INTRODUCTION

The two essays that follow were originally conceived as the opening chapters of a book on the history of Jews in the American military by my father, Professor Jack D. Foner, who died in 1999 at the age of eighty-eight. At the time of his death, he had completed much of the research for the book but had only drafted these chapters, which take the story from the early colonial period to the eve of the Civil War. My father very much regretted that illness in the last year of his life prevented him from completing the book, and I know that he would have been very pleased that at least some of the fruits of his research are now being made available to readers interested in American Jewish history.

I am very grateful to the *American Jewish Archives Journal* not only for bringing these essays into print, but for accepting them without the usual scholarly apparatus. My father had not yet completed the task of incorporating footnotes into these chapters, and his system of note taking was so personal that it has proven impossible for me to reconstruct the notes. I can, however, vouch for the accuracy of all the information and direct quotations in these essays. My father was an indefatigable researcher and the material presented here was gathered from archives across the country as well as a wide array of memoirs, manuscript collections, newspapers, and historical studies. Much of this material has never been consulted by previous scholars of American Jewish history; hence, even without footnotes, it should be of considerable value to scholars in the field. All readers, I believe, will find these essays to be engaging accounts of Jewish participation in the military affairs of the colonial era, Revolution, and early Republic. They chronicle the contributions of long-forgotten individuals and offer careful evaluations and reevaluations of better-known figures.
such as Simon Magruder Levy, the first (or perhaps second) graduate of West Point, Uriah P. Levy (who was subjected to numerous court-martials during his military service), and David S. Franks (an aide to Benedict Arnold acquitted of complicity in Arnold's treason). In addition, the essays offer information about nonmilitary contributions by Jewish merchants and financiers, shed light on anti-Semitism in early American history, and show how Jewish military service catalyzed the movement for the removal of religious qualifications for voting. In seeking to view military history within the broader perspective of American social history, these essays follow in the footsteps of my father's two previous books: *The United States Soldier Between Two Wars, 1865–1898* (New York: Humanities Press, 1970) and *Blacks and the Military in American History* (New York: Praeger, 1974).

Jack D. Foner's life and career exemplify some major features of twentieth-century American politics, both praiseworthy and reprehensible, as well as modern trends in historical scholarship. Born in Brooklyn, New York, on December 14, 1910, the son of immigrant Jewish parents from the Russian empire, he graduated from City College in 1929. From 1935 he taught history at the downtown branch of CCNY, now Baruch College. He became active in the era's left-wing causes which included support for the Spanish republic, the trade union movement, and the rights of black Americans. In 1941 he was among some sixty faculty at the City University who were forced from their jobs in the wake of an investigation of alleged communist influences in higher education by the New York legislature's Rapp-Coudert Committee. He was subsequently blacklisted and unable to obtain academic employment for almost three decades. In 1981 the Board of Higher Education apologized to the victims, terming the events of 1941 an "egregious violation of academic freedom."

Foner served in the United States Army from 1942 to 1945. Possibly because of his political background he was assigned to nonessential duties—caring for horses at a barracks in the Midwest and later serving as a baker. He also taught illiterate recruits, mostly black and white Southerners, to read and write. Long after the war's
end, he continued to receive grateful letters from his charges, for whom the acquisition of literacy was the turning point in their lives. After leaving the army, he supported himself as a freelance lecturer on current affairs to devoted groups of listeners in Long Island, New York City, Philadelphia, and Florida. He also joined his three brothers (including his prolific twin, historian Philip S. Foner), in the Foner Orchestra, which played swing music at Catskill resorts.

Foner received his M.A. in history from Columbia University in 1933. He nearly completed his doctoral dissertation in the next few years, only to see his research notes and only draft copy destroyed in a fire. In the 1960s, with academic blacklisting waning, he returned to Columbia and completed his Ph.D. in American history in 1967. Two years later he was hired at Colby College in Waterville, Maine, where he established the first Black Studies program in New England and became immensely popular among both black and white students. He retired from Colby in 1976 and was awarded an honorary doctorate by the college in 1982. The citation concluded: “Colby salutes you as a long-time opponent of racism and thanks you for your courage, your service, and your friendship.” He was also honored by Colby’s Student Organization for Black Unity, which praised him for “his quiet sincerity and integrity” and for his interest in black history long before it became an “intellectual fad.” In 1986 Foner received the Tom Paine Award from the Emergency Civil Liberties Committee, along with his brothers Philip, Moe, a founder of Local 1199 of the Drug and Hospital Workers Union, and Henry, former president of the Fur and Leather Workers Union. After his retirement from Colby, Jack D. Foner moved to New York City and in the late 1980s began work on his study of Jews in the American military.

On a personal note, I would add that my father never retreated into bitterness at having his career destroyed. He remained a generous, gentle man, a true child of America’s Jeffersonian tradition, who believed that in the end the best side of human nature would come to the fore—a difficult faith to maintain during the dark days of McCarthyism. Most of what I have achieved as a historian I owe to the instruction and example of my father, who taught that visionaries and underdogs—Tom Paine, Wendell Phillips, Eugene V. Debs, and W. E. B. DuBois (a friend of my family)—were as central to the historical process as presidents and captains of industry. At home I learned ideas today taken for granted but then virtually unknown outside
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black and leftwing circles: slavery was the fundamental cause of the Civil War and emancipation its greatest accomplishment; Reconstruction was a tragedy not because it was attempted but because it failed; the condition of blacks was the nation's foremost domestic problem. Most important, Jack D. Foner believed that the present can and must be illuminated by the study of the past. His writing and teaching on African American history was premised on the conviction that only by confronting its troubled racial past could the United States move toward a greater degree of racial justice. And he hoped that by illuminating both the contributions of Jewish soldiers and sailors and the barriers they faced, his last book would contribute toward a better understanding of the place of Jews in modern American life.

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Marker (tablet) in the City Hall of Charleston, S.C.
Commemorating Francis Salvador. (American Jewish Archives)
The Colonial and Revolutionary Eras

Almost from the beginning of the colonial era, Jews have been part of the American population. And their connection with the military dates to the earliest days of settlement. Although one or two Jews may have been among the first immigrants to the colonies that would become the United States, the first permanent Jewish settlement on the North American continent was created by a contingent of twenty-three Jews who came to the settlement of New Amsterdam from northeastern Brazil in September 1654. These settlers were veterans of Dutch colonial expansion and the military conflicts it spawned. Since the 1620s the Dutch and Portuguese had warred over control of Brazil. In 1624 Dutch forces seized Bahia, only to be expelled by the Portuguese a year later. In 1630 a Dutch military expedition captured Recife. A number of Jewish mercenaries employed by the Dutch West India Company served in the expeditionary force. They were soon joined by hundreds of Jews from Amsterdam, attracted by the religious toleration offered by the Company and the Dutch government. In the militia established in Recife by the Dutch, all free citizens, including Jews, were enrolled. By 1637 about three hundred fifty militiamen—approximately half of the total—were Jewish. For a fee, a Jewish militiamen could claim exemption from guard duty on Saturday on the basis of “scruples of conscience.”

The Portuguese war for the reconquest of Brazil began in 1645 and lasted for nine years. Jews participated in the defense of Recife, which finally reverted to the Portuguese in January 1654. According to the capitulation agreement, Dutch citizens were given three months to either leave the colony, or remain as Portuguese subjects or alien residents. The Jewish community chose to disperse. Many returned to the Netherlands or settled in Dutch colonies in the Caribbean. One group, consisting of twenty-three men, women, and children, eventually made their way to New Amsterdam, arriving early in September 1654. It is with their arrival that American Jewish history begins.

It did not take long for them to discover that the tolerant treatment they had experienced in Holland and Dutch Brazil was not to be duplicated in New Amsterdam. Neither the Dutch Reform ministers nor Governor Peter Stuyvesant, “a committed anti-Semite,” attempted to hide their distaste for Jews. Referring to them as
members of a "deceitful race" and "blasphemers of the name of Christ," Stuyvesant sought permission from the Dutch West India Company to expel the newcomers. He had already asked them "in a friendly way" to leave, but they had refused.

Stuyvesant's efforts to oust the Jews was countered by a campaign launched by their coreligionists in Amsterdam including shareholders in the West India Company. In response to an appeal from Jews in New Amsterdam, a group of Dutch Jews, including several prominent merchants, reminded the company of the Jewish role in defending Dutch Brazil:

It is well known to your Honours that the Jewish nation in Brazil have at all times been faithful and have striven to guard and maintain that place, risking for that purpose their possessions and their blood.

In February 1655 Stuyvesant was directed to allow the Jews to remain. Excluding them from the colony, the company declared, would be "somewhat unreasonable and unfair," since they had suffered heavy losses in Brazil because of their loyalty to Holland. Not for the last time, Jewish military service would become the basis for claims to equal rights.

The company's decision, however, did not resolve the problem of what role these refugees would play in New Amsterdam. A new controversy quickly arose when, in August 1655, the governor and council ordered Jews excluded from service in the local militia (required of all free white males), since, they claimed, other members were unwilling to serve with Jews or remain in the same guardhouse. In return for this exemption, each male Jew between the ages of sixteen and sixty was to pay a special monthly tax.

On November 5, 1655, Jacob Barsimson and Asher Levy petitioned for the right "to keep guard" or to be exempted from the tax, since "they must earn their living by manual labor." Unmoved, the governor and council replied that the petitioners could not serve and if they cared to leave the colony, were free to do so. Levy thereupon went over the head of local authorities, presenting his case directly to the West India Company in Amsterdam. The appeal was successful, and the New Amsterdam Council was ordered to grant Levy the right to serve in the local militia. Levy now carried his campaign for civic
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recognition one step further, insisting upon equal rights, since he kept "watch and ward like other burghers." With the support of other Jewish settlers, Levy was granted the "burgher right" (enabling him to engage in certain kinds of business in New Amsterdam), although he remained excluded from the "great burgher right," which included the ability to hold office. In subsequent years, Jews were granted the right to purchase real estate, be merchants and mechanics, worship freely in their homes (although not in public), and have their own burial ground. After the British occupied New Amsterdam in 1664, renaming it New York, Jews slowly gained additional rights, including that of public worship.

The Jewish population of the British colonies in North America expanded quite slowly in the eighteenth century. By the time of the American Revolution only about one thousand Jews resided in the thirteen colonies. Unlike the original Jewish settlers of New Amsterdam, mostly Sephardic Jews whose origins lay in Spain and Portugal, most eighteenth-century emigrants were Ashkenazi Jews of German-Polish background. They resided primarily in port towns along the Atlantic coast—Newport, New York, Philadelphia, Charleston, and Savannah. Only a handful dispersed into the interior, to such locations as Easton and Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

By the time of the American Revolution, most Jews were merchants and shopkeepers. They engaged in trade throughout the Atlantic world—with the West Indies, Europe, and Africa—as well as in coastal shipping. Generally, they relied on contacts with other Jewish merchants in places like Curasao and London. Some, like other colonial merchants, participated in the African slave trade. They were active in frontier trade and land speculation west of the Alleghenies and served as purveyors, supplying British and colonial military forces, and as sutlers, selling provisions to the troops. For example, Aaron Lopez of Newport had commercial interests in the West Indies, British Isles, and throughout the American colonies. Some of his many ships carried Biblical names. The brothers Michael and Barnard Gratz of Philadelphia, and Joseph Simon and Levy Andrew Levy of Lancaster, engaged in extensive western trade and land speculation. The Gratz brothers established posts along the Western frontier and traded with the Indians.

In the British colonies, Jews eventually won the rights—sometimes in law, sometimes in fact—to be naturalized, participate in
business and commerce, work and worship in peace, and live in any neighborhood rather than being confined to ghettos, as in Europe. In colonial towns, Jews patrolled the streets as constables and members of the watch. In New York, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island, Jews were able to attend college; one graduated from King’s College in New York in 1774. In fact, Jews possessed more rights than in contemporary Britain. On the other hand, they by no means enjoyed full tolerance and equality. They suffered from Sunday closing laws and in colonies with an established church were forced to pay religious taxes. Many colonies required attorneys and schoolteachers to take a Christian oath, effectively barring Jews from these professions. And Jews suffered from anti-Semitism, reflected in occasional acts of vandalism against their funeral processions, cemeteries, and even homes. As in the Old World, stereotypes of Jews were quite common, including those of the rapacious Jewish merchant and the people who had murdered Christ.

