


Jews with Pharaoh's Values:
Why Southern Jews Fought and Died for the Confederacy


By
Brian Abrams


Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
Department of History of Vanderbilt University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for Honors in History

April 2011

On the basis of this thesis
defended by the candidate on
April 29, 2011 we, the
undersigned, recommend that the
candidate be awarded
Highest Honors
in History:







*To my grandparents, Hal and Nancy Abrams, my
grandmother, Ninoo, and my great-grandmother, Vivian
McMahon. You have inspired me more than you will ever
know.*

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Acknowledgements

I have been working towards the completion of this thesis for nearly a year and a half, and a number of people have helped me along the way. First of all, I need to thank my thesis advisor, Professor David Wasserstein, who has worked with me throughout the entire process. His insights and advice have been invaluable as a historian, a writer, and a person. I cannot thank him enough for the amount of time he has spent helping me by meeting with me and reading my work. I have never received such detailed and thoughtful feedback on my writing, which says a lot about his commitment to his students and to producing quality works of history. Professor Wasserstein brings a remarkable level of professionalism and dedication to the study of history that I can only hope is in some small way reflected here.

Professors Arleen Tuchman and Richard Blackett have also helped me and my classmates finish these projects. Professor Tuchman worked with me during junior year to focus on a specific research question, to understand the components of writing a thesis, and to learn how to be a historian. I must thank her for somehow managing to set the bar high for our seminar, forcing us to meet her standards, while keeping our spirits up and inspiring us to want to do better. She taught me to “hit up the line.” Professor Blackett directed my seminar throughout senior year. He has pushed us to the finish line. He too demands quality. Professor Blackett has provided seemingly endless insights about how to write history that is interesting, yet more importantly makes a sound argument. His humor has helped all of us get through the most work-intensive times, and he always seems to find the weak spots in our work.

I could not have done all of this research by myself either. The staff at the American Jewish Archives was incredible. It was so impressive how willing they were to help out an undergraduate student. In particular Kevin Proffitt, the Senior Archivist for Research and Collections, assisted me with locating sources within the archive and answering all of my questions about visiting it. Another valuable reference was Lewis Regenstein, who happily shared with me his research on southern Confederates. His perspective and thoughts helped me to better understand how people today look back on the Civil War and how those connections can be so powerful.

Completing this thesis (and most anything else that happens in Department of History) would have been immensely more difficult without the help of Mrs. Heidi Welch. I do not want to even think about how slowly and haphazardly this process would have been with her coordination, organization, and time.

I also want to thank Professor Carol Atkinson from the Department of Political Science for graciously agreeing to be my outside reader. I do not think she realizes how uplifting her enthusiasm has been.

Finally, I have been lucky to have had a number of outstanding history teachers since I was in middle school. I have learned more lessons from them than I can count, and I will always be indebted to them for their work and love of history. They include: B.J. Hayes, Emily Stevens, Helen Smith, Michael Gannon, Thomas Schwartz, and Sarah Igo. I could never have reached this point without all of these people.

Introduction

It was the spring of 1862 in the fields of West Virginia. A group of twenty young men gathered in a log hut. They had cider, lamb, chicken, some herbs, and a brick. The herb that the men ate was so bitter that they drank more than four cups of cider each, until they became so drunk that one thought he was Moses, another Aaron, and the third Pharaoh. It was a moment of laughter and fun in a dark time. These men were Jewish Civil War soldiers celebrating Passover in the midst of the most violent conflict America had ever seen.¹

In 1861 all-out civil war embroiled the United States of America, dividing the country and forcing Americans to choose sides. Many decided to join the newly raised armies in the North and South. Prior to 1860 the number of Jews residing in the United States had risen steadily. The Jewish population in the U.S. increased by about 100,000 people from 1850 to 1860.² Between 1820 and 1880 250,000 Jews immigrated to America.³ When war broke out they faced the same difficult decision as did every other American. Where would their loyalties lie? In the South most Jews supported the Confederacy, and some even enlisted to defend the South.

By 1861 Jews lived all across the South. They lived in prominent cities such as Charleston, Richmond, Savannah, and New Orleans and small cities like Cartersville, Georgia. Some of the Jewish families had been in America since before the Revolution of 1776. Others had just arrived. Some were rich; some poor. Southern Jews, along

¹ J.A. Joel, *The Jewish Messenger*, XIX, No. 13, p. 2, March 30, 1866, <http://www.jewish-history.com/civilwar/union.htm>.

² Jewish Virtual Library, "Jewish Population of the United States," <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/usjewpop1.html>.

³ Hasia R. Diner, *The Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 79.

with millions of others, actively participated in the Civil War. We know what they did and where they did it. The question remains why they did it and how much they were tied to the Confederacy. What motivated them to put their lives on the line? How did Jewish soldiers differ from other Civil War enlistees in terms of motivations for fighting? What common themes, if any, tie together the rationale of Jews for defending the Confederacy? The question why they fought may very well not even have a single answer, given the multitude of enlistees, but discovering some of those motivations may enhance our understanding of Civil War soldiers.

Historians have already done extensive research on Civil War soldiers, including their reasons for fighting. In attempting to explain the motivations of some three million participants, these scholars examine hundreds of primary sources, most notably personal letters and diaries but also autobiographies, recollections, and newspaper accounts. They use a large number of sources in order to create as broad a picture of Civil War soldiers as possible. In most cases historians have treated the question why men enlisted as part of their larger studies on these men, usually spending only a chapter or so on this question and often simultaneously discussing why they continued to go into battle. Bell I. Wiley wrote the first and foremost works that started the study of Civil War soldiers as a separate topic: *The Life of Johnny Reb* (1943) and *The Life of Billy Yank* (1952). Perhaps the most notable of the most recent works is James McPherson's *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (1997) and James Robertson's (a student of Wiley's) *Soldiers Blue and Gray* (1988).

From the thousands of documents these authors have examined, they have put forward a number of explanations for why soldiers decided to fight in the Civil War.

McPherson's major argument is that they had ideological motivations: they fought for their ideals.⁴ The Confederates wanted autonomy and states' rights. Northerners sought to preserve the Union formed in 1776. Slavery was also a critical issue. Reid Mitchell suggests that most white southerners benefited from slavery even if they were not slave owners, and many of them also feared a potential slave revolt. As a result, he says, many white southerners fought to protect the institution of slavery.⁵ However, historians are not in agreement over the importance of slavery to individual foot-soldiers. Robertson argues that for the most part only those who owned slaves fought to keep them.⁶ In the Confederacy another motivation to enlist was to defend one's home and one's family. Robertson and Mitchell agree that Confederates believed they were defending their homeland from an enemy that was going on the offensive.⁷

Historians discuss many other potential motivations for enlistment. At the beginning of the war many got caught up in the initial excitement and rage.⁸ According to Robertson and Steven Woodworth many young men looked at the military as a source of adventure and excitement, believing that they, personally, would emerge unharmed.⁹ Some soldiers joined to collect the paycheck, although there is disagreement in the literature over how much this mattered. McPherson mostly discounts its importance, while Aaron Sheehan-Dean and to a lesser extent Robertson think that it had a significant

⁴ James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 18, 21.

⁵ Reid Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers* (New York: Viking Penguin Inc, 1988), 4.

⁶ James I. Robertson Jr., *Soldiers Blue and Gray* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 9.

⁷ Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers*, 3, 8-9. Also Robertson, *Soldiers Blue and Gray*, 9.

⁸ McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 16.

⁹ Steven E. Woodworth, *The Loyal, True, and Brave: America's Civil War Soldiers* (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2002), 8-9. Also Robertson, *Soldiers Blue and Gray*, 8.

effect.¹⁰ Ambition and the chance for command may have attracted some to the military.¹¹ These motivations are broad and could apply to anyone in either army; they do not take into account the differences that any group like the Jews might have.

The two foremost modern books on Jews during the Civil War are Bertram Korn's *American Jewry and the Civil War* (1951) and Robert Rosen's *The Jewish Confederates* (2000). These books discuss the range of experiences of Jews in America. The most recent major work is Jonathan Sarna and Adam Mendelsohn's *Jews and the Civil War: A Reader* (2010), an anthology of essays. These three books discuss several common themes: anti-Semitism, Judah P. Benjamin, slavery, Jews on the home front, and Jews at war. None get into an extensive discussion of why some Jews decided to fight for the Confederacy, although Rosen does outline a few key reasons. In fact, the essay from Sarna and Mendelsohn's book about Jewish soldiers is from Rosen. These sources do, however, address issues that may assist in learning about why Jews fought.

The quantity and quality of research done by these historians, about both Jews and other Civil War soldiers, is remarkable. McPherson and Robertson paint wide-sweeping yet detailed pictures of what it was like to serve in the Civil War. Rosen and Korn explain the major events and most prominent examples of Jewish involvement, while providing numerous examples of ordinary Jews. They also debunk some of the arguments of lesser scholarship produced by amateurs in their field.

The real shortcoming in the literature comes in the lack of communication between these sections of Civil War history. The countless books on the soldiers do not

¹⁰ McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 5. Also Robertson, *Soldiers Blue and Gray*, 8-9 and Aaron Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought: Family and Nation in Civil War Virginia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 30-31.

¹¹ Woodworth, *The Loyal, True, and Brave*, 2.

focus much on minority groups, much less one as small as Jewish Confederates. Korn predates nearly all of the scholarship that followed the Bell Wiley model. Rosen's book comes the closest, but he is faced with an impossible task: to discuss in two chapters about Confederate Jewish soldiers the same things that McPherson does in an entire book. Despite the daunting task, he does an admirable job and has sifted through an unbelievable number of letters, diaries, family papers, and memoirs to do it.

Very few works attempt to tell the entire story of American Jews during the Civil War. Korn's classic book and to some extent the new reader from Sarna and Mendelsohn are two of the only examples that do. Even Rosen only takes on half of the country. Most of the works are extremely focused, usually on specific places or people. There are articles, like Mark Greenberg's, that are devoted exclusively to Savannah. There are also several biographies of Judah P. Benjamin, who served in the United States Senate and later in the Confederate Cabinet. Diaries and other personal accounts are also popular. Perhaps one of the best collections of primary sources comes from Jacob Marcus Rader, who also founded the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati. The third volume of Rader's *Memoirs of American Jews* contains excerpts from a number of memoirs and diaries that tell the personal stories of the conflict. Two of the most well-known publications of primary sources are *The Civil War Diary of Clara Solomon* and *Last Order of the Last Cause*.

Amazingly, the number of surviving primary sources from Civil War soldiers is quite large. A very large percentage of them were literate, and they left thousands upon thousands of letters. Finding sources that discuss Jewish troops in the Confederacy adds a level of specificity and difficulty to the search for appropriate evidence. These

documents are less numerous and many of the soldiers did not start writing letters until they were already enlisted, so they would have little need to discuss why they enlisted in the first place.

Jewish soldiers have not been studied exclusively. Scholars of the Civil War have already created the framework for analyzing Civil War soldiers. They use specific examples from as many primary sources as possible in order to illustrate general trends and elucidate variations. These types of studies aim to learn about not individual groups but soldiers as a whole. In *Jewish Confederates* Rosen begins to examine southern Jewish fighters in this way. He discovers what they did in battle, what roles they played, where they served, and more. Rosen shows that southern Jews almost entirely supported the Confederacy.¹² What remains unclear is why.

There are many reasons why it would be surprising to find Jews in the Confederate army. A significant proportion of the Jews living in the South in 1861 had ties to places other than the American South. As immigrants, they still had ties to their homelands in Europe, yet some of them fought for the Confederacy. Anti-Semitism occurred in several cases in the South, which may have alienated some Jews or could have made other white southerners suspicious of Jews as a group. The southern cause was also indelibly linked with slavery, and yet people who every year celebrate their escape from the Egyptian Pharaoh fought in an army that aimed to preserve the institution of slavery.

