# How Do We Reconcile Wrongdoings in our Past?

American Jews and the Civil War (1861-1865)

**Discovering** American **Jewish History** Through **Objects** 

# 01 TWO PATHS

Free will is granted to all people. If one desires to turn oneself to the path of good and be righteous, the choice is theirs. Should one desire to turn to the path of evil and be wicked, the choice is theirs.

רשות לָכל אדם נתונָה. אם רצה להטות עצמו לדרך טובה ולהיות צדיק הרשות בידו. ואם רצה להטות עצמו לדרך רעה ולהיות רשע הרשות בידו.

Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance, 5:1

# **AN UGLY HISTORY 09**

It's hard to overstate how racist, sexist and jingoistic most American comic strips and comic books have been throughout their history. But expurgating leaves us without a history at all.

Art Spiegelman, artist and illustrator, in Society is nix: gleeful anarchy at the dawn of the American comic strip: 1895-1915. edited by Peter Maresca and Philippe Ghielmetti, published,

# **02 REVOLUTION**

It is a revolution; a revolution of the most intense character; in which belief in the justice, prudence, and wisdom of secession is blended with the keenest sense of wrong and outrage, and it can no more be checked by human effort for the time than a prairie fire by a gardener's watering pot.

Judah Benjamin, letter to lawyer Samuel L. M. Barlow, Dec 9, 1860

# MOVING ON 08

Most American Jews, as a recent poll by the Pew Research Center showed, now position "remembering the Holocaust" at the center of Jewish identity....Most Jews would find it deeply offensive to be told to "move on" from the Holocaust. We should not, therefore, ask the same of our African American neighbors.

Eric K. Silverman, "A Jewish perspective on slavery reparations," The Jewish Advocate, 2015

# 03 SILENCE

Should we choose sides with one of the parties? We cannot, not only because we abhor the idea of war, but also we have dear friends and near relations... in either section of the country.... Therefore, silence must henceforth be our policy... until a spirit of conciliation shall move the hearts of millions to a better understanding of the blessings of peace, freedom and union.

Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, "Silence, our Policy," published in The Israelite, April 19, 1861



Confederate \$2.00 bill, issued December 2, 1862 Weitzman National Museum of American Jewish History, 1984.30.7.1

# FOLLOWING 07 THE PATTERN

Because I believe in the rights of the individual to conduct his business according to his own best judgment, I have continued to operate my restaurants in conformity with the pattern I found when I came to Atlanta.

Charles Lebedin, restauranteur, announcing that his restaurant would now serve integrated clientele, 1964

# **VICTORY IN DEFEAT 06**

The continuous columns of these martial hosts, their victorious cheers... seemed to give utterance to but a single thought, and that was: "This is the Northern army returning from its victory over the South;" but today, as I look back over twenty years of peace and prosperity, I feel that there was victory for the South in the defeat. It cost the lives of many dear ones, but this was the only loss. We are to-day one people - we might have been a dozen.

Septima Maria Levi Collis, A Woman's War Record, 1861-1865, published 1889

# DISBELIEF

How is it possible, one asks oneself in astonishment, that members of a tribe, which for millennia has been oppressed, persecuted, and enslaved, like few here, in America, where they are afforded full freedom, are defenders of the most shameful institution on earth, slavery, and enemies of the struggle for freedom?

Bernhard Felsenthal, report published in Sinai, July 1862

# ARRESTED FOR TREASON 05

Again I ask myself what is my crime? If an ardent attachment to the land of my birth and the expression of deepest sympathy with my relatives and friends in the South, constitute treason - then I am indeed a traitor.

Eugenia Levy Phillips, in her diary while under house arrest, August 30, 1861



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Teacher Guide 7th - 11th Grade

# How Do We Reconcile Wrongdoings in our Past?

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Slavery, an experience etched into Jewish memory and chronicled in the book of Exodus, emerged as the most vitriolic issue in the young nation and defined nineteenth-century politics. Like most national debates, past and present, the debate over slavery split the Jewish community—separating friends and dividing families.

How do we explain why Jews owned enslaved Africans, and that Jews supported and fought for the Confederacy? What does it mean when people in a community make choices that seem to be against that community's values? What if those choices are not just unethical but possibly evil? In our own times, we have seen countless examples of segregation or persecution of minority populations, both in the United States and worldwide.