In at least seven colonies, where religious qualifications were required for voting, Jews were denied the franchise. In New York Jews voted until 1737, when, in a disputed election, the Assembly decided to bar them from the polls, since they could not vote for Parliament in England. However, the enactment was not rigorously enforced, and Jews seem to have voted in subsequent elections. Jews were reported to be voting in South Carolina in the first decade of the eighteenth century. Nowhere, however, were Jews permitted to hold “honorific office,” since members of colonial assemblies were required to take a Christian oath. (Occasionally, this requirement was waived, as in the case of Joseph Ottolengu, who sat in the Georgia Assembly from 1761 to 1765.) In 1790 Moses Seixas of Newport reminded George Washington that Jews in the prerevolutionary era had been “deprived of the invaluable rights of free citizens.”

As for the military, from the beginnings of English settlement Jews were expected to serve in the militia, although most colonies required militia officers to take a Christian oath. In Georgia, a sparsely settled military outpost in the 1730s, a group of forty-two Jewish immigrants were permitted to settle in spite of opposition from the trustees in London. One, Dr. Samuel Nuñez, effectively treated victims of an epidemic then spreading through the colony. Appreciative of his efforts and recognizing the potential military contribution of the group, mostly able-bodied young men, governor James Ogelthorpe allowed them to remain. Among them was Benjamin Sheftall, who
became the first lieutenant of the Georgia militia. "The German Jews in Savannah," wrote one observer in 1733, "drill with a rifle, as all soldiers do." Five years later, eleven Jews were enrolled in New York City militia companies. In Pennsylvania some Jews joined the First City Troop, an elite unit of light-horse cavalry. Joseph Levy served as a lieutenant in the South Carolina militia, beginning in 1757.

Individual Jews also participated as soldiers and occasionally held the rank of officer (despite British regulations excluding anyone who refused to take a Christian oath) during the four imperial wars that stretched from the 1690s to 1763. The first Jew to bear arms for the British in North America was Joseph Isacks, a butcher who enlisted in the New York militia in 1690, soon after the outbreak of King William’s War. His reception by his fellow soldiers was not enthusiastic. In 1691 unknown persons—soldiers according to Isacks—removed his rifle from his lodgings, and he was instructed to return the weapon or pay five pounds for its loss. During Queen Anne’s War, Moses Nuñez served as a courier on the Georgia-Florida frontier, carrying messages to the front. In 1742 he commanded a small scout boat that monitored the movements of Spanish forces. King George’s War, fought between 1744 and 1748, pitted the British, including colonists, against France and Spain. In 1744 Zacharias Cohen was a gunner on the privateer sloop, Queen of Hungary, which sailed from Newport. Another Rhode Islander, Jacob Cohen, lost his life during the war, and Jacob Judah, listed as "Jew Boston," was among those taken prisoner and subsequently released. Jewish soldiers were also involved in the Seven Years War, the worldwide Franco-British struggle for empire that lasted from 1754 to 1763 and was known in North America as the French and Indian War. Among the troops who served under young George Washington in an expedition from Virginia across the Allegheny
Mountains were Michael Franks and Jacob Myer, who received awards for gallantry. (Some doubt exists, however, as to whether Michael Franks was in fact Jewish.) Isaac Myer of New York City organized a company of volunteers, was chosen captain of the unit, and subsequently led it into action in the Ohio Valley. Aaron Hart, an English-born Jew who had come to New York with the British army, was a commissary officer in the campaign that captured Montreal in 1760. A number of Jews also served with the colonial militias, particularly those of Rhode Island and New York.

During the four colonial wars, Jewish merchants provided equipment and supplies for the British army and provincial troops. Between 1740 and 1743, Abraham Minis of Savannah operated boats shuttling supplies to James Ogelthorpe's troops. For some Jewish merchants, military contracts became an extremely lucrative business. Jacob Franks of New York and his son David of Philadelphia were the chief suppliers of the British army during the French and Indian Wars. They furnished the supplies used in General James Braddock's unsuccessful attack on Fort Duquesne in 1755 and helped equip George Washington's expedition that took the fort in 1758. Jacob and David Franks received over £750,000 for provisioning British armies and garrisons. Mathias Bush of Philadelphia, Joseph Simon and Levy Andrew Levy of Lancaster, and Uriah Hendricks of New York were also actively engaged in supplying the armed forces. And Jewish sutlers were stationed with the troops at forts on Lake George and along the upper Hudson River. It was also during these colonial wars that privateering became big business, and Jewish merchants joined in this hazardous but lucrative activity, either as individual owners or members of groups.

The war ended in 1763 with the French driven out of North America. But Britain and her colonies soon found themselves on a collision course. Just when the colonists no longer needed British military protection, the mother country looked to them as a major source of revenue to help pay off the war debt. Despite political restrictions imposed by colonial assemblies, Jews took part in the growing colonial opposition to British revenue laws. Jewish merchants were among the signers of nonimportation agreements during the Stamp Act crisis of 1765 and the controversy over the Townshend Duties in 1770. Jews also assumed significant positions in the local committees that enforced the regulations adopted by
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Congress in the Continental Association of 1774. Indeed, these extralegal bodies did not impose the restrictions on Jewish participation that had barred them from office in the legally constituted governments. For example, Mordecai Sheftall, a merchant, rancher, and businessman and leader of Savannah’s Jewish community, became the city’s dominant Whig leader. From 1774 to 1776 he served as chairman of the committee of Christ Church Parish, the de facto county government. In enforcing the boycott of trade with Great Britain, Sheftall’s committee broke into the Custom House and prevented ships from unloading their cargoes. The royal governor of Georgia later claimed that Savannah’s Jews “to a man” were “violent rebels,” who offered “fresh insults to the British every day.” South Carolina’s royal governor echoed this opinion. Francis Salvador, who emigrated from England to South Carolina in 1773, was elected to the colony’s first and second Provincial Congresses. In July 1776, while serving in the South Carolina militia, Salvador was killed in a skirmish with Tories and Cherokee Indians, the first Jew to die in the revolutionary war and, thanks to a memorial plaque erected by Charleston Jews, “the only Jewish soldier of the Revolution to be individually commemorated in the United States.”

Well before this, however, war between the American colonies and England had begun at Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts, in April 1775. Congress proceeded to organize an army, printed money to pay for it, and appointed George Washington as its commander. In response, Britain declared the colonies in a state of rebellion, sent thousands of troops, and ordered the closing of colonial ports. In July 1776 came the Declaration of Independence. In the eight years of war that followed, some two hundred thousand men bore arms in the Continental army (whose soldiers were volunteers) and state militias (where service was compulsory for every able-bodied man unless he provided a substitute).

The role of Jews in the revolutionary army, and the contribution of Jewish financiers and merchants to the war effort, has been extensively chronicled. Early Jewish historians tended to expand the list of Jewish soldiers uncritically, including all manner of individuals with Jewish-sounding names who were not in fact Jewish. The leading contemporary authority on Jews and the American Revolution, Samuel Reznick, estimates that of the approximately one thousand Jews in the American colonies, seventy-two served as soldiers and twenty-two as officers. But the experience of this small
cadre was significant. As Reznick notes, the Revolution "may well have been the first war in the western world in which Jews were permitted to serve on an equal basis."

Jews participated in many of the war's major engagements. In July 1776 a large British fleet and thirty-four thousand troops under the command of General Howe moved upon New York City. Washington's army of fourteen thousand took up positions on Long Island. Unwilling to remain under British occupation, the bulk of the Jewish population voluntarily fled the city for Connecticut and Philadelphia, taking with them the scrolls and records of their synagogue, Shearith Israel. Fighting began on August 27 at Brooklyn Heights, and by dusk Washington was already in retreat. Among the troops who fought under his command was Solomon Bush of Philadelphia. He had enrolled as a captain and adjutant early in 1776 in the Flying Camp of Associators of Pennsylvania. Isaac Franks, who at seventeen had enlisted in a regiment of New York volunteers, also participated. Years later he recalled:

In June, 1776, armed and equipped at my own expense, I joined the army in the City of New York, and in July following, in parade order attended the first communication of the Declaration of Independence, which was read to the troops: when we all as with one voice, Declared that we would support and Defend the same with our lives and fortunes.

After the Battle of Long Island, Franks retreated with his unit to New York City, where he was captured by the British and imprisoned. A young man of remarkable courage, he escaped after three months, crossed the Hudson in the dead of winter in a leaky skiff with one paddle, and eventually rejoined American forces in New Jersey. Assigned to the Quartermaster Department of the Continental army, he served as an assistant forage master at West Point. He retired from the service in 1782 at the age of twenty-three and settled in Philadelphia.

The British occupied New York City for the remainder of the war. In the summer of 1777, Howe embarked for Philadelphia with some fourteen thousand troops. Washington confronted him at Brandywine Creek with eleven thousand soldiers. Unable to prevent the capture of Philadelphia, the Continental army settled into winter quarters at
Valley Forge. Several Jews participated in this campaign. Lewis Bush, captain of the Sixth Pennsylvania Battalion, died of wounds received at Brandywine. Solomon Bush, a deputy adjutant general of the Pennsylvania militia, was wounded but survived. Taken prisoner in October, he was released soon afterwards on parole. His wound never fully healed, but in October 1779 he was commissioned a lieutenant colonel, thus becoming the highest ranking Jewish officer in a combat unit of the Continental army.

Among the troops who froze and starved at Valley Forge during the winter of 1777-78 were Privates Asher Pollock of Rhode Island and Philip Moses Russell of Philadelphia. Russell had enlisted as a surgeon’s mate in 1777 and at Valley Forge was assigned to the Second Virginia Regiment as an assistant to Surgeon Norman. He saw action at Brandywine and subsequently at Monmouth. Exhaustion and an attack of camp fever affected his sight and hearing and he was forced to leave the service in 1780. He received a special commendation from Washington “for his assiduous and faithful attention to the sick and wounded, as well as his cool and collected decorum in battle.”

Perhaps the most controversial Jewish military figure of the Revolution was David Solebury Franks, who was associated with Benedict Arnold during the time of his command in Philadelphia and his treason at West Point. No other Jew had relations with so significant a group of patriot leaders. Born at Philadelphia in 1740, Franks moved to Canada when the British assumed control in 1763. By 1774 he had become a successful merchant and president of the Jewish congregation in Montreal. He was imprisoned for sixteen days in 1775 for defending the right of a demonstrator to protest against King George III. When American General Richard Montgomery’s forces occupied Montreal in October 1775, Franks advanced funds to aid the revolutionary army and he was subsequently appointed paymaster for the garrison, again advancing his own funds. As Franks later wrote, “As many Officers... can vouch,.... everything in my Power was done for them, while in Canada, and my good Offices and Purse were ever open to them, at a time when they had neither friend or money.” He left Canada when the defeated American army retreated in 1776, thereby incurring the displeasure of his father, a leading supporter of Quebec’s Governor Carleton, and the loss of his inheritance.
Joining the Continental army, Franks served as a volunteer in the Northern army and unofficially as an unpaid aide to General Arnold. When it became evident that the British were planning to abandon Philadelphia in 1778, Arnold was directed by Washington to take command of the city after the evacuation and Franks was attached to his staff as aide-de-camp, with the rank of major. On his arrival in the city, Arnold ordered the shops and stores temporarily shut, as directed by Congress, and forbade the sale of certain scarce goods. In February 1779 the Pennsylvania authorities presented Congress with eight charges of misconduct against Arnold, who had come under increasing fire for abusing his power as military commander. In April Congress referred four of the charges to a court-martial, whereupon Arnold resigned his post. After several postponements, on December 29, 1779, hearings on the charges began. Two of the four charges directly involved Franks. One accused Arnold of secretly ordering Franks to purchase goods for Arnold’s own profit when American troops entered Philadelphia. According to the deposition of Colonel John Fitzgerald, an aide to George Washington, Franks received an unsigned letter from Arnold, instructing him to purchase European and East Indian goods “to any amount” and to hide Arnold’s involvement in the transactions from even “his most intimate acquaintances.” However, the scheme was aborted when Pennsylvania Congressman Joseph Reed directed Arnold to close all shops and permit no purchases whatsoever. In answering the charge, Franks contended that he had been planning to resign from the army and that the purchases were intended to help to set himself up in business. But at any rate, because he decided to remain in the army, no purchases were made. The second charge, of imposing menial duties on a militiaman, arose from an incident on October 4, 1778, when Franks ordered militia Sergeant William Matlack to summon his barber. Matlack complied but later complained both to Arnold and to his father, Timothy, Matlack, a major political figure in
Philadelphia, that the order was unbecoming of a militiaman. Arnold responded that it was the duty of an orderly sergeant to obey every order "of my aides," not violating the law, "as mine, without judging the propriety of them." Never called to testify on this charge, Franks made no public reply. On January 26, 1780, the court dismissed the two charges involving Franks but found Arnold guilty of the two remaining charges of misconduct—allowing a vessel of which he was part owner to clear port when others could not and using public wagons for private purposes. The sentence was a reprimand from Washington.

