It has long been recognized that the bulk of the East European Jewish immigrants consisted of the masses of Jewish folk, rather than the elite. This immigration, which swelled from the relatively small influx of the late 1860s and 1870s to the gigantic proportions of the years immediately preceding World War I, was unparalleled in Jewish history in the scale and rapidity of resettlement.

It was increasing economic and legal pressures that made America appealing as a haven to the oppressed Jews of Eastern Europe, but there were additional factors as well that affected the decision of the Jewish masses to opt for the New World. To what extent did information about America in the press influence East European Jews? What impact did the discussions of Jewish intellectuals about the respective merits of America and Palestine have upon the public? To what extent did the opposition of the Orthodox rabbinate figure in dissuading Jews from emigrating? While much has been written to illuminate the immigrant experience, answers to these questions must be based on further research into such sources as the press, belles lettres, memoir literature, rabbinic writings, and folklore. These works provide keys to a fuller understanding of the image of America in the eyes of nineteenth-century East European Jewry.
The Hebrew press served as one of the major instruments for shaping the East European Jewish image of America.\(^2\) The influence of such periodicals as *Ha-Maggid*, established in 1956 in the Prussian border town of Lyck, of *Ha-Melitz*, established in 1860 in Odessa, and of *Ha-Zefirah*, established in 1862 in Warsaw, was considerable. The issues of these periodicals were widely read and often passed from hand to hand. Beginning with the 1860s, *Ha-Maggid* especially carried frequent reports concerning the new land.

A whole cadre of correspondents kept European readers informed about conditions in America and the problems of the immigrants. Even those correspondents who advocated emigration did not attempt to gloss over the materialism and laxity of religious observance in the New World. Nor did they mince words about the necessity of being ready for hard labor in order to survive.

The image of America in the Hebrew press is thus an ambivalent one. On the one hand, we find articles extolling the equality and freedom, the technological advances, and the natural wonders of the new land. On the other, there are recurring complaints about a lack of Jewishness and moving accounts of immigrant toil and suffering.

On various occasions, especially when editorial policy favored emigration to Palestine over America, *Ha-Maggid* and *Ha-Melitz* published dire warnings against going to the new land. *Ha-Maggid* characterized the immigrants as “the exiles in America.” In its issue of 16 November 1881, for example, it reported that a group of immigrants had participated bareheaded in a Cincinnati synagogue service and declared that “the emigration to America will perhaps bring material benefit to some of the arrivals but they will be lost for Judaism.” On another occasion, in the issue of 3 May 1882, a correspondent pleaded, “As a kindness to our oppressed brethren in Russia and for the good of all I beg of you . . . have mercy on the unfortunates and warn them with all your power of persuasion not to leave their native land to come to America.”\(^3\)

During the same year, in *Ha-Maggid* on 18 May 1882, Tuviah Pesach Shapiro, who had emigrated to America and after a few months returned to Russia, was critical of what he had found. He reported on the poor economic conditions and indicated that Russian-Polish Jews, except for the skilled, had not done well. He
pointed also to the spiritual danger that faced Jews and to the specter of antisemitism. His findings led him to support aliyah to Palestine instead.

On 10 September 1886, *Ha-Melitz* published Hillel Malachowsky's impassioned plea from Pittsburgh to his overseas brethren. A maskil and Hebrew teacher, he wrote, "Those who consider America to be a Garden of Eden only lie." He cautioned them not to be misled by letters from abroad as he himself had been and urged them to stay home so that they would have no cause for later regrets.

One could continue to give examples of negative reactions in the press, but a number of correspondents chose to adopt a more positive approach. It was not that they were fully satisfied with conditions in the New World. Still, they felt that compared with their countries of origin, America was indeed a blessed land.

Rabbi Bernard Felsenthal of Chicago was one of the early correspondents who, as early as the end of the 1860s, advised Jews through *Ha-Maggid* to emigrate. In a report of 24 June 1868 he stressed that American Jews shared in the equality of their fellow citizens and indicated that anyone who could till the soil or engage in commerce or work hard would be able to support himself or herself. On 12 January 1869 he added that religious functionaries would find it difficult to eke out a living here. He suggested the formation of societies for emigration and urged that immigrants not limit themselves to New York and Philadelphia, but settle beyond the Mississippi River where they could still acquire land.

