

# INTRODUCTION & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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German-speaking Jews in the United States constitute an ethnic and religious subgroup of both German Americans and American Jews that maintained a distinct cultural identity in the US throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Generously supported by the Gerda Henkel Foundation and the German Historical Institute in Washington, DC, and its partners, the Abteilung für Jüdische Geschichte at the University of Munich and the Wissenschaftliche Arbeitsgemeinschaft of the Leo Baeck Institute in Germany, this GHI reference guide aims to stimulate research on the history of this important minority group.

“German Jews” emerged as a community with a unique identity in the late eighteenth century. The term was used to describe modern, civil, and acculturated German-speaking Jews in Central Europe who identified themselves culturally as German. The German language was key to the development of this unique identity. Beginning with the Jewish Enlightenment (Haskalah), which provided an important foundation for a new, pluralistic, and decidedly modern Judaism, the use of modern High German served to connect the formerly particularistic community to German civil and intellectual life and culture more broadly.

Modernity and Enlightenment thought triggered a process of civil integration, or emancipation, within the emerging modern states. In the German-speaking territories of Central Europe, however, where territorial divisions made a rational and unified policy impossible, this process was especially difficult. Several states sought to undermine the emancipation of Jews rather than promote their social and political progress. Many Jews were forced to emigrate, resulting in the first mass immigration of German Jews in America. It is estimated that between 1830 and 1914 alone, approximately 280,000 German-speaking Jews came to the United States. Thus, German Jews became a core constituent of American Jewry,<sup>1</sup> transforming the community with their modern understanding of Jewish existence.

This immigration started a lasting long-distance relationship, essentially creating a community that shared values, cultural affiliations, as

<sup>1</sup> Avraham Barkai, *Branching Out: German-Jewish Immigration to the United States, 1820–1914* (New York/London, 1994); Naomi W. Cohen, *Encounter with Emancipation: The German Jews in the United States, 1830–1914* (Philadelphia, 1984); Hasia Diner, *A Time for Gathering: The Second Migration, 1820–1880* (Baltimore/London, 1994).

well as business and family relations across the Atlantic. After 1933, the close ties of this community made the United States the primary destination for German-Jewish refugees from Nazism. Although US immigration regulations had been rather restrictive, after the Second World War the administration allowed many of these refugees into the country. From this mass immigration to the present—for almost 200 consecutive years—the US has been home to the largest German-Jewish community outside of Israel. Thus, the US has been and continues to be a center of German-Jewish legacy and memory.

To be sure, certain aspects of the American German-Jewish community have received some scholarly attention, especially from the perspectives of economic history, German-Jewish history, contemporary German history, intellectual history, and American Jewish history. Yet few studies have examined the role this ethnic group played in interactions and exchanges across the Atlantic—in either direction.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the ongoing history and legacy of the German-speaking Jewish community in the United States have barely been addressed from a transatlantic perspective. Specialists in German-Jewish history have not yet shown much interest in Jews overseas, or in American or American-Jewish history. Thus, empirical studies of the changeability of identity, its persistence, or its hybridity, remain quite rare. In any case, researchers have thus far had only very rudimentary insights into the—clearly very intense—contacts and relationships between “German Jews” in the United States and their Central European “cousins.”

There are similar deficiencies in American-Jewish and American ethnic historical research. Historians in these disciplines throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries demonstrated little interest in transnational research questions, or in differences within individual ethnic groups. They seldom looked for the origins of American-Jewish identity in a complex web of German, Jewish, and American cultural practices, in part because they hardly communicated with other disciplines. The research on German-speaking emigration after 1933, for example, which only recently began in the field of American-Jewish history, often fails to take relevant German publications and contributions made by émigré German-Jewish historians into account.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Herbert A. Strauss, Werner Röder et al., eds., *Biographisches Handbuch der deutschsprachigen Emigration nach 1933*, International Biographical Dictionary of Central European Émigrés, 1933–1945 (Munich/New York, 1980).

<sup>3</sup> Anita Kassof and Avi Y. Decter, Deborah R. Wiener, eds., *Lives Lost, Lives Found: Baltimore's German Jewish Refugees, 1933–1945* (Baltimore, 2004); Herbert Strauss, ed., *Jewish Immigrants of the Nazi Period in the USA*, 7 vols. (New York and Munich, 1979). Herbert Strauss also worked on the handbook on German-speaking emigration.

