with Jews already Americanized, in order to better understand and adjust to American society. These different landsmanshaftn may have had different purposes, but all were able to have some impact on their members’ progress towards becoming Jewish Americans.

As stated before, there is an overlap between the different types of groups. Another overlap develops later in American history, as immigration from Eastern European eventually dwindled, and Jewish immigrants encouraged their children and grandchildren to join these organizations. Many Jews who had moved from certain areas of the city joined landsmanshaftn that may not have been from their hometown, but within the region, out of convenience. Some landsmanshaft groups were combining their members with another group to keep their numbers up. This can be seen as acculturation as well, because as Jewish immigrants from places across Eastern Europe were once extremely different, many of these immigrants were adopting similar values and holding onto similar customs, thus making it easier to coexist as Americans.

46 Soyer, 62
WHY DO THEY EXIST?: PURPOSES BEHIND LANDSMANSHAFT

When Jewish immigrants arrived in the United States, one of their first actions was to search for familiarity. Eastern European Jews came from countries where customs, language and even traditions differed. While most Americans viewed this flood of immigrants as homogeneous, Eastern European Jews originated from different regions in Eastern Europe and often felt uncomfortable with their counterparts. There were even differences between groups from the same country. Not all Jews from Russia shared the same customs or religious practices, and many were often unfamiliar with their fellow immigrants’ traditions. Having recently settled in a foreign country, many of these Jews craved the feeling of familiarity, the security of being surrounded by people like themselves. In many different pieces of literature from this time period, especially those published by the Yiddish press, the term “di alte heym” was used quite frequently, meaning the old home. In a Bialystoker pamphlet, this term is used to describe the small shtetl that this group got its name from, and in a speech, the president of this organization describes how the memory of di alte heym will help immigrants continue to push forward, while remaining faithful to their faith and their people. Home, which was the old country, meant comfort to these people, and they would find this comfort through a landsmanshaft group.

Eastern European Jews did not necessarily feel loyalty to the countries they had emigrated from, such as Russia, or Poland. In fact, most Jews in Eastern Europe had been forced by the Russian Empire’s rulers to live in the Pale of Settlement. This piece of land was an area stretching from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea on the outer western edge of

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47 Howe, 181.
48 “Workmen’s Circle, Philadelphia District”
the Russian Empire, and contained the provinces of Grodno, Vilna, Podolia, Minsk, Ekaterianoslav, and Kiev, among others. In sum, the Pale was made up of 15 provinces in west and southwest Russia and 10 provinces in Poland. Around five million Jews lived in this area of Russia at the end of the 19th century. Having been forced to live in crowded, isolated, small towns called shtetls, secluded from other countrymen, most immigrant Jews felt only loyalty to those from their tiny towns. Feeling lost in America’s large urban environments, they sought out old-country neighbors instead of other Russian or Polish immigrants. It was a way for these immigrants to recreate the comfortable world from which they had fled. Though the villages in the old country had not been much, they were home and they “cherished memories of the mud and sticks in the places where they had been born.” For many, the landsmanshaft’s support and comfort helped these immigrants with their feelings of loneliness and longing for home. Rebecca Kobrin’s states,

As Bialoystoker (a city in Poland) Jews wandered throughout America, they discover it is impossible to feel at home in the United States and find that only dreaming and writing about their beloved home provides them any solace in their immense suffering. Many Eastern European Jews had difficulty embracing their new country, regardless of the opportunities it presented to them, and so held on to their local regional identities. Some wrote stories or articles about their birthplace, others sent money home to family and friends they had left behind in an effort to reassemble their loved ones in the new world. With a constant flow of newly inducted members into landsmanshaftn, many

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49 Howe, 190
immigrants were able to receive regular reports of what was going on in the old country. It was a way to keep in touch with home, and a means of socializing with others in the same situation.

Unlike most Jews from Western Europe, who had years before settled in the United States, Eastern European Jews followed very strict religious guidelines, observing an older, more traditional Judaism. Most of these immigrants were from Orthodox backgrounds and landsmanshaft organizations became a tool used by community leaders to ensure the preservation of the Jewish faith in a secular country. Some of these groups offered a chance for old-country neighbors to pray together, be part of a synagogue, and feel that there was a place to express one's faith in a country full of gentiles. Most of these immigrant Jews had settled in coastal cities in the northeast, and obviously were surrounded by Catholics or Protestants. Religious leaders, afraid that this Christian dominated environment, along with a smaller population of Jewish citizens, would negatively influence many of the immigrants' religious faith, brought prayer and services to landsmanshaft groups in order to continue a strong Jewish community in America.

Landsmanshaftn had a number of purposes. Some helped lead to acculturation into society. Others did not. However, the larger picture shows that many of these purposes help support my claim that landsmanshaftn helped Jewish immigrants adapt to American society. The first purpose was to provide financial assistance to its members and their families, whether sick or deceased. For example, in the Vietbsker Beneficial Association, a royter fatsheykhe (red bandana) was passed around during meetings to

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52 Soyer, 65.
collect anonymous contributions from members for those who were ill. In the secretary's notes for the Krakauer-Yompoler Beneficial Association the majority of the payments went towards sick benefits: for example, $6.00 for one week from entire group was given to a family that had recently lost a spouse or had a newly deceased family member. This is for the month of May 3rd to July 19th in 1914. Many immigrants new to the United States either faced unemployment or jobs with wages that could not support their family. Landsmanshaft groups helped members financially when they were too sick to go to work, or provided care if the unsatisfactory conditions of their work environment caused them physical harm. Usually, if a group could afford one, a landsmanshaft appointed a “society doctor” who looked in on sick members free of charge. One of these doctors described how “The society would pay me a certain amount for coverage for a certain number of patients – fifty cents or a dollar for a family. Every member had a right to come to my office and ask me to call at his house.” The doctor was typically a member of the group himself, and as such, was entitled to all its benefits plus a small salary provided by the organization.

This benefit can almost be seen as a type of healthcare system. Members voted on their physician every six months, and members demanded medical care and were not afraid of complaining or exercising their right to fire doctors if they felt they weren’t receiving the proper medical attention. For example, the Satanover Benevolent Society went through five different doctors from the time of its founding, in 1906, to 1913. In

54 Secretary’s Notes, “Krakauer – Yomper Beneficial Association,” 1914, Box #945, Philadelphia Jewish Archives
55 Anonymous in Irving Howe, 188.
56 Soyer, 75.
this organization, the doctor was paid $40 a year, plus a co-pay of 25 cents from each member for each visit. This system is a forerunner to privatized healthcare today.