During the 1870s the question of support for the emigration of Rumanian Jews to America was raised by Leon (Aaron Judah Leib) Horowitz. He had come to America in 1870 and soon became an enthusiastic advocate of settlement here. In his articles in the European Hebrew press he sang the praises of American tolerance and for some time was a regular contributor to the American Hebrew weekly *Ha-Zofeh ba-Aretz ha-Hadashah*. His views clashed, however, with those of Hayyim Zvi Schneurson, emissary of the Jewish community in Palestine, who was supported in his pro-Palestinianism by the editor, Zvi Hirsch Bernstein. This difference of opinion regarding America and Palestine can be viewed as a prelude to the heated America-Palestine debate that developed later in Russia.

Horowitz continued his pro-American propaganda and in 1873
published a Hebrew book titled *Rumaniyah va-Amerikah* (Rumania and America), which offered information on American geography and civics to prospective emigrants. The final section presented a practical emigrant’s guide to travel and jobs. In his public appearances back in Rumania Horowitz stressed the opportunities of America. Even following his final return to Europe, where he sided with the supporters of *aliyah* to Palestine, Horowitz still pointed to America as an important haven because of its material advantages.

The views of two early pioneers of Hebrew writing in America, Henry (Zvi) Gersoni and James (Yaakov Zvi) Soble, are noteworthy because of their comparatively optimistic outlook. Gersoni, who arrived here in 1869 and became active as a journalist and rabbi, soon began to send his reports to *Ha-Melitz*. In the issues of 22–29 November 1869 he expressed his faith in the new land and stressed that the best prospects for the new immigrants were not in petty business but in labor and agriculture. Later, during the America-Palestine debate, he differed with Alexander Zvi Zederbaum, the editor of *Ha-Melitz*, who supported Palestine. Gersoni asserted that all who came here would eventually do well and that their children would grow up in freedom. He expressed a belief that Russian Jews would eventually assure the future of Judaism in America. In a postscript, Zederbaum based his differences with Gersoni on the fact that the new immigrants had already been forced to abandon their traditions.

Soble, who arrived in America in 1876, became convinced that the salvation of the immigrants lay in agriculture. In 1877 he contributed an article to Peretz Smolenskin’s *Ha-Shahar* entitled “Besorah Tovah” (Good Tidings), in which he pointed to the opportunities in farming. Like Gersoni he foresaw even prior to the pogroms that America was destined to become a haven for Russian Jews: “The Jews have come to America not on the basis of the advice of their leaders. Rather, each individual came here on his own because he had his fill with oppression and want while living under the rule of his tyrannical homeland.”

Another active correspondent, Judah David Eisenstein, emigrated to this country from Miedzyrech, Poland, in 1872 at the age of eighteen. In the letters he sent to members of his family at the
end of the 1870s he still spoke of his desire to return to his birthplace. He soon abandoned this plan and in his reports in the European Hebrew press expressed his conviction that America would become a haven for persecuted Jewry and a vital center of Jewish life. In his correspondence in Ha-Zefira at the end of the 1870s he spoke favorably of the state of Judaism in the new land. He doubted, however, the success of Jewish agricultural efforts, which he felt were better suited to Palestine or Russia than to the American scene.

Following the Russian pogroms, Eisenstein penned a series of articles in Ha-Zefira entitled "Ha-Yehudim ba-Aretz ha-Hadashah" (The Jews in the New Land) and mentioned that he was responding thereby to many letters of inquiry received from Russia. In the issue of 25 April 1882 he disagreed sharply with the anti-American policy of Ha-Maggid and declared that there were some twenty thousand observant Jews here. He played down the danger of antisemitism and asserted that the non-Jews favored immigration. While there were no opportunities for religious functionaries and maskilim, laborers and agricultural workers would find a place for themselves. As for trades- and businesspeople, success would depend on luck. In another correspondence, published in Ha-Melitz on 12 December 1882, Eisenstein was critical of the Hebrew press for its overwhelming emphasis on Palestine settlement. He upheld American Jewry's role in providing financial support for emigration and protested the emphasis in the press on the difficulties of the immigrants. All in all, his approach reflects a sober, balanced view.