This lesson encourages students to think through these questions and to explore how we might reconcile wrongdoings in our national past, using as an example Jewish support of the Confederacy. Texts from different perspectives and time periods offer varying responses to these uncomfortable historical realities: developing a strong moral code, empathizing with past actors, moving on from painful experiences, finding the silver lining, and teaching about difficult histories.

# **KEY QUESTIONS:**

- What positions did American Jews take on the critical issue of slavery, and how did they draw on Jewish texts, traditions, and values to legitimate those positions?
- How did the Civil War affect the ways in which Jews viewed themselves as Americans and as Jews?
- How do we react to the ways that American Jews have supported what we now consider to be the wrong side of history?

# **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

# By the end of this unit students will be able to:

- Apply inquiry-based methods to interpreting museum objects and/or primary sources
- Explore a historical question using critical thinking, text analysis, object interpretation, and discussion
- Describe the challenges Jews faced during the Civil War and how they overcame those challenges both in the North and in the South
- Make connections between historical debates and present-day controversies

# Suggested Pre-Lesson Activity

- 1. Begin by showing students the image "The Soldier's Dream of Home."
- 2. Refer to the *OpenBook* Overview and follow the instructions for the "See, Think, Wonder" activity as a class. Consider using the following discussion questions.

# See:

- What is the main figure at the bottom of the image wearing? What is he doing?
- What do you see in the background?
- What figures do you see in the sky?
- What colors do you see?

# Think:

- Who is the main figure? What is happening between the figures in the sky?
- What story does this image tell?
- Who created it? Why do you think it was created? Who was it for?
- How do you think the creators of this image wanted its viewers to feel?

# Wonder:

- I wonder how popular this image was.
- I wonder if this image was a solo piece or part of a series of images.
- I wonder if similar images were produced from the Confederate perspective.
- 3. Explain that this object was produced for wives of Union soldiers during the Civil War and intended to communicate that their husbands, sons, and family members fought both for the Union and for the safety and preservation of their families.

The image was intended to provide a sense of comfort in its depiction of a man sleeping comfortably by a fire and wearing a clean uniform and of soldiers in the background sitting around a fire, playing the flute. In contrast, life on the battlefield was difficult, indicated by the bullet next to the soldier's leg (perhaps a cannonball) and the cannon in the lower-center background. Soldiers often lacked many basic amenities, suffered from diseases and weather, received little medical treatment, and endured the near constant presence of death.

# 4. Using this new information, discuss the print further:

- How does this image portray a civil war?
- What do you think it was like for the families who stayed at home during the conflict?
- What does the title "The Soldier's Dream of Home" mean to you? What might "home" be?
- From whose perspective is the story being told?
- 5. Ask students: How might this painting look different if it were from the Confederate perspective?
- 6. Have students sketch out their own versions of "The Soldier's Dream of Home."

# Procedure

1. Refer to the *OpenBook* Overview and follow the instructions for the "See, Think, Wonder" activity as a class. Consider using the following discussion questions.

# See:

- What is this?
- How much is this bill worth?
- Where is this bill from? When is it from?
- What illustrations do you see?

# Think:

- Why do you think the bill has the illustration in the center?
- Why do you think the bill is from Richmond, Virginia?
- Why do you think this man's portrait is on the bill? Who do you think he is?

# Wonder:

- I wonder why a Jewish man would be on a Confederate dollar bill.
- I wonder why the Confederate states needed their own money.
- I wonder why the bill is worth \$2.00. I wonder if the Union also had \$2.00 bills at that time.
- I wonder why the bill specifies that it is part of the "first series" of dollars.
- 2. If you haven't already, divide students into pairs or trios. Distribute one Talmud page to each group and Student Guide to each student.
- 3. Refer to the *OpenBook* Overview and follow the instructions for the *havruta* study.
- 4. Refer to the *OpenBook* Overview and follow the instructions for the Wrap up activity. Consider using the following discussion questions.

- Can you find two texts that agree with each other? What do you think their authors might say to each other?
- Can you find two texts that disagree with each other? What do you think their authors might say to each other?
- Which text surprised you? Why?
- Read about the experiences of Benjamin (#2), Wise (#3), Felsenthal (#4), Phillips (#5), and Collis (#6). What words do they use to describe the Civil War? How are they similar or different?
- How do you think Spiegelman (#9) would respond to Wise (#3) about his policy of silence
- How do you think Felsenthal (#4) would respond to Lebedin (#7) about his decision to keep his restaurant segregated?
- How do you think Maimonides (#1) would respond to Wise (#3) and Lebedin (#7) about their reactions to the Civil War and to integration protests?