The best estimates say that about two thousand Jews became Confederate soldiers although it is possible that the actual number was up to three thousand. Other totals have been suggested ranging from 1,000 to 12,000. Rosen gives the most complete

¹² Robert N. Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 14.

explanation of the varying counts. It was first reported by Joseph Goldsmith in 1890 that in a meeting in 1864 Adjutant General Samuel Cooper claimed that there were between 10,000 and 12,000 Jews serving in the Army. However, he counted based on their names and likely miscounted because it was impossible for him to distinguish between Jews and non-Jewish Germans serving in the military based on name alone. Simon Wolf in his book, *The American Jew as Patriot, Soldier and Citizen*, which now serves as the basis for the Jewish Civil War Veterans Database, counted 1,340 Jewish Confederates. His collection of names in 1895 unsurprisingly has been shown to be incomplete as he could not reach or communicate with every community across the South.¹³ The total number is unclear, but the contributions of these southerners were not insignificant. Many served as typical infantry soldiers, while others were officers and key administrators.

A mere surveying of primary documents will not reveal enough to resolve the difficulties in determining what motivated southern Jews to fight. However, a closer reading of the documents may help to illuminate some of the thought processes behind Jews' decisions to enlist in the Confederate Army. Comparison to the already established literature on Civil War soldiers offers a reference point for analyzing the motivations of southern Jews. The goal is to discover why they fought. In the process insights into immigration, assimilation, the power of ideology or self-interest, and the importance of religious differences in the American Civil War may be discovered.

¹³ Ibid., 161-162.

Chapter One: Why Confederate Soldiers Fought

The Civil War was the bloodiest conflict in American history. Over three million people, men and women, took part in it. More than six hundred thousand were killed. Many more were wounded. The conflict began quickly. On April 17, 1861 Confederates in Charleston, South Carolina launched the opening volley, attacking Fort Sumter. By July 21, only three months later, both sides had mobilized thousands of troops to battle at Bull Run in Virginia.

A huge excitement swept across the country as the conflict began and caused many to enlist. James McPherson argues that the northern call for troops ignited a “rage militaire” amongst the Confederates, where war was the talk of every town.¹ According to McPherson, Lincoln’s steps to raise an army, even before the attack on Fort Sumter, pushed the Border States firmly onto the side of the Confederacy because they refused to fight their neighbors and perceived Lincoln as taking the offensive. James Robertson presents a similar analysis suggesting that new recruits responded with zeal and enthusiasm to the outbreak of war.² Do these analyses hold for southern Jews? Heyman Herzberg was a merchant from Cartersville, Georgia. In his memoirs Herzberg writes of the reaction to the beginning of the war, “I was living in Cartersville, Georgia, when the war broke out in 1861. The excitement was very great, and every young man was expected to join some military organization.”³ Herzberg’s diary shows that even in a

¹ James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 16-17.

² James I. Robertson Jr., *Soldiers Blue and Gray* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 11.

³ Heyman Herzberg, *Diary of Heyman Herzberg of Civil War*, in *Memoirs of American Jews: 1775-1856*, vol. 3, ed. Jacob Rader Marcus (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955), 116.

small town (only 15,000 people lived in the entire county⁴) the news of war roused the population. This evidence of initial excitement gains weight when we note that in 1862 Herzberg and his two brothers left the Confederate Army. Once their preliminary enthusiasm wore off, they had insufficient reasons to continue fighting. Other factors for or against fighting increased in relative importance for the Herzbergs as the “rage militaire” subsided. Herzberg’s statement also reveals something about the public nature of military recruitment. It provides evidence for the impact of social pressure and expectations on enlisting that will be discussed later.

More evidence exists of how the excitement affected southern Jews. Philip Philips, a prominent Jew from Charleston, South Carolina, who was living in Washington D.C. in 1861, tells of the exhilaration of his two young daughters.

These two young girls of amiable disposition wrote under the excitement, which then pervaded the public mind like two viragos. If they could read them now, they would themselves laugh heartily at their extravagant expressions. It is no less amusing to note the extravagant excitement of the provost marshal, who gravely endorses the tattle of these two children as “rank treason.”⁵

Certainly the buzz in the nation’s capital may have exceeded what occurred in the rest of the country, but it remains remarkable that two young girls found themselves so tied to the South. Their father on the other hand, did not share their enthusiasm, as he opposed secession. What does this reveal? Several differences existed between Philips and his daughters that could show why people chose to favor the Confederacy or not. Age could have factored in with the youth being more excitable and naïve. Economics could have

⁴ University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center, *Historical Census Browser*, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/php/county.php>.

⁵ Philip Philips, *A Summary of the Principal Events of My Life*, in *Memoirs of American Jews: 1775-1856*, vol. 3, ed. Jacob Rader Marcus (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955), 152.

mattered as the father conducted business in Washington D.C. with many Unionists. Because they did not have economic ties to any regions, perhaps the relative importance of family ties that connected them to the South was greater for the two girls. However, age cannot be a sufficient explanatory variable as the political elite (Philips' age) pushed the conflict forward. Economics also has some difficulties as an explanation because many people had business across the Mason-Dixon Line. Instead, the realization that there were conflicting ties to both the North and South for many people better reflects the complexities of loyalty at the outbreak of the Civil War. The Philips family shows the high levels of excitement that preceded the conflict but also the difficulties in pinning a single cause as the explanation for why people supported the Confederacy.

What sort of excitement would cause men to volunteer for military service? In the most powerful examples, such as Heyman Herzberg's, men were swept up in the news of the day and were unwilling to be left behind. How could they refuse to participate in the most momentous event of their lives? The anticipation of the conflict that spread like wildfire across the South at least made the idea of military service salient to everyday people. The increasing probability of war and the initiation of conflict at Fort Sumter made the idea and the prospect of enlisting real: it forced them at least to consider the possibility and to articulate to themselves a reason not to fight for the Confederacy. Those who did not serve had to justify their refusal not only to themselves, but also to the communities in which they lived. Furthermore, did the South's potential soldiers even have the ability to make fully reasoned decisions in a time of great upheaval and to consider the potential costs?

Most people had serious misconceptions about the nature of war. McPherson argues that Civil War soldiers, like most American soldiers in any war, had romanticized visions of battle perpetuated by stories or legend or Hollywood (in later wars, of course).⁶ This point reinforces other arguments made earlier about how life as a soldier differed from expectations and the shock that soldiers faced when they finally entered into battle, which was not the grand adventure they imagined it to be. The diary of Clara Solomon, a sixteen year old Jewish girl living in New Orleans when the Civil War began, shows what people thought war would be like. In June of 1861, she writes that she expects a “*great* battle,” during which the battalions from Louisiana will “render a good account of themselves.”⁷ Clara describes the possibility as someone might talk about a sporting event, a simple exercise or competition. At this point the North and the South had merely mustered many thousands of troops and were preparing to engage. Most people would have been like Clara – unable to articulate a realistic version of fighting to themselves or others.

Besides the ferocity and violence, the length of the Civil War also surprised the soldiers and nearly everyone else. At the onset of the war, most people on both sides believed that the war would be over quickly, with little bloodshed, and that their side would win. Scholars largely agree that the majority of people in the South and the North alike demonstrated optimism and confidence. Sheehan-Dean points to the short-term enlistment periods created early on, lasting three months in the Union and one year in the

⁶ McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 32.

⁷ Clara Solomon, *The Civil War Diary of Clara Solomon: Growing Up in New Orleans, 1861-1862*, ed. Elliott Ashkenazi (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 33.

Confederacy as evidence that both sides believed they would have an easy victory.⁸ Lewis Leon expressed similar hopes, saying that in his youth he expected “the speedy termination of the war, and our independence.”⁹ Believing that the war would end quickly made enlisting much easier. If the fighting stopped soon then soldiers would face less risk, lessening the downside to signing up. Many of the soldiers believed that they had simply embarked on an exciting adventure for a few months and that they would quickly return home.

Regardless of their predictions about the duration of the war, individuals generally believed that they would survive the conflict. Woodworth argues that most people assumed that they, personally, would emerge from battle unharmed.¹⁰ Even those who anticipated casualties rarely entertained the idea that they would become a casualty. This notion of invincibility made the risk of signing up appear minimal. Civil War soldiers were quickly disabused of this idea as they fought their first battles.

Not everyone exhibited optimism about the likely length of the conflict. Philip Philips, the southern Unionist from Charleston, refused to believe that the North would let the South secede easily. The claims by southern leaders that secession would be bloodless astounded him.¹¹ Philips was not alone. Salomon de Rothschild, of the Jewish banking family, traveled extensively in the United States during the outbreak of the Civil War. From his outsider position, as a member of the Paris branch of the powerful banking family, he perceived a major war coming, saying that “the southern states will

⁸ Aaron Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought: Family and Nation in Civil War Virginia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 36.

⁹ Lewis Leon, *Diary of a Tarheel Confederate Soldier* (Charlotte: Stone Publishing Company, 1913), 225.

¹⁰ Steven E. Woodworth, *The Loyal, True, and Brave: America's Civil War Soldiers* (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2002), 8-9.

¹¹ Philips, *Principal Events of My Life*, 151.

defend their independence at the cost of their last cent and of their last drop of blood.”¹²

After observing the preparations for war in Louisiana, full of excitement and hope, de Rothschild predicted:

Members of one and the same family are going to find themselves opposed to each other, old friends will cut each other's throats, and rivers of blood will be shed. The North and the South are going to hurl themselves upon each other like two locomotives driven at full steam and meeting on the same track. There will be no gratification except the brutal passion of vengeance, no result except death and destruction. When the two sides have exhausted all their resources, when they have seen the flower of their youth perish, when they have squandered millions in that bottomless abyss, the Civil War, they will find themselves right back where they started and, furthermore, with a gulf between them.¹³

De Rothschild presents a fairly accurate forecast of the course of the Civil War, which proved to be anything but easy.

These examples appear to create the impression that reasonable men should have known, and did know, that the secessionist conflict would reach catastrophic proportions. However, that depiction should not be accepted. First, it was a prediction and later approval of it is guided by hindsight. The fact that we know what did happen allows us to look for the signs that indicated what would occur. Secondly, Philips and de Rothschild were a tiny part of the Jewish elite. They had access to greater information than most people, and they had a better education, which allowed them to process what they observed better. Philips in particular had close friendships with a number of the top members of Lincoln's Cabinet. Thirdly, Sheehan-Dean's evidence about the short-term enlistments proves convincing because they were set up by government officials who

¹² Salomon de Rothschild, letters to Nathaniel de Rothschild, in *Memoirs of American Jews: 1775-1856*, vol. 3, ed. Jacob Rader Marcus (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955), 103.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 109.

presumably knew, or thought they knew, the situation best. Why would they not take advantage of the excited population to enlist them for a longer term if they knew the war would drag on? Instead, we should conclude that the Civil War reached proportions never before seen by Americans and that the average person more closely resembled Lewis Leon with his optimism and youthful eagerness.

Even if some people had the foresight to realize that the war would drag on for years, almost nobody could have known how violent, deadly, and ferocious the fighting would become. The casualties of the Civil War reached levels never before seen by Americans. Clara Solomon provides evidence for this in her diary entry for July 22nd, 1861. On this day Clara records her reaction to the early reports of casualties at Bull Run. She expresses shock at the “*immense slaughter on both sides.*”¹⁴ These reports included a total of 10,000 casualties for the two sides that in truth were vastly higher than the reality. However, even these exaggerated estimates would pale in comparison to the magnitude of later battles at Antietam, Gettysburg, and Shiloh. Despite her youth, Clara’s perceptions should not be dismissed. Her family was well connected in New Orleans, and they had contact with many people involved in the military situation. She was well read, educated, and stayed up to date on the latest news. In all likelihood her response resembled that of many in the Jewish community to which she belonged. Her surprise at the casualties at Manassas is also startling because she had often expressed more pessimistic views in her diary. After witnessing her first funeral as a result of the war, Clara worried that this would merely be the first of many more to come.¹⁵ She could never have anticipated to what extent that premonition would come to pass. The same is

¹⁴ Solomon, *The Civil War Diary of Clara Solomon*, 84.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 77.

true of the men who actually enlisted in the Confederate army: in many ways they had no idea what they were getting themselves into.

The excitement surrounding the onset of war and the optimistic belief in an easy victory created a powerful combination that propelled many southerners, including Jews to enlist. Edwin Marks of New Orleans joined the Louisiana Battery and served as a private. He was one of seven Jews serving in the Battery.¹⁶ Years later he would write about the state of New Orleans just before the war, describing just how the city became swept up in the enthusiasm for war. He says of New Orleans, “It is in a wild whirl of excitement. Each day adds to it.” The telegraph and newspapers were full of talk about war and were “surrounded by groups of excited men, busily discussing the latest developments.” At the same time predictions abounded about how easily the South would win. Common refrains included “if there is war it will only last 90 days,” “One Southern man is worth 10 yankees,” and “The Northern heart is not in it – they won’t fight the South.”¹⁷ The intrigue of battle pulled southern men towards enlisting, and their supreme optimism made it seem like a low-risk choice to fight for the Confederacy. Such views were widespread and certainly affected Jews in the South like Edwin Marks.