The outbreak of the 1881 pogroms and the flight of refugees to Brody, Galicia, sharpened the debate regarding emigration and the choice of Palestine or America. The Russian Jewish intellectuals argued the pros and cons of the emigration issue in the Russian Jewish press. The periodical Razsvet, which had favored Russification, now published articles by such writers as Simon Dubnow and Mark Zamenhof in support of emigration to America. At the same time, Moshe Leib Lilienblum championed in its pages the cause of Palestine, arguing that only there could Jewish national aspirations be fulfilled. By the end of 1881, Razsvet supported emigration as part of its editorial policy. Another periodical, Voskhod, underwent
various changes in policy and could not easily give up its opposition to emigration. Yet it, too, was led to recognize emigration as a fact and eventually supported Palestine *aliyah*.

The Hebrew press served as the battleground for the contesting views of the leading Hebrew writers. David Gordon, editor of *Ha-Maggid*, and Peretz Smolenskin, editor of *Ha-Shahar*, marshaled a host of arguments to demonstrate why Palestine was preferable to America. Judah Leib Gordon, however, expressed some doubts regarding the Palestine solution and in his essays and poetry advocated emigration to America. An exponent of Haskalah, he argued that such emigration would not hurt the chances for the amelioration of the Jewish situation in Russia. His stand occasioned a sharp polemic in which both David Gordon and Lilienblum sought to refute his views.

Another Hebrew writer who supported America was Yehudah Leib Levine, known by his acronym Yehalel. He outlined his views on the need for emigration to America and for Jewish territorial concentration there, dwelling on the economic advantages of the new land in a letter addressed to David Gordon in the *Ha-Maggid* issue of 6 October 1881. In his autobiography he wrote that he was attracted to the idea that if sixty thousand Jews were gathered in one place in America, they would be entitled to set up their own state in which they could enjoy their own enlightened form of government. The suggestion to establish a Jewish state in America was then current in various circles. It was voiced by Moses Schrenzel in his brochure *Die Lösung der Judenfrage* (The Solution of the Jewish Problem), published in Lodz in 1881, and also by Saul Pinhas Rabinowitz, who supported this idea in an article in *Ha-Zefirah* in the same year. It was not until the spring of 1882 that Yehalel retreated from his position and adopted the Palestine solution. Rabinowitz was likewise eventually won over to the Palestine cause.

No doubt the enormous economic opportunities of America, coupled with the promise of equality and freedom, led many intellectuals to support emigration there. These factors also gave rise to the establishment of the Am Olam movement, which attracted a diverse membership and adopted an idealistic program based on return to the soil and establishment of agricultural colonies in the
The members of the Vilna Am Olam group even dreamed of the establishment of a Jewish canton in the new land. During 1881–82 groups from various Russian cities and towns set out under the banner of the movement. In many places newly organized societies to promote emigration debated the merits of America and Palestine.

Valuable insight into the reaction of Russian Jewry during the crisis years of 1881–82 can be derived from the extensive memoir literature that reveals the feelings and hopes of the writers. The pages of Voskhod in 1889 contain serialized chapters of the diaries of Chaim Chissin, who was seventeen when the 1881 pogroms erupted. He described an identity crisis engendered by the pogroms: until that time he considered himself a devoted son of Russia but then became interested in the Am Olam movement and looked to America. At the age of eighteen, however, he joined a Moscow group of Bilu students that decided to go to Palestine because fellow students Yehiel Tschlenow and Menahem Mendel Ussishkin countered his pro-American arguments and convinced him of the advantages of Palestine.