Another important purpose of the landsmanshaft was for members to receive a proper traditional Jewish funeral and burial. In fact, many of the oldest landsmanshaft organizations were formed at funerals. This is an old landsmanshaft tradition, and a tradition that does not necessarily deal with acculturation. Societies provided either free or inexpensive burial plots located in Jewish cemeteries as well as traditional Jewish services. An anonymous Orthodox Jew was quoted in a newspaper, "A landsman died in the factory. People think he is Greek and bury him in Potter’s field. Landslayt hear about it, his body is dug up, and the decision taken to start our organization with a cemetery." Many Orthodox Jews had a strong belief that unless they were buried in an Orthodox cemetery, they would be unable to live the afterlife among their own people; obviously, they did not want to be misplaced. In Irving Howe’s book he explains that, “The cemetery appeared as second only to the synagogue among communal institutions in the life of European and Asian Jews.” One of the landsmanshaft’s first acts as an organization was to buy a plot of land in a Jewish cemetery. Along with the funeral and burial, the landsmanshaft also provided financial assistance during Shiva, the mourning period traditionally observed after a loved one passes on. Usually $5.00 to $7.00 was provided for the family to give the employed family member the means to take time off of work to mourn. This may not seem like a lot, but it went a long way in helping to keep these new American citizens stay a step back.

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58 Howe, 184.
59 Howe, 188.
ahead. By providing money for members who needed to take off from work, landsmanshaftn were ensuring that members could continue providing for their family, and saving for their future. It could have made the difference between eventually becoming successful American citizens and falling through the cracks. Successful immigrants more easily adapted, and further, acculturated, into American society.

Many landsmanshaft helped their new members find employment close to home. Unlike the Jews who had emigrated from Germany and Western Europe earlier, Jews from Eastern Europe often had few skills that could be used in America; these organizations helped find them work at factories, mills or small shops. If one was lucky, employment came with the kosher butcher down the street, or at the laundromat. These jobs were usually better than factory jobs. An entire community existed within a landsmanshaft, and forming connections in this community helped immigrants survive the first years of living in America.

While most purposes were economic in nature, such as buying burial plots, giving money to the ill, or finding employment, perhaps the most important role of the landsmanshaft had nothing to do with finances. These groups provided the new immigrants the means to assimilate into society, as greenhorns were "Americanized." These groups would take age-old Jewish communal values and merge them with American principles, helping members ease into American society. While the accepted language in these societies was Yiddish, or on occasion Hebrew, many members learned how to speak English with the help of older members. Older members had also been involved in landsmanshaftn when they had arrived in America, mostly German groups, and as a result, could help these Eastern European Jews form societies. Aspects of the

₆₆ Stern, 57.
landsmanshaft also celebrated the American promise of upward mobility in status, and taught immigrants that unlike their old home, in America it did not matter that they were Jewish, they could become upper-class citizens.\textsuperscript{61}

Many have learned their English at their lodge meetings. Others have acquired their knowledge of parliamentary procedure and decorum at public meetings...In fact most of our people gain their connection with and knowledge of Jewish activities, and take an interest in the same, through their affiliation with the Jewish fraternal orders.\textsuperscript{62}

Many Jews arriving from Eastern Europe had experienced persecution, they had little education and no idea what effect democracy and equality could have in their lives; they came to America searching for opportunities which did not exist in their native countries. Landsmanshaftn taught their members American values and exposed them to the essence of life in a democracy. Immigrants gained access to these opportunities through the support and guidance of the landsmanshaftn. Jews had been displaced for thousands of years, and with their history of moving from country to country they realized the importance of adapting to a new society. While these Jewish immigrants worked hard to attain the benefits of American society, they did not want to lose their customs and traditions; landsmanshaftn groups guided, supported and educated these immigrants while they become accustomed to American ways. Leo Wolfson, one of the leaders of the \textit{Independent Western Star Order} wrote, "The lodges of various orders have been and still are the most valuable schools through which our immigrant Jews pass."\textsuperscript{63} Members were able to Americanize without interference from native social workers or reformers. Actually, many groups began engaging in American activities with neighbors and friends, using their own dialects and behaviors. It was a smoother, and therefore easier, transition.

\textsuperscript{61} Soyer, 103.
\textsuperscript{62} Leo Wolfson in Daniel Soyer, 62.
\textsuperscript{63} Leo Wolfson in Daniel Soyer, 62.
These organizations provided the necessities for Jewish immigrants trying to adapt to American society. Medical care, sick benefits, job networking, even a proper funeral and burial. Many immigrants joined for these practical purposes. They wanted to ensure a stable environment in which they could provide for their family. However, the single most important purpose always remained to help members become American citizens. Daniel Soyer may have said it best: "These benefits, both material and emotional, were central to the societies' mission and help explain not only their membership policies but also their role in the Americanization process."64

64 Soyer, 80.
REQUIREMENTS OF MEMBERSHIP: RULES FOR LANDSLAYT

This section details the different rules that members of the landsmanshaftn had to follow. Many of these guidelines parallel those described in the Constitution of the United States, and yet others are very unique to these immigrants' Old World customs. This delicate balance between the Old World and the New World, and the ability to maintain both in these landsmanshaftn, helped these immigrants acculturate into American society and to keep their old traditions while incorporating new ones. One of the very first rules decided by a developing landsmanshaft was always to write and then ratify a constitution.

Writing a constitution was the first action taken by newly formed societies. All landsmanshaftn had a constitution that was taken very seriously, by both the leaders, and the members. Most followed the same formula; they were printed in booklets written in Yiddish and distributed to members annually and to new members upon induction. These booklets were created in 1891 by a number of German Jews belonging to Arbeiter Zeitung, (Worker's Newspaper), who wanted a standard for immigrants that were unfamiliar with landsmanshaftn. It was claimed to have been the best compilation of books on parliamentarianism in the United States and stressed the need for Jewish immigrants to learn about organizations from more experienced members of American society. Many immigrants therefore turned to already acculturated Jews to help form their landsmanshaftn based on American principles. For example, the manual Cushing's Parliamentary Practice, published by a Massachusetts legislator and lawyer in 1850, was one of the most widely used manuals in forming landsmanshaftn, and was published in Yiddish twice, first in 1900, then again in 1914. This shows the desire of these groups to
organize based on American principles, and the willingness of members to conform to new policies. In the introduction to the *Arbeiter Zeitung* manual, the author wrote, “All English and German associations thus adhere to parliamentary rules and should serve as an example for Russian and Polish Jews, who in their homeland had almost never heard of such things.”