In the meantime, starting in the spring of 1779, General Arnold had begun his secret correspondence with Sir Henry Clinton that was to last for sixteen months. On June 15, 1780, Arnold informed the British that he expected to be put in command of West Point, and shortly thereafter he succeeded in wrangling an appointment as commander of this strategic post from General Washington. He then entered into a plot to deliver West Point to the British in exchange for a commission in the Royal Army and £20,000. The final details of the surrender of the post were to be worked out between Arnold and Major John André, Clinton's aide, in a clandestine meeting near West Point.

Arnold took command at West Point on August 5, 1780. Major Franks accompanied him as an aide. Franks was shortly joined by another aide, Lieutenant Colonel Richard Varick. Varick later testified that when he arrived, on August 13, he found Franks deeply distressed over "repeated insults" and mistreatment by Arnold. Franks had decided to leave his position with Arnold, which he had held for three years, and transfer to the staff of Rochambeau or some other French officer. On September 22 Arnold met with André and delivered the plans to the fort. But the plot was thwarted when Major André, on his way back to the British lines, was captured wearing civilian clothes and carrying incriminating documents. Arnold fled to the Vulture, a British warship then in the Hudson River. Meanwhile, Franks had begun to suspect that Arnold was involved in some kind of treachery. Reluctantly, he confided his suspicions to Varick, but the two concluded that the suspicions were unwarranted. Shortly thereafter, Arnold wrote to Washington exonerating Franks and the other members of his staff, insisting that they were "totally ignorant of any transactions of mine that they had reason to believe were injurious to
the public.” Nevertheless, Varick and Franks were placed under house arrest.

Washington, who did not believe Franks was “privy” to Arnold’s treason, on September 27 dispatched Franks to escort Arnold’s wife and child to Philadelphia. Franks, like many others, was convinced Peggy Arnold had nothing to do with her husband’s treachery. Only years later would it become known that she was deeply involved from the outset. Meanwhile, Franks had requested that a board of inquiry be convened to investigate his relationship with Arnold both in Philadelphia and at West Point. While in Philadelphia, Franks was examined by the Pennsylvania council, where he found himself accused of perjuring himself at Arnold’s court-martial. Nonetheless, Washington, who convened a court of inquiry, insisted that it confine itself to the conduct of Franks and Varick in connection with Arnold at West Point. Two investigations, one for Varick, another for Franks, opened in November 1780. Both were unusual in that neither officer was accused of disloyalty, nor was anyone prosecuting or appearing against them. The hearings consisted mainly of affidavits from prominent officers attesting to the innocence and integrity of the two aides and a series of questions directed by Franks and Varick at each other. The court cleared the two officers, and Franks urged Washington to publish the proceedings relating to him: “Many people are to this hour inclined to think that my connection with Arnold could not be devoid of criminality.” On December 8 Washington accepted the report of the court of inquiry and made public its conclusion that “every part of Major David S. Franks’s conduct was not only unexceptionable but reflects the highest honor on him as an officer, distinguishes him as a zealous friend to the independence of America, and justly entitles him to the attention and confidence of his countrymen.” Historians today agree that Franks had no part in Arnold’s treason. However, many of his contemporaries appear to have had some reservations about his personality. Jefferson considered him “light” and “indiscreet,” although “honest” and “affectionate,” and Silas Deane called him “volatile and trifling.”

After being acquitted of complicity in Arnold’s treason, Franks remained on the army rolls as a major but without a specific military assignment. In the summer of 1781, Franks was appointed by Robert Morris as a special courier to the Franklin mission in Paris. Doubtless his command of French from his Montreal days made him particularly
suitable in this capacity.

Franks remained in the army until January 1, 1783, when he retired. But his service to the young Republic continued, for he was selected to deliver copies of the final peace treaty with England to American ministers abroad. At this time, Charles Thomson wrote to Franklin: "Colonel Franks has great merit for the early part he took and the sacrifices he has made in the late controversy and for his steady adherence to our cause." Franks subsequently served as vice consul at Marseilles and as a staff member of the commission that negotiated a trade treaty with the emperor of Morocco. His final position was as assistant cashier of the Bank of North America in Philadelphia. Franks died there during the yellow fever epidemic that swept the city in 1793.

In the winter of 1778-79, Britain shifted the focus of conflict to the South. In November 1778, Clinton sent thirty-five hundred men from New York to the coast of Georgia, where they were to join two thousand troops coming up from St. Augustine in the hope of capturing Savannah. Mordecai Sheftall and a number of other Savannah Jews sent their families to safety in Charleston, which was more strongly defended. They themselves remained behind to help defend Savannah from the impending British invasion, Sheftall having been appointed a commissary officer when hostilities with Britain began, with his son serving as his deputy. At the same time, a company of Charleston militia known as "Jew's company" because it contained a considerable number of Jews, left for Savannah under Captain Richard E. Lushington to assist in the city's defense.

On December 1, 1778, the Charleston Gazette published an article impugning the loyalty of Savannah's Jews. Signing himself "An American," the anonymous writer denounced "the Tribe of Israel" as cowards who, with Savannah under siege, "fled here for an asylum with their ill-gotten wealth, dastardly turning their backs upon the country when in danger, which gave them bread and protection." The same would occur in South Carolina, the writer predicted. The attack was refuted by "A Real American and True Hearted Israelite," whose article in the South Carolina American General Gazette pointed out that the refugees were women and children. Not a single male "Georgia Israelite" had fled to South Carolina and, the writer noted, many Jews of Charleston had left to join their "brother citizens" defending Savannah.
Late in December 1778, the British captured Savannah. Mordecai Sheftall and his son were taken prisoner, beginning an unusual and harrowing odyssey. The British commander ordered that the elder Sheftall be guarded carefully as “a very great rebel.” After being imprisoned on the British ship *Nancy,* the Sheftalls were released on parole. Eventually, fearing for their lives in British-held territory, they headed for Charleston, only to be intercepted by a British frigate which took them to the island of Antigua. Finally, in December 1780, they were again paroled and exchanged for British prisoners at Philadelphia. Almost immediately the younger Sheftall accepted an appointment to command the sloop *Carolina Packet* on a mission, under a flag of truce, to bring food and money to destitute American prisoners at British-held Charleston. And he managed to transport seventy persons, including his own mother and sisters, back to Philadelphia.

When in September 1779, American and French forces launched an unsuccessful attempt to recapture Savannah, two Jewish merchants, Philip Minis and Levi Sheftall, not only offered suggestions as to the most desirable landing places but served as guides for the attacking troops. (Following the fall of Charleston, however, Levi Sheftall took an oath of loyalty and received the king’s pardon. Only the strenuous efforts of his half brother Mordecai enabled him to regain his Georgia citizenship in 1784.) Minis’s mother, Abby Minis, a merchant still active despite having reached the age of eighty, made supplies available to the American and French troops. After the failure of the attack on Savannah, she and her daughters were forced to leave the city. Another Jewish participant in the campaign was Benjamin Nones, a merchant from Bordeaux who came to America in 1777 and immediately enlisted as a volunteer in the Continental army. He fought in Count Pulaski’s legion in Savannah and was praised for bravery by his commanding officer. Several Jews also took part in the defense of Charleston, which fell to the British in May 1780. A number of Jewish prisoners of war were subsequently deprived of their property and banished from the city. Abraham Mendez Seixas recorded in his prayer book that he was “banish’d from Charles Town as disaffected by the British Government and arrived in Philadelphia 29th May 1782.”

Far more important than the contribution of the one hundred or so Jews who served in the Continental army and state militias were
the commercial activities of Jewish entrepreneurs who, in the words of Jacob R. Marcus, helped to "keep commodities flowing" to the army and advanced indispensable financing to the revolutionary government. Joseph Simon of Lancaster, for example, supplied the Continental army with rifles, ammunition, drums, blankets, and other supplies, and provided money to pay for a messenger service between the city and Washington's army. Jewish entrepreneurs provided essential supplies by running the British blockade and serving as civilian purveyors to the armed forces. They also outfitted privateers and extended credit for the purchase of materiel and for paying soldiers. As brokers they served the revolutionary cause by selling government bonds.

Among the most daring of the blockade runners was the firm of Isaac Moses and Company, based in Philadelphia, whose ships made the run from Amsterdam to St. Eustatius in the Dutch Caribbean, which served as an American supply base until its seizure by the British in 1781. The new rulers vented their anger on local Jews, stripping them of their property and deporting thirty to the island of St. Kitts. The multifaceted efforts of Isaac Moses and his partners were of considerable significance to the American cause. To help finance the invasion of Canada in 1775, the company made available over $20,000 in specie in exchange for Continental paper currency. Moses was also among the more than twenty Jewish merchants involved in outfitting privateers who harassed British shipping during the Revolution. He also provided a personal bond of three thousand British pounds to provide supplies for the American army. Other Jewish merchants who advanced funds included Jacob Hart, who loaned money to pay Lafayette's troops, and Philip Minis, who as paymaster advanced money to the Continental forces fighting in Georgia. Some, including Minis, were eventually repaid, at least in part, by Congress. Mordecai Sheftall, who had dipped into his own pocket to supply Continental troops, was not among the fortunate ones. After the war, he repeatedly appealed without success for a settlement of his pay accounts and reimbursement for his advances. "I want nothing but justice," reads one of his petitions to Congress. Eventually, Sheftall received about five percent of what he claimed to be owed.

The best known of the Jewish financiers who served the revolutionary government was undoubtedly Haym Salomon. Born in
1740 in Lissa, Poland, he arrived in New York City in 1772, establishing himself as a commission merchant, dealer in securities, and ship broker. After serving as a sutler selling provisions to American troops stationed at Lake George, Salomon returned to New York, then under British occupation. In time he aroused British suspicion and was imprisoned. Owing to his fluency in German, the British found him useful in communicating with their Hessian soldiers. He was released from jail and soon resumed his business activities. Threatened with a second arrest in August 1778, he fled to Philadelphia, where he addressed a memorial to the Continental Congress, detailing his services to the revolutionary cause and asking for employment. Salomon claimed that while in New York, he had assisted French and American prisoners with money and helped them to escape.

When Congress proved indifferent to his appeal, Salomon opened an office as a dealer in securities. Within a few years he had become a successful broker. In 1781, when Robert Morris was named superintendent of finance for the Continental Congress, he engaged Salomon to assist him in raising funds. The "most energetic and successful" broker who served the revolutionary government, Salomon, with Morris's permission, advertised himself as "Broker to the Office of Finance." He was not a banker, nor did he loan his own money to the government; rather, he sold about $200,000 worth of government securities for a broker's fee. He did extend credit to members of the Continental Congress when their pay was late in arriving, notably to James Madison and Edmund Randolph, and he declined to charge them interest. Salomon died two years after the end of the war, eulogized by the Pennsylvania Packet as "a native of Poland and of the Hebrew nation...remarkable for his skill and his integrity in the profession and for his generous and humane deportment."

After his death, Salomon's name became involved in controversy.
For years his descendants sought compensation from Congress, making unsubstantiated claims that he had advanced large amounts of his own money to the government without being repaid. Subsequently, a myth developed that Salomon had been the “financier of the Revolution” who almost singlehandedly saved the new nation from collapse—an exaggeration of his nonetheless important contribution. (When a group of Polish Jews sought to erect a statue of Salomon at New York City in 1924, the B’nai B’rith’s magazine claimed that he had advanced the government $658,000 without receiving a penny in repayment.)