If they were wrong about the possible level of violence, were southerners’ other expectations of military service accurate? Some have argued that in going off to war they sought adventure. Thus, these young men would have seen military action as an exciting experience for themselves. According to Robertson and Steven Woodworth southerners believed that military life offered a chance for adventure, heroism, and to see the world.

¹⁶ Jewish American History Foundation, *Jews in the Civil War*, <http://www.jewish-history.com/civilwar/default.htm>.

¹⁷ Edwin Marks, Civil War, Miscellaneous file, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Many of them left their hometowns for the first time.¹⁸ In many instances this could easily have applied to southern Jews. Lewis Leon, a clerk in a dry goods store from Charlotte, North Carolina, enlisted in the Charlotte Grays within a week of the attack on Fort Sumter along with many other men no older than twenty-one. Their first experiences were “full of joy and pleasure” as everywhere they stopped people cheered them and “the ladies showered [them] with flowers.”¹⁹ Leon was shocked when he learned that a soldier’s work mostly involved digging and cutting down trees. The drudgery and hard work of soldiering was unexpected by these new recruits, who anticipated action and a chance at heroism. Southerners, swept up in the fervor of war, mistakenly believed that military service offered an opportunity to fulfill their desire for adventure and an outlet for their patriotic excitement.

Beyond simple adventure, participation in the army allowed soldiers to travel and to visit vast expanses of the country that they had never seen before. Evidence for this comes from Clara Solomon’s diary. In 1861 she records that the family received a letter from her father, who was off to join the troops. In the letter he tells them about “the loveliest and most picturesque regions of the Country,” which according to Clara revealed an uncharacteristic enthusiasm in her father.²⁰ Like many of the other larger Jewish populations in the South, the Solomons in New Orleans lived in a very urban setting. Traveling all over the United States would have been an entirely new and greatly appreciated experience for many of these people.

For all the talk of adventure, this incentive should not have affected some Jews as much as it did others, like Lewis Leon, because they were immigrants. Would a chance

¹⁸ Woodworth, *The Loyal, True, and Brave*, 8-9. Also Robertson, *Soldiers Blue and Gray*, 8.

¹⁹ Leon, *Diary of a Tarheel*, 1-2.

²⁰ Solomon, *The Civil War Diary of Clara Solomon*, 109.

at travel and to see the world really have much pull for someone who had once lived in Europe and immigrated to the United States? Isaac Hermann, a French Jew, came from France to Georgia several years before the Civil War. In his memoirs Hermann appears as someone whom adventure would entice to join the army. However, even Hermann views himself as the exception, noting that being a Frenchman made him an oddity for the First Georgia Regiment.²¹ It was more unusual for him to be a French immigrant than to be Jewish. The Jewish Civil War Veterans Database shows that ten other Jews served in the First Georgia Regiment.²² Given the curiosity exhibited towards the Frenchman by his fellow soldiers, it is likely that few immigrants who had arrived recently enough still to be distinguishable as immigrants fought alongside the native Georgians. Even so, many immigrants, especially Germans and Irish, did fight in the Civil War. However, some other motivation besides adventure-seeking seems more plausible. Furthermore, the Germans and Irish mostly lived in the North, where other arguments such as ideology probably played a part in their decisions to participate. The ideology of southern Jews and their ties to the South will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

Immigrants, like Hermann, who had recently arrived in the United States and had not yet established themselves, may have had other reasons for fighting. Historians disagree about the impact of money on the recruitment of soldiers. Both the Union and the Confederacy promised enlistees a salary for fighting and they often offered bonuses too. In a study of Virginia, Aaron Sheehan-Dean suggests that the poorer members of

²¹ Isaac Hermann, *Memoirs of a Veteran Who Served as a Private in the 60's in the War Between the States* (Atlanta: Byrd Printing Company, 1911), 14-15.

²² Jewish American History Foundation, *Jews in the Civil War*, <http://www.jewish-history.com/civilwar/default.htm>.

society would have eagerly accepted a steady paycheck for military service.²³

Considering the ongoing excitement and the romanticized ideas of war many people had, this probably seemed like a great opportunity. They were to be paid for going on a heroic adventure across the country. McPherson, though, discounts the role of money in motivating most new recruits in the Confederacy because of the small amounts of money involved and the unreliability with which Confederate soldiers received the pay owed to them.²⁴ Robertson also concludes that, in the Confederacy, the prospect of pay had a small effect.²⁵ However, would new recruits have anticipated the Confederate government's inability to pay? McPherson's argument, especially, relies on an evaluation of how effective the Confederacy was at fulfilling its promises. It does not make a claim about the perceptions of southerners at the beginning of the conflict. Given that most southerners believed they would win easily, the upswing in patriotism, and McPherson's own arguments about the strong ideological belief in the Confederacy it seems unlikely that the soldiers who joined would not have expected to receive their pay. The question still remains whether the money was enough to incentivize someone to put his life on the line.

For Jewish immigrants military service offered a way to make money in a difficult economic time. While he is not a Confederate, Louis Gratz's story provides a fitting example. Gratz arrived in New York in 1861 and found that the only way he could make a living was by peddling. He barely had enough money for rent and food. Gratz says that when war broke out "Business came to a standstill; all public works were

²³ Sheehan-Dean, 21-23, 28. Also, Reid Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers* (New York: Viking Penguin Inc, 1988), 27.

²⁴ McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 5.

²⁵ Robertson, *Soldiers Blue and Gray*, 8-9.

stopped, and ... all the young folks flocked to the colors.”²⁶ Military life provided Gratz with a goal, money, and ironically stability after a war that created massive instability. While this example comes from an immigrant in New York, it can reasonably be expected that this scenario played out less frequently in the South. Because many immigrants went to New York first it is likely that the poorest would not have been able to continue southward. Thus, the South should have had fewer poor immigrants to entice into the army with the promise of pay and the situation that Louis Gratz encountered would have occurred less frequently. This is not to say that there were not poor Jewish southerners enticed into fighting for money, just that the total should have been smaller than it was in the North.

There is still evidence that money influenced people’s decisions to serve in the Confederate Army. The poor were more likely to fight because of the need to make money, while others sacrificed other potential earnings. Financial factors in some cases provided a reason to join and in others a reason to stay away. Heyman Herzberg, for example, left the Confederate army by hiring a substitute to take his place. For the merchant, Herzberg, fighting for the South promised less money than he believed he could make in trade. Once his brothers decided to quit, he followed them.²⁷ However, since Herzberg based his decision on economics, this likely implies that he had weaker ties to the Confederacy in other ways. It is difficult to see how someone who ideologically believed in the Confederacy or identified strongly with the South would decide to quit because of money alone. Herzberg appears to be on the fence about

²⁶ Louis A. Gratz to Aron and Emma Kurtzig, November 25, 1861, in *Memoirs of American Jews: 1775-1856*, vol. 3, ed. Jacob Rader Marcus (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955), 230.

²⁷ Herzberg, *Diary of Heyman Herzberg*, 117.

military service: he joined and eventually left when the opportunity arose, but he did not desert. The actions of his brothers and monetary concerns serve as a tiebreaker.

Furthermore, as discussed earlier, Herzberg's reversal demonstrates the power of the initial uproar of excitement in causing enlistments and how easily someone could be caught up in that fervor.²⁸

On the other hand, many people, including Jews, ended up fighting for the Confederacy in order to make more money than they would have otherwise. The issue of substitutes generated a lot of debate, as it often resulted in the poor fighting for the large plantation and slave-owners. Maier Einstein, for example, enlisted as a substitute only after receiving a bounty. Even though he was a native southerner he did not join the military until 1862, when he was paid a \$50 bounty. Einstein received the bounty as compensation for replacing someone else in serving the Confederacy. Jews do not appear to differ very much from the population at large in terms of their motivation for seeking payment. The promise of financial reward was a non-starter for wealthy Jews, while for those less well off a mere \$50 represented a very substantial sum – enough to risk their lives for.

The story of Louis Gratz, the peddler from New York, also demonstrates another motivation for joining the army: ambition. With the patronage of a number of officers and other powerful people, Gratz became an officer, was promoted as high as major, and was offered him the rank of colonel if he remained in the army after the war. However, Gratz had tasted life living in East Tennessee with the upper class, and he left the army to

²⁸ Herzberg left the Army in 1862 and he was not alone. While accurate statistics of desertion rates in the Confederacy are not available, other evidence shows that desertions increased throughout the year as the Union Army moved into more states on the Western front. See: Mark A. Weitz, *More Damning than Slaughter: Desertion in the Confederate Army* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 52-54.

become a lawyer and married into an influential Tennessee family. Ironically, Gratz settled in the South even though he had fought in the armies of the North and only came to Tennessee as part of the army. Military service acted as a vehicle for Gratz's ambitious journey from peddler to lawyer. Several other examples of similar advancement can be seen in both the Union and Confederate armies. In his work chronicling the involvement of American Jews in the Civil War, Simon Wolf provides a number of examples of Jews who advanced rapidly through the ranks of Civil War armies. Edward S. Solomon joined as a second lieutenant, was promoted to Brigadier General, and President Ulysses S. Grant appointed him Governor of the Washington Territory. General David De Leon from South Carolina became the first Surgeon General of the Confederacy. In the Union Army Frederick Knefler achieved the highest rank of any American Jew. Enlisting as a private, he became a Brevet Major General. Charles Hayman and Albert Luria Moses fought for the Confederacy and were recognized for their bravery.²⁹ At the beginning of the war in both armies, wealthier and more powerful men usually gained appointments or won elections as officers because they organized units. However, as the war wore on, the armies became more like meritocracies, where the best and most able earned promotions. Military service created the potential for upward social mobility for many members of society, especially immigrants and the poor.

In contrast to Gratz and other poor Jews who advanced through their service in the army, many Jews were already wealthy and held prestigious positions. New Orleans had a particularly powerful group of Jews. Judah P. Benjamin, a U.S. Senator and later

²⁹ Simon Wolf, *Selected Addresses and Papers of Simon Wolf* (Cincinnati: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1926), 83-92.

member of the Confederate cabinet, Henry M. Hyams, the lieutenant governor, and Edwin W. Moise, Speaker of the House of Louisiana, all lived in or near the city. These men, and others like them, would not have needed military service for money or for social status. Nonetheless, Hyams did serve as an officer in the Confederate Army, perhaps in order to advance himself further. Benjamin, clearly, did not need to serve in the war because he directed it.

The secondary literature on Civil War soldiers makes some mention of ambition as a reason to enlist, which seems logical, but the evidence is inconclusive. Woodworth gives examples of how the chance for advancement created fights over new recruits because the number of recruits someone brought in determined the rank their leaders could receive upon enlisting.³⁰ This system gave an advantage to certain people, not based on how well or bravely they might lead troops into battle. As casualties mounted and soldiers and military leaders gained experience, they learned the importance of quality leadership. McPherson says that adoptive Americans aimed to gain personally by fighting, which would also prove their loyalty and gain them recognition and honor.³¹ However, Woodworth's and McPherson's explanations and presentations of primary source evidence on this issue remain sparse.

Ambition could still be an explanation for someone like Louis Gratz, but the impact of it on an individual's decision is still unclear even for Gratz. Did men like Gratz join the military in order to advance themselves or was it merely a benefit discovered later? After all it would be risky to try to fulfill one's ambitions based on skills as a soldier, since most had never experienced combat or life as a soldier. Then again, if the

³⁰ Woodworth, *The Loyal, True, and Brave*, 2.

³¹ McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 25.

earlier arguments about people's perception of war are correct, then perhaps it is not impossible to see how that decision was made. McPherson's argument also raises the question whether immigrants felt the need to prove their loyalty. Discussion of whether southern Jews needed to prove themselves will appear in Chapter Three. Even if they did not experience this motivation, southern Jews still lived in the South and faced the impact of an attack by the Union.