This also demonstrates the tension that existed between German Jews already in the United States, and Eastern European Jewish immigrants. German Jews wanted to quickly “Americanize the greenhorns” because while they were also Jewish immigrants and they knew Eastern European Jews and their Old World ways could reflect badly upon them. One example of German Jews helping to Americanize was the Educational Alliance, set up in New York City as a sort of school to Americanize Eastern European Jews. “The Alliance represented a tangible embodiment of the German Jews’ desire to help, to uplift, to clean up and quiet down their ‘coreligionists.’” Though their reasons behind helping may have been both elitist and selfish, these German Jews, already acculturated into American society, helped Eastern European Jews adjust, both through landsmanshaftn and other organizations.

The constitution accepted by most groups had much in common with democratic ideals and most groups accepted this standard when writing their constitution. All landsmanshaftn had a President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Secretary, modeled after other American societies. This was again, another attempt to learn about American society by following its customs and structure. The constitution usually regulated all aspects of society life, including the name of the organization, its purpose, and its official

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65 *Arbeiter Zeitung* manual, 1891, Box #814, Philadelphia Jewish Archives
66 Howe, 230.
67 Howe, 230.
language. It also gave dates for regular and general meetings, the manner of selection and
duties of members and officers. In organizations that provided aid, the constitution also
defined the material benefits members received in case of illness or death. The bylaws
stressed the equality of members and rules to be used during the meetings. A member’s
social position in the old country did not reflect the role he might have in the
organization. Often, a reversal of status took place; a man achieving a position of power
might have been lower on the ladder in the old country, while the reverse occurred as
well. A man spoke of how the Oshmener Society, a social landsmanshaftn, “...abolished
the ascribed social distinctions (yahsanut) familiar from home...Those who were born on
the outskirts behind the bathhouse became the equals of those who were raised on
Zupraner Street and attended the district school.”68 Jewish immigrants had to learn to
change their way of thinking in terms of equality. By stressing the classless
landsmanshaft society, these organizations were encouraging Jews to view themselves as
equal with their fellow Americans, and to go through life believing in this principle.
Changing and molding views can also be another type of acculturation. Now these Jewish
immigrants were no longer Jews living among superiors as in the Old Country, they were
Jewish Americans living among their equals.

Landsmanshaft meetings were always strictly organized. The Jews who formed
these groups felt that disorder was inefficient, and that citizens of a free country like
America should conduct themselves in a civilized fashion. The chaos and confusion that
reigned in groups formed in the Old Country was felt to be an embarrassment in front of
non-Jews. They wanted to impress their new countrymen, and they felt that being
disciplined and orderly was the way to do this. A member of a landsmanshaft

68 Soyer, 71.
commented, "Very often the honor of all of Israel is at stake, since members don't know how to run their meetings and they therefore get into fights among themselves, and scandals wind up in jail." In the Constitution of the Krakauer-Yampoler Beneficial Association, organized in 1925 in Philadelphia, the meetings were broken down into nine categories, beginning with the reading of minutes from the previous meeting, discussing old business, reports on committees, initiation of new members, proposal of new members, new business, collection of dues, welfare of individuals, and adjournment. Dictated by the constitution, this order was strictly adhered to. Eastern European Jews felt that landsmanshaft groups were a vehicle to represent their culture in a positive light to Americans. Many newspapers in the Philadelphia area wrote highly of these organizations.

The constitutions also dictated who was allowed to become members. Most organizations that were founded at the turn of the century, and excluded women from joining. Women were allowed to participate in the social gatherings of cultural societies, such as balls and outings, yet they came as the wives, daughters, or sisters of members. Later, after the wave of immigration had ceased and these organizations were trying to survive, certain groups began allowing women membership, but it wasn’t until the 1950s and 1960s that any woman could join. In the Old Country, there was an emphasis on a man’s patriarchal role in society: only men were allowed to study scripture, and more men than women joined political organizations. Women stayed home and cared for the

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69 Daniel Soyer, 76.
family, and this did not change much within the first few decades of Eastern European Jewish immigration to America.\textsuperscript{71}

All landsmanshaftn required their members to be Jewish, others went so far as to call for state citizenship in which the organization was located. The Krakauer Beneficial Society, created in 1879 in Philadelphia, required its members to be Jewish, male, a citizen of Pennsylvania, at least 21 years of age, of good character, and "free from any bodily infirmity."\textsuperscript{72} Section III of the \textit{Krakauer–Yampoler Beneficial} Constitution, stated, "All applicants must be proposed by a member or members in good standing and are limited to members of the Jewish faith, the entire membership of this organization being confined to men within the aforementioned category."\textsuperscript{73} Age was also a factor. Many groups had a beginning age requirement of 16 or 18, since many of the young men in the society were already working or getting married, and therefore were contributing to the community. The age requirement was in place to keep children from joining. It was an honor to reach the age when a young adult could join the landsmanshaftn, almost a rite of passage. The encouragement to receive this honor persuaded many to join. Most landsmanshaftn began as small neighborhood grassroots organizations, and were proponents of doing whatever one could to contribute to the community. Whether that was working, starting a family, or studying the scriptures, members of the group were supposed to help the Eastern European Jewish community. Only adult men were seen to have this ability. Many fraternal organizations in America were also exclusive to certain types of society and these landsmanshaftn were modeled after them.