# **General prompting questions:**

- How do you treat people you disagree with? What if that person is a friend? A stranger?
- Do you think it's important to remember our past wrongdoings? Why or why not?
- Do you think it's possible to love a country while being critical of its past or present actions? Why or why not?
- Do you think it's ever appropriate to try and move on from a painful experience? Why or why not?
- Do you think it's ever appropriate to try and find the hope in a bad situation? Why or why not?

# Suggested Post-Lesson Activity

- 1. Review what figures are featured on contemporary American currency. Create a list with their names, their birth and death dates, and for what they are most well-known.
- 2. Consider using the following questions as you discuss the list:
- What do all these people have in common?
- Is there anyone who stands out as different?
- What happens when a country features a person on their currency? Or names a building after them? Or puts up a statue of them in a public place?
- What happens when our opinion about that person changes?
- 3. Put students into small groups to research the ongoing debates about replacing Andrew Jackson on the \$20.00 bill. Students should work together to try to answer the following questions:
- Who initiated this debate and when?
- What are the arguments for replacing Andrew Jackson on the \$20.00 bill?
- What are the arguments for keeping Andrew Jackson on the \$20.00 bill?
- Who is proposed to replace Jackson and why?
- What is the current status of this debate?
- 4. Depending on the number of groups, have each group report out on one or two of the questions.
- 5. Ask: If you could put anyone on American currency, who would you feature and why?
- 6. (optional) Have each group choose one person to feature on American currency and then create a poster showing what the bill or coin would look like. The currency should also include imagery indicating their chosen person's accomplishments.

Major Funding for *OpenBook: Discovering American Jewish History Through Objects* provided by the Covenant Foundation and the Lucius N. Littauer Foundation. Additional support provided by the Koret Foundation; and the Elizabeth and Alan Shulman Education Fund, supported by the Judy and Fred Wilpon Family Foundation.

# **Object Information**

# Confederate \$2.00 bill, issued December 2, 1862

How did a Jewish lawyer end up on Confederate currency? By becoming a state legislator and US Senator, turning down two appointments to the US Supreme Court, and serving in Confederate President Jefferson Davis's cabinet as attorney general, the secretary of war and state. Judah P. Benjamin (1811–1884), has been called by some ontemporaries "the brains of the Confederacy." Others blamed him for the South's defeat. Most described him as brilliant, ambitious, fortunate, and blessed.

In 1861, just before the Civil War began, the Confederate States of America (CSA) began issuing paper currency but no coins because metal was scarce. The bills depicted symbols of the CSA like cotton bales, slaves, and state capitols, as well as mythical gods and goddesses and real people like Benjamin. The Confederacy stopped printing bills in 1864, and at the war's

end some were destroyed as worthless notes and others hoarded, either sentimentally or hoping that, like the Confederacy, they would rise again.

Benjamin was born in the Caribbean to poor Jewish parents, whose ancestors came after the 1492 expulsion from Spain. At age 2 his family moved to Charleston, South Carolina, then at age fourteen he matriculated at Yale Law School but was expelled for "ungentlemanly conduct." Moving to New Orleans without a law degree or money, he worked his way up from odd jobs to professional positions in important New Orleans law firms, eventually specializing in commercial law. Admitted to the bar in 1832, Benjamin associated with New Orleans social elites and national political and business thinkers. His prominence in predominantly Catholic New Orleans led Benjamin to downplay his Jewishness.

To practice law in Louisiana, whose state code was based on French and Spanish law, Benjamin needed to know French. On condition that Natalie St. Martin teach him French, he tutored the sixteen-year-old from a wealthy Catholic



Weitzman National Museum of American Jewish History, 1984.30.7.1

French Creole family. The two eventually married and purchased Belle Chasse plantation, which had 140 slaves. The marriage did not last, and by the 1840s his wife and their daughter, Ninette had moved to Paris. In 1850 he sold the plantation, but in 1852, after his election as senator from Louisiana, he coaxed Natalie back to the US with promises of an expensively furnished home in Washington. Mother and daughter eventually returned to France, leaving Benjamin to sell their home, despondent and humiliated amid unsubstantiated rumors of his impotence and her infidelity.