Civil War scholars have little disagreement over the fact that southerners fought to defend their homes and their families. McPherson describes the feelings of southerners as an emotional tie and territorial link to a homeland that demanded protection.³² For Mitchell being on the defensive unified the Confederates early on in the conflict in a way that did not occur in the Union. Furthermore, he says that the Confederates' strongly negative views of people from the North generated an even greater reason to fight back.³³ For Robertson Confederates fully believed that they were fighting to save their homelands as well as to preserve their own liberty.³⁴ Regardless of their other affiliations with the Confederacy, as long as they believed an invasion was coming, Jews too had an incentive to fight in defense of their homes. This defensive motivation would hold true regardless of ideology or other reasons to fight. Even bystanders would have faced the threat of collateral damage. Salomon de Rothschild, in his travels in the South, observes that as the North prepared to fight, the South gained strength. According to him, when the states of the east and west offered troops and money to the federal government for the preservation of the Union, Virginia immediately seceded and Kentucky and Tennessee followed right along. Even before that the other

³² McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 21-22.

³³ Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers*, 3, 8-9.

³⁴ Robertson, *Soldiers Blue and Gray*, 9. Also, McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 19-20.

states prepared vigorously for the defense of their homeland.³⁵ It was the threat of invasion that caused the Border States to side with the Confederacy. These states already sympathized with the cotton states, and, according to de Rothschild, the offensive preparations of the Union pushed them over the edge. They decided that they would rather fight the industrial North than join them in an offensive war. The next chapter will continue the discussion of why Jews desired to defend the Confederacy for reasons other than their own self-interest in preventing an invasion.

A multitude of powerful reasons induced people to volunteer to fight in the Civil War. The ones discussed in this chapter applied at least to some extent to people across the country, North and South. They are generic, not specific to any geographic location or any group of people. These motivations affected the Jews in the Confederacy just as they affected the non-Jews. The primary sources studied here, while only a small sample, reveal many similarities between the Jewish population and southerners as a whole. However, as we have seen, there are some small differences. Being an immigrant uniquely changed the effect of certain factors such as the desire for adventure, the need for money, or the pursuit of ambitious goals. For the most part, though, religion did not affect the extent to which the motivators discussed in this section applied to people. Jews did not differ terribly much from everyone else in terms of how the reasons examined so far affected them. The last factor discussed was about defending the homeland. One could reasonably ask why and whether Jews and especially immigrants viewed the Confederacy as their home. Why would men like Isaac Herman not just return to their places of origin or move on elsewhere after having spent so little time in the Confederacy? The next chapter will turn toward this discussion, attempting to shed some

³⁵ Rothschild, letters to Nathaniel de Rothschild, 106-107.

light on the assimilation of Jews into the South and to learn to what extent they identified themselves as southerners.

Chapter Two: Why Southerners Fought: Slavery and Ideology

When someone asks what caused the Civil War, two responses are the most likely: slavery and states' rights. Oftentimes people present these as a forced choice, either slavery or states' rights triggered the conflict but not both. This is a heated debate that still has an impact on American society today, in large part due to the intense personal and one-sided beliefs that people on both sides of the issue hold. In the early 2000s the state of Georgia hotly debated replacing its state flag that was modeled on the Confederate Battle Flag, and in many ways the issue rested upon interpretations of the Civil War. Was the flag merely a commemoration of the Civil War or was it a symbol of the fight for slavery and racial discrimination? The responses to an article by Lewis Regenstein, an Atlanta Jew, published in the Atlanta Journal Constitution at the time demonstrate the intense anger over the issue. Regenstein attempted to explain why some white southerners celebrate their ancestors for their bravery in protecting their homes against overwhelming odds and doing so in the terrible conditions of a Civil War army. The responses were not pretty. One compared him to "neo-Nazi apologists denying the Holocaust," while another labeled him a defender of slavery and treason.¹ The debate over the origins of the Civil War elicits emotional responses and still affects the United States, but to what extent do such positions have support in historical fact?

Did ideology or belief in slavery influence Jewish participation in the Civil War on behalf of the Confederacy? The debate over the causes of the Civil War has consumed an untold number of pages. The following discussion does not seek to resolve this debate. Instead, it aims to analyze the power of slavery and ideology in terms of one,

¹ Lewis Regenstein, "Our Sacred Duty": *The Moses Family & The War Between the States*, Unpublished Manuscript, 7-8.

small subset of the population in the 1860s. The newspaper exchange with Regenstein shows the importance of remembering the level of analysis – individuals might differ from the state in their motivations for action. The reasons why the South seceded may be different than why individuals felt the need to fight. The former deals with macro-political issues: the latter with specific people. The question to be answered here is whether and how much did ideology and slavery play a role in southern Jews' decisions to enlist in the Confederate army. This is not to place these Jews in the camp of states' righters or defenders of slavery, though they may belong in those groups. Instead, a more complex picture emerges of the divisions among American Jews, especially with regard to slavery.

While slavery was certainly a major political issue, did it affect the ordinary southerner when he thought about enlisting? James Robertson points out that a tiny percentage of the Confederate populace owned slaves, and only the upper classes directly derived economic benefits from slaveholding. According to Robertson this contradicted the beliefs of Northerners who thought that most southerners fought for slave ownership.² Reid Mitchell, on the other hand, argues that other southerners benefitted economically from the slave system. He says that slavery tied together the social and economic systems of the antebellum South.³ Both historians may be correct. Only a limited white upper-class enjoyed the wealth necessary to own slaves, but other whites may have gained from this system. The question is whether the non-slaveholding whites realized how slavery affected their interests economically or even socially. Robertson implies that, if these people were not the direct beneficiaries of slaveholding, they would not

² James I. Robertson Jr., *Soldiers Blue and Gray* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 9.

³ Reid Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers* (New York: Viking Penguin Inc, 1988), 4.

perceive the indirect effects. Aaron Sheehan-Dean sees a society that is tied together by and invested in slavery, causing men to fight for it. His evidence is well presented and documents multiple ways in which Virginian society was linked by slavery.⁴ Perhaps, however, these types of arguments are too complex. Would the average Virginian farmer have been able to connect the dots to reach the same conclusion, that he should put his life on the line so that other people could own slaves?

What was the link between Jews and slavery? In order to determine how the debate between historians like Robertson and Sheehan-Dean applies to groups of Jews, who were scattered across the South, the relationship between Jews and slaves must be examined. Just as in the South more generally, only a very small number of southern Jews owned slaves and even fewer were planters.⁵ Some Jews owned slaves and came to rely heavily on the institution for support. Eleanor Cohen, who lived in Virginia near Richmond, for example, writes of her great regret at the Confederacy losing the war because it led to the abolition of slavery. She believed strongly in the tradition and was “accustomed to have them[slaves] wait on” her.⁶ The same belief held true elsewhere. In Savannah Jews owned slaves and supported the institution, especially Jews who were born in the South.⁷ Wealthier Jews, socialized in southern tradition, were just as likely to support slavery as other whites in the same economic class.

⁴ Aaron Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought: Family and Nation in Civil War Virginia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 17-18.

⁵ Bertram W. Korn, “Jews and Negro Slavery in the Old South, 1789-1865,” in *Jews and the Civil War: A Reader*, eds. Jonathan D. Sarna and Adam Mendelsohn (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 88-89.

⁶ Eleanor H. Cohen, “Champion of the Lost Cause,” in *Memoirs of American Jews: 1775-1856*, vol. 3, ed. Jacob Marcus Rader (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955), 368.

⁷ Mark I. Greenberg, “Becoming Southern: The Jews of Savannah, Georgia, 1830-70,” *American Jewish History* 86, No.1 (1998):61, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/american_jewish_history/v086/86.1greenberg.html.

Slavery may be an instance where differences existed between people born in the South and immigrants to America. Generally, immigrants would have been poorer and unable to purchase slaves. Isaac Hermann and Louis Gratz provide examples of immigrants who came to America only a few years before the Civil War broke out. They (if Gratz had lived in the South) would have been unable to afford a single slave and would not have been invested in the slaveholding system, if Robertson is correct that only slave owners perceived a benefit from the system. Hermann, however, still fought for the Confederacy and enlisted early on. Belief in slavery was not a necessary condition for fighting for the Confederacy.

American Jews were not a nationally organized group politically and had no official or standardized view of slavery. In fact, the issue was hotly debated among the rabbis, who preached about religious doctrine for their congregations. They disagreed over interpretations of Biblical verses dealing with slavery and whether or not the Bible allowed for the continuation of the institution. Somewhat ironically, a New Yorker delivered one of the first and most well-known biblically-based defenses of slavery on a national day of prayer. Dr. Morris J. Raphall, who was also a rabbi, declared to the abolitionists “that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Job...all these men were slaveholders, does it not strike you that you are guilty of something very little short of blasphemy?”⁸ Raphall’s sermon in early 1861 was a major event. Salomon de Rothschild mentioned the address and the positive reaction to it in his letters back home.⁹ Rothschild’s commentary adds an important layer to consider when examining the rabbis’ debate.

⁸Morris J. Raphall, in Bertram W. Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1951), 17.

⁹ Salomon de Rothschild, letters to Nathaniel de Rothschild, in *Memoirs of American Jews: 1775-1856*, vol. 3, ed. Jacob Rader Marcus (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955), 100.

These speeches were meant for public consumption and to sway other Jews. Their aim was to communicate with the public like Rothschild. They were not merely academic exercises but engaged the major political problem of the day.

Other rabbis vehemently disagreed with the point Raphall made, arguing that the Bible did not condone the institution of slavery. While Raphall relied on a very literal reading of the Bible, these rabbis, most notably David Einhorn of Baltimore, looked for the message and principles of the Bible. Einhorn argued that it was an affront to God “to enslave human beings created in His image, and to degrade them to a state of bestiality having no will of their own.”¹⁰ His position directly answers Raphall. The divisions between the rabbis in many ways reflected the divisions of the rest of America.

Einhorn and others also saw a connection between rights for slaves and rights for Jews. They believed that if blacks could be excluded, then it was only a matter of time until other minority groups were also excluded. If the rights of slaves were not secured, then the rights of Jews would not be safe.¹¹ This argument stands in stark contrast to that of many of today’s historians of the antebellum South. These historians argue that the social system dominated by slavery secured the social status of Jews. Because of the jobs, education, and behavior of Jews their “whiteness” was never questioned, which helped them integrate into southern society.¹² It is important to note that Einhorn was a rabbi from the North. From his perspective, he could not see how slavery changed the social dynamics of the South, but he could see how free blacks were treated in the North. Perhaps Einhorn worried about the fate of the Jewish minority because he witnessed the terrible conditions experienced by supposedly free people in northern cities. Southern

¹⁰ David Einhorn, in Korn, *American Jewry*, 20.

¹¹ Korn, *American Jewry*, 21.

¹² Greenberg, “Becoming Southern,” 62.

Jews may not have shared these concerns because slavery so downgraded the blacks that everyone else felt relatively secure and because the southern Jews were so few in number that they were not a potential threat to the native whites, in the same way that slaves were seen to be.

Several Northern rabbis disagreed with Einhorn's support for the abolition of slavery. One of the most prominent was Isaac Mayer Wise, the rabbi-editor of *The Israelite*, a weekly newspaper. Although no supporter of slavery, Wise did not believe it was his job to preach about the morality of slavery. Instead, he focused his few political stances on his disapproval of the abolitionist movement. He blamed the abolitionists for tearing the Union apart in an attempt to grab political power for themselves.¹³

Additionally, Wise believed that what he called fanatic abolitionists, led by Protestant priests, would turn on any group who disagreed with them and that the Jews would be next.¹⁴ The slavery issue set off a wide range of feelings and reactions that pitted the rabbis of the North against one another.

Were the southern rabbis similarly divided? In the South many rabbis supported the Confederate cause and slavery. After the fall of New Orleans to Union forces, Rabbi Jacob Koppel Gutheim was forced to leave the city because he refused to take the oath of allegiance to the Union.¹⁵ According to Bertram Korn, many Confederate rabbis supported the institution of slavery. He provides several examples of rabbis who owned slaves and spoke out in favor of it. Reverend J.M. Michelbacher, a rabbi in Richmond,

¹³ Isaac Mayer Wise, *The Israelite* 8, no. 16(1861):124, <http://www.americanjewisharchives.org/wise/attachment/3115/TIS-1861-10-18-001.pdf#search=slavery>.