\textsuperscript{71} Peltz, 189.
\textsuperscript{72} Stern, 35.
\textsuperscript{73} Krakauer–Yampoler Constitution, "Krakauer–Yampoler Beneficial Association," 1914, Box #945, Philadelphia Jewish Archives
Since landsmanshaftn valued their impact on the community, men had to prove they were in good standing before being allowed to join. Usually that entailed holding steady work or supporting a family. A man who could not hold a job, or was too lazy to work, was not allowed into the landsmanshaftn. Another prerequisite to membership was the sponsorship of a current member who could vouch for the candidate’s good character. Members voted on the induction of new members and their decisions were based on a man’s character. Almost every action decided at landsmanshaftn meetings were decided by vote. Immigrant Jews had very few opportunities to vote before coming to America. Democracy was a foreign term in Eastern Europe, especially for outsiders such as Jews. These landsmanshaftn demonstrated early on to immigrants that their opinions and views were respected enough to be involved in decisions – for every man’s view matters. Again, this was a new way of thinking for many Jewish immigrants, and it taught them to speak up for what they believed in, and to use democracy to achieve what they wanted. Learning how to use the system is another form of acculturation. These Jews were voting, yet possibly for legislation to keep their traditions and cultures alive. For example, the Krakauer–Yampoler Beneficial Organization voted to keep their meetings’ notes in Yiddish in 1925. As a result, these Jewish immigrants used the American political process to maintain the use of their old country traditions. The delicate balance between the New World and the Old World was kept in place.

74 Secretary’s Notes, “Krakauer – Yomper Beneficial Association”
Many landsmanshaft groups were organized before a majority of Eastern European Jews had immigrated to the United States. Jews already living in the United States created these organizations because they understood the different features of American society and felt that through fraternal societies, they could help ease these immigrants’ adjustment to American culture. As a result, landsmanshaftn had many similarities to American organizations already in existence and conformed to democratic standards as well. Perhaps with these groups to help, Eastern European Jews learned very quickly how to adapt to American society, and raise their children to be Jewish American citizens. In the old country, Jews also had similar organizations because they were politically and socially separated from the rest of society and had to provide their own institutions to carry out the necessary functions for the community. These institutions had some democratic aspects similar to the American style of government. As a result, some parts of these institutions were carried on in landsmanshaftn, while other aspects of the groups were influenced by American democracy. Therefore, these landsmanshaftn emphasized both American values and ideals and with their own traditional customs. Encouraging and surrounding these immigrants with aspects of democracy, along with maintaining their own loyalties, helped to acculturate these Jews from Eastern Europe into American society.

This section of my thesis will focus on the theory that landsmanshaftn emphasized American ideals, values and customs. Landsmanshaft organizations encouraged and surrounded these Jewish immigrants with the trappings of democracy, thus enabling them to adopt democracy, but at the same time, maintain their loyalties to their culture and
religion. Acculturation was the process by which these Eastern European Jewish immigrants became successful members of American society.

A fraternal organization’s purpose was for older men to help newcomers become acculturated by those who already understood American society. The men in positions of authority in some major fraternal orders guided groups containing officers with less knowledge and exposure to American culture. While usually each society was restricted to men from a specific hometown in the old country, some men who helped run the organization were often older immigrants, sometimes not of that town, or even Eastern European, sometimes they were German, or Dutch Jews. For example, in many of the Russian Jewish landsmanshaftn in Philadelphia around the turn of the century, German Jews, who had arrived in the United States about thirty years previous, held leadership positions. These men were there to help Eastern European immigrants who had no prior experience in fraternal organizations. An organizational handbook was compiled in 1891 to help these new immigrants form associations. Daniel Soyer’s book states that this handbook “…stressed the need for Jewish immigrants to learn about organizations from more experienced members of American society…There is no other country in the whole world where associations are so widespread as in the United States of America…” These landsmanshaftn had to have been influenced by American culture. In the Krakauer-Yampoler Beneficial Constitution, the democratic process of voting was mandatory. Officers were nominated, and voted on annually in December. Coming from Krakow, Poland, these men were possibly familiar with this process from Jewish institutions. Voting took place in annual elections. However, American Jews who had

75 Stern, 196.
76 Soyer, 75.
77 Krakauer – Yampoler Constitution
lived in the United States long enough understood the structure of the American government, therefore, landsmanshaftn tended to be modeled after this example. There is evidence of this from the sources these groups referenced. For example, in Luther S. Cushing’s *Manual of Parliamentary Practice*, an American author was referenced. Other groups used the actual United States Constitution. A note from a meeting of the Krakauer – Yampoler Beneficial landsmanshaft referenced the “United States Constitution.” The section will further provide evidence that suggests a mix of the different government structures influenced the structure of the landsmanshaftn.

Landsmanshaftn were structured to be democratic institutions. As I have stated, the first act of most landsmanshaftn was to create a constitution. They were usually printed in booklet form, and often in both Yiddish and English. At its inception, usually chose a Yiddish version, however as time went on and more landsmanshaft members learned English, this shifted. Sometimes there was even a mix of both Yiddish and English. In the *Krakauer Beth Elohim Beneficial Association’s Membership Book*, the first question is “Was ift thr name?” We can understand that this says “What is your name?” but it is not entirely in English. We can interpret this as the member creating this log going to great lengths to use English, even if he has not fully mastered the language. Usually in the beginning of each constitution, an oath was printed that bound each member to the organization. Here is an example of one from the *Tvies Schor Anshe Zalkiev Society*:

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I, _____, solemnly swear in the presence of all those here foregathered brothers of Tvies Schor Anshe Zalkiev Society that I will follow all the
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78 Secretary’s Notes, “Krakauer – Yampoler Beneficial”
79 Kliger, 59.
80 Membership Book, “Krakauer Beth Elohim Beneficial Association,” Box 945, Philadelphia Jewish Archives
laws of the Society, that I will not betray the Society...On this I give my sacred word and pledge my honor. Amen.\textsuperscript{81}

Every member of the landsmanshaftn took an oath upon induction into the organization. In Jewish institutions in the Old Country, communal organizations, called kehila, used a takanot, which is a system of bylaws that represented an accumulated number of decisions that were taken at meetings.\textsuperscript{82} A constitution was never created before the first meeting, and officers were elected without these bylaws in place; they were created after men were already in office. These men took no oath of office, and there was no system that forced these men to account for their actions, like the checks and balances system of American government. However, most landsmanshaftn had established constitutions as their first act as a group, and many had a system in which men could be voted out of office if performing unsatisfactorily. Jewish Americans had been involved in American Government since the 1800s, with the first representative being elected to office in New Hampshire in 1845. After the Damascas Affair in 1840, Jews had become more politically involved in political affairs. Therefore, it is likely Jewish Americans who understood the American system of government helped influence the structure and organization of landsmanshaftn.