The memoirs of Abraham Cahan offer a vivid account of how the writer was led to join the ranks of Am Olam. He related that, as a young man, he was swept up by the oppressive events and became convinced of the truth of Socialism. He met several times with Israel Belkind, who was recruiting students for the Bilu movement and then considered leaving Russia for Switzerland. Paradoxically, it was Belkind who steered the young Cahan toward America. Cahan, who joined the Balta group of the Am Olam, described the debates that took place in Brody between the supporters of America and Palestine and among the America-oriented emigrants. Cahan shared the Am Olam idealistic conception of the new land, writing that “they were motivated by a religious enthusiasm.” He looked forward to America where he could help establish a Garden of Eden on earth and where people would become like angels: “I imagined a fantastic picture of a communist life in distant America, a land in which no man knew of ‘mine’ and ‘thine,’ where all are brothers and all are happy.”

In the memoirs of Alexander Harkavy and Israel Isser Kasovich
we find additional information on the emigration fever that gripped Russian Jewry. Harkavy told of the opposing America and Palestine factions and recounted how, in 1882, at the age of nineteen, he joined a group of Vilna intellectuals that was interested in farming in the new land. “We imagined to ourselves that we would easily be able to become farmers, especially on American soil, which we presumed a Garden of Eden.”

Kasovich also depicted the impact of the events that led to the formation of groups for emigration to America. He related that he had received propaganda material from the Kiev Am Olam group regarding plans to settle overseas, describing the idealism of its members who arrived in Brody on the way to the New World. He recalled reading press reports that Russian Jewish immigrants had become farmers after having been granted land by the government. He wrote, “Our bitter lot in Russia created in me a strong desire to go to America.” His memoirs record his disappointment with farming in America, which led him briefly to return home.

Many of the memoirs mention the role of letters from immigrant relatives in America as influencing the East European Jews to undertake the journey. Harris Rubin’s memoir testifies to a “burning desire” to go to America that was strengthened by such letters. According to Rubin, who was a Hebrew teacher, at the end of the summer of 1881 his brother-in-law came to his village of Kavarsk, Lithuania, bearing a letter from a relative “who gave a glowing description of the welcome he had received in America.” Again, some years later, at the beginning of 1888, a letter came from a Mr. Silberman “who had been in New York for two years. In this letter he extolled the material benefits for Jewish immigrants in America to such an extent that the whole town was talking about it.” Despite misgivings about his future religious observance in America, his mother-in-law urged him to go. Since he was leaving before the end of the term, there was a commotion in town. He managed to placate the townspeople by promising to write home about conditions in America so as to be of help to the many who were also thinking of making the journey. George Price, in The Russian Jews in America (St. Petersburg, 1893), which consists of articles that appeared originally in Voskhod, mentions that he was led to describe the life of the immigrants in their new abode because
he had received more than one thousand letters of inquiry from abroad.

The memoir literature abounds in descriptions of the pain of parting from dear ones. Mordecai Zev Raisin related the circumstances of his father’s leaving Nesvizh, province of Minsk, in 1889. His father, who was a maskil, took this step even though he was fully cognizant of the popular opinion that only the poorer class of workers went to America, where little attention was paid to matters of the spirit. Raisin reported that his father kept his intention secret and that his mother felt shame because of his father’s decision. In his first letter from America, Raisin’s father listed the reasons that had motivated his act—poverty, the conditions in the Pale, the pogroms, his concern over the conscription of his sons, and, finally, his view of Russia as a chazer land (piggish land) that was unworthy of sacrifice. These factors were undoubtedly among the considerations that governed the decision of countless others to emigrate.

Because of their deep concern for the continued religious welfare of their children in America, parents occasionally wrote special letters admonishing them to remain faithful to the tradition. An example is the Hebrew missive of Meshulum Faitel Goldbaum of Kuznitzkah, Poland, written in 1875 to urge his American children to live a Jewish life. The writer indicated that he was concerned about the state of religious observance in America and related that a returnee who had just arrived told him this was the reason for his return. Goldbaum adjured his children not to go astray and to be punctilious in their Sabbath observance.