¹⁴ Korn, *American Jewry*, 27.

¹⁵ Isaac Leeser, *The Occident* XXI (1863): 140-141, in "The Jews of the Confederacy," *American Jewish Archives Journal* XIII, No. 1(1961):40, http://www.americanjewisharchives.org/journal/PDF/1961_13_01_00.pdf.

believed that God gave slaves to the Confederacy and that the work of the abolitionists made a slave insurrection more likely.¹⁶ His words reflected the fears of the general public, while giving them religious authority.

The policy of abolition entered the thoughts of white southerners, creating fears of a slave revolt and of freed slaves. Many whites were willing to fight to protect the institution of slavery because they feared that talk of abolition would incite the slaves to revolt.¹⁷ The idea of a slave revolt terrified whites, who feared that slaves would take revenge on their masters. Even those who did not own slaves feared the presence of large numbers of slaves in their area. They believed that by fighting to preserve slavery they could keep the blacks subjugated and less of a threat.¹⁸ Many members of society, including Jews, shared these anxieties. Clara Solomon, the teenage girl from New Orleans, reports that exactly those worries swept through the town in early July of 1861. A friend reported to her “that there was a great commotion in town last night – There were some fears of a *servile insurrection*.”¹⁹ Ironically, the Confederates may have made themselves more susceptible to a slave revolt by sending such a large proportion of the able-bodied men off to war, leaving the women and children behind with the slaves.

There was certainly not an outpouring of support by Jews for enslaved blacks. Consider this statement by a minority group that is always wary of being discriminated against. In 1861 the congregation of Jews at Shreveport, Louisiana sent an angry letter to Samuel M. Isaacs, editor of the journal *The Jewish Messenger*, a similar publication to the weekly *The Israelite*. Displeased that Isaacs had started discussing political issues

¹⁶ Korn, *American Jewry*, 29.

¹⁷ Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers*, 4.

¹⁸ Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought*, 34.

¹⁹ Clara Solomon, *The Civil War Diary of Clara Solomon: Growing Up in New Orleans, 1861-1862*, ed. Elliott Ashkenazi, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 57.

and advocating for the Union, the Shreveport Jews cancelled the congregation's subscription and derided *The Jewish Messenger* as a "black republican paper."²⁰ Both the words "black" and "republican" were used as an insult and were directed at a fellow Jew. The Shreveport Jews demonstrate the disdain that many southerners, Jews included, had for slaves.

Disagreements between northern and southern rabbis about the implications of religion or of scripture for slavery are not surprising. The regional lines between the rabbis over slavery demonstrate that with a few notable exceptions their views differed little from those of the people around them. Religious beliefs did not seem to dictate beliefs about slavery. People could find support in the Bible for their beliefs about slavery, no matter which side of the issue they agreed with. Being Jewish did not change people's views of or support for slavery.

In many ways Judah P. Benjamin, the Jewish Senator from Louisiana and member of the Confederate Cabinet, exemplifies what we know of the beliefs about slavery of individual, every day Jews. First off, it is difficult to determine Benjamin's actual beliefs about slavery. This is especially true because he destroyed all of his personal papers at the end of his life. The secondary literature does, however, come to a sort of consensus about the Senator's position. Bertram W. Korn advances the most extreme position on Benjamin, calling him a "champion of slavery."²¹ On closer inspection this appears less than true. Korn cites Robert D. Meade's book, *Judah P. Benjamin: Confederate Statesman*. All Meade shows, however, is that Benjamin defended the institution of

²⁰ Samuel M. Isaacs, *The Jewish Messenger*, June 7, 1861, in "The Jews of the Confederacy," *American Jewish Archives Journal* XIII, No. 1(1961):40, http://www.americanjewisharchives.org/journal/PDF/1961_13_01_00.pdf.

²¹ Korn, *American Jewry*, 16.

slavery against abolitionist northerners in legal debate. His argument is only a legal one; he defends slavery as not violating the “law of nations,” while refusing to make an argument about whether it violated “natural rights.”²² Meade does not show Benjamin making any normative claims about the value of slavery; he merely defended its legality.

Several other historians make similar arguments about Benjamin. Benjamin was a member of the upper class in New Orleans and owned slaves. He was said to have treated his slaves very kindly and to have seen slavery as “a necessary evil.”²³ As early as 1850, though, Benjamin freed all of his 140+ slaves, and as a Senator from the South he was stuck defending “an institution that he found personally repugnant.”²⁴ These same historians often compare Benjamin to Thomas Jefferson, suggesting that the social beliefs of the day left him to deal with slavery as a critical component of the South’s culture even if personally he believed it was wrong. His tacit acceptance of slavery in the debate, discussed by Meade, probably resembles the attitudes of many other Confederate Jews, who for the most part seemed apathetic towards the institution, while uncaring towards the plight of its victims.

Regardless of their personal feelings about slavery, Jews of the 1860s at minimum understood the issue’s importance in cleaving the country into two. Isaac Mayer Wise’s writings in *The Israelite* demonstrate this point of view. Salomon de Rothschild appears to agree with him. In one of his letters back home, he describes the American two-party political system as driven by extremists in the form of secessionists (ultra-Democrats) and abolitionists (ultra-Republicans). He labels slavery as “the point of departure” for the

²² Robert D. Meade, *Judah P. Benjamin: Confederate Statesman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1943), 100-102.

²³ Robert N. Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 63.

²⁴ David Massie, “The Brains of the Confederacy,” *American History* 40, Iss. 2(2005):61.

Civil War.²⁵ Slavery dominates the political debate in Rothschild's observations. In his eyes it is slavery that set the scene for the division of the Democratic Party, Lincoln's election, and other controversies over tariff policy, ultimately leading to the outbreak of the Civil War.

Alfred Mordecai presents similar arguments to Rothschild in his letters to his brother. Mordecai was a Major in the United States Army when the Civil War broke out. He was born in the south but had served in the Army for decades by 1861 and had married a woman from Philadelphia. When it came time to choose sides, Mordecai was torn in two directions. Instead of choosing to fight for the Union or the Confederacy, the munitions officer resigned his post and moved into civilian life.

In early 1861 Mordecai wrote a series of letters to his brother explaining his decision. He discussed slavery as one of the causes of the Civil War, but it did not factor into his decision to fight or sit the war out. In a letter dated March 17, 1861 Mordecai explained that he believed slavery was a constitutional right but that secession represented a rash decision, pushed by-out-of control extremists. He suggested that they could have maintained slavery through the political process and that protecting slavery was not worth the dissolution of the Union. While he dismisses the importance of slavery as an issue to himself, Mordecai demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the debate.

I do not think it necessary to begin at the beginning and to give you my opinion on the abstract questions of the moral effect, or the social or political advantages and disadvantages of the institution of African slavery, which has produced the convulsion that is now rending the Union to pieces.

²⁵ Rothschild, letters to Nathaniel de Rothschild, 105-106.

To any common sense appreciation of the subject it appears to be sufficient to know that at the formation of our government slavery existed all over the land and was expressly protected by the Constitution from being interfered with by any authority but the states themselves...

But I regard the existence of the Union so essential to the welfare and respectability of our country, at home and abroad, that I am unwilling to give up the hope that both sides may yet see the utter madness of the course on which we are rushing to our ruin.²⁶

In a later letter the former Army major suggested that he would support the abolition of slavery but that it could not be forced: the slave owners had to be willing to give it up.

Even though he disagreed with the idea, it was not worthy destroying the Union to Mordecai²⁷ Moredecai acknowledged the power of the debate over slavery and believed it was tearing the country apart, but for him it had little bearing on whether or not he would personally participate in the Civil War.

The letters from Major Mordecai demonstrate a point made earlier: the level of analysis matters. In the big picture slavery was crucial; it was the catalyst for war between the Union and Confederacy. For the Jews this much was obvious. The writings of Wise, Rothschild, and Mordecai all demonstrate an understanding of the tremendous magnitude of the political effect of slavery. Raphall's sermon on a national day of prayer shows how much bearing the issue of slavery had – he chose to talk about it, instead of any number of other issues. That does not, however, tell the complete story. The fact that it had immense political effects did not mean that southern Jews enlisted to protect slavery. On the contrary, not a single document studied for this work shows a Jew

²⁶ Alfred Mordecai, letter to "My dear brother," March 17, 1861, Civil War, Correspondence file, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

²⁷ Alfred Mordecai, letter to "My dear brother," June 2, 1861, Civil War, Correspondence file, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

proclaiming slavery as a significant reason for fighting. Several documents, especially the letters from Alfred Mordecai, show that other factors, such as family ties and regional identification, far outweighed the protection of slavery in terms of motivations for an individual person to enlist in the Confederate military.

In contrast to the aim to protect slavery, many people suggest the aim of preserving liberty as a motivator for Confederate soldiers. James McPherson espouses this view. He argues that Civil War soldiers were uniquely ideological, compared to soldiers in other wars. For the most part, they were informed about the major political issues of the day and wrote about their ideological beliefs in their letters home. Even soldiers who expressly desired to maintain slavery believed they were fighting for liberty.²⁸ Robertson concurs with McPherson. Confederates enlisted because they wanted to defend their homeland and to preserve their own liberty.²⁹ Southerners saw themselves as under attack from the North, not only militarily but also politically. They feared losing their autonomy as radical Republicans attempted to impose disagreeable policies on them, from anti-slavery laws to economic policy.

Another common theme in ideological claims was that the Confederacy continued the legacy of the American Revolution. Secessionists compared themselves favorably with the revolutionaries of 1776 who opposed British control of the colonies. They viewed secession from the Union as equivalent to the colonies' secession from the British Empire. The legacy of 1776 served as a powerful tool for linking the idea of the Confederacy with core American political beliefs, thus encouraging people to defend

²⁸ James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 18, 21.

²⁹ Robertson, *Soldiers Blue and Gray*, 9. Also, McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 19-20.

their homes against the tyranny of the North.³⁰ The history of revolution legitimized the idea of secession as an acceptable political course.

Did the South's Jews in 1861 share the ideology of their neighbors? At least some did. Lewis Leon, the lowly private from North Carolina who had previously worked as a clerk in a dry goods store, viewed the southern cause as one for independence. For Leon the cause of the Confederacy was righteous and just, and his only regret after the war was that the Union armies had massively outnumbered the Confederacy's, giving them an unbeatable advantage.³¹ Leon's dedication to the cause was extreme but not unique. He fought for four years, through miserable conditions, and against overwhelming odds in order to inflict as much damage as possible on the enemy from the north and to win independence.

The South's Jews were remarkably aware of the ideological reasons for fighting. For example, when comparing Private Leon to Major Mordecai, one might expect to see a significant difference in the level of sophistication of their explanations for why they did or did not enlist in the Confederate army because of their relative educational, occupational, and social backgrounds. Leon was a young man, working as a store clerk. Mordecai in 1861 was a well-educated career military officer. Sure enough, some difference is present. Mordecai is more sophisticated and detailed than Leon.³² However, his explanation for resigning from the Army was the entire point of Mordecai's letter to his southern brother, while the discussion of enlistment is only a small part of Leon's diary of his experiences during the war. The different purposes of their writings

³⁰ Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought*, 21-23, 28. Also, Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers*, 17.

³¹ Lewis Leon, *Diary of a Tarheel Confederate Soldier* (Charlotte: Stone Publishing Company, 1913), 225.

³² Alfred Mordecai, letter to his brother, March 17, 1861, Civil War, Correspondence file, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

help to explain the varying degrees of justifications. Despite their backgrounds both the private and the officer show a noteworthy level of awareness.

Another important symbol of independence was the Confederate flag. The flag symbolized the fact that the South viewed itself as distinct from the Union. In particular, battle flags possessed significant importance; carrying the colors into a fight was a point of pride. Clara Solomon exemplifies the pride felt by Jewish southerners in the Confederate flag. Her younger sister Alice was given a small Confederate flag that Clara propped up for her. Later, in her diary, Clara writes:

It is but a *very* miniature one, and yet I love it. I placed it there with my own hands and in the invasion of the city, dare any Federalist lay his polluted hand upon it, then... Yes, with my own hands, will I slay him. There it floats, yielding gracefully to every breath of air. "Forever may it wave over the land of the free and the home of the brave"³³

By the outbreak of the war the Confederate flag had already replaced the American flag in the minds of many southern Jews as well as non-Jews. It represented the land of the free (at least for whites). The Confederate flag was the new star-spangled banner that demonstrated the loyalty of the Confederates.