Despite his prominence in the Confederacy, Benjamin preferred to stay out of the limelight. Jefferson Davis's wife, Varina, wrote in her autobiography that he spent twelve hours daily at her husband's side, helping him shape Confederate policies, strategies, and tactics. According to Benjamin's biographer, Eli Evans, he "served Davis as his Sephardic ancestors had served the kings of Europe ... as a kind of court Jew to the Confederacy. An insecure President [Davis] was able to trust him completely because ... no Jew could ever challenge him for leadership of the Confederacy."

When the South was about to lose the war, Benjamin privately suggested to Robert E. Lee that the South's best, and possibly only, chance to save itself was to emancipate any slave who would fight for the Confederacy. But the idea was rejected when he raised it publicly. Evans wrote, "The South chose...to go down in defeat with the institution of slavery intact." Benjamin, accused with Davis of plotting Lincoln's assassination, fled to England after the South's defeat.

# Appendix A – Historical Background

By the late 1850s, the slavery debate brought the United States to the verge of political collapse. Like their neighbors, Jews became deeply divided. Often, like non-Jewish Americans, their opinions depended on where they lived. Given their own history of persecution, some Jews expressed surprise that their brethren could tolerate slavery. Others supported the institution or remained committed to finding a compromise on slavery that would preserve the Union.

Roughly seven thousand Jews fought for the Union, and about three thousand took up arms for the Confederacy. Like their gentile comrades, many were recent immigrants.

Parents, sisters, wives, and children on both sides rallied to support soldiers and stepped in to fill roles previously held by absent young men. Women organized hospitals and sewing circles. Jewish women's organizations in Northern cities participated in United States Sanitary Commission fairs to raise funds for the war effort, selling handmade goods like embroidery and wax flowers.

Religious leaders argued passionately for their perspectives from the pulpit. Reverend Morris J. Raphall (1798-1868) of Congregation B'nai Jeshurun in New York delivered a sermon explaining that the Bible sanctioned slavery and condemning radical abolitionists for dividing the country. The sermon ignited a heated controversy and provided powerful ammunition for the South.

In Baltimore David Einhorn (1808–1879) called on the Jewish press to "disown and disavow" Raphall's remarks, calling slavery a "rebellion against God." An outspoken abolitionist, he saw freedom and equality for African Americans as fundamental to the establishment of rights for other minorities, including Jews. Isaac Mayer Wise (1819-1900), founder of Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, preferred to accommodate slaveholders rather than face secession. He critiqued Raphall, arguing that Moses had attempted to abolish slavery in biblical times. Wise believed firmly in the preservation of the Union, which led him to criticize Northern advocates of war as "demons of hatred and destruction."

Even as Jews fought against each other on the battlefield, from the pulpit, and in the press, they also came together when necessary to address issues of concern to all American Jews, for example, the 1862 orders by General Ulysses S. Grant (1822-1885) to expel "Jews as a class" from the area under his jurisdiction. His orders grew out of the black-market trade that had sprung up behind the battle lines as Northern forces advanced into Tennessee and Mississippi. Union military leaders focused on the role of immigrant Jewish merchants, conspicuous because of their foreign appearance, even though the illegal trade included many other speculators. The expulsion of Jews by General Grant in December, known as General Orders No. 11, produced a flurry of protest from the American Jewish community, with the Missouri Lodge of B'nai B'rith issuing the first formal complaint to the president; the orders also generated significant criticism in the general media and Congress. Lincoln soon realized that he needed to rectify the situation and quickly overturned the orders, explaining that to "condemn a class is, to say the least, to wrong the good with the bad."

When the Civil War ended, Americans faced the challenge of reuniting and rebuilding the shattered nation. Reconstruction aimed to reintegrate the South into the Union, return it to self-government, and, most importantly, ensure the freedom of formerly enslaved people—all goals that sparked violent controversy. Many Northern Jews traveled South during Reconstruction in search of economic opportunities, sometimes courting the business of former slaves. Efforts to revive the Southern economy did not resolve festering racial tensions, and within a decade Reconstruction had failed as Jim Crow laws reinforced racial segregation in Southern society—and in many parts of the North—and Jews continued to position themselves on both sides of the issue.

# Appendix B – Supplementary Information for Talmud Page

# 01 TWO PATHS

Jewish legal commentator and rabbinic authority Moses ben Maimon (1135–1204), also known as Maimonides and the Rambam, grew up in Córdoba, Spain, under peaceful Muslim rule. When a Berber tribe took control and forced all Jewish residents to choose between conversion, exile, or death, his family chose exile and moved to Morocco, Palestine, and eventually Egypt.