Other forms of literature played a role in fashioning the image of America for East European Jews in the nineteenth century. One of the early important works in that category was Joachim Heinrich Campe’s Die Entdeckung von Amerika, the first part of which (dealing with Columbus) was translated into Hebrew by Moses Mendelsohn Frankfurt under the title Metzi‘at Eretz Hadashah (The Discovery of a New Land) as early as 1817. In order to deal with his material, he had to find Hebrew equivalents for various technical terms, which he listed in a Hebrew-German glossary at the beginning of the book.
Other translations followed, attesting to the further popularity of Campe's book. Chaim Haykl Hurwitz reworked all three parts in 1817 in Yiddish translation and called his work *Tzofnat Pane'akh* (cf. Gen. 41:45). In his introduction he pointed to the many benefits that had been derived by humanity from the discovery of the New World. The Hebrew writer Abraham Baer Gottlober recalled in his reminiscences in 1888 that Hurwitz's translation had a wide circulation and that almost all Jews, including women, read it.

In 1824 Mordecai Aaron Günzberg issued his translation of Campe's work, entitled *Gelot Eretz Hadashah* (The Discovery of a New Land). He indicated that his aim was to depict America not only as a land that was discovered in the past but also as a social and economic reality in the present. Günzberg followed up his Hebrew translation with a Yiddish version the following year. Still another Hebrew translation and adaptation was *Metzi'at Amerikah* (The Discovery of America) by David Zamosc, also published in 1824. During the second half of the nineteenth century various geographical descriptions of America, including those by Issachar Baer Gordon and Kalman Shulman, made their appearance. All of these books served to whet the appetite of their readers for more information about the New World.

For Judah Leib Gordon, who had contributed greatly to the debate regarding emigration, America represented a symbol of enlightenment and liberalism, in contrast to the oppressive regime in Russia. Already in 1859 he had completed the first part of *Eretz Hadashah* (A New Land). (He saw fit to publish it in 1892, on the occasion of the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America.) In it a young couple who fall in love against the will of their parents flee to America, where they prosper and ultimately bring over their families. In the poem America is called “eretz ha-tzevi,” “the land of beauty” whose fertility has made it a veritable Garden of Eden. The poet describes the motivation for the discovery and compares Columbus to Moses. America is praised as a refuge that receives new immigrants as brothers.

In 1882, Gordon published in a supplement of *Ha-Melitz* his poem “Ahoti Ruhamah” (My Sister Ruhama), in which he declared that redemption was possible only in the land of freedom, in America. Moved by compassion, he called upon the persecuted Russian Jews
to leave. Since there was no other safe haven, they would do well to seek refuge in America, where the light of freedom shines upon all. America could serve as a *melon orhim* ("temporary resting-place") where they could stay and wait. This poem of Gordon's was severely criticized by Lilienblum and other adherents of Hibbat Tsiyyon, who accused the poet of disloyalty to the cause of Palestine.

In 1892 Gordon also published his poem *Tashlikh*, which he dedicated to a friend leaving for overseas. Earlier he had written an epic poem entitled *Bi-Metzulot Yam* (In the Depths of the Sea), in which he castigated Spain for expelling the Jews. But now, on the occasion of the anniversary of Columbus's discovery, he feels that he condemned Spain too harshly and expresses his gratitude for its role in establishing new havens of refuge. Gordon describes America as a good and bountiful land among whose people his friend would be able to enjoy in peace the fruit of his labors. Telling his friend to bless God for having prepared a refuge for the oppressed, he concludes, "When you traverse the ocean, cast my sin into the depths of the sea," referring thereby to his abovementioned epic poem in which he had been critical of Spain.

If Gordon was an eloquent supporter of emigration to America, his contemporary, Peretz Smolenskin, was equally persuasive in opposition. He made his opinion known not only in publicist essays but in bellettristic writings as well. Already in his early novel *Ha-To'eh be-Darkhe ha-Hayyim* (The Wanderer in the Paths of Life), America figures as a haven for individual Russian Jews, who, like the protagonist's father, have sought their fortune in the New World and have become wealthy.