The table of contents would follow the oath, and each addressed the same points, such as the group's name, its purpose, and the language it would use. Meetings, officials, and the nomination and election of officials would usually follow. Meetings were usually held twice a month, on a specified day. "A quorum is necessary to open the meeting (seven to ten members usually constitute a quorum), and at each meeting all questions are
Everyone was allowed to speak, and large numbers were urged to participate at each meeting. This structure of meetings demonstrates these Jewish immigrants’ desire to adopt democratic ideals and structures. This can also be interpreted as the influence these immigrants allowed American democracy to exert upon their organizations. Contained in most constitutions were the mandatory election of all higher-ranking offices, from President, to Vice-President, all the way down to Cashier, Medical Examiner, and Sergeant of Arms. Almost every position on the landsmanshaft was voted on, and not just by officers, but by the entire membership. In the Constitution of the Krakauer – Yampoler Beneficial landsmanshaft in 1925, Article II determines the officers: president, vice-president, secretary, financial secretary, and treasurer. Nominations for these positions were accepted by any member of the organization, and they were held on the first Sunday of December annually, with elections on the third Sunday of December. Jewish institutions in the old country held elections annually as well, sometimes biannually depending on the size of the organization, and no office was held for life. These characteristics were repeated in many of the landsmanshaften. However, unlike the landsmanshaft groups, where any member could run for any office, in the kehila, there were qualifications to hold office. Certain positions could only be held if the man had been married a certain number of years, and to run for a high level position one must have already served in the lower level offices. The member had to be a taxpayer and a property owner, however there were three categories of taxpayers, and only those in the highest category could run for office. This meant that those with privilege and those who had made a higher contribution to the community had a greater

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83 Kliger, 61.
84 Katz, 90.
opportunity to seek office then others.\textsuperscript{85} This inequality did not continue on to
landsmanschaft, for like American democracy, office was open to any man of appropriate
age.

The newly elected officers were installed on the first Sunday of January.\textsuperscript{86} Not
only is this process democratic, in allowing the entire membership to vote, and having
only one-year terms in office, but also elections were held on the third Sunday of
December, and the President took over the first Sunday of January. This is not a far cry
from the American process, where instead of a chosen date, it is a chosen day of a chosen
month. It also takes place towards the end of the year, as when the American President is
elected on the second Tuesday of November, first by its citizens, and then by the
Electoral College in December, the same as this Constitution. The President-elect then
takes office in January. Some constitutions also limit a president to two consecutive
terms, but he can then run again after another member has been elected to at least one
term.

After proscribing conditions for elections, most constitutions then outlined will go
over the duties of the elected officials, the conditions set upon becoming a member of the
landsmanschaft, and the rights and duties of each member. Next, most constitutions devote
a large part of their booklet to parliamentary procedure.

They stipulate that the societies transact their business in a \textit{democratic}
fashion, with due regard to the rights of the members...Some direct the
members to consult Cushing’s \textit{Manual of Parliamentary Rules} in case of a
radical disagreement on interpretation in the matter of procedure.\textsuperscript{87}

\textsuperscript{85} Katz, 93.
\textsuperscript{86} "Krakauer – Yampoler Beneficial Constitution"
\textsuperscript{87} Kliger, 65.
Most landsmanshaftn, when in disagreement over parliamentary procedure, turned to Cushing’s pamphlet for guidance. “The great purpose of all rules and forms, is to subserve the will of the assembly rather than to restrain it; to facilitate, and not to obstruct, the expression of their deliberate sense.” This quote comes from Luther S. Cushing’s *Manual of Parliamentary Practice*, written in 1854 when Cushing served as a clerk for the Massachusetts House of Representatives, and was himself an authority of parliamentary law in America. Cushing’s book was a short guide to the basic principles of parliamentary rule that would help leaders of societies establish their own set of parliamentary procedural rules.\(^8\) As a result, these landsmanshaft members were not only looking to already acculturated American Jews for help, they were also researching American democratic laws and guidelines to make sure they established their own rules and laws after American procedure.

One can see examples of American influence in displays and even brochures produced by landsmanshaftn. For example, on a testimonial given to President David Landis by the *Chavas Achim Beneficial Association*,\(^9\) there is an American flag to the left of the photo, and a flag remarkably similar to Israel’s to the right. In 1933, Israel had not been established yet, however this flag had dark and white stripes, with a Jewish Star in the middle. Neither is more prominent than the other, thus showing the Association’s dual loyalty to their new country and their Jewish heritage. Most of the testimonial is written in English, however there is some Hebrew below the landsmanshaft’s title, and some Yiddish towards the bottom. Again, this displays this dual loyalty that existed

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\(^9\) David Landis Testimonial, “Chevras Achim Beneficial Association,” 1933, Box #1143, Philadelphia Jewish Archives
within the membership. Another thought to consider is that this testimonial was given to David Landis in 1933, very soon after the period of intense immigration by Eastern European Jews. While many of these immigrants were taking large steps to learn English, they most likely had help in creating a piece of work this professional from Jews already living in America and already adjusted to American lifestyles and customs. It is undeniable that their help produced this testimonial.

Another interesting fact regarding David Landis’ testimonial is the list of Officers written in the lower right-hand corner.90 There is one President listed, David Landis, one Vice President, Phip Newman, and one Treasurer, Harry Nitzksy. In the Old Country, there was also a hierarchy of officers, with three to six parnasim, or heads, with the tovim following, which included titles of treasurer, overseers, and “good men.”91 Each was publicly elected. Different from the American system of government, the parnasim were those at the top of the hierarchy, and there, one of these officers was the parnas ha-hodesh, or warden of the month. This man was considered the final authority, and this rotated monthly through the parnasim. The structure of the landsmanshaftn changed this. Instead of electing a number of leaders, one president was chosen per election, as American government dictates. However, there are a number of different secretaries listed, a Max Prussel and a Max Felgoise, along with a number of different membership examiners, a medical examiner, and another title that does not seem to be in English. This officer, S. Felgoise, is listed in the middle of the section, under the title of Insibe Guarth. Unfortunately, being unable to translate the title, I cannot determine this officer’s position within the landsmanshaftn. This demonstrates the mix of traditions within a democratic

90 David Landis Testimonial
91 Katz, 68.
hierarchy, namely an elected President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Secretary.