Clearly, Clara and the Solomon family felt an allegiance to the Confederacy, but what about Jewish immigrants who had only just arrived in the United States? Did they also believe that the South was a bastion of liberty that needed to be protected? How could they reconcile slavery with the idea of liberty? Louis Gratz, the New York peddler, and Isaac Hermann, the Frenchman living in Sandersonville, Georgia, exemplify Jewish immigrants who came to the United States only a few years before the Civil War and

³³ Solomon, *The Civil War Diary of Clara Solomon*, 61.

enlisted on their respective sides. In order to understand their attachment to America, it is necessary to understand where they came from.

The Jewish immigrants came almost entirely from Europe, which before 1861 was anything but a beacon of political liberalism. Only thirteen years earlier, the revolutions of 1848 had shocked European stability. Jewish immigrants from Russia were attempting to escape famine, war, and conscription into the Russian army.³⁴ In many German states Jews faced a number of discriminatory policies, reminiscent of the Middle Ages. They lacked citizenship, paid higher taxes, suffered limits on where they could live and what occupations they could pursue, and only a limited number of Jewish marriages were allowed at any time.³⁵ If we compare these conditions to the freedom they experienced in the United States, it is easy to see how the Jewish immigrants would have quickly developed an allegiance to their new homeland.

Immigrant Jews often developed a strong attachment to America in a short period of time. Frederick Wolf was born in Germany in 1835. He came to New York in 1851 and arrived in Memphis in 1857. After living in the South for only four years, he joined the 15th Tennessee Infantry, being “imbued with military spirit.” He fought in a company with 23 other Jews. Wolf was said to be patriotic and enthusiastic for his adopted country. He fought until the end of the war, surrendering just after Appomattox. They fought because of “a sense of loyalty to their homes and their neighbors,” which was

³⁴ Hasia R. Diner, *The Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 75, 80.

³⁵ Frank L. Byrne and Jean Powers Soman, eds., *Your True Marcus: The Civil War Letters of a Jewish Colonel* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1985), 1-2.

even more remarkable since an immigrant like Wolf had the opportunity to return to his country of origin and chose to stay.³⁶

The Civil War divided not only the country but families and friends from each other as happened to Alfred Mordecai. Jewish immigrant families did not escape this fate either. John Proskauer fought in the revolution in Breelau, Prussia in 1848 before immigrating to the United States. During the Civil War he fought for the Union, as he had lived in the North. His son, Adolph, however, was born in the United States and lived in Mobile, Alabama. Adolph enlisted in the Confederate army and rose to the rank of major. Adolph was very patriotic and integrated into America. In 1868 he got his certificate of citizenship. He was a member of the Free and Accepted Masons. He also maintained his faith and was president of the congregation of Shaarai Shamayim for two years.³⁷ Their Judaism did not affect which side of the conflict the Proskauers supported. Instead, they sided with their neighbors.

Isaac Hermann's memoirs tell the story of how a French immigrant like himself could so quickly feel connected to the American South. Hermann came from France and arrived in Georgia in 1858 or 1859. He voluntarily enlisted in the army when the Civil War began. In his memoir he recalls a conversation with a General Beaufort who inquired how a Frenchman came to be serving in the Confederate army. Hermann's response is illuminating:

I found in this country an ideal and harmonious people; they treated me as one of their own. In fact, for me it was the land of Canaan, where milk and honey flowed. In the discussion of the political issues, I felt, with those that I was in contact with, that they were grossly imposed upon

³⁶ Frederick Wolf, Civil War, Miscellaneous file, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

³⁷ Proskauer Family, Civil War, Manuscript Collection 254, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

by their Northern brethren, and joined my friends in their defense, and so here I am.³⁸

There are several important points to glean from his answer. First, he was welcomed into the South. This may relate to the earlier discussion of how slavery guaranteed Jews a higher level of social status. In contrast to many European countries, Hermann did not experience any political discrimination in Georgia. Second, Hermann's biblical comparison of Georgia to Canaan reveals that he must have had some success in his endeavors in his new country. Economic success would have reinforced his attachment to the South both from a material standpoint and in appreciation of the possibility of a better life. Third, his perception of the political battles in the United States was informed by those around him. This helps explain why immigrants would share beliefs with their new neighbors: immigrants learned about American politics from these neighbors. Fourth, even if immigrants like Hermann could not fully grasp or appreciate the decades long debate over states' rights, they still viewed the people around them as "friends." In fact, at the end of his response Hermann does not say that he is defending states' rights or slavery or liberty. He is defending his friends.

Slavery and political ideals, including the defense of slavery as an institution and states' rights, certainly played a major role in the development of the Civil War. However, their relative importance for individuals outside of the political elite is less clear. Many Jews did not seem to have a significant opinion one way or the other about black slavery. Clara Solomon and her family just wanted to be safe. Alfred Mordecai looked to his family ties instead of political issues when deciding what to do about his role in the army. Judah Benjamin even gave up his slaves before publicly defending the

³⁸ Isaac Hermann, *Memoirs of a Veteran Who Served as a Private in the 60's in the War Between the States* (Atlanta: Byrd Printing Company, 1911), 260.

rights of southerners to own slaves. There were also exceptions. Eleanor Cohen relied on her slaves to keep her life comfortable and did not want to lose them. A series of high-profile rabbis did express strong positions on whether or not the Bible allowed for slavery, but these debates belonged more in the political sphere and in the media than in the small communities of Jews from which Confederate soldiers came. Slavery did have an impact on the lives of individual Jewish southerners, but, for the most part, it did not motivate them to fight for the Confederacy.

The case for political ideology as a motive for enlisting is stronger than that of slavery, but neither tells a complete story. Many Jews did express a desire for independence and liberty. Leon Lewis expressed his happiness at being able to fight for these ideals. However, that is all they were: ideals. In many cases, the calls for independence and liberty were merely abstractions with no substance to back them up. The Jews of the South like the Solomon family and Leon clearly believed in the project of the Confederacy, but it is unclear that they fully understood the political doctrines such as Nullification for which they fought. Furthermore, immigrant Jews had even less reason to fight for states' rights. James McPherson's argument that Civil War soldiers in the Union and the Confederacy were more ideological and knowledgeable than most soldiers in other wars in American history is very possibly correct but is a relative claim, comparing soldiers across conflicts, and its accuracy cannot be tested here.

If not for slavery and states' rights, then what did Confederate Jews fight for? While Jews whose families had become almost entirely assimilated into the South, recently arrived immigrants were less attached to slavery and states' rights. Hermann's final answer in his memoir points toward the next component of studying Jewish

Confederate soldiers. Hermann fought for his friends. Even though he saw himself as distinct from the other southerners, pointing out his distinctive French background to the other soldiers, he still expressed a sense of belonging and allegiance to the citizens of his new homeland. John and Adolph Proskauer and Frederick Wolf also show how quickly that integration occurred. This growing attachment helps to explain why Jews, especially recently arrived immigrants, decided to fight for the Confederacy. They felt accepted and were better off than they had been in Europe. Others had lived in the South so long as to be mostly assimilated. In other words Jews began to see themselves as southerners.

Chapter Three: Jews as Southerners

In the course of the Civil War, thousands of southern Jews mobilized to fight for the Confederacy. Among these some needed the money, while others sought adventure. Some Jews wanted to defend the institution of slavery, others their ideological beliefs. Ending the discussion here would leave an incomplete story. Many Jews living in the Confederacy saw themselves as deeply tied to that nation. The deeper question is why are these Jews described as “southern?” Is it merely because of their geographic location? If not, how much had they integrated into the society in which they lived? One possibility may be that acting southern was merely a matter of expediency. It’s also possible that they truly accepted and appreciated the values and lifestyle represented by the Confederacy.

The patriotic feelings for the Confederacy exhibited by many Jews equaled those of anyone else in the South. These Jews wholeheartedly supported the cause and proudly showed it. That patriotism can be seen in many of the thousands of Jews fighting for the Confederacy. Lewis Leon of North Carolina joined the Charlotte Grays with much excitement in April of 1861.¹ Isaac Hermann was swept up in the patriotism at Davisboro as he departed for Virginia with the Washington Rifles.² Besides these two examples, many have noticed the strong support the Jews had for the Confederacy. In September of 1861 *The Charleston Mercury* republished a letter from the New Orleans *Crescent* that expounded upon the “Patriotism of the Jews.” The letter suggests that the Jews were highly represented within the Confederate army, donated money to the cause,

¹ Lewis Leon, *Diary of a Tarheel Confederate Soldier* (Charlotte: Stone Publishing Company, 1913), 198.

² Isaac Hermann, *Memoirs of a Veteran Who Served as a Private in the 60's in the War Between the States* (Atlanta: Byrd Printing Company, 1911), 14.

and helped to bring needed supplies into the South.³ It demonstrates that other southerners had at least anecdotal reason to believe that Jews fully supported the cause. However, the fact that someone would take the effort to submit this proclamation of support to the *Crescent* raises the question why did the Jews need to be defended? The author of this particular article could have discussed other minority groups but deliberately chose to discuss only this one religious minority. The answer is not apparent from the newspaper article, as it does not respond to any specific claims or accusations, but could play into a later discussion about the difficulties Jews occasionally had in gaining acceptance.

The actions of men like Leon and Hermann provided the anecdotal evidence for people to believe that Jews supported the Confederacy, and the behavior of Jews on the home front only served to reinforce that belief. Clara Solomon's diary provides several poignant examples of the fierce connection Jews had to the Confederate cause. Clara relays that a newborn, baby boy "glories in the name of 'Sumter Davis,'" a powerful example of Southern patriotism (the name refers to the opening shots of the war and the Confederate president, Jefferson Davis).⁴ Even at Clara's school the girls showed off their Confederate pride by "wearing upon their shoulders black crepe bows" or dressing in clothes with a Confederate flag pattern. Clara, however, disapproved of this practice, not because she did not support the cause but because she believed in it even more than the other girls. Clara points out that one only wears black to funerals, and in the diary she proclaims that "our *cause* is not *dead*, it is only *sick*. The Yankees are here on a *visit*."⁵

³ *The Charleston Mercury*, September 20, 1861, www.proquest.com.

⁴ Clara Solomon, *The Civil War Diary of Clara Solomon: Growing Up in New Orleans, 1861-1862*, ed. Elliott Ashkenazi (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 154.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 354.

Clara's diary reflects the strong beliefs she and others held about the righteousness of the Confederate cause. Philip Phillips' daughters expressed similar views when they wrote about their excitement as the beginnings of war surrounded them in Washington.

It was not just the youthful females who unyieldingly supported the Confederacy; Phillips' wife, Eugenia Levy Phillips, famously defied Union General Benjamin Butler, who led the occupation of New Orleans in 1862. Eugenia, unlike Clara Solomon, was not originally from New Orleans. She came from an upper-class family in Charleston and lived with her husband in Mobile and Washington before arriving in New Orleans after they were forced to leave Washington because of her Confederate sympathies and despite her husband's Union leanings.

In May of 1862, soon after taking control of New Orleans, General Butler issued General Order No. 28 directing that women who were seen disrespecting Union troops should be treated like prostitutes. The next month he had Eugenia Phillips arrested and imprisoned her on Ship Island. In her recollections Eugenia says that she was accused of "laughing and mocking at" a funeral procession for a Union officer. She describes herself as "full of holy indignation" and makes it clear that she held so strongly to her beliefs about the Confederacy that Butler's threats could not move her even to beg for mercy.⁶ Eugenia's firm defiance of the general became an infamous symbol of southern pride. She represented the great extent to which an aristocratic, Jewish family in the South could become wholly ingrained and invested in that culture as much as any other whites.

⁶ Eugenia Levy Phillips, *A Southern Woman's Story of Her Imprisonment During the War of 1861-62*, in *Memoirs of American Jews: 1775-1856*, vol. 3, ed. Jacob Rader Marcus (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955), 187.