In his novel *Gaon va-Shever* (Pride and Fall), Smolenskin strung together a number of loosely connected stories to indicate why some fugitives from the collapse of the Vienna stock exchange sought refuge in America. The novel presents a gallery of unsavory characters whose conversations aboard ship serve as a clue to the author's views. An assimilationist, for example, declares that he looks forward in America to severing his ties with Jews, something he had been unable to do previously. When the fugitives land they are apprehended by the police and returned to Europe.

In another novel, *Ha-Yerushah* (The Inheritance), which Smo-
lenskin completed shortly before his death in 1884, Zerachiah's mother is falsely informed that her son has left for America, the land to which one can apply the biblical verse "all who go to her cannot return." The woman is grief stricken, but she is consoled when told that many have returned after earning their fortune in the new land. Actually, Zerachiah is eventually reunited with his sweetheart and does not get to America.

As his contribution to the America-Palestine debate, A. B. Gottlober published a poem in *Ha-Maggid* (no. 6, 1882), which he entitled "Nes Tsiyyonah" (Signpost to Zion). He wrote,

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The new land is a blessed land.
But you, my people, should not go there.
For you will be a stranger there, a refugee.

Not so the Holy Land, the land of Canaan.
There every rafter shall proclaim:
Your fathers have always dwelt here.
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Typical of the Hebrew novels by lesser literary lights that reflect prevalent views of America are *Ester o le-Eretz Hadashah* (Esther; or, To a New Land) by Israel Joseph Sirkis and *Bein ha-Zemanim* (Between the Times) by Israel Weisbrem. The novel *Ester*, published in Warsaw in 1887, describes a young woman who goes to America after being disowned by her family. Although the author informs us that she had been warned against America because many suffered hunger there, he remains a strong advocate of emigration to America and is publishing his novel to further this aim. The novel *Bein ha-Zemanim*, published in Warsaw in 1888, depicts in melodramatic fashion the fortunes of Jonathan, the adopted son of the rabbi of a Lithuanian town, and of the shiftless Gershon. Both go to America, but whereas Jonathan becomes a rich manufacturer in Quebec, Gershon undergoes five years of hardship, first as a peddler and then as a miner.

After the two characters are reunited, they return to their hometown to establish a factory and to find happiness with their former lovers. The novel stresses a number of concepts that were then current regarding America. The new land was a place of opportunity, but at the same time immigrant life was no bed of roses. Also reflected is the hope that America need not be a land of no return
and that it is possible for those who have left to take up the threads of their lives again in their hometowns.

Our survey of the belletristic treatment of America in Hebrew literature must also take account of the writings of two established authors—Reuben Asher Braudes and Mordecai David Brandstaetter. Braudes was the author of Shirim Atikim (Ancient Songs), a story that incorporates verse, diary entries, and letters and that first appeared in Ha-Zeman, the periodical that he edited in Cracow in 1890–91. As an exponent of the Palestine cause, Braudes chose to depict the sad fate of a maskil who had opted for America. We see the protagonist Naftali on his sick bed in a New York hospital, where he reflects on the path he chose. He muses on the many immigrants who were misled by unscrupulous people into sweatshop slavery and who were led to forsake their religious observance. His own life he characterizes as that of a lifeless and unfeeling machine similar to the machine over which he labored. How reminiscent of Morris Rosenfeld, who was later to compare the sweatshop worker to a machine and who became known as the Sweatshop Poet. In short, Naftali now rejects the American dream in favor of Palestine but his decision comes too late and he dies. In this graphic novel Braudes left no doubt as to where he stood in the Palestine-America debate.

Brandstaetter also expressed his disillusionment with the American dream in his story Reb Lemel Tarvad (Reb Lemel the Busybody), which was written at the beginning of the 1890s and was later included in his collected works. It deals with a Galician Jew whose two daughters are initiated into prostitution in America by connivers who had ostensibly come to seek brides. Brandstaetter made use of a sordid side of immigrant life to register his disapproval of emigration to the new land. The attempt of Reb Lemel and his son to bring the connivers to justice ends in failure.