Finally, research on the diverse population of German Americans has only occasionally dealt with German Jews. We really know very little about the relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish German Americans in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. How did class, education, and political background shape this relationship? To what extent did German Jews maintain their own cultural profile separate not only from other Jews but also from other Germans? How did the growth of German nationalism at home affect the relationship between German Jews and non-Jews abroad? Fortunately, new research into these questions is on the horizon.<sup>4</sup>

The history of German-Jewish migration and emigration has been exhaustively researched,<sup>5</sup> for example, in modern culturally oriented family and business histories.<sup>6</sup> Still, there is a need for studies that address the transatlantic community of German Jews and treat it in terms of “transatlantic modernity,” a concept central in histories of the entertainment industry, theater, film, music, publishing, and new popular culture studies. There is also a need for studies related to economic and business history, examinations of cultural-historical aspects of trade, of international bank connections and financial history, of economic innovation and the modernization of various sectors along “American” lines. These topics relate to the emergence of modern industries, international economic relations, and communications networks that spanned large parts of the Atlantic sphere. In the nineteenth century, especially, this kind of transatlantic commerce would not have been possible without the stabilizing influence of close family relationships. Likewise, a modern, transatlantic Jewish solidarity emerged in this period, promoted by Jewish organizations such as the B’nai B’rith, the American Jewish Committee, the Joint Distribution Committee, as well as Jewish cooperation with German organizations like the Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden or the Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens. Research into the histories of these organizations promises to encourage new interpretations of modern Jewish solidarity and identity.

One factor contributing to the neglect of transnational research in German-Jewish historiography is the highly dispersed and confusing

<sup>4</sup> Sonja Meikel, for example, is working on a dissertation at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, in which she examines this relationship in detail based on the data available for the city of Milwaukee. I would like to thank her for assisting in gathering information on some collections in the Milwaukee area.

<sup>5</sup> Diner, *A Time for Gathering*; Henry Feingold, *A Time for Searching: Entering the Mainstream, 1920–1945* (Baltimore, 1992); Gerald Sorin, *A Time for Building: The Third Migration, 1880–1920* (Baltimore, 1992).

<sup>6</sup> Ron Chernow, *The Warburgs: The Twentieth-century Odyssey of a Remarkable Jewish Family* (New York, 1993); German ed., *Die Warburgs: Odyssee einer Familie* (Berlin, 1994); Barkai, *Branching Out*, 55ff.

state of the source materials. Interested researchers not only have to deal with a community separated by migration but also with different archival systems in several countries. Moreover, many repositories in Germany were seized and transferred to Eastern Europe. Still other records were salvaged and transferred to Israel. Only after 1990 did many organizations begin to exchange archival materials with American institutions, thus creating a completely new landscape for American-based materials. In part, the source material on the history of German Jews in America and other diasporic communities outside of Europe has been insufficiently examined because these “recent” communities for a long time did not view themselves as part of Jewish historical research, which concentrated on Europe and the Mediterranean sphere. In the United States, home to the largest such community, systematic collection efforts within the framework of American-Jewish history did not begin until very late. Often, sources on the history of German Jews are found in collections that focus on German—and not Jewish—migration.

With this in mind, we embarked on this project to establish a sound basis for the systematic study of German Jews in transnational perspective. Scholars wishing to pursue research in this field require information about sources that support this perspective as well as information on institutions that could foster international communication. A few key reference works already exist, such as the very substantial biographical handbook and archival guide on German-speaking emigrants by John Spalek, as well as the publications of Herbert Strauss and Werner Röder.<sup>7</sup> Still, the present guide brings entirely new sources to the attention of researchers, in part because of its broader temporal and spatial scope, and in part because of sources that have only recently been made available to researchers. As members of the generation that emigrated after 1933 have died, numerous private documents have been transferred to public archives. As the existing guides are over two decades old, these new sources have been and continue to be either largely unknown or difficult to find. This reference guide should close this gap in documentation, laying the groundwork for further research into the history of German-speaking Jews in the United States and the transatlantic character of the Jewish diaspora. Not only do German and German-Jewish history stand to gain from this project: it is hoped that the research guide will also benefit American history, especially American ethnic and religious history, as well as the field of Jewish Studies.

<sup>7</sup> John M. Spalek, *Guide to the Archival Materials of the German-speaking Emigration to the United States after 1933* (Charlottesville, 1978); Straus, Röder et al., *Biographisches Handbuch*; Herbert A. Strauss, ed., *Jewish Immigrants of the Nazi Period in the USA*, 6 vols. (Munich/New York, 1978–1987).

The information presented here is based primarily on questionnaires distributed to key repositories in the field of Jewish studies, including national, state, and local archives, as well as those known for their German-American focus. As responses differed considerably in scope and detail, we supplemented these questionnaires by researching online catalogs and printed archival guides whenever feasible. As a result, we have been able to compile a store of information on German Jews and their culture in the United States, from individuals (including a large number of German-Jewish women), organizations, and businesses to culture and the arts. We hope this will spur new interest in this group, so often portrayed as a mere stereotype, that actually offers a broad range of talent, intellect, enterprise, and mobility. To facilitate research in practical ways, we have also included information on fellowships and grants available for specific topics or at particular institutions. Although omissions and errors are inevitable, we very much hope that this guide will prove useful and encourage both new and experienced scholars to reinterpret the history of this important American ethnic and religious group that linked so many worlds and fields of thought.

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