Maimonides studied Torah and Talmud with his father, a scholar, but he also studied sciences like astronomy and anatomy, eventually becoming a physician. His goal with the Mishneh Torah (literally "Review of the Torah") was to give Diaspora Jews access to the breadth of rabbinic literature by producing an easily read and understood, uniform code of law. Spanning fourteen books and almost a thousand chapters, and written clearly, without bibliographic citations or scholarly debates (aspects of the text criticized by some scholars), the Mishneh Torah is still considered one of the most important and innovative Jewish legal texts of all time.

# **02 REVOLUTION**

Caribbean-born Judah P. Benjamin (1811–1884) grew up poor in Charleston, South Carolina. Attending Yale Law School at fourteen but never graduating, he nonetheless opened an extremely successful law practice in New Orleans. A US Senator, Benjamin twice declined Supreme Court nominations. After secession, he served the Confederate president Jefferson Davis as attorney general, secretary of war, and finally secretary of state—the highest government position achieved by an American Jew to that date. When the South surrendered, Benjamin fled to England, resuming a successful legal career.

As owner of a sugar plantation with his wife, Natalie St. Martin, Benjamin had purchased slaves (instead of inheriting them). Considering his slaves to be private property as well as a status symbol, Benjamin fought against any perceived attacks on so-called "private property," such as the Northern states' rejection of the Dred Scott decision, which declared that slaves residing in a free state were not thereby entitled to freedom; however, a few months before the South surrendered, Benjamin made a controversial speech

encouraging the Confederacy to offer enslaved Africans emancipation in return for fighting against the Union.

### 03 SILENCE

One of the most prominent Jewish leaders of the 19th century, Isaac Mayer Wise (1819-1900) was instrumental in establishing the major ideas and institutions of Reform Judaism in America, including the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, Hebrew Union College, and the Central Conference of American Rabbis. Born in Bohemia, Wise immigrated to America in 1846 to lead Congregation Beth El in Albany, New York. There, he introduced such significant reforms as choral singing, mixed seating, and confirmation, all of which created significant controversy and eventually lead to heated arguments and Wise's departure. Wise moved to Cincinnati in 1854 to become rabbi of B'nai Yeshurun, which he built into the largest and most prominent congregation of its time. That same year Wise founded The Israelite, one of the country's first Jewish periodicals. A leading organ for the promotion of reform Judaism, Wise also strongly advocated for Jews' civil and religious rights. In 1874 the periodical changed its name to The American Israelite in order to emphasize its America context. He believed preaching and writing in English would help fulfill his goal of uniting the American Jewish community. His prayer book Minhag America (American Rite) included Hebrew text alongside an English translation. Wise did, however, publish a German-language journal for women called Die Deborah. Wise was a proponent of religious reform and community unity, with a goal of unifying the American Jewish community and creating a union of American synagogues. During the Civil War, he

preferred to accommodate slaveholders rather than face secession.

### **04 DISBELIEF**

Born in Münchweiler, Germany, Bernhard Felsenthal (1822-1908) immigrated to Indiana at age thirty-two. In 1858, he moved to Chicago, where he founded the Jüdische Reformverein, which eventually morphed into Chicago's first Reform synagogue, Sinai Congregation. In 1864, he became rabbi of Chicago's Zion Congregation, another Reform synagogue. Felsenthal believed that Judaism is a culture as much as a religion and that the Torah is a product, rather than the source, of Judaism. He supported individual and congregational autonomy in making religious decisions and was an early supporter of Zionism. Strongly opposed to slavery, he believed that Jews should never condone it, but that complacency was preventing Southern Jews from speaking against it. He published his opinion in Sinai, a German-language newspaper founded by Rabbi David Einhorn, a Reform rabbi living in Baltimore. Einhorn published the monthly paper from 1856 to 1862, where he often wrote articles strongly condemning slavery. In 1861, Einhorn had to flee from Baltimore to Philadelphia after a pro-slavery mob targeted him and his printing press.