Like every other group of Americans, Jews divided in their response to the struggle for independence. Although most undoubtedly supported the patriots—including not only soldiers, suppliers, and financiers, but those who voluntarily left their homes to avoid living under British occupation—a number of Jews sided with the British. Indeed, several prominent Jewish families, such as Gomez, Lopez, and Hays, “divided into hostile camps—Whigs and Tories.” Among the Jewish loyalists were some who had taken part in the protests of the 1760s and early 1770s but drew back when the issues became war and independence. As merchants and shippers as well as suppliers to the British armed forces, not a few had profitable ties with the mother country. “The thought of revolution and secession,” writes Jacob Marcus, “frightened them. They had a great deal to lose.” The early patriotic historians of colonial Jewry minimized the number of Jewish Tories. It is now established that there were more than they acknowledged. New York, Newport, and Philadelphia were the homes of prominent Jewish loyalists. Although most Jews fled when the British captured New York in 1776, between fifteen and thirty Jewish families remained in the city during the long occupation. Some sixteen Jews were among the 948 New Yorkers who, on October 16, 1776, swore loyalty and pledged “true allegiance” to the British crown. The same number fought for the British in military units of loyalists headed by General Oliver DeLancey. A number of Jews also remained in Newport after the British occupation in October 1776, including Isaac Touro, hazan of the city’s synagogue, and the entire Hart family.

David Franks and his daughter Rachel were probably the best known Jewish loyalists. A prominent Philadelphia merchant, Franks had signed the nonimportation agreement of 1770. When war broke
out, he professed to be neutral. At first he served the Continental forces, providing supplies for British prisoners of war held in Pennsylvania stockades. When the British occupied Philadelphia, Franks and his family remained. He was soon employed by the British to provision their American prisoners. Franks opened his house to social events for British authorities and his daughter Rachel entertained British officers. In May 1778 she acted as one of the two Queens of Beauty at the famous Meschianza, an extravaganza organized by British officers as a farewell party for General William Howe.

When the Americans reoccupied the city in 1778, Franks was arrested as an alleged Tory but was released a month later, for Congress found no basis on which to try him. Two years later he was again arrested on the charge of having surreptitiously aided the British and was ordered to leave Philadelphia, but unlike other Tories, his property was not confiscated. Together with his daughter, he departed for British-held New York, and the two eventually made their way to Britain. Having married an officer, Rachel Franks remained in Britain, but her father obtained permission to return home after the war. He died at Philadelphia in 1793. Other Jewish loyalists were not so fortunate. Jacob Louzada of New Jersey was forced to flee to Nova Scotia and never returned. The Rhode Island Assembly deprived three members of the Hart family of their rights and property. Isaac Hart fled to Long Island where he met his death at the hands of patriotic Whigs.

"We have obtained our independence..." Mordecai Sheftall wrote his son in April 1783, as peace descended upon the new nation. "Of which happy event I sincerely congratulate you and all my friends. As an [entire] new scene will open itself, and we have the world to begin again." But Jews, like many other Americans, had fought a dual battle—to achieve independence and to expand equality in the new Republic. As far as Jewish patriots were concerned, the revolutionary struggle had not yet ended. There was an urgent need to revise state constitutions to reflect the egalitarian ideals spawned by the revolutionary struggle. (Like Jefferson and many other southern patriots, however, Sheftall, a slaveholder, did not push these principles to their ultimate conclusion.) Although the thirteen states had drawn up new constitutions during the Revolution, all but New York retained colonial provisions barring Jews from voting and holding public office.
Jews and the American Military

Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Virginia, Georgia, and North and South Carolina limited office holding to Protestants. Delaware required state officials to swear a Trinitarian oath. Even Pennsylvania, with the era’s most democratic constitution, required officeholders to affirm the divinity of the Old and New Testaments, a provision also adopted in Maryland.

Jews deeply resented these religious test oaths. In petitioning for their removal, they repeatedly referred with pride to their multifaceted activities in support of the Revolution. Late in 1783 leaders of Philadelphia’s Jewish congregation petitioned the state Council of Censors to modify the constitution. “In behalf of themselves, and their brethren Jews residing in Philadelphia,” they called for the repeal of oaths that deprived Jews of the most eminent right of freemen.” The Jews of Charleston, New York, Newport and other cities occupied by the British had suffered “for their attachment to the revolution principles,” and Pennsylvania Jews had served enthusiastically in the Continental army and militia and contributed to the support of the state government.

Published in The Independent Gazetteer, the petition was endorsed by the newspaper’s editors:

The Jews of the continent...have been peculiarly firm and united in the great cause of America, and therefore, are of right entitled to all the privileges and amenities of equal government in common with every other body of people.

No action was taken on the Pennsylvania petition. But in October 1785 Virginia became the second state to guarantee Jews political equality when the House of Burgesses eliminated religious tests for public office.

The new federal constitution took a major step toward guaranteeing Jews political equality. Article 6, section 3, stipulated that no religious test should ever be required, “as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.” (Should the president ever be a Jew, one newspaper commented during the debate over ratification, he might order the armed forces “to rebuild Jerusalem.”) Although the Constitution said nothing about qualifications for state office, its adoption spurred four additional states to eliminate religious tests. Between 1789 and 1792, Delaware,
Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Georgia eliminated provisions that barred Jews from holding public office.

Thus, Jewish patriots made their contribution to the winning of American independence and achieved partial victories in the struggle for civic equality. Future generations of Jews would labor to preserve and widen these accomplishments.

**From the Revolution to the Civil War**

By the time of the first census in 1790, the Jewish population of the United States numbered about fifteen hundred. Ten years later, it had risen to only twenty-seven hundred, the large majority of them native born, since immigration in these years was relatively low. Jews resided, as they traditionally had, in New York, Philadelphia, Charleston, Savannah, and two new locations, Richmond and Baltimore. In the early years of the Republic, a number of Jews served in the armed forces on both the local level—in the citizen militia and volunteer units—and nationally in the regular armed forces. Unlike during the colonial era, some Jews were able to become commissioned officers. Some were involved in the era’s dramatic confrontations. Israel Franks, lieutenant colonel in command of the Second Regiment of the Philadelphia County Militia, composed of citizens of Germantown and its vicinity, led his men into the disaffected area of western Pennsylvania during the Whiskey Rebellion of 1794. On that occasion, too, Reuben Etting served as a lieutenant and subsequently captain in a Baltimore unit, despite the requirement of a Christian oath in Maryland. In Richmond, Virginia, a number of young Jewish men joined the Richmond Blues, an independent volunteer company called out in 1800 to suppress Gabriel’s slave rebellion and again in 1807, when a British frigate attacked the Chesapeake, inflicting severe casualties. Unable to purchase supplies, the British admiral threatened to land and take them by force, whereupon Virginia’s governor ordered out the troops. Although the threatened invasion did not materialize, the city council complimented “the Israelites of Richmond” for their response “when the country was in danger from a foreign foe.”

In the early years of the Republic, relatively few Jews sought professional careers in the law, medicine, or teaching. A number did become career officers in the army and navy. During the undeclared war against France during John Adams’s administration, Congress
augmented the size of the regular army and navy, created the Navy Department, and established the Marine Corps. Between 1799 and 1801, the navy secretary appointed a number of Jews as midshipmen. Once peace was restored, however, Congress reduced the navy's size to a peacetime footing. The only Jews retained in the service were Midshipmen Barnard Henry and Joseph Israel, and both were involved in highly dramatic incidents in 1804 during the war with the Barbary pirates of Tripoli. Henry was a midshipman serving on the *Philadelphia* when the frigate ran aground off Tripoli. He, along with Captain William Bainbridge and the rest of the crew, were imprisoned on February 16, 1804. Lieutenant Stephen Decatur, with a raiding party of volunteers, slipped into the harbor, boarded the frigate, set it afire, and escaped. But it was not until the treaty of peace in June 1805 that Henry and the others were released. Henry was promoted to lieutenant in 1807, but resigned from the navy in May 1812.

Israel lost his life in a similar incident that ended less fortuitously. In 1804 Commodore Edward Preble dispatched the ketch *Intrepid*, loaded with explosives, into Tripoli Harbor with the aim of destroying the Tripolitanian fleet by exploding the small boat. The *Intrepid* was accompanied by two fast rowboats in which the officers and crew were to make their escape. Thirteen men, all volunteers, were on board the *Intrepid*, including Israel, although it is unclear whether he was an original member of the venture or, as one historian claims, “managed to get abroad unobserved” and when discovered was allowed to remain. In any event, on September 4 the tiny ship reached the harbor safely but then exploded prematurely, killing all on board. A monument to the six naval officers, including Israel, who fell in the Tripolitanian war, now stands on the grounds of the Naval Academy at Annapolis. During the First World War, the navy named a destroyer in Israel’s honor.

Two Jewish physicians served in the navy in the early years of the nineteenth century. Dr. Gershon J. Jacques served as a surgeon’s mate with the squadron off Tripoli in 1804 and was promoted to surgeon. He resigned from the navy in 1808. Manuel Phillips, the first Jewish doctor in Philadelphia, joined the navy in 1809, but his service was interrupted when he embarked on a prolonged trip to China and India, which kept him out of the country for six years. Upon his return, he remained on the navy’s rolls, but without assignment, until he resigned in 1824.
The first Jewish officer in the early regular army was Simon Magruder Levy, a member of West Point’s “first graduating class” of 1802. Like Israel’s, Levy’s career was tragically cut short. Born in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in 1774, he was the second son of Levy Andrew Levy, who, as we have seen, was a nephew and business partner of Joseph Simon. After the revolutionary war, the Levy family moved to Hagerstown and then to Baltimore. In 1793 Levy enlisted in the army and served as a member of the Fourth Infantry Regiment, perhaps fighting under General Anthony Wayne at the 1794 battle of Fallen Timbers, although the evidence on this point, as will be related, is unclear. On March 3, 1801, Levy, then a sergeant, was appointed by President John Adams as a cadet in the corps of artillerists and engineers. Shortly after assuming office, the new Jefferson administration undertook to establish a tuition-free public institution for the education of prospective army officers. The initial step was to revitalize the military school begun at West Point in 1794 to train cadets of the artillery and engineers corps to become officers. One of Jefferson’s first acts in carrying out his program was to install Jonathan Williams, a grandnephew and protégé of Benjamin Franklin, as superintendent of the school at West Point and to order the cadets, including Levy, to report there on September 1 for instruction. On September 21 the eleven cadets began a daily routine of morning classes, with afternoons devoted mostly to field sports. They were joined on October 12 by Joseph Gardner Swift of Massachusetts, who in 1800 President Adams appointed a cadet and assigned to Newport Harbor for training in engineering and fortifications. Major Williams took command of the school in December 1801. According to George W. Cullum, Swift’s biographer, Williams quickly developed a special relationship with Swift, lending him books and often dining with him.

Not until March 1802 did Congress officially establish a military academy at West Point for the purpose of training professional army officers. The act created a Corps of Engineers separate from the artillery and stipulated that promotions in this new corps were to be based on merit rather than seniority, as was the practice in the rest of the army. Jonathan Williams was named to head both the corps and the school with the rank of major, and shortly after its formal opening in April 1802, Levy, together with several others including Swift, were transferred as cadets of the Corps of Engineers. As Swift recorded in his memoirs: “In July [1802], by transfer I became a cadet of engineers.
...The number of cadets at the academy was twelve. Among them was Simon Magruder Levy, from a respectable Jewish family of Baltimore,... promoted to cadet for his merit and mathematic attainments. He was now twenty-five years of age.”

The school's curriculum was organized so as to ensure mastery of the basic skills required for command in all branches of military service; its emphasis on engineering came after the War of 1812. Cadets were to be commissioned when the instructors deemed them qualified. On September 11, 1802, the first public examination was conducted at the military academy, and on October 12 the institution held what came to be considered its “first graduation.” Two cadets were promoted to second lieutenant in the Corps of Engineers—Swift and Levy.