However, the landsmanshaftn stray from American government structure and use influences from the Old Country as well for some of the positions. This represents the fragile balance between the two worlds.
Many landsmanshaft groups created by Jewish immigrants in America were influenced by Freemason Societies, a chain of established fraternal orders which date back to the 1300s. Orders of this society were formed in the United States even before the American Revolution, and their list of members includes distinguished individuals such as President George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and John Hancock. While Masonry had existed in America since its origins, the height of its growth came after the Civil War. Around the time of mass Eastern European immigration to America, between 1880 and 1900, it is estimated that there were over 460 orders existing in the U.S. and more than five million Americans were members. During this time, Freemasonry in America underwent some significant changes, and some of these changes, unique to American orders, were reflected in traditions and customs developed by landsmanshaft groups.

While Masons tended to be Protestants, Jews were actively involved with Freemason Societies in America even before the Revolution. “You initiate Jews into Masonry; you promise them on the word and honor of a gentleman and Mason, that they should enjoy all Masonic privileges without violating their conscience.” There is evidence that Jews helped to establish orders in many of the original colonies, including New York, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, and Maryland. Jews continued to be involved throughout American history, and there have actually been 51 Jews as American Grand Masters, one of the society’s highest honors. Many Jews felt that by joining these fraternal orders, they would be accepted by society, they would show that they could

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93 Dumenil, 54.
exist among other religions. The Jewish religion also had many similarities to the Freemason society that most likely made these members feel comfortable.

In America, Freemason orders tended to be less exclusive than in Europe. While Jews were not always welcomed in all orders, many were able to become members if they desired.

"Masons insisted that their order was committed to the principle of universality, which they defined as the association of good men without regard to religion, nationality, or class. The prospective candidate must be a physically sound, freeborn male who believed in God and lived a moral life."94

Freemasonry stressed the equality of all men, and demonstrated this by being receptive to immigrants. There was little anti-Semitic feeling in American orders, although some Christians still had difficulty accepting Jews as members.

Why would Jews want to join Freemason orders? Some members had difficulty accepting Jews as equals, and these immigrants were accustomed to forming their own institutions and organizations back in Eastern Europe. The appeal for many Jewish immigrants wanting to belong to these orders was that under the Freemasonry, all men were considered equal. Therefore, these orders provided the opportunity for poor or disadvantaged men to achieve something, to move up the social ladder. While the prestige of becoming an officer had little impact in the outside world, just belonging to a secret society gained the respect of many Americans. Another advantage of joining an order was the charity work. "At initiation, Masons gave their oath to aid their brethren and their brethren’s dependents in time of need."95 Similar to landsmanshaftin, these groups often gave money to the sick, provided funeral services and burials, and provided

94 Dumenil, 9.
95 Dumenil, 19.
relief from other financial burdens. Money was collected within the membership, and then distributed to non-Masonic charities used to provide housing for those who could not afford it, medical assistance, and help for the underprivileged pursuing education through grants. These different charities and services are very similar to those provided by the landsmanshaft groups. For example, many landsmanshaft groups gave money to hospitals, schools, orphanages, and other charities that were helping to establish the State of Israel. These gestures were even recognized by the non-Jewish community. In the Philadelphia Inquirer in 1885, an article written about these landsmanshaft groups was quoted as saying: “The organization has not had an existence of quite one year, but has demonstrated beyond a doubt its rare usefulness in the community.”

Both Jews and Freemasons stressed the need for charity, looking out for their own, and this can be seen in both Freemason societies and landsmanshaft groups. Jewish landsmanshaft already held characteristics of Freemason Societies, perhaps originating from their own institutions in Eastern Europe, or even older Freemason orders that existed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, there are characteristics of Freemason Societies unique to America that show up in landsmanshaftn. There are also traits from orders, perhaps not unique to America, that were not part of Jewish life before immigrating to America. Therefore, one can assume that Jewish immigrants trying to form landsmanshaftn were influenced, probably from Jews already belonging to Freemason lodges in America. Keeping some of their own traditions and incorporating some of the fraternal order again shows this delicate balance between the old country and

96 “Among the Hebrews, Notes About the Charitable and Educational Institutions under Their Care,” The Philadelphia Inquirer, 8 July 1885, 3 November 2006.
the New World that Jewish immigrants were able to keep while acculturating to American society.

Many similarities existed between the culture and religion of Jewish immigrants and Freemason Societies. The first similarity between the two organizations was the complex rituals. Freemason Societies had always had elaborate, secret rituals that bound their members together for centuries, but Jewish communal or social groups from the old country never practiced these intricate ceremonies. Yet many landsmanshaftn in the United States adopted a number of different rituals, from Freemasonry. For example, B’nai B’rith was a German Jewish fraternal organization that later took in Eastern European Jews. They believed complex rituals gave expression to one’s emotional being and should remain secret, not unlike the Masons. In the initiation ceremony, the candidate answered preliminary questions blindfolded, then he was led into a separate room in which the officers would take the new member around, stopping at certain stations set up around the room so they could teach him the principles and practices of the order. The same custom was used in Freemason societies. During an induction ceremony for a Freemason order, the candidate was taken through a “journey,” because the degrees of Masonry symbolized the stages of life, and as the candidate went through his “travels” he stopped at different points for lectures, prayers, or a presentation in which he was taught about the order.\textsuperscript{97} The following is a quote from a B’nai B’rith initiation ceremony: “He learned the order’s passwords and hand signals. And he learned the meaning of a set of symbolic objects that stood arrayed on a table in the center of the lodge room: the tablets

\textsuperscript{97} Dumenil, 35.
of the law represented the basis in Judaism of all moral and ethical teachings..."98 As Yiddish-speaking immigrants joined these established Jewish landsmanshaftn, they too became acquainted with fraternal rites.

