

Jewish Diversity: Great, Mighty, and Multitudinous

Contributed by [Truah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights](#)

Source: The Other Side of the River, The Other Side of the Sea

“No people have had a more inadequate preparation, educational and economic, for American citizenship.”

This quote comes not from today’s rightwing media but from McClure’s Magazine in 1907, referring to Russian Jews. Jews have been targets of the same rhetoric hurled at today’s immigrants. As HIAS President and CEO Mark Hetfield likes to say, “We used to help refugees because they were Jewish; now we help refugees because we are Jewish.” The history of Eastern European Jews immigrating to the U.S. through Ellis Island looms large in the American Jewish psyche. But we must also remember and honor the diversity of Jewish experiences:

- The first wave of Jews to arrive in America were Sephardim, who established synagogues and Jewish communities, some of which continue to operate today.
- Native American Jews are not immigrants.
- African-American Jews likely have ancestors who were brought here violently and against their will.
- Converts may come from families that have been here for hundreds of years.
- Many Jews are themselves immigrants; for them, the story is not one of long ago but of here and now.

Our shared sacred story is one of migration, seeking the promised land and being exiled from it in cycles, but each individual also has their personal stories.