Levy's career as a commissioned officer lasted only three years and was embroiled in controversy. First, there was the question of whether he or Swift outranked the other. They had received identical letters from Secretary of War Henry W. Dearborn, notifying them of their appointments as second lieutenants in the Corps of Engineers. As West Point’s superintendent, Lieutenant Colonel Williams, as early as November 2, 1802, pointed out, “the letters of appointment do not state any priority of Rank between Lieut. Swift and Levy.” Since Williams deemed Swift “foremost as a Cadet,” he took it upon himself to rank him above Levy. “Although the letters [of appointment] are of the same date,” he continued, “it is indispensable that one or the other should preside, and former usage is the only ground I could take.”

In September 1803, the issue of relative rank surfaced again. Captain William Barron, temporarily in charge at West Point, raised the issue of “the present rank of Swift and Levy,” in a letter to Secretary of War Dearborn. The secretary turned the communication over to Adjutant General Cushing for his judgment. Four days later, the latter responded that the relative rank “appears to have been fixed” in the letter Williams wrote to him in November 1802. “Mr. Levy,” he continued, “cannot complain if Mr. Swift should stand first, because they have stood so from the beginning.” On the basis of this letter, Dearborn advised Barron that the question of rank had been decided “in favor of Lt. Swift.” He added, however, that since promotions in the engineering corps depended on merit, rather than rank, this issue was “of less consequence than in other Corps.” Nonetheless, to this day, controversy continues over whether Levy or Swift should be
considered "West Point's first graduate."

Levy remained on duty at the military academy until 1804. During his service there he was a founding member and recording secretary of the United States Military Philosophical Society and also served as secretary of the academy, keeping records and regularly communicating with Williams, who was often away from West Point. The latter position embroiled him in a lengthy exchange with Williams. Because Levy considered his duties as academy secretary to be outside his normal responsibilities, he urged Williams, without success, to have the secretary of war authorize additional compensation for his "extra services." As he wrote Williams in May 1803:

Were the time that was absorbed in performing those several duties, applied to Scientific pursuits, I should have had the happiness of possessing a greater proportion of useful knowledge, which exclusive of the personal benefits and satisfaction deriving therefrom, would, according to the standing of our Corps, in a superior degree, qualify me for an Additional Grade; — this time, of course, is in a measure lost, and in order to make amends for the same, I intend sacrificing to it, the intermediate hours and ensuing vacation, however indispensably necessary, a relaxation from study, the mind may naturally require.

While pursuing this question, Levy also became involved in a controversy over whether engineer officers possessed the right of command over troops of other branches equal to officers of the line. Williams and his successor, Major Decius Wadsworth, pressured the secretary of war, to no avail, to accept this principle. In November 1803 Levy added his voice to the debate in a letter to Wadsworth:

I have just given upwards of nine years of the bloom of life to a service that I have made professional, and can it be supposed that I will hold a commission in our Army without authority to command or to be obeyed by my inferiors in rank? I am, D[ear] Sir, situated in life as you represent yourself; my means will not afford me an independency, or I should immediately retire from the Army, if the adopted principle continues.
Soon, the issues of extra pay and equal command were overshadowed by Levy's deteriorating health. In February 1804 he wrote Williams (who had resigned from the army and returned to civilian life) that he was suffering acutely: "I fear the loss of the use of my right arm, & the pains have seized my feet." The "only hope for cure" was a change of climate. If he could not obtain a furlough enabling him to go south, he would have no choice but to leave the profession to which he had given "so many years of the bloom of life." The following month, Secretary of War Dearborn authorized a six-month furlough, enabling Levy to travel to Georgia to regain his health. When the furlough was about to expire, Dearborn denied Levy's request for a permanent transfer from the Corps of Engineers to some unit stationed "at the southward," meaning the Artillery Corps. Ordered to return to West Point, Levy failed to comply, remaining in the South and vainly reiterating his request for a transfer. Indeed, when requested by his father to provide information about Levy's whereabouts, the War Department in November 1804 responded that "no information had been received at this office from him" for over a month. By February 1805, Williams was hinting at a darker side to the story. To Lieutenant Swift he wrote: "I cannot bear to hear that a certain disease called the Rumitis should attack anyone [belonging to the Corps of Engineers]." Swift responded that he had heard Levy was at Fort Wilkinson, Georgia, and was in fact suffering from rheumatism. "Poor fellow," he went on, "from his account he must go from this World of pain and trouble soon." Meanwhile, in January 1805, Wadsworth had resigned to return to civilian life and was replaced by Williams, who assumed the position of superintendent for a second time.

By May 15, 1805, tired of Levy's repeated requests for transfer, Dearborn ordered him to return to West Point without delay. But events soon took an even more disappointing turn when Swift, in June, was promoted to the rank of first lieutenant, passing over Levy, who believed himself entitled to equal consideration. To make matters even worse for Levy, Walker K. Armistead, who had graduated from West Point a year after Levy and Swift, received the same promotion. One month later, Levy submitted his resignation from the army "because of serious illness." "Levy has resigned," Williams wrote to Swift. "I suppose your promotion over his head roused his benumbed spirit and induced him to do what, from a conscientious sense of his
dependence on artificial spirits, he should have done long since." Two years after he left the service, Levy died "somewhere in Georgia." The place of his burial remains unknown.

Even after his death, Levy's record was bedeviled by curious developments. In the 1868 edition of George Cullum's Register of West Point graduates, a footnote was added which stated that Levy had been "appointed Cadet for his good conduct as Orderly Sergeant in the Battle of Maumee Rapids, August 20, 1794." In the 1891 edition, however, the footnote was transferred to the record of Walter K. Armistead, West Point's third graduate, whose name followed Levy's (listed, as usual, second to Swift). Three decades later, when the editor of The American Hebrew asked the adjutant general to clarify this matter, he was informed that no record existed of Levy having served at Maumee Rapids.

The second Jewish cadet at West Point was Samuel Noah. Born in London in July 1779, he came to the United States at the age of twenty, settling in New York City and soon becoming an American citizen. After unsuccessfully seeking to join the navy as a midshipman, he received an appointment to West Point in 1807. During his brief stay at the military academy, Noah served as an aide to the superintendent and, because of his exemplary handwriting, as a recorder at military courts. He was commissioned on December 9, 1807, and was appointed an ensign in the Second Infantry Regiment, which he joined after a long and tedious journey to Fort Adams, Mississippi. From 1808 to 1811 he spent his time studying the writings of Napoleon, tracking down smugglers along the Florida frontier, and marching from "one unhealthy post to another" in the Gulf states. Despite winning a promotion to second lieutenant in 1808 and first lieutenant two years later, Noah became increasingly discouraged by the "boring duty" and the appointment of "ignorant" civilians above him in rank. He resigned from the army on March 13, 1811.

Noah's career became far more eventful after leaving the army. In the summer of 1812 he joined with Augustus W. Magee—another West Point officer who had also resigned his commission, feeling slighted because a promised promotion had been denied him—to lead a filibustering expedition to free Texas from Spanish rule. The Republican Army of the North, as it was called, consisted of Americans, Mexicans, and Indians. Noah participated in the campaign that captured La Bahia (today called Goliad, Texas) in
November 1812. Years later Noah recalled his experience in Texas:

In our battle with the Spanish Royalists before we marched on San Antonio, we were perplexed to know how we could distinguish our Mexicans from the Royalists as both wore the same uniform. An expedient however, was soon presented and urgently recommended by a Lapan Indian chief, which was simply to paint the faces of our Mexicans with rouge, the same with which they painted their own which at once relieved us from our dilemma. It effectually disappointed the enemy.

After a four-month siege by Spanish forces, during which Magee died and was replaced by another American, Major Samuel Kemper, the army marched to San Antonio, with Noah in command of its rear guard. Routing the Spanish forces, they entered San Antonio in April 1813 and proclaimed the Republic of Texas. But Noah quit the expedition in disgust and returned to the United States after Mexican members of the Republican Army executed ten Spanish officers who had been taken prisoner. As we will see, this was not the end of his military career.

Another Jewish officer, Abraham Massias of Charleston, also took part in the quasi-legal military campaigns along America's southern borders in these years. After serving in the New York militia from 1802 to 1808, Massias entered the regular army as a first lieutenant in the Regiment of Riflemen. Rising to the rank of captain in 1809, he was stationed at Fort Norfolk, Virginia. Although his religion was not a bar to Massias's appointment and promotion, he was the victim of anti-Semitic barbs. In 1810 a fellow officer, Captain John McLelland, left his military boots at a tavern in Petersburg and received permission to perform duty in "fair top" civilian boots. Massias objected strongly to this arrangement, and the result was a bitter verbal exchange during which he exclaimed, "Sir, if you are offended at anything that I have said, you know where my room is." To which McLelland replied: "Sir, I cannot condescend to look for the room of a little Jew." "Do you call me a Jew, Sir?" responded Massias. "Yes, Sir," McLelland answered, "I believe you are a damned Israelite." No blows were exchanged, and several weeks later, "through the interference of our brother officers," the two captains shook hands and were reconciled.

Massias's involvement in American efforts to acquire East Florida
from Spain began in 1812, a year after Congress had authorized President Madison to use the army and navy to secure the area if local residents desired or to prevent seizure by another foreign power. Massias at this point was third in command at Point Petre, Georgia, a fort on the Saint Mary's River just above Florida. In March 1812 Georgia’s former governor, George Matthews, arrived at the fort accompanied by Ralph Isaacs, his Jewish secretary. Matthews had been commissioned a general by Madison and empowered to use the military to secure East Florida. Having recruited a “patriot army” inside East Florida, Matthews now sought reinforcements from the troops stationed at Point Petre.

With Lieutenant Colonel Smith absent, Major Jacint Laval was in command. He at first refused to allow any of his troops to join the expedition but later authorized the participation of fifty soldiers. Matthews and Isaacs, however, seeking to avoid direct governmental involvement, wanted these men to go as “volunteers,” not regular soldiers. When Laval heard of this plan, he canceled his order. Behind Laval’s back, Matthews sought to sow dissension at the fort and to raise volunteers for his expedition. According to Matthews, Massias and the other officers were ready to do everything required “for the benefit of their country,” offering, if necessary, “to resign their commissions and act as volunteers.” For his part, Laval stationed guards to prevent any soldier or officer from slipping away to join the insurgent army. Whereupon, on March 16 Massias confronted his commander, accusing him of acting “contrary to the wishes of our government” and suggesting that he “leave the post.” When Laval ordered Massias to report to his quarters, Massias shouted that he would march the troops to East Florida himself and was placed under arrest. At this point Colonel Smith unexpectedly returned, dismissed the charges against Massias and confined Laval to his quarters. Smith, Laval complained to the secretary of war, had been “deluded by Matthews and his confidential Jew, Col. Isaacs.” “Is it possible,” he went on, “that the government cannot be better furnished with officers than with Jews, rogues, traitors, conspirators?”

Having resumed command, Smith agreed to give Matthews the aid he desired, and on March 17, 1812, the forces assembled by Matthews seized the town of Fernandina and the surrounding territory of Amelia Island. The leaders of the “patriot army” then issued a declaration of independence from Spain and adopted a flag
designed by Colonel Isaacs. Shortly thereafter, Matthews, with two companies of U.S. troops—one commanded by Massias—took over the area in the name of the United States. Then, the "patriot army" and American forces moved on to St. Augustine, the stronghold of Spanish power in East Florida, and laid siege to the city. In the meantime, Secretary of State James Monroe repudiated Matthews for having exceeded his authority and replaced him with Governor Mitchell of Georgia. In July Massias was appointed the American commander at Fernandina, remaining in charge for ten months. According to one authority, Massias "proved to be a brilliant occupation governor" who instituted "a series of tough rules and regulations that enabled him to run the town firmly but fairly." But growing opposition in Congress to the illegal occupation led the administration to abandon East Florida in 1813.

After being recalled from Florida, Massias was placed in command of a company of riflemen stationed at Fort Petrie. On September 17, 1814, he was promoted to the rank of major in the newly formed Fourth Regiment of Riflemen. However, in December the Senate rejected his appointment. Probably lingering resentment over the invasion and occupation of East Florida played a role in this turn of events. In any event, six years later the region was purchased from Spain.