Other rituals used by both landsmanshaftn and Freemasons involved both groups' desire to maintain secrecy. For example, members used signs, grips, or words to gain access to secret meetings their society held; landsmanshaftn did the same. This proved their allegiance to the organization. Most groups had to learn a password to enter into the building during a meeting, and often the password was an English term, even though the landsmanshaft was run in Yiddish.99 Elaborate handshakes also allowed entrance into Freemason meetings, and these handshakes often involved a number of different grasps along with a password. Many felt these acts provided a more dignified and more secure environment. This need to keep everything secret goes back to the beginning of Freemasonry, but Jewish organizations did not practice these rites until they arrived in America, and learned and adopted some of the practices of Freemasonry.

Other parts of landsmanshaft ritual also resembled Freemasonic rituals. Religious motifs were used during Freemason ceremonies, often symbols of Adam and Eve, or the Temple of Solomon. In the Independent Order Brith Abraham, rituals also used religious symbols, including a portrayal of the life of Abraham and along with Star of David and passages from the Old Testament to strengthen the attachment of its members to their heritage. However, the complicated props and costumes, along with the dramatic ritual,

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99 Soyer, "Entering" 170.
were all foreign to Jewish tradition. Freemason initiations were always elaborate, always dramatic, and always religious in nature, not unlike this example.

In the order of *Brith Abraham*, the candidate played the role of Isaac, and was blindfolded, bound, and wore a white robe. Blue and white ribbons formed a Star of David on the floor, while the officers sat at each of the points of the star. At the beginning of the ceremony, the members stood, linked arms, and the president came in under the crossed swords of the conductor and marshal, carrying a staff. Then the candidate received moral lessons, eventually the blindfold was removed and the candidate was accepted into the society. The white robes, the blindfolds, and the officers sitting at the representative six points all are parts of Freemason ritual. For example, Freemasons often wore white robes, or even a white, lambskin apron over their street clothes. Candidates were often blindfolded, and sworn to secrecy during initiation ceremonies. Masonry also used symbolic points to emphasize different themes of the Society. Most immigrant Jews had never witnessed such a complex initiation until their induction ceremony into their new landsmanshaftn.

In Russia, any type of secret society or fraternal organization was illegal. The majority of Eastern European Jews who immigrated to the United States were unfamiliar with the concept of a fraternal society and unaware of its benefits. Common sense dictates that these Jews should have been hesitant to join these organizations, and would have had difficulty accepting the secrecy and complexities of the landsmanshaftn. However, the opposite is true, most of these immigrants wanted to join these societies.

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100 Soyer, "Entering," 63.
101 Soyer, "Entering," 175.
once they arrived in the United States because of its benefits and comforts. Daniel Soyer states,

Though the masses of Yiddish speaking Jews in Eastern Europe had little or no contact with fraternal ritual in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the professed universalism of the Masons did attract many acculturated Jews seeking an entrée into Western European and North American society.  

The Masons used Old Testament imagery and Hebrew words, which helped Jews feel a sense of familiarity with these elaborate rituals, and they also identified with the Masons' strong sense of patriotism. The importance of charity, philanthropy, providing members assistance, both financially and emotionally, emblematic of the Freemasons, was similar to Eastern Europe Jewish immigrant values. These Jewish immigrants slipped easily into older Freemason customs and traditions.

Around the time these Jewish immigrants were coming to America, Freemasonry was adapting to the ways of new century. “The changes in Masonry are significant because they reflect the attempt of leaders and members of an established organization to reshape their institution to meet the needs of a changed society.” Orders became less about religion and morality, and more focused around a civic institution. Nationalism and democracy became important, along with American patriotism. “Preach to the brethren to be true to the Government, to be charitable to all, to spread the Doctrine of Universal Brotherhood...” stated the New York Grand Master in 1920, showing the new hierarchical values of the Freemasons. During a time when massive immigration existed, democracy was being threatened overseas, and other forms of government were growing

102 Soyer, "Entering," 164.
103 Dumenil, 115.
104 Dumenil, 120.
powerful, Freemasons stressed tolerance, equality, nationhood, and democracy. These are all tenets of landsmanshaftn.

This new civic consciousness of the Freemasons led to a priority in education. "Lodge bulletins from various cities revealed that lodges were offering speeches on such general themes as Americanization, Bolshevism, crime, law and order, and public education."\textsuperscript{105} Different orders set up different programs teaching immigrants to learn English, American values, even about democracy. It became the responsibility of a Mason to help provide speakers at lodges, to further educate members. Groups also supported public education. Many Masons supported school funding, and promoted education legislation by lobbying for bills locally and on state levels. In 1919, the Smith – Towner Bill addressed the need for a cabinet position, the Secretary of Education, "who through research and administration of appropriations would raise the standards of education throughout the country."\textsuperscript{106} The bill was introduced in Congress unsuccessfully for a few years, all the while that Masons stressed its importance. They lobbied for the bill, handed out flyers and petitions to sign, and supported it until it was passed.

Scholarship was also of great importance to Jewish immigrants and some groups developed their own schools. For example, the Workmen’s Circle started schools in Philadelphia in which the curriculum included Yiddish language and literature, Jewish history, and socialist principles. A small number of professional teachers staffed the schools, which added grades as the students' skills advanced. These schools were paid for by the Workmen’s Circle, and members could send their children for a small cost. Many of the principles and purposes of the Eastern European Jewish landsmanshaftn were the

\textsuperscript{105} Dumenil, 133.
\textsuperscript{106} Dumenil, 139.
same as those from the Freemason Society. The Freemasons also donated money to further education, believing that their group and its values and ideas would only continue if they encouraged study. Freemasons and Jews both understood the value of an education in America.

Outsiders may think that fraternal and civic organizations exist primarily to initiate new members, to parade, hold luncheons, and listen to speeches. But such are only the superficially apparent activities. In all such organizations there lies a firm, fine foundation of HUMAN SERVICE.\textsuperscript{107}

This statement from the \textit{Saturday Evening Post} refers to the contributions Freemason Societies began to make at the end of the nineteenth century. Before 1880, these orders always helped out members, but never contributed to the outside world. American members began to criticize their fellow Masons that helped out friends and family, but cared nothing for the American public. Many saw service as a way to better oneself, and to be a responsible citizen. Already discussed was the Freemasons’ contribution to public education, but there were other service avenues for American orders. "A related field of service was Masonic support of youth groups. Not only were Masons involved in originating De Molay...but they also participated in Boy Scout activities.\textsuperscript{108} These organizations were demonstrated to boys, teaching them how to become model citizens, an important part of Freemason Society. American orders also set up charitable programs, giving money to the Shriner’s hospital organization, for example, or in San Francisco the Scottish Rite Order organized a free milk distribution program. Other orders were encouraged to pursue local charity projects, such as summer camps, educational scholarships, and emergency aid to disaster areas. Such services were so encouraged in

\textsuperscript{107} \textit{Saturday Evening Post}, 5 April 1924, 174.
\textsuperscript{108} Dumenil, 175.
American lodges for a number of reasons. The first was to create responsible citizens out of their members, and the second, to become moral role models. However, by improving their community they were also improving their reputation, thus ensuring their survival. Goals of service increased membership.