New Orleans was not the only place in the Confederate South where Jews strongly supported their new homeland. Emmanuel Isaacs was born in England in 1820. When he arrived at Macon in 1845, he was the first Jew in the city. Living in Macon, he participated in the war and publicly pushed for more Jews to enlist and to defend Savannah in 1863. In an open letter published in the newspaper:

I call upon you, as you love the country of your adoption, and are willing to hurl back into the teeth of those who make them, the ungenerous aspersions upon the citizens of the South of our race and lineage, to join with me in securing for the defense of our sister city of Savannah, a strong and delegation of the Israelites of Macon.⁷

Isaacs demonstrates a remarkable level of self-awareness in this article. He acknowledges that he is fighting for his adopted country, yet his love for it is more than sufficient to put his life on the line. His background contrasts with Clara Solomon's in that he was born abroad. Both, however, fully supported the Confederacy although she did not have to explain how she came to belong to the South. It was likely easier for Isaacs to assimilate and support the Confederacy compared to the German Jews living in Macon because he had lived there for 16 years when the war began, was a native English speaker, and had married a Georgian.⁸ Did these newer immigrants also fight to defend the Confederacy? The Macon Daily Telegraph reported in April, 1861, in a summary of how various groups of people were aiding the war effort, that not only did the Jews and Germans give money to the cause, but "quite a number [are] going to the wars."⁹ Just like the article "Patriotism of the Jews," Emmanuel Isaacs' article raises the question of

⁷ Emmanuel Isaacs, "To the Israelites of Macon," *Macon Daily Telegraph*, February 19, 1863, in Lawrence M. Ginsburg, *Israelites in Blue and Gray: Unchronicled Tales from Two Cities* (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc., 2001), 47.

⁸ Ginsburg, *Israelites in Blue and Gray*, 49.

⁹ *Macon Daily Telegraph*, April 30, 1861, <http://telegraph.galileo.usg.edu>.

whether he was calling for more action because the Jews were not seen as doing enough or because he believed they ought to go above and beyond the call of duty.¹⁰ His article does not give an answer. It is only clear that he believed each Israelite had a duty to protect the Confederacy, so even if the vast majority were already fighting, he believed the rest should follow suit.

Emmanuel Isaacs employed social pressure as a means to get Jews to fight for the Confederacy, supporting the arguments made by many historians that social pressure often motivated people to enlist. Reid Mitchell and Aaron Sheehan-Dean both argue that the influence of other community members was quite powerful.¹¹ Sheehan-Dean says that in Virginia less populous areas sent a higher proportion of men to war than more populous areas which demonstrated the ability of neighbors to affect one another's enlistment. This argument can be applied to southern Jews in two ways. First, Jews such as Isaac Hermann or Emmanuel Isaacs, who lived in small towns like Sandersonville and Macon, would be more easily influenced by the non-Jews around them. Second, even if Jews lived in more populous areas such as New Orleans or Charleston, many of them maintained links with one another through the synagogue and other religious organizations, which could have simulated the smaller community of a less populated city.

¹⁰ While Isaacs wants a larger proportion of Macon's Israelites to fight, it is unclear how many of them lived in Macon. The entire population of Macon was just under 8,500 according to the 1860 census and the only "Jewish Church" in Georgia was located in Chatham County (Savannah). See: University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center, *Historical Census Browser*, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/php/county.php>. However, the Jewish population was clearly growing in size as they established a congregation, *Beth Israel*, in early 1860. See: Ginsburg, *Israelites in Blue and Gray*, 31-35.

¹¹ Aaron Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought: Family and Nation in Civil War Virginia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 21-23, 28. Also Reid Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers* (New York: Viking Penguin Inc, 1988), 17.

Jews were certainly not immune from the power of social pressure to enlist, especially at the beginning of the war. Heyman Herzberg of Cartersville, Georgia explicitly addressed this in his diary. He says in 1861 that “every young man was expected to join some military organization,” and join they did. Heyman and his two brothers each joined different outfits to fight for the Confederacy.¹² Potential soldiers were bombarded by messages in newspapers and from the home front encouraging them to enlist. Sheehan-Dean argues that southern women often played a major role in inspiring or shaming men into fighting. In fact, he says that there was a “masculine imperative” to defend the homeland.¹³ Women on the home front often viewed men who stayed home as cowards.

In a similar vein, the South’s honor system, which Jews largely adopted, provided further incentive to join the army and demonstrated the assimilation of Jews into southern culture. These southern Jews understood that their honor was tied up in their willingness to defend their homes and neighbors from Yankee aggression. In his memoirs after the war, Edwin Marks of Louisiana reflected on his experiences serving in the Civil War. His discussion of the quality of southern troops reflects the great importance of honor and chivalry in the culture. Marks says that these young, green troops “illuminated Louisiana chivalry in Virginia and Tennessee” and that “the whole of Louisiana contingent have imperishably carved their [sword?] upon blazing fields of battle and finally pound out their life blood as a libation to Southern honor.”¹⁴ For Marks it mattered less, at least

¹² Heyman Herzberg, *Diary of Heyman Herzberg of Civil War*, in *Memoirs of American Jews: 1775-1856*, vol. 3, ed. Jacob Rader Marcus (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955), 116.

¹³ Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought*, 27.

¹⁴ Edwin Marks, Civil War, Miscellaneous file, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

retrospectively, that these southern forces had lost than that they fought honorably and chivalrously.

Mark Greenberg's work on Savannah's Jews provides evidence of how those Jews, many of whose families had lived in Savannah for generations, adopted the culture of the South. He says that not only did they accept slavery and support the Confederacy, but they also accepted the southern honor code. They even took up the practice of dueling.¹⁵ James McPherson and Reid Mitchell also discuss the power of honor in the South. Not only did the actions of men reflect themselves, but also their families, communities, and legacies.¹⁶ This raised the incentive to fight because it was not just a personal matter but a decision taken on behalf of everyone around them. The code of honor placed additional responsibility on the southern man. Thus, a southern Jew who skirted military duty made himself look bad and embarrassed his family and fellow Jews, at least in the eyes of other southerners.

Despite the evidence that many Jews in the Confederacy fully supported the cause and saw themselves as southerners, there appeared to be some lingering doubts about their loyalty and trustworthiness. The evidence here shows that the Jews did not see their religion as setting themselves apart, but that in the eyes of some others, it was a distinguishing feature. This raises a new possibility to explain Jewish participation in the Civil War. Did they do it to prove themselves? McPherson suggests that for some immigrants this very well may have been the case. He says that they joined in order to

¹⁵ Mark I. Greenberg, "Becoming Southern: The Jews of Savannah, Georgia, 1830-70," *American Jewish History* 86, No.1 (1998):57.

¹⁶ James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 23-24. Also, Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers*, 17.

demonstrate their loyalty and gain honor.¹⁷ McPherson only provides one example for this: a letter exchanged between a Minnesotan couple of Swedish descent. In the letter the husband explains to his wife why he must enlist because people were beginning to question the loyalty of Swedish-Americans in the area because many were not rising to the defense of a country to which they had proclaimed their loyalty. It is unclear from this one example how frequently this sort of thought process occurred.

Among the documents examined here, none of them makes such explicit claims as does the Minnesotan immigrant, leaving some doubt as to whether this motivation held true for Jews in the Confederacy. The two newspaper articles mentioned earlier, "Patriotism of the Jews" and "To the Israelites of Macon," may have been responding to claims that the Jews were not fully supporting the Confederacy. Emmanuel Isaacs acknowledges that some of Macon's Jews had hired substitutes, and he implored Macon's Israelites to "prove" themselves and perform their "duty" in defense of Savannah.¹⁸ This admission does not prove that the people of Macon questioned the commitment of Jews to the cause; only that Isaacs wanted everyone to fight.

In order to show that Jews fought to gain acceptance, it must be proven that they knew that they stood to gain something. In Charlotte, North Carolina the Jewish women made substantial gains in achieving political equality. They had taken a collection of donations to be given to the families of volunteers and sent \$150 to the town commissioners. The commissioners were grateful and sent this reply:

The thanks of the community are due... to "the Jewish ladies of Charlotte" for the generous, patriotic and appropriate contribution... the Commissioners cannot forego the opportunity of testifying to the uniform kindness

¹⁷ McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 25.

¹⁸ Isaacs, "To the Israelites of Macon," in Ginsburg, *Israelites Blue and Gray*, 47.

and liberality which has ever characterized the entire Jewish population of our town...to congratulate them upon the removal now, or soon to be effected, of all unjust restrictions upon those who have contributed so liberally not only of money, but of men for upholding the equal rights of the South.¹⁹

In response to the generous contribution, the commission pushed for the state of North Carolina to remove restrictions on Jews holding political office. Through their donation the Jewish women of Charlotte proved their loyalty to the Confederacy and gained the approval of their townspeople. This instance does not prove McPherson's argument. Even though it had the same effect as McPherson's Minnesotan soldier, this source does not reveal the intent of the women. According to their letter they merely wanted to assist the people whose family members were off defending their homes. As we have seen with other Jewish women like Clara Solomon and Eugenia Phillips, their devotion to the cause seems entirely genuine, and it seems difficult to ascribe some ulterior motive to their donation.

The argument that Jews needed to prove themselves begs the question whether or not they were accepted to begin with. There are numerous examples of Jews being accepted at least enough to rise up the rungs of the social ladder. In Savannah, Greenberg says, the Jews were a part of the highest social circles and could hold political office.²⁰ In Louisiana Jews such as Judah Benjamin and Henry Hyams were elected to the U.S. Senate and to the office of lieutenant governor, respectively. Despite these and numerous other examples, a few people still held lingering doubts about the Jews' loyalty that was

¹⁹ *The Charleston Daily Courier*, July 24, 1861, in "The Jews of the Confederacy," *American Jewish Archives Journal* XIII, No. 1(1961):40,

http://www.americanjewisharchives.org/journal/PDF/1961_13_01_00.pdf.

²⁰ Greenberg, "Becoming Southern," 57.

probably based on an underlying anti-Semitism and long standing stigma attached to the Jews, not on the behavior of the vast majority of the South's Jews.

Two examples of Jew jokes from southern newspapers demonstrate this feeling, which was not targeted at any individuals but vaguely attributed to the merchant Jews. The Weekly Raleigh Register published a joke about how a poor Jew outsmarted a group of wealthy travelers on a voyage down the Rhine in order to win money from them in a game of riddles.²¹ The Fayetteville Observer published a similar story between a Jew and a merchant:

‘I bet you cannot repeat three words after me, as I say them.’ The merchant, thinking that a few pence, more or less, would make no difference to him, replied, ‘Say on.’ The Jew said ‘cutler.’ The merchant repeated ‘cutler.’ Next, ‘bagpipe,’ and ‘bagpipe’ was responded. The Jew smiled and said ‘wrong.’ The merchant puzzled, bethought himself where the mistake could be...And so on to the sixth time, when the merchant said, ‘Now I will pay you if you can show me how I was wrong.’ The Jew said, ‘You never said the third word, ‘wrong,’ and accordingly I won the bet.’²²

These examples are clearly far, far from the worst forms of discrimination, but they represent an underlying stigma with regard to the Jewish population. Some people saw them as shifty merchants just out to make a quick buck. In these stories the Jew is looking to take advantage of any situation for financial gain. The turmoil of war, however, escalated these small instances to some of the worst examples of anti-Semitism in American history.

The idea that Jews were only interested in money filtered into people's analysis of the events of the war. During the Civil War sufficiently wealthy southerners could pay

²¹ *The Weekly Raleigh Register*, April 10, 1861.

²² *Fayetteville Observer*, March 28, 1861.

for substitutes to take their place in the army. This led to the creation of a labor pool of soldiers for hire amongst the poorest members of society and to a variety of scam artists who hoped to game the system to earn multiple bonuses for signing up repeatedly. The Weekly Raleigh Register (quoting the Richmond Examiner) accused “Shylocks” and “Jew peddlers” of speculating in the supply of substitutes and extorting huge sums of money from the wealthy to pay for their substitutes.²³ This article does not supply any evidence that could possibly attribute these scams (which did exist) solely to Jews. It is certainly possible that there were Jews involved in the practice of procuring substitutes for the wealthy, but there were plenty of others involved in the practice too.

The worst instance of anti-Semitism occurred in the Union during the war and strongly reflected this long held stigma toward Jewish merchants. Before he took over the Army of the Potomac, General Ulysses Grant was in charge of the Department of the Tennessee. In 1862 he issued General Order No. 11 that banned Jews from the territory within the department.