Meanwhile, on June 18, 1812, Congress declared war on Great Britain. Like other Americans, many Jews viewed the War of 1812 as a second war for independence. It is estimated that 128 Jews (of a total Jewish population of around three thousand) participated in the war effort, serving on land and sea as privates and officers in the regular army and navy, in state and local militia, and in citizen volunteer units. Unlike most of the Jews who served during the American Revolution, those in the War of 1812 were largely native born.

Among the most prominent Jews to serve in the regular army was Mordecai Myers, who subsequently recorded a vivid account of his experiences. Because of previous service in the New York militia and his study of military tactics, undertaken "at the particular request" of the state's governor, Daniel Tompkins, Myers was commissioned a captain in the Thirteenth United States Infantry on March 12, 1812. "Sum must spill their blud," he wrote in his peculiar spelling to Jewish newspaper publisher Napthali Phillips, "and others their ink. I expect
to be among the former and hope you are amongst the latter." Myers distinguished himself during General James Wilkinson's offensive against Montreal, launched from Sacketts Harbor in the fall of 1813. On the evening of October 17 Wilkinson's flotilla started down the St. Lawrence River. The night turned stormy and no fewer than fifteen boats were lost before the expedition reached the rendezvous at Grenadier Island. For more than a week severe winds and blizzards pinned the Americans down on the island. At this point it was decided to send back to Sacketts Harbor the men who had become too ill or disabled to proceed. About two hundred men were placed on two schooners and the vessels set out in a storm, only to be wrecked on rocks one mile from the mainland. Captain Myers initiated the rescue effort. As he later recalled:

I volunteered to General Boyd, then commanding on the island, to go to their rescue. He said that it was impossible in such a storm, but that if I would undertake it I might have as many men and boats as I pleased... With great difficulty we reached the vessels and found them lying on the rocks... We made thirteen trips to the shore and landed all, dead and alive, from both vessels.

On November 5 the flotilla resumed the descent of the St. Lawrence, and six days later Wilkinson decided to give battle to the British forces at Chrysler's Field in Upper Canada. While leading his men in the attack, Myers was seriously wounded and was removed to the home of a local physician in upstate New York. "At one time," wrote Myers, "the doctor feared that he could not save me." But not only did Myers recuperate, he met and married Charlotte Bailey, the Christian daughter of a Plattsburgh judge. The marriage led Myers to reduce his ties with the Jewish community; indeed, his Reminiscences, published in 1853, do not mention his Jewish origins. Myers saw
additional service toward the end of the war and was discharged from the army in September 1815 because of his wound. Subsequently, he became active in business and politics, serving several terms as a Democratic member of the New York State legislature and, in the 1850s, twice as mayor of Schenectady. He lived to his ninety-fifth year and died in 1871.

Another Jewish officer to see action during the war was Captain Abraham Massias. In January 1815 a British expedition arrived off Cumberland Island, Georgia. Massias, with but eighty riflemen, was ordered to retreat from the nearby fort at Point Petrie if the enemy landed in force. "As my order contemplates a retreat," he wrote his commanding officer on January 10, 1815, "I have thought it best to prepare in time, . . . but I hope to have it in my power to give the enemy a brush before I leave the ground." The following day fifteen hundred British troops landed. Massias offered resistance and then made an orderly retreat. As he reported on January 15:

Alas! Our efforts were unavailing, the number of the enemy too imposing, a thousand to eighty was too much odds and... it was with reluctance I ordered a retreat, and which I am happy to state was effected in good order.

Massias received his honorable discharge on June 15, 1815. When he left the service he still had an unsatisfied claim against the government "for various services performed by me (other than military) during the occupancy of East Florida by the troops." Massias repeatedly pressed his claim, without success. In 1816 circumstances seemed to work in his favor. In that year Mordecai Manuel Noah, American consul at Tunis, was removed from his post. A letter from Secretary of State James Monroe cited Noah's Jewish religion as the primary cause. Embittered, Noah returned to the United States and distributed copies of the letter to prominent Jews. Several pressured Monroe, seeking to discover if anti-Semitism lay behind Noah's recall. The State Department enlisted Massias on its behalf, dispatching him to visit Isaac Harby, a prominent South Carolina Jewish journalist and playwright who had written "a passionate letter" in protest. The implication was that Massias's claim against the government would receive favorable consideration if he convinced Harby that "the religion of Noah formed no part of the motive for his recall." Massias fulfilled his part of the bargain, but his reward was not forthcoming.
In December 1820, however, Monroe, now president, reappointed Massias to the army as a paymaster with the rank of major. This time, the Senate approved his promotion. He retired in 1842.

Among the other Jews in the regular army were Dr. Jacob de la Motta of Charleston, a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania Medical School who served as a surgeon, and Isaac De Young, born in Holland, who fought in a number of the major northern battles and was severely wounded at Lundy's Lane during a bayonet charge.

In the summer of 1814, as the British occupied and burned Washington and then headed up Chesapeake Bay toward Baltimore, Jews joined with other citizens to fortify and defend seaboard cities. Some forty served in the successful defense of Baltimore, including eight at Fort McHenry. Approximately ten Jews served under Andrew Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans, the war's final engagement. Among the members of Philadelphia's militia units were Jacob, Benjamin, and Joseph Gratz, from one of the city's most prominent Jewish families. Benjamin wrote his sister, Rebecca, of his enthusiasm at marching like a "veteran soldier," but Jacob found the construction work less to his taste. "Jac...," Rebecca reported, "found a day's work at the fortification rather too severe. He has complain'd of burnt arms and shoulders ever since Wednesday." In New York Jewish volunteers included Samuel Noah, who had traveled to Washington after his adventures in Texas, seeking reinstatement as an officer in the regular army. When his petition was rejected by President Madison (on the grounds that he had been born in England), Noah, determined to rejoin the army, went to New York, where he volunteered as a private soldier with militia units engaged in the defense of Brooklyn and Harlem Heights. His military background enabled him to train the inexperienced citizen soldiers in the rudiments of defensive warfare. But the expected British attack never came.

Noah died in 1871 at the age of ninety-two, as the oldest surviving graduate of West Point. For years he had been living in straitened circumstances. In 1868 he inquired of Brevet Major General George W. Cullum, with whom he had been corresponding for some time, whether any provision existed "for a needy Senior Graduate, any allowance for his support when he becomes superannuated or in distress?" But no assistance was forthcoming, and he died in poverty and obscurity.
The best-known Jew to serve in the navy during the War of 1812 was Uriah Phillips Levy. Born at Philadelphia in 1792, he served in every position in the merchant marine between 1801 and 1812, from cabin boy to master. In the process he gained rich experience as a seaman. He also attended an excellent naval school, studying navigation. As soon as war was declared, Levy sought an appointment as a sailing master, a rank with no equivalent in today's navy but which called for seamanship, skill in navigation, and the ability to keep a vessel in proper trim. Later in life he explained why he had chosen to apply for this post:

I sought this particular position in the belief that my nautical education and experience would enable me to render greater service to my country in this post, than in that of a midshipman—the grade in which the Naval Service is usually entered.

After receiving his appointment in October 1812 he was assigned to serve aboard the USS Argus, commanded by Captain William H. Allen, whose mission was to carry the country’s new minister, William H. Crawford, to France.

After delivering Crawford, the Argus began a spectacular career of raiding British merchant ships in the waters between England and Ireland. When the Betty, with an especially large cargo, was seized, Levy was selected to pilot the vessel to a French port. While en route, however, the British captured the ship, and Levy and the crew were taken prisoner. After being held in England’s notorious Dartmoor Prison for sixteen months, Levy was released in December 1814 and returned to the United States.

Another Jewish sailor imprisoned by the British was Levy Charles Harby of Charleston, who in June 1812 was the first Jew to receive an appointment as a midshipman during the war. Captured by the British on his way to assume his position, Harby was confined to a prison in Halifax, from which he wrote pathetic letters to his brother,
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Isaac Harby, that were published in his newspaper, the Southern Patriot. He accused the American government of abandoning him and lamented that he "was wasting my prime of life" in prison. Released after the war, Harby remained in the service. Two decades later, while on leave of absence, he took part in the Texas War for Independence, an action which led to his dismissal from the navy for serving with a foreign government. After the annexation of Texas he was restored to duty as a captain in the Revenue Naval Service.

Only two other Jews served as midshipmen. Abraham Phillips of Charleston, assigned to the frigate Constitution, drowned when the vessel's out-cutter overturned, and Joseph B. Nones, son of a revolutionary war veteran, received an appointment, as he later wrote in his autobiography, as the result of the efforts of a friend of his mother's, "a lady of great influence with our government." Nones remained in the navy after the war, serving under Decatur in the expedition against the Barbary powers. He was wounded in one of the engagements and retired from the navy in 1821. Manuel Phillips was a naval surgeon, and Ezekiel Solomon, the son of Haym Solomon, served as a naval purser. Finally, in December 1814, Barnard Henry was recalled to service in the navy with the rank of captain and placed in command of a flotilla set up in the Delaware River to protect Philadelphia from British warships.

As in the American Revolution, Jews also contributed in nonmilitary ventures important to the war effort. Herman Hendricks, a New York businessman, was one of the largest individual subscribers to wartime bond issues, purchasing some $58,000. From Mammoth Cave, Kentucky, which they owned, Simon and Hyman Gratz and a non-Jewish partner furnished great quantities of saltpeter for the manufacture of gunpowder. A French Jew, Captain John Ordronaux became one of the war's leading privateers whose operations resulted in the capture of fourteen British vessels, including the frigate Endymion.

Although states newly admitted to the Union tended not to have religious tests for voting and office holding, many of the original thirteen states still denied Jews full political equality at the end of the war. Jews and their allies now launched a vigorous campaign to end this discrimination, insisting that their active role in both the Revolution and War of 1812 entitled them to full equality. "In times of peril and war," wrote Jacob Cohen of Baltimore in 1818, "the Jews have
borne the privations incident to such times, and their best exertions have been given to the utmost in defense of the common cause."

Although Connecticut in 1818 and Massachusetts in 1833 allowed Jews to hold office, in Maryland legislative efforts to remove the religious test that required a Christian oath for political positions, officers of the state militia, and lawyers repeatedly failed. In 1824 Thomas Kennedy renewed the legal battle. The featured speech in support of Kennedy's bill (not infrequently referred to as the "Jew Bill") was delivered by Colonel W. G. D. Worthington. Worthington had submitted five questions about the role of Jews in America to Solomon Etting, a leader of the Baltimore Jewish community. The responses, on which Worthington elaborated, affirmed that Jews had fought in both the American Revolution and the War of 1812 and currently served as officers of the regular army and navy. In January 1826 the legislature finally repealed the test oath. A few months later, Solomon Etting and Jacob Cohen were elected to the Baltimore city council, the first Jews to hold elective office in Maryland. By 1840 all but four of the twenty-six states—New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Carolina, and Rhode Island—afforded Jews full religious and political equality. In 1842 Rhode Island removed the test oath, as did New Jersey in 1844.

There were still only about four thousand Jews in the United States in 1830. But the arrival of six thousand European Jews in the next decade helped boost the Jewish population to an estimated fifteen thousand by 1840. The next two decades witnessed the first mass influx of Jewish settlers, and the Jewish population reached one hundred fifty thousand on the eve of the Civil War. Large numbers of German, Galician, Polish, Russian, and Lithuanian Jews arrived on the east coast, spreading westward and southward. Most of those who traveled west started their careers as peddlers supplying goods to farmers in the Old Northwest.

During the period between the War of 1812 and the Civil War, a
number of Jews served as officers of the regular army and navy. In the navy the most prominent was Uriah P. Levy, who remained in the service after his release from Dartmoor Prison and quickly rose to the officers' ranks. While serving on board the USS Franklin as a second sailing master, Levy engaged in a duel with a lieutenant who had called him "a damned Jew." In the encounter the lieutenant was killed. Nonetheless, Levy applied for a commission under a recent act of Congress authorizing the promotion to lieutenant of masters of "extraordinary merit and service." An officers reviewing board unanimously recommended Levy for the promotion, and on March 5, 1817, he was commissioned.