# **05 ARRESTED FOR TREASON**

Born in Charleston, South Carolina, Eugenia Levy Phillips (1820–1902) later moved to Mobile, Alabama, with her husband, Philip Phillips. When Philip was elected to the House of Representatives in 1852, the couple moved to Washington, DC. While Philip supported the Union, Eugenia advocated strongly for the Confederacy, assisting spy networks for the Confederate military and secretly providing their army with material aid. Unable to find evidence of Eugenia committing treason, Union troops nonetheless placed her under house arrest in 1861; while at home she kept a diary of her experiences. After three weeks she was freed, and the family moved to New Orleans. Arrested again in 1862 for laughing at a funeral procession for a Union soldier, she was imprisoned for several months and then moved to Georgia.

# **06 VICTORY IN DEFEAT**

Born in Charleston, South Carolina, Septima Maria Levy Collis (1842–1917) married an Irish-American man from Philadelphia. Despite her Southern roots, she chose to support the North during the Civil War. At nineteen, Collis accompanied her husband as he led a Union regiment to the front lines and recorded her experiences in a journal.

# 07 FOLLOWING THE PATTERN

Owner of a small Southern restaurant chain, Charles Lebedin (1901–89) refused to serve African Americans in his Jewish-style Atlanta deli, Leb's, citing segregation laws and his customers' wishes. In 1962 he turned away Harry Belafonte, explaining, "I know how it feels to be discriminated against and I'm a great admirer of Belafonte. But I can't integrate my restaurant because others won't."

In 1963 Jewish protestors targeted Leb's, with signs like "As Jews we protest/SHAME," often facing members of the Ku Klux Klan. Lebedin joined the Klan to protest a dinner celebrating

Martin Luther King Jr.'s receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize. After the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Lebedin fully integrated his restaurant, citing compliance with state and federal laws. As a result, he lost many customers and the restaurant closed soon thereafter.

### 08 MOVING ON

Eric K. Silverman, a professor of anthropology at Wheelock College and of women's studies at Brandeis University, studies ethnic identity, globalization, gender, masculinity, childhood, Judaism, and culture. One of his books focuses on how the clothing choices of Jews communicate their sense of ethnic and gender identity.

In the referenced essay, Silverman writes about a conference he attended in Scotland, to discuss reparations for the Atlantic slave trade. In the article, he gives five reasons for why American Jews should support these reparations for slavery:

- Jews are already involved in modern conversations about reparations, which are typically modeled after the reparations that Germany paid after the Holocaust.
- 2. Most American Jews see "remembering the Holocaust" as central to their Jewish identity and would be offended at being told to "move on," and therefore American Jews cannot say that African Americans should "move on" from slavery.
- Jews and Black people have a parallel history of being seen as "undesirables" in European society.

- 4. While in Europe, Jews were shunned as non-white, in America, skin color trumped religion and Jews slowly received access to whiteness and thus citizenship. Because African Americans never received this benefit and directly suffered from this focus on color, it is a historical debt that American Jews must be grateful for.
- 5. 70% of American Jews annually participate in the Passover seder, which concerns themes of "ancient servitude and emancipation." This makes it easier to sympathize with more recent victims of enslavement and the need for reparations.

Overall, Silverman praises the ways that Germany has worked to come to terms with its difficult past and declares that the United States must do the same.

# **09 AN UGLY HISTORY**

Born in Sweden, American cartoonist Art Spiegelman (b. 1948), immigrated to the United States in 1951, settling in Queens, New York. Despite his parents' wish that he become a dentist, he chose cartooning, where he often addresses social issues, and in 1992 won a Pulitzer Prize for his graphic novel, *Maus*, an autobiographical work exploring his relationship with his father, a Holocaust survivor. Many credit Spiegelman for legitimizing comics as a literary form, one he believes best represents how the mind processes information.

Student Guide

# OPEN OS

# How Do We Reconcile Wrongdoings in our Past?

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Discovering American Jewish History Through — Objects

NOTES		

Read the texts around the image. Beginning in the upper left corner, follow the commentary counter clockwise. Read each text out loud and discuss it with your partner. Make sure you carefully look at the image and use its details to support your opinions. You can choose whether to use the following questions to guide your discussion:

## 01 TWO PATHS

The Mishneh Torah (literally, "Review of the Torah") is a fourteen-volume explanation of Jewish law written by Moses ben Maimon (1135–1204), also known as Maimonides and the Rambam. Maimonides regarded the Mishneh Torah as his masterpiece; still influential today, it is considered one of the most important and innovative Jewish legal texts of all time. Concerned that life in the Diaspora had made it difficult for Jews to have access to or understand the breadth of rabbinic literature, Maimonides wanted to produce a thorough code of law that could be easily read and understood. He wrote it in clear language and did not use any bibliographic citations or present debates among scholars.