Among Yiddish literary figures the strongest advocate of American emigration was Isaac Meir Dik. In the Palestine-America debate he supported the views of Am Olam. He had incorporated favorable references to America in his popular writings as early as the 1850s. A prolific writer, Dik had a wide readership that was influenced by his repeated stress on America as a fabled land for Russian Jews, a utopia. He remained firmly convinced that only
here was there opportunity for Lithuanian Jewish youth to develop into useful citizens.

Already in 1864 Dik published a story entitled Reb Haykl Yentes fun Shhot Tsiyosk (Reb Haykl, Yente's Son of the City of Tsiyosk), in which a poor melamed in the first half of the nineteenth century becomes the beneficiary of a large inheritance. His uncle had settled in Jamaica, where he owned a large plantation. Reb Haykl goes there to claim his inheritance and to his delight finds many Jews who maintain the tradition. A similar theme is the basis of Dik's story published in 1871 under the title Di Yidn in Lite (The Jews in Lithuania). Here, too, a Jew goes to America to claim an inheritance, this time in Louisiana. His prosperity does not cause him to forsake his religiosity.

In addition, Dik was the author of three specifically American tales. Di Shklaferay (Slavery), first published in 1868, was a reworking of Uncle Tom's Cabin in which the master is a Jew and in which other Jewish elements are introduced. A second tale, Der Opekun (The Guardian, 1872), is also set on a Louisiana plantation. The son of a purveyor of religious articles is brought up by a Jewish planter. He marries the planter's daughter and ultimately becomes a jurist who champions the abolitionist cause. Finally, Dik's Di Amerikaner Geshikhte (The American Story), which he began in the eighties and which was published in 1899 following his death, takes us this time to Guadeloupe, an island in the Caribbean. Here a Spanish-Portuguese Jew from Amsterdam settles and prospers. His assistant, who hails from Vilna, becomes his son-in-law. Thus, in all his tales Dik never missed an opportunity to romanticize America and to look to it as a source for the renewal of a more natural and patriarchal life.

Another central figure in early Yiddish letters was Shloyme Ettinger, who died in 1856. His collected works contain an unfinished play published by Max Weinreich and entitled Der Feter fun Ame rike (The Uncle from America). Uncle Binyomin is described as a bankrupt merchant who is left so penniless in America that he does not have enough money for the return passage. This play may be taken to indicate that such occurrences were not infrequent.

Two popular accounts published in the nineties dealt with the unsuccessful returnees and their sad experiences. Ch. A. Yakhnuk
of Bialystok had emigrated to New York and returned to Russia a disappointed man. He published his story, entitled *In Amerike oder fun Amerike* (In America or from America), in Warsaw in 1894. After describing the romantic notions of the immigrants he tells of their despair, which was occasioned by the economic crisis of 1893. There was simply no work to be had and many clamored to be sent home. The author himself relates that he was shipped back in a cattle ship. A similar tale of woe was related by Auser Blaustein in his *Der Pedler in Amerike* (The Peddler in America). The narrator regrets his trip to America and although he must return by cattle boat, he rejoices that he is headed for home. Blaustein was also the author of two humorous treatments of the immigrant experience, *Vikhne-Dvoshe Fort kayn Amerike* (Vikne-Dvoshe Goes to America) and *Vikhne-Dvoshe Fort Tsurik fun Amerike* (Vikhne-Dvoshe Returns from America). Both accounts were reprinted in New York.

Eliakum Zunser, who became known as the People’s Bard, had long been a supporter of the Hibbat Tsiyyon movement and had planned to settle in Palestine. In 1899 he emigrated to America together with his eldest son, spurred on by his fear of arrest and encouraged by letters from Hibbat Tsiyyon activists in New York. Aboard ship he completed his “Columbus un Washington,” an idealist paean of praise for the new land. Each of its stanzas presents a different person who has reason to bless America and its two heroes for the freedom to pursue his or her aims. He parades before us an artisan, an honest burgher, a bankrupt, a young woman, and a Yiddish actor who are liberated from their European shackles. In America Zunser went on to express the mood and feelings of the immigrant masses in such songs as “Die Goldene Land,” “Der Griner,” and “Tsum Pedler.”