During his stormy naval career, Levy stood trial at no fewer than six court martials. It was not uncommon in those days for naval officers to be court-martialed a number of times and to continue in the service. He was never fully acquitted, was sometimes reprimanded, and on two occasions was dismissed from the navy, only to be reinstated by Presidents Monroe and Tyler. He remained in the service until his death, although much of the time Levy was inactive, as the navy refused to put him in command of ships. He used his time on inactive duty to good effect. Between 1827 and 1838 he traveled extensively in Europe and commissioned Pierre David D'Angers, a French sculptor, to create an enormous bronze statue of Thomas Jefferson writing the Declaration of Independence, which Levy presented to Congress (it now stands in the Capitol rotunda). Levy also invested in New York City real estate, increasing his wealth significantly, and in 1836 purchased Monticello, Jefferson's home.

Levy's quick temper, along with his vanity and acerbity, help account for his troubled relations with his fellow officers and numerous legal difficulties. But in addition he was resented for having risen through the ranks at a time when most officers entered the navy as midshipmen (in effect, officers in training) and for his opposition to flogging at a time when this punishment was widely accepted in the
Jews and the American Military

We observe the Jewish encounters with the American military, noting the ostracism due to religion. Levy encountered this on the North Carolina, where junior officers attempted to exclude him from the officers' dining room because he was a Jew. Levy's naval career was marred by these experiences, as he testified:

May I not say that I have been marked out to common contempt as a Jew until the slow unmoving finger of scorn has drawn a circle round me that includes all friendships and companions and attachments and all the blandishments of life and leaves me isolated and alone in the very midst of society.

The most famous of Levy's court-martials occurred in 1842. In 1838, Levy was promoted to commander and assigned to the Vandalia in the West Indian Squadron. Levy intended to eliminate flogging, urging captains to substitute pecuniary fines, badges of disgrace, and mild correction over the humiliating practice of whipping. Levy's regime featured drunken seamen wearing black wooden bottles and those guilty of petty theft wearing badges. Levy's approach, labeled as innovative, received significant praise. However, charges were preferred against Levy by George Mason Hooe, who accused Levy of cruel and scandalous conduct. The trial took place in April 1842.

But Levy's actions angered many fellow officers, leading to charges preferred against him. Levy contended
that the Thompson incident had been blown out of proportion, that
the symbolic tarring was a far cry from tarring and feathering, and was
preferable to the navy's customary flogging with a cat-o'-nine-tails.
Besides, he insisted, his humane punishment assured the finest
discipline of any vessel in the navy. The court, acting on the traditional
naval belief that ridicule was a more severe punishment than flogging,
found Levy guilty of illegal and cruel punishment, stripped him of his
command, and dismissed him from the navy. But President John Tyler,
noting that Levy's actions had been within the spirit of Secretary
Woodbury's circular of 1831, returned the verdict for reconsideration
by the court on the grounds that Levy's punishment was"exceedingly
severe and disproportioned to the offense." When the court
reaffirmed its original decision, Tyler reduced the sentence from
dismissal to suspension for one year, thereby keeping Levy on the
navy rolls. Levy went on to publish several articles on corporal
punishment.

In 1844, soon after his suspension had expired, Levy was
promoted to captain, the first Jew to reach what was then the navy's
highest rank. But he received no further active assignment until the
very end of his career. At the outset of the Mexican War, Levy pleaded
in vain for active duty. Mordecai Noah appealed to Secretary of the
Navy George Bancroft on Levy's behalf, noting that "the friends of
Captain Levy . . . are not without apprehension that there may be
some religious prejudice operating to his disadvantage." But Levy
remained on inactive duty. As he complained to Kentucky Senator
John C. Crittenden:

I stand in the navy register, 'No sea service.'... For this the
'Secretary of the Navy' should be censured, not me, as I have
applied at least 18 or 20 times for 'sea service.'... In one of my
applications for the command of the Macedonia Frigate,
which was detailed to carry provisions to the starving Irish, I
offered to give all my pay, and rations, during that service.

In 1850 a vigorous campaign was launched to persuade Congress
to abolish corporal punishment in the Navy. At a public meeting in
New York City, summoned by the mayor and "a large array of
respectable citizens," former seaman John Haynes praised Levy, "a
notable specimen of the sailor," for having abolished flogging on his
vessel. "We want more such men in our service," he added. "They
would soon reform abuses.” In September Congress approved a measure introduced by New Hampshire Senator John P. Hale, who had been influenced by Levy’s articles on the subject, which would abolish flogging in the navy. Levy testified before the Senate naval committee in support of Hale’s bill, brandishing a cat-o’-nine-tails to emphasize his point.

The greatest crisis of Levy’s career occurred in 1855. In that year Congress authorized the president to appoint a naval board to determine whether any officers were unfit for duty. Those so identified would be dismissed or retired from the active list. In June and July the board, which met in secrecy, called no witnesses, and did not confront the men they were discussing, considered 712 officers. It recommended the removal of 201, forty-nine by outright dismissal, and the rest to be retired or furloughed. The secretary of the navy and the president approved these judgments. Among those dismissed was Levy, who on September 13 received a “curt, bald statement on Navy Department stationary” notifying him that he had been judged incapable of further service and was therefore “stricken from the rolls” of the United States Navy.

Friends advised Levy to protest directly to Congress. Convinced that Levy had suffered an injustice, the prominent New York attorney Benjamin F. Butler, a former attorney general and secretary of war, became his counsel, joined by the distinguished Jewish attorney from Alabama, Philip Phillips. In a memorial to Congress in December 1855, Levy charged that his dismissal had nothing to do with competency: the navy objected to him because he had not risen through the ranks, had strongly advocated the abolition of flogging, and “last and chiefest of all, that he is by descent and religious faith, an Israelite, and one of the few of his race and persuasion in the American Navy.” Levy asked Congress to restore him to the rank of captain. Meanwhile, the affected officers, along with their friends, relatives, and political allies, had launched “a tenacious campaign to have the work of the board set aside.” The storm of protest had its effect and in 1857 Congress gave every dismissed officer the right to have his case reviewed before a court of inquiry. Levy’s convened at Washington in November 1857.

In seeking to justify Levy’s dismissal, the navy brought up the history of his past courts-martial and called a number of high-ranking officers to testify that he was temperamentally unsuited for his
position. In response Butler contended that since Levy had been promoted twice since the early courts-martial, they were irrelevant. And an impressive array of character witnesses testified on his behalf, including thirteen active duty officers and six others previously connected with Levy. Commodore Thomas Catesby Jones offered the opinion that Levy, like all high-minded public officials "faithfully discharging their duties," had made enemies. "To the few clamorous opponents thus made," he went on, "there may be added the Pharisees of the Navy... who profess to think that an Israelite is not to be tolerated in or out of the navy." Former Secretary Bancroft testified that he had kept Levy out of the service not from a lack of personal respect, but because of "a strong prejudice in the service... which seemed to me, in a considerable part attributable to his being of the Jewish persuasion." Despite his high regard for Levy, said Bancroft, he had been forced to take into account the need for harmony on naval vessels.

At the end of the hearing, Butler presented Levy's eloquent (and lengthy—its reading lasted four days) final plea for reinstatement. Prepared in part by Butler, it reviewed Levy's entire career and life as an officer. The issue, Levy insisted, came down to the question of "whether a Jew should be tolerated in the Navy." He concluded:

This is the case before you... It is the case of every Israelite in the Union. Are all these to be proscribed?... And think not, if you once enter on this career that it can be limited to the Jew... What is my case today,... may tomorrow be that of the Roman Catholic of the Unitarian; the Presbyterian or the Methodist... There is but one safeguard... the wise the just, the impartial guarantee of the Constitution.

On December 24, 1857, the court unanimously declared Levy "morally, physically, professionally fit for naval service" and ordered him reinstated.

In 1858, on active service for the first time in fifteen years, Levy was given command of the Macedonian, with instructions to join the Mediterranean squadron. Five years earlier, at the age of sixty-one, Levy had married his eighteen-year-old niece, Virginia Lopez, of Kingston, Jamaica. (Such uncle-niece marriages were not prohibited in New York State until 1893.) Levy now received permission to have
his wife accompany him as far as Italy. When his ship reached Palestine, Levy took on a wagonload of soil from Jerusalem to be presented to his congregation, Shearith Israel in New York City, for use in burial services. The British consul at Jerusalem, James Finn, described Levy at this time:

This Captain Levy I had long wished to see, being the only example I had ever heard, of a Jew commanding a ship-of-war... He is a fine looking rosy old fellow... with strong Jewish features which looked curious with cocked hat, epaulettes and eagle buttons— with abundance of jewellery [sic]... I find that the other officers dislike him. They represent him as a coddled old woman.

Through his uncle, the influential Democratic Congressman Henry M. Phillips of Philadelphia, Levy had applied for command of a squadron. There was no excuse, he wrote, “for not giving me my legitimate command, having passed through the fiery ordeal.” Whether due to “Uncle Hen’s” intervention, Levy in January 1860 was made commander of the Mediterranean fleet. As was the custom in the navy, Levy was henceforth known as commodore, although officially that rank did not exist until 1862. On his return to this country in July 1860, he retired from active service. When the Civil War broke out, however, Levy, then seventy, again petitioned for a command. Supposedly, he met personally with President Lincoln to offer his “sword and fortune” to the Union but was told he was too old for combat. Instead, he was called to Washington to serve on a board of court-martial, an ironic assignment for one whose main experience with naval justice was as a defendant. Here, Levy found time to complete his Manual of Internal Rules and Regulations for Men-of-War, which he published and distributed at his own expense. He died in March 1862 in New York City at the age of seventy-two. He bequeathed Monticello “to the people of the United States.” But a nephew, Jefferson Madison Levy (later a congressman), successfully contested the will and obtained ownership of Jefferson’s home. During World War II the destroyer escort USS Levy was named in Uriah P. Levy’s honor, and the first permanent Jewish chapel for American armed forces, the Commodore Levy Chapel, was established at the naval station in Norfolk, Virginia.
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The changing interpretations of Levy provide a microcosm of how American Jewish history itself has evolved. Earlier generations, seeking to establish Jews' right to a secure place as American citizens, ascribed Levy's legal difficulties entirely to anti-Semitism. From the time he entered the navy, concluded Simon Wolf in 1897, Levy was hounded and harassed because he was a Jew, and James Morris Morgan, writing in the Century in 1899, characterized Levy as "an American forerunner of Dreyfus." More recent scholars have pointed to other sources of Levy's problems, including his abrasive personality. Abraham Kanoff, noting that Levy had risen to the rank of captain and that the Naval Board that dismissed him discharged two hundred other officers, termed the charge of anti-Semitism "questionable on the face of it." Jonathan Sarna concluded that the pugnacious Levy might have been found guilty in his several courts-martial "for reasons which had nothing whatsoever to do with religion." Most recently, Jacob R. Marcus, while noting the prevalence of "anti-Jewish" sentiment in the navy, pointed out that Levy "was consistently, however slowly, advanced despite all opposition."

In the years following the War of 1812, an increasing number of Jews joined the navy, intending to make careers in the service. Henry Etting, of the prominent Baltimore family, obtained a commission as a midshipman in January 1818 and advanced to the rank of purser in 1826. Etting was court-martialed in 1832 for wounding a fellow officer who had assaulted him and called him a "damned Jewish son of a bitch." "It is esteemed as the sacred right of all men," he told the court, "to worship Almighty God according to the dictates of their own conscience." Etting was found guilty and sentenced to be reprimanded publically by the secretary of the navy. Other Jewish naval officers included Henry B. Nones, who entered the service in 1831, was appointed third assistant engineer in 1853, and resigned three years later, and Joseph Myers, who reached the rank of commander in 1841 and was retired in 1855.

A number of Jews also made careers in the regular army after the War of 1812. Most prominent was Alfred Mordecai, who in 1823 became the third Jewish graduate of West Point. Mordecai's father Jacob was a well-known Hebraic scholar who ran a boarding school for girls in Warrenton, North Carolina. Educated in his father's classrooms, Alfred had mastered geography, trigonometry, geometry, and Latin by the age of fifteen. "My intellectual development," he later noted, "was a good deal in advance of my years." Through the
influence of Senator Nathaniel Macon of North Carolina, Alfred in June 1819 secured an appointment at West Point. His fellow cadets found him, as one wrote, "frank, manly, and genial." At the end of his second year, while still a cadet, he was appointed acting assistant professor of mathematics. During his last two years he was first in his class, and at the age of nineteen in 1823 was commissioned a second lieutenant. By virtue of graduating at the head of his class, Mordecai was able to choose his branch of the service and selected the Corps of Engineers.