- 1. How did this passage define free will? How did it suggest responding to those who turn to the path of evil? How would you respond?
- 2. How do you differentiate between the path of good and the path of evil?
- 3. Is it possible that one person's path will be considered as "good" by some people and as "evil" by others? How? Which path do you think Judah Benjamin chose? Why?
- 4. Have you ever had to make a difficult moral choice? How did you know which was the path of good? Looking back, do you think you made the right decision?

NOTES		

# **02 REVOLUTION**

Born in the Caribbean, Judah Benjamin (1811–1884) grew up in Charleston, South Carolina, and became a successful lawyer in New Orleans, Louisiana. He was elected to the U.S. Senate and twice declined nominations to the Supreme Court. Confederate president Jefferson Davis asked Benjamin to join the Confederate government, where he served as attorney general, secretary of war, and finally as secretary of state—the highest government position achieved by an American Jew to that date. For a time, Benjamin and his wife, Natalie St. Martin, owned Belle Chasse, a sugar plantation whose work force included enslaved Africans.

- 1. First, draw a picture of what it might look like to put out a prairie fire with a gardener's watering pot.

  Next, label the different parts of the picture using words from the first part of Benjamin's text. What do you think the fire represents? The watering pot?

  How, if at all, did Benjamin suggest fighting the fire?
- 2. Why do you think Benjamin associated secession with "justice, prudence, and wisdom?" What do you think Benjamin meant by "wrong and outrage?"
- 3. How does it make you feel to see a Jewish man hold such a prominent position in the Confederacy and be featured on their money? How does it make you feel to learn that he and other Jews enslaved people?
- 4. Have you ever felt like you have been wronged? Have you ever felt outraged? Why? What did you do in response?

# 03 SILENCE

One of the most prominent Jewish leaders of the 19th century, Isaac Mayer Wise (1819-1900) founded Hebrew Union College and helped establish Reform Judaism in America. Born in Bohemia (modern day Czech Republic), Wise immigrated to America in 1846. He advocated for religious reforms including choral singing, mixed seating, and confirmation. He also strove to unify the American Jewish community and creating a union of American synagogues. During the Civil War, he preferred to accommodate slaveholders rather than face secession.

- 1. What reasons did Wise give for remaining silent during the Civil War? Can you think of any other reasons why someone would prefer not to take sides in a conflict?
- 2. What do you think staying silent actually accomplished?
- 3. Read text #1 and remember the two paths Maimonides believed people could choose. Which path do you think Wise chose when he decided to remain silent?
- 4. Have any of your friends or family members ever disagreed about an important issue? How did you react? Did you take sides or try to remain neutral? What happened? Do you think it is ever appropriate to stay silent during a conflict? Why or why not? What are the consequences of silence?

### 04 DISBELIEF

Bernhard Felsenthal (1822–1908), born and educated in Germany, came to America in 1854 at age thirty-two. He first settled in Madison, Indiana, then moved to Chicago, where he worked first as a banker and then as rabbi for two synagogues. Felsenthal strongly identified as a Zionist and played an important role in popularizing Reform Judaism in America. He strongly opposed slavery and believed that Jews, by nature, should never condone it.

- 1. Underline the words that Felsenthal used to describe Jews. Can you think of any holidays or Torah passages that support his description? How did he describe the treatment of Jews in America?
- 2. What was Felsenthal's stance on slavery? How did he explain his opinion?
- 3. How do the other authors on the Talmud page answer Felsenthal's question? Do they agree with each other or give different answers?
- 4. Have you ever had a friend or family member support something you strongly disagreed with? What was it? How did you react?

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# **05 ARRESTED FOR TREASON**

Eugenia Levy Phillips (1820–1902) was born in Charleston, South Carolina, lived for a time in Mobile, Alabama. In 1853, after her husband's election to the House of Representatives, she moved with him to Washington, DC. Despite her husband's support for the Union, Phillips aligned herself with the South and even spied for the Confederate Army—an activity for which she was twice arrested.

- 1. What language did Phillips use to describe the South?
- 2. In your own words describe why Phillips believed she was arrested. What reason do you think the Union forces who arrested her would have given?
- 3. Which do you think is stronger: loyalty to your friends and family or your sense of what is right and wrong?
- 4. Do you think it is acceptable to arrest a person for their beliefs? Why or why not? Are there any exceptions?