The Jews, as a class violating every regulation of trade established by the Treasury Department and also department orders, are hereby expelled from the department within twenty-four hours from the receipt of this order.²⁴

Grant’s order was short, direct, and unyielding. Lincoln eventually ordered him to repeal it after receiving a number of protests from Jewish representatives. The whole story does not need to be repeated here. It was an egregious example of military rule that exemplified an imbedded anti-Semitism in parts of America. No government led example of this magnitude happened in the Confederacy, which may be a reason why

²³ *The Weekly Raleigh Register*, March 19, 1862.

²⁴ Ulysses S. Grant, General Order No. 11, December 17, 1862, in Bertram W. Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1951), 122. Bertram Korn’s book has a complete analysis of the episode and the extent of General Grant’s involvement.

Jews would have comparatively favored the Confederacy: it was less discriminatory. This event may demonstrate that Jews in the North were unable to obtain the same level of acceptance that they had in the South. Robert Rosen goes so far as to say that the Jews' role as merchants gained them acceptance in the South.²⁵ His argument is that because they acted as productive members of society, southerners were willing to and learned to work and live with Jews. Clearly, those interactions described by Rosen are insufficient to overcome anti-Semitism everywhere and it continued to exist on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line.

Most of the anti-Semitic attacks demonstrated vague, unsubstantiated claims not directed against any specific instance or individual, but Judah Benjamin's prominent presence in the Confederate Cabinet gave these people a target on which to focus. Benjamin served as a lightning rod for criticism; he was a focal point for anti-Semitic charges.²⁶ The accusations against Benjamin illustrate the wider gap between the perception of discriminators and the actions of the Jews. Benjamin was certainly a southerner. He lived in New Orleans, left the Senate when Louisiana seceded, and had owned slaves. Jefferson Davis brought him into the Confederate Cabinet where he served at various times as the attorney general, secretary of war, and secretary of state. By all accounts he acted to the greatest of his considerable abilities to preserve the Confederacy and was incredibly loyal to President Davis.²⁷ Benjamin's opponents used his religious background as a source of ad hominem attacks to further their policy and personal differences with Benjamin.

²⁵ Robert N. Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 32.

²⁶ Peggy Robbins, "Jefferson Davis and the Jews," *Civil War Times Illustrated* 39, No. 1(2000):52-57.

²⁷ David Massie, "The Brains of the Confederacy," *American History* 40, Iss. 2(2005), <http://www.proquest.com>.

Despite these instances of discrimination and other disincentives to enlisting, southern Jews still fought for the Confederacy. Religion did not seem to provide a significant reason to join the army, but it could make army life complicated. Army rations did not exactly meet Jewish dietary regulations.²⁸ Jews deployed across the United States also had difficulty celebrating their religious holidays in the field. Isaac J. Levy of the Virginia Infantry writes to his sister Leonora about the problems they had celebrating Pesach. Everyone in camp had the date of the holiday wrong, and they had to pay a premium to purchase sufficient matzo in Richmond.²⁹ Service in the army made preserving Jewish practices difficult. It's possible that concerns about not being able to practice their religion deterred some Jews from enlisting, but others still joined and mostly successfully managed to do both.

Even with the difficulties that Jews had serving in the military, they still became strongly tied to their units and their leaders. Several generals had their own strong, personal followings. The most famous example is the cult based around the figure of Robert E. Lee. Jews were not immune from the massive loyalty that Lee's men had for him. Eugene Henry Levy fought in Virginia in Lee's army at the end of the war. In his diary he recounts his reaction to meeting Lee: "Can it be wondered at that this man has won our hearts and minds? Opposed as I am to hero worship, I shall never utter the name of Robert E. Lee unless with respect and veneration."³⁰ General G.T. Beauregard had a loyal following in his hometown of New Orleans. Clara Solomon was one of his biggest

²⁸ *Savannah Daily Morning News*, February 23, 1862 in Ginsburg, *Israelites in Blue and Gray*, 83-85.

²⁹ Isaac J. Levy, letter to Leonora Levy, April 24, 1864, <http://www.jewish-history.com/civilwar/seder.html>.

³⁰ Eugene Henry Levy, personal diary, in *Memoirs of American Jews: 1775-1856*, vol. 3, ed. Jacob Marcus Rader (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955), 304.

fans.³¹ The Jews developed the same loyalties as many other southerners to the army and their generals.

In fact, the Jews living in the South adopted many of the beliefs and practices of the other whites they lived with. Besides joining in the hero worship of Confederate generals, they engaged in duels, supported secession, bought into the code of honor, and even owned slaves. All of this occurred despite lingering instances of anti-Jewish stigmatism. Even with these problems and the difficulties for practicing their religion that military service presented, many southern Jews still enlisted and fought for the Confederacy. For some Jews, being southern had become part of their culture. More recent immigrants seemed to appreciate their new home and wanted to protect it.

³¹ Solomon, *Civil War Diary of Clara Solomon*, 322.

Conclusion

Jews from across the South supported the Confederacy. They came from all walks of life. From the young like Clara Solomon, to adults like Eugenia Philips, women like Eleanor Cohen, to men like Edwin Marks, a Senator, Judah P. Benjamin, to a store clerk, Lewis Leon, an immigrant, Isaac Herman, to a longtime southerner, Emmanuel Isaacs, all sorts of Jews believed in the Confederate cause. Of these approximately two thousand joined the army and fought for independence.

While only a small fraction of the Confederacy's fighting force, two thousand soldiers was proportional to the size of the Jewish population in the South in 1860. Approximately 20,000 to 25,000 Jews lived in the Confederate states.¹ Out of a total free population of 5.5 million, Jews made up a tiny 0.4% of the South's free people.² Given that they made up such a small portion of southerners, Jews probably contributed disproportionately to the cause. The best guesses say that around 850,000 fought for the Confederacy although estimates range by the hundreds of thousands around that number.³ Given these best guesses about 15% of the free population in the South served, which is within a few percentage points of the proportion of Jews serving. The number of Jews, however, is so small that it makes it nearly impossible to get an accurate estimate.

Why did they fight? In many ways the South's Jews behaved much like other whites. Some sought adventure and a way to see the country. Poorer people enlisted for the money or were paid to be substitutes. Many in the white South, including Jews, were caught up in the excitement and patriotism that swept across the country as the war drew

¹ Robert N. Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 25.

² University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center, *Historical Census Browser*, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/php/county.php>.

³ James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 306-307.

closer and the first shots were fired at Fort Sumter. To a large extent, white southerners believed that their cause was just and that they fought to defend their homes, women, and children.

There were also ideological reasons to enlist. While the North sought to preserve the Union, the South aimed for independence and autonomy on the basis of states' rights. Historians such as James McPherson have demonstrated how surprisingly informed and educated most Civil War soldiers were and argue that many of them fought for these ideologies. Some Jews certainly espoused such beliefs as men like Lewis Leon declared that they fought for liberty. Often, however, these expressions of ideology seemed to be little more than the repetition of the key buzz words of the day, and the argument for ideology as a motivator for enlistment seems less practical especially for the everyday soldier.

Besides states' rights, slavery was the other issue that dominated discussions of the causes of the war in subsequent scholarship. As with other theories, the Jews split along geographic lines with the majority in the South accepting the institution while the majority in the North wanted to end it. Of course there were exceptions. The rabbis in the United States at the time, North and South, were divided on the subject and both sides used Biblical texts to support their positions. Among Confederate Jews, only a small number owned slaves, and the most well-known of them, Judah Benjamin, freed all of his slaves well before the Civil War. Slavery was certainly a major reason for the outbreak of conflict, but its effect on individuals is unclear. It certainly did not differentiate southern Jews from the other whites in the Confederacy.

Jews also faced some difficulties gaining acceptance and assimilating into the South. Latent anti-Semitism lingered on in parts of the population. In several newspaper articles Jews were mocked. But in others their southern patriotism was defended. In a very small number of instances, like in Thomasville, Georgia, Jews experienced overt discrimination. These instances, however, were few and far between. For the most part, Jews were accepted in white southern society. In Savannah the older Jewish families especially were part of the upper class. These Jews adopted many parts of the South's culture: they owned slaves and even participated in duels to defend their honor. In New Orleans Jews held statewide political offices.

Many Jewish immigrants also supported the Confederacy even though, having been born in Europe, their ties to the region were relatively new. They came to appreciate living in the American South. They had greater economic opportunities. There was more political freedom and potential for advancement. Perhaps most importantly, in America they were not the minority that was targeted for discrimination. Regardless of their views of slavery, the existence of this practice elevated them in terms of the social hierarchy. These beneficial changes from living in Europe, especially the economic and the political changes, helped immigrants and led them to believe in the American dream. They were befriended by their neighbors, for the most part, and came to associate the ideals of the Confederacy with the existence of a politically free system. They began to identify with and see themselves as part of the people among whom they lived.

Because of this allegiance, southern Jews worked for the Confederacy, and, though few in number, made noticeable contributions to the Confederate cause. Most

obviously, Judah Benjamin served in the Confederate Cabinet and helped Jefferson Davis direct the war effort. Abraham Charles Myers held the position of quartermaster general for the Confederacy. Major Raphael Jacob Moses from Georgia carried out the last order of the Confederacy, escorting the remaining funds of the government to be distributed to those in need. Jews served throughout the Confederate Army. Some became officers, while others were privates. Adolph Proskauer became a major. Louisiana's contingent of troops included a large number of Jews like Henry Hyams and Alexander Hart, who became a prisoner of war. Jews were at nearly all the major battles from Gettysburg to Appomattox.

Knowing that they did fight is not enough. Knowing something of why they did so adds a deeper level of understanding to our knowledge of the Jewish experience in America. Humans are complex beings and determining why they behave in particular ways is generally impossible. However, we can study the reasons they gave when they wrote letters and diaries and other documents, and these are important because this is what they told their families, friends, and themselves to justify going off to war on behalf of the Confederacy. These texts show what people valued enough to put their lives on the line for.

The example of southern Jews during the Civil War, while of limited focus, shows something about a lot of things. It reveals the attraction of America to immigrants and the lengths they went to in order to demonstrate their newfound patriotism. Even during this most tumultuous period the number of Jews living in the United States increased dramatically, mostly because of immigration. People wanted to come to the United States, and, when they arrived, they quickly became attached to it.

The experiences and writings of these Jews also say something about why people support war and join the army. In this case religion seems to have been a relatively small issue, although in many other wars it was the key issue (the Arab/Israeli conflicts for example). Many seemed to agree with arguments about political ideology, rights, and slavery, but these are insufficient explanations of why someone chose to enlist. At best they only apply to the non-immigrant Jews. Class played a role for some people who needed the money that could be earned by enlisting, while others could exempt themselves with a substitute. For the many others though, money would not be the deciding factor. What then made them fight?

Individual ties to one's neighbors, friends, and family affected which side a person would fight for more consistently than any of these other factors. Rarely is there evidence of a southerner fighting for the North or vice versa. Even the immigrants who had only been in America for a few years joined the army in the half of the country where they lived. Perhaps they associated that region with the economic and political openness they were experiencing for the first time. It seems that social cohesion was why people were willing to enlist. This was even truer in the South, which fought a defensive war against the Union. The evidence here shows that Jews behaved mostly like their neighbors did. There were a diverse number of reasons to enlist and most of those reasons hold true for Jews as much as they do for the rest of the white South. The only exception was immigrants, for whom slavery and politics was less important. Other factors that motivated people such as money, adventure, or to protect one's home did, however, still apply to them.

This study is quite limited in its scope and in the number of primary documents that could be examined. It treats Jews here as one group, with divisions only between immigrants and American-born Jews. In reality, however, there could be other important distinctions between groups of Jews at the time. Jews in rural areas may have acted differently than Jews in urban places with bigger Jewish communities. Class may also have played a role. There were even more Jews in the North. Hopefully, however, this examination of Confederate Jews has begun to create a framework for bridging the gap between scholarship focused on individual groups, like the Jews, and Civil War history in general. Future research could put any other group or war under the microscope in a similar fashion. The results here show that the Jews as a whole were little different than anybody else. The Confederate South may have divided itself along racial lines but not religious ones. Only being an immigrant Jew resulted in some distinctions. Jewish southerners, for the most part, believed, just like their neighbors, that they fought to protect their families, their friends, and their freedom, which is why they enlisted to fight for the Confederacy.

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