Undoubtedly, an important influence in shaping the image of America in the minds of East European Jews was the negative attitude of the Orthodox rabbinate. Leading Orthodox rabbis constantly complained of the lack of qualified religious leadership in America and the laxity of observance among the new immigrants. With the rise of the American Reform movement their opposition became even sharper. The reports by correspondents in the press
regarding scandalous religious behavior in the so-called *treyfa medina* ("impure land") added fuel to the fire.\(^{30}\)

In the Palestine-America debate that followed the outbreak of the 1881 pogroms, Rabbi Mordecai Gimpel Jaffe was among the rabbis who called for emigration to Palestine. In a letter published in *Ha-Levanon* (no. 13, 1882) he stressed that among the reasons why Palestine was preferable to America was that "most of those who go to America forsake their religion, either willingly or unwillingly." In 1882 three leading rabbis, Josef Baer Soloveitchik of Brisk, Shmuel Mohiliver of Radom, and Eliyahu Chaim Meisel of Lodz, issued a joint appeal to the fleeing Russian emigrants to choose Palestine over America because of the rampant irreligiosity in the new land.

Note should also be taken of the Hebrew book *Ha-Yehudim ve-ha-Yahadut be-New York* (Jews and Judaism in New York) by Moshe Weinberger, published in New York in 1887. The author intended his description of religious and spiritual Jewish life in America as a guide for European Jews who might be contemplating emigration to the new land. In one section of the book he addressed his honored readers, the Torah scholars in Russia, Poland, and Hungary, as follows:

> To you we have devoted this chapter: to the poor unfortunate man who in the midst of his sorrows may perhaps have considered coming here to seek a fortune. You have neither money nor tools, neither skills nor work. All you know is that you are a young scholar. So listen to us, and tough it out: stay home.\(^{31}\)

Especially typical of the negative Orthodox approach to America were the writings of Rabbi Israel Meir Ha-Kohen, the Hafetz Hayyim. He saw fit to devote an entire tract entitled *Niddehei Yisrael* (The Dispersed of Israel, 1894) to the religious problems of those who were led to emigrate to far-off lands. He did his best to discourage such a step and urged those who had left to return. He warned especially against bringing up children in distant lands and being misled by economic success. The emigrant should make every effort to return home so as not to exchange an eternal world for a transient one.

Unquestionably, there were many who hesitated to leave for
America because of such exhortations. But the fact remains that the admonitions of the rabbis could not effectively stem the growing tide of emigration reaching these shores. Ultimately it was to be demonstrated that the New World could become a providential land of spiritual as well as physical well-being.

If literature is the reflection of life and its problems, then the Hebrew and Yiddish writings of the immigration era mirror not only the suffering and travail of East European Jewry but also their dreams and hopes and yes—even their misconceptions.

Notes


5. See my monograph on Gersoni in my *Halutziei ha-Sifrut ha-Ivrit ba-Amerikah* (Tel Aviv/Cleveland: Yavneh, 1966), 82-84, 92-95.

6. See my monograph on Soble in ibid., 49-50.


9. For a detailed analysis of the attitude of the Russian-Jewish periodicals see Yehuda Slutsky, *Ha-Ittonut ha-Yehudit-Russit ba-Mefah ha-Tesha-Esreh* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1970). Slutsky noted that 273 articles on the Jews of America were published in *Voskhod* between 1881 and 1889, including fifty-two during 1882, the first year of mass migration. See his note 263 to chapter 11, on page 361.


19. The Hebrew letter was published together with an English translation by Arthur A. Chiel in *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (March 1972): 230–33. Another English translation of this letter is
found in Jacob Rader Marcus, This I Believe: Documents of American Jewish Life (Northvale, N.J.: Aronson, 1990), 115-17.

20. See the survey article by Ben-Ami Feingold, “Sifrut ha-Haskalah Megalah et Amerikah,” in Bein Historiyah le-Sifrut (Tel-Aviv: Dyunon/Tel-Aviv University, 1983), 91-104.


23. See the discussion of this poem in Michael Stanislawski, For Whom Do I Toil?, 198-99.


26. See David Patterson, ibid., on Sirkis, 30, and on Weisbrem, 31-32.