The same could be said for landsmanshaftn. An important part of these Jewish immigrant groups were not only helping out members and their families, but providing aid to charities, stressing the need for members’ involvement in community services. In fact, a number of different articles in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* in the early 1900s comments on all the charity work these organizations did to help both Jews and their surrounding Philadelphia community. One article, entitled “Hebrew Charity and its Bestowal,” states that as many as 70% of Jewish members of such societies contribute to charities to help others. Another remarks on the importance these Jewish groups had towards endorsing and supporting education, philanthropy and aiding immigrants. Often landsmanshaftn would make donations to the Hebrew Education Society, which would then focus on educating the poor through establishing schools. “The establishment of these new schools cost the society last year nearly $40,000.00.” Landsmanshaftn were also known to give money to scholarships, hospitals, and local community organizations. Similar to the Freemasons, philanthropy was ingrained in these organizations, to help better their members, and to give back to the community. However, perhaps learning from the Freemasons, providing community services would help give these Jewish immigrants a better reputation, making the transition into American society somewhat

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110 Anonymous, “Among the Hebrews: Notes About the Charitable and Educational Institutions Under Their Care.”
easier for their members. Respect from the non-Jewish society was essential for acculturation.

Freemason Societies during the 1900s became much more secular, and as a result, social aspects of the orders began to grow. As a result, religious and ritualistic aspects also began to decrease. Monthly bulletins were put out advertising events, balls, lectures, even weddings and funerals. Landsmanshaft groups, while incorporating religion into their rituals, often kept their groups secularized, focusing on acculturation and democracy rather than prayer and religion. Perhaps they took a lesson from Freemason orders that were losing membership due to the importance they placed on religion. Landsmanshaft leaders decided that while being Jewish was important, how, or when a member wanted to pray would be his decision, independent of the group, something done, in private. Both groups were secular in nature at the turn of the century, and both groups attempted to form bonds with members through social engagements. This method seemed to work, for both groups, in the early 1900s, had large numbers of members and continued to increase until after the world wars.

Freemasons and Jews had many similarities even before coming into contact. The most obvious similarity between the Freemasons and the Jews is their belief in God. "Through lectures, allegories, and symbols, they imparted Masonry's commitment to equality, charity, fraternity, morality, and faith in God." [111] Aside from their belief in God, both Jews and Freemasons stressed charity along with the freedom of the individual. Jews have always believed in the ability to choose between good and evil, that a person can decide what kind of person he or she is going to become. Freemasons also believe in this choice. Therefore, landsmanshaft organizations most likely had already developed some

of these traits in America before coming into contact with Freemasons. However, with the help of Jewish Masons already living in the United States, it is highly probable that these landsmanshaftn developed complex rituals and secret ceremonies, for secret orders were respected and encouraged in American society during this time period. Membership in a fraternal organization helped these men's standings among Americans. Most Americans believed this, an example being a comment from an American off the street, "It is hard to find an intelligent American who does not belong to a secret order." Landsmanshaftn also learned lessons from the changes Freemason orders in America were going through, and perhaps secularized and encouraged service partly from this influence. Choosing some aspects of Freemason Society to adapt and leaving others out further shows this attempt to acculturate into American society, to blend in and become Americans while maintaining aspects of their culture that made them Jewish Americans.

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112 Soyer, 163.
Landsmanshaftn were organizations created in order for immigrants to find a place of comfort in an entirely new environment, far from the world in which they knew and understood. Thousands joined in the hopes of finding that feeling of familiarity and to gain a support system while having to adjust to life in America. As discussed at the beginning of this paper, many historians have come to the conclusion that landsmanshaftn were formed for the reason of keeping Jews from assimilating into American culture. They feel that because many immigrants were afraid of losing their identity in order to become American that they isolated themselves within these organizations as resistance. However, evidence throughout this thesis points to a different conclusion: that in actuality, landsmanshaftn were able to ease the transition of these immigrants into American society, and as a result caused these Jews to acculturate, rather than assimilate.

Landsmanshaftn had a number of key characteristics that helped these Jewish immigrants acculturate into American society and become successful Jewish Americans. First, landsmanshaftn guaranteed a comfortable environment in which family and friends were available to provide a support system throughout the process of becoming American. There was no pressure from the outside world to assimilate, and no threat of losing one’s Jewish identity, therefore the tension between the two worlds was minimized. Second, landsmanshaftn offered the opportunity to learn about America, through classes that taught English, or lectures that described democratic ideals. Third, the structure of a landsmanshaft itself helped immigrants understand American government, and the societies that existed in the United States. Last, all of these
characteristics mixed a blend of old traditions with new, so these immigrants could step forward into American society without losing their connection with old country. As a result, I believe that the Community Theory of Americanization, which prefers acculturation to assimilation, helped establish these successful Jewish Americans.

Remember Benjamin Sherman? Years after he successfully acculturated into American society he remained a loyal member of the Bialystoker Landsmanshaft. He continued his membership even after moving from the south end of Philadelphia to the northeast section, settling near a few of his children. He kept close ties to the group, sending letters, receiving mailings, and traveling back downtown for meetings. He discussed Judaism not as a religion, but as an ethnicity, a culture to expose your children to, and to proudly maintain while becoming American. As his children grew, they in turn met friends and formed bonds in their father’s organization. This particular landsmanshaft along with countless others in a number of American cities continued to provide a service for the Jewish community – allowing members a place in which they could exist as Jewish Americans. This allowed members to HAVE a dual loyalty, in which they could maintain both aspects of their Jewish ethnicity while continuing to be American citizens.
Kline, Ashley

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