# **06 VICTORY IN DEFEAT**

Septima Maria Levy Collis (1842–1917) grew up in Charleston, South Carolina,and married an Irish-American man from Philadelphia. Despite her Southern roots, she chose to support the North during the Civil War. At nineteen, Collis accompanied her husband as he led a Union regiment to the front lines and recorded her experiences in a journal.

- 1. Collis wrote that "we are today one people" instead of "a dozen." What do you think this means? How did the South's defeat contribute to this?
- 2. When Collis reflected on her experiences during the Civil War twenty years later, would you describe her perspective as positive or negative? Why? Do you think someone from the South would have a similar or different perspective?
- 3. Have you ever tried to find hope in a bad situation? Why? Were you successful?

NOTES	07 FOLLOWING THE PATTERN
	Jews did not unanimously embrace the civil rights movement. Charles Lebedin (1901–1989), owned Leb's Restaurant in downtown Atlanta, Georgia. He refused to integrate his establishment until the 1964 Civil Rights Act required him to do so. In 1963, Jewish protestors targeted Leb's with signs like "As Jews we protest/SHAME," often facing members of the Ku Klux Klan. Lebedin joined the Klan to protest a dinner celebrating Martin Luther King Jr.'s receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize. After the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Lebedin fully integrated his restaurant, citing compliance with state and federal laws. As a result, the restaurant lost its few remaining customers and closed soon thereafter.
	1. What reason did Lebedin give for keeping his restaurant segregated? What do you think Lebedin meant by following a "pattern" in Atlanta? Where do you think that pattern came from?
	2. Lebedin said that maintaining a segregated restaurant was "according to his own best judgment." Why do you think he made that judgment?
	3. What argument could you have made to Lebedin to convince him to integrate his restaurant?
	4. Have you ever been affected by peer pressure? What did you do?
	O8 MOVING ON
	Eric K. Silverman, a professor of anthropology at Wheelock College and of women's studies at Brandeis University, studies identity and culture. One of his books focuses on how the clothing choices of Jews communicate their sense of ethnic and gender identity. He also wrote this article, titled "A Jewish Perspective on Slavery Reparations."
	Reparations – money paid or help given to those who have been wronged, typically because of a war, genocide or other tragedy caused by humans
	How are reparations a response to painful past wrongdoings? Do you think that descendants of

NOTES	Confederates, or white people in general, owe reparations to African Americans? Why or why not?
	2. Why do you think a society should try to find reconciliation after a painful tragedy? Do you think this is possible? Why or why not?
	3. What does it mean to move on? Do you think it is even possible to do so?
	09 AN UGLY HISTORY
	Art Spiegelman (b. 1948) is an American cartoonist who won the Pulitzer Prize for his graphic novel <i>Maus</i> , which explored his relationship with his father, a Holocaust survivor. Spiegelman immigrated to the United States with his parents in 1951 and settled in Queens, New York. His parents wanted him to be a dentist, but he was determined to become a cartoonist. A lifelong advocate for cartoons as a form of literature, Spiegelman often addresses significant social issues in his work.
	Expurgate – remove objectionable material; censor
	Jingoism – an extreme form of patriotism that encourages violence against foreigners
	1. Why do you think people might want to ignore the discrimination represented in some American comics? What connection can you make between ignoring this history and Silverman's description of "moving on" in text #8?
	2. What do you think are the potential consequences of ignoring this history?
	3. Do you think this quotation could apply to all American history? Why or why not?
	4. The \$2.00 bill featuring Judah Benjamin is on view at the National Museum of American Jewish History. If the Museum chose not to display this, visitors might never know it existed. How might that censorship influence visitors' understanding of Benjamin's role or of Jewish support for the Confederacy?

Major Funding for *OpenBook: Discovering American Jewish History Through Objects* provided by the Covenant Foundation and the Lucius N. Littauer Foundation. Additional support provided by the Koret Foundation; and the Elizabeth and Alan Shulman Education Fund, supported by the Judy and Fred Wilpon Family Foundation.



TITLE SOLDNERS DREAM OF HOME.

The Soldier's Dream of Home by Max Rosenthal; chromolithographic copy, Louis N. Rosenthal, 1864 Weitzman National Museum of American Jewish History, 1989.36.1 Dedicated in honor of Ron Rubin's birthday by Lyn and George Ross