At West Point Mordecai, like the other cadets, attended compulsory Presbyterian services on Sunday. He remained a Jew, although not a particularly observant one, and in 1836 married Sarah Ann Hays, a member of one of Philadelphia's most prominent Jewish families. He subsequently noted that religion never came up in his association with other officers, except for philosophical discussions with Captain Ethan Allen Hitchcock. Like his Federalist father, Mordecai held conservative political views. While stationed in Washington he attended several sessions of the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1829-30 and expressed considerable displeasure at the broadening of suffrage rights. The convention, he wrote, had been unable to stem "the tide of democratic influence." After attending with his brother George a lecture by abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, Mordecai noted, "I have seldom seen George so much vexed and excited, and truly with good reason."

Through writings, membership on commissions investigating military practices abroad, and scientific experiments, Mordecai made numerous contributions that were of vital importance to the development of the American army. At the request of Secretary of War Lewis Cass, Mordecai in 1833 compiled and published A Digest of the Laws Relating to the Military Establishment of the United States. As an officer in the Ordnance Department, to which branch he had been transferred and promoted to captain in 1832, Mordecai served as a member of the permanent ordnance board that periodically tested and evaluated new types of arms and set standards for American military weaponry.

In 1840, along with three other members of the board, Mordecai was dispatched to Europe by Secretary of War Joel Poinsett to report on the latest developments in European weapons manufacturing and to bring back various kinds of cannons for examination. Mordecai and
his companions received extensive exposure to European ordnance systems. They visited arsenals, foundries, iron mines, small-arms factories, and military posts in the British Isles, Norway, Sweden, Russia, Germany, Belgium, and France. Mordecai’s travels introduced him to experiences that challenged his provincial attitudes. From Frankfurt he wrote to his wife about his encounter with a “curiosity in the way of a travelling companion . . . a colored woman, a pretty dark mulatto, travelling as a fine lady, on very familiar terms with her companion. [My] southern blood revolted a little,” he continued, at hearing the woman address her companion as “my dear,” and he was amazed to hear her speak German and French and discuss literature and the fine arts with “a learned Professor” sitting nearby. On their return the board members produced the army’s first Ordnance Manual, mostly composed by Mordecai, and a few years later he wrote the board’s report, a classic of its time, published as Artillery of the United States Land Service. Meanwhile, Mordecai conducted extensive experiments on the properties of gunpowder, which led to two reports, widely distributed throughout the army and within the scientific community, that paved the way for advances in the manufacture of explosives and the design of cannons, projectiles, and small arms. Translated into French and German, they became the basis of Mordecai’s reputation in Europe. In 1853 he was elected to the American Philosophical Society, the nation’s oldest scientific organization. The following year, in a period when promotions were “painfully slow,” Mordecai rose to the rank of major.

In 1855 Mordecai once again was sent abroad to study changes in military practices, especially the impact of the Crimean War. He traveled with Major Richard Delafield and Captain George B. McClellan. Before departing Washington, the three officers attended a reception in their honor at the home of Secretary of War Jefferson Davis, to which officers and ambassadors were invited. Davis’s wife,
Varina, later recorded her impression of Mordecai: "Major Mordecai was a Hebrew, and one could readily understand, after seeing him, how the race had furnished the highest type of manhood; his mind was versatile, at times even playful, but his habits of thought were of the most serious problems... His moral nature was as well disciplined as his mental... He was an 'Israelite without guile.'"

The three officers reached St. Petersburg in June but were refused permission to travel to the front. They headed for Constantinople on their own, eventually making their way to Sebastopol, but too late to witness the final storming of the city. Mordecai was shocked by the conditions he encountered in Russia—"the cringing manners of the people; the debased and abject look of the crowds of poor (or rich) Jews." On their way home the Americans inspected the fortifications and military facilities in several European countries, taking careful notes on the latest improvements. They were particularly impressed by the "Napoleon," a bronze, twelve-pound gun-howitzer, and urged its adoption by the American army. The Napoleon proved to be the most widely used (by both sides) and efficient artillery weapon of the Civil War. Mordecai's report, published as a congressional document in 1860, also emphasized European developments in rifled and breech-loading guns. Along with the reports of his two colleagues, it was a "landmark in the new American military literature."

In 1857 Mordecai, now a major, was placed in command of the country's establishment manufacturing military weapons, the Watervliet Arsenal. And, through the influence of Secretary of War Jefferson Davis and President Franklin Pierce, he secured a cadetship at West Point for his son Alfred. Although Mordecai had "no wish to see him in the Army," he felt his son could only obtain a proper education at the military academy.

Mordecai attended his last meeting of the ordnance board on February 4, 1861. Stanley L. Falk summarizes his contribution: "The system of artillery that he and his colleagues had developed... was, with a few additions and modifications, the system with which the Civil War was fought." But Mordecai, as we shall see, resigned from the army rather than serve with either of the combatants.

The only other Jew to graduate from West Point before the Civil War was Abraham Charles Myers. A native of Georgetown, South Carolina, he came from a rabbinical family, his grandfather having been the first hazan of Congregation Temple Beth Elohim in
In April 1826 Myers’s father, a prominent Georgetown lawyer, received word from his congressman that his son would soon receive a cadetship at West Point. But Myers never received the official warrant of appointment, which instead went to the son of a local planter with more political influence. Despite a promise to appoint him the following year, Myers was passed over again. Only after his father wrote to Secretary of War James Barbour, complaining that Myers stood “upon a different footing from any other candidate” and appealing to the government “to measure out to my son that justice which belongs to the humblest citizen,” did Abraham C. Myers finally receive his appointment. On July 1, 1828, he passed his examinations and was admitted as a cadet.

Unlike Mordecai, Myers was not an outstanding student at West Point. He was forced to repeat the plebe year after failing his examinations, and because he graduated in 1833 so low in his class, he was assigned to the infantry rather than the more prestigious engineers, artillery, or cavalry. Myers served against the Seminoles in the Florida campaigns of 1836–38 and again in 1841–42, after being promoted to captain in the Quartermaster Corps. (One of the posts at which he served, Fort Harbie, was subsequently renamed in his honor and became the major Florida city of Fort Myers.) Assigned to General Zachary Taylor’s command in Texas, he moved with American forces into Mexico in 1846 and served as a division quartermaster under Taylor before being transferred to General Winfield Scott’s command for the march on the Mexican capital.

From Puebla, midway between Vera Cruz and Mexico City, Myers described to his mother his impressions of a Mexican religious festival:

I have attended the Cathedral on their greatest Festa day, called the Fete de Dieu, the day of God. The ceremonies were not imposing so far as filling the soul with earnest and affecting devotion, but was rather a gorgeous pageant accompanied by sweet and rich music, like that of the Opera. ...There is one thing that cannot fail to impress you in a Catholic Church, it is the equality with which all worship the Deity. There are no pews or seats that distinguish the high from the low—all stand or kneel, after their form of worship, in a promiscuous crowd.

Myers performed exceptionally in the Mexican War. In the
"unlikely capacity" of a division supply officer, he had the distinction of receiving two brevet promotions—major and lieutenant colonel—for "acts of gallantry" at Palo Alto, Resca de la Palma, and Churubusco. General Taylor was so impressed with his performance that he put Myers in charge of quartermaster operations for the entire American army. After the war, Myers was stationed in various posts in the South, filling a number of important administrative positions in the quartermaster department. He married Marion Twiggs, the daughter of General David Emanuel Twiggs, a prominent figure in the Mexican War. At the beginning of 1861 Myers was appointed chief quartermaster of the Southern Department, with headquarters at New Orleans. But he shortly resigned from the army to join the Confederacy.

After Myers, no Jew graduated from West Point until the beginning of the Civil War. Henry Moses Judah, class of 1844, is sometimes referred to as a Jewish graduate, but in fact he was the son of a Christian minister. Levi J. Myers of Savannah was admitted in July 1840 but resigned six months later. James W. DeLyon, from a prominent Georgia Jewish family, was admitted in 1844 but was discharged in 1848 for deficiency in engineering. Six years later, Isaac Hyams of New Orleans entered West Point but resigned in the fall of 1856. Several Jews, however, did serve in the regular army's Medical Department. Dr. Jonathan Horwitz, a Dutch-born Jew who received a medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania, became assistant director of the army's Bureau of Medicine and Surgery. Dr. Philip Minis of Georgia was appointed an assistant surgeon in the U.S. Army in 1826 and promoted to surgeon with the rank of major in 1836. He resigned one year later. Another Jew who rose to the ranks of surgeon and major was Dr. David Camden De Leon, a South Carolinian who graduated from the University of Pennsylvania's Medical School and entered the army in 1838. Assigned to duty in Florida, he served throughout the Seminole War, and in Mexico he is reputed to have led charges at Chapultepec and Molino del Rey, winning the sobriquet "The Fighting Doctor." After the Mexican War he was stationed for seven years at outposts on the western frontier. In 1860, while visiting his brother Edwin, the United States consul general in Egypt, De Leon paid a call on the British consul in Jerusalem, James Finn, who had earlier seen Uriah P. Levy. "Thus," Finn recorded in his diary, "I have seen in my time an officer of the Army, Navy and Civil Service of the
United States from the Jewish people.”

Another Jewish surgeon who served during the Mexican War and thereafter in the regular army was Israel Moses of New York, a grandson of the revolutionary era merchant and financier Isaac Moses. A graduate of Columbia College and the College of Physicians and Surgeons, he volunteered for service in Mexico in 1846 and served with the Medical Department during the war. His subsequent service in the regular army covered a wide range of territory. In 1849 he took part in the famous March of the Mounted Riflemen from Fort Leavenworth to Fort Vancouver, the first military unit to travel the entire length of the Oregon Trail. Moses was one of only two physicians ministering to the medical needs of three full divisions. Thereafter, he served at numerous posts in the Oregon and Washington Territories, as well as in New Mexico and Texas.

Edward Coffman, a specialist in nineteenth-century military history, notes that officers’ correspondence occasionally contained “mild anti-Semitic comments (usually in the vein of using ‘Jew’ as a synonym for sharp trader).” Of Moses, one fellow officer, Lieutenant Theodore Talbot, wrote in 1851 that he had departed from Oregon to California “to make some speculations there.” “He is a Jew...” Talbot continued, “and retained at least, one of the grand characteristics of his nation, the desire to make money, an inclination which I must confess that I share with him but I do not know how to go about it.” Then, in a quite different vein, he continued, “We have had quite a treat lately in some new books which Dr. Moses received from New York.”

Early in 1855 Dr. Moses’ application for sick leave was granted and he left Texas for New York City. Shortly before his leave was to expire, he wrote to the surgeon general requesting an assignment elsewhere than on the southwestern frontier upon his return to active duty. Otherwise, he would have no choice but to leave the military service and return to civilian life and private practice. Four days later came the reply from Washington. The requirements of the service rendered it “imperative” that he return to Texas or go to New Mexico without
delay. Under these circumstances, continued the surgeon general, Moses' decision to leave the service was the proper course to pursue. "The demand for medical aid will be incessant on the extreme frontier, and those who remain must expect arduous field service. I think, therefore, your determination the best for yourself."

On May 31, 1855, after eight years of service, Moses resigned his commission. He took up a post as an attending surgeon to the recently opened Jews' Hospital (subsequently renamed Mt. Sinai), in whose founding he had played a key role while still in the army. His taste for military life had not ended, however, and the following year he joined William Walker's Nicaraguan army and served it as surgeon general for eight months. Following a year of study in Europe he resumed his post at Jews' Hospital.

Moses' connection with the army continued even after he returned to private practice. For a number of years, he had been dissatisfied with the "crude and uncomfortable" vehicles provided by the quartermaster department "for the transport of the sick and wounded." After studying European practices, he drew up plans for a vehicle specifically designed to serve as an ambulance and sent them to a carriage maker for construction. Convinced that his design would prove "more complete and useful than any hitherto constructed," he arranged for an official inspection of the completed vehicle by General Winfield Scott, general-in-chief of the army. Scott was so pleased, he recommended to the surgeon general that several of Moses' vehicles be purchased for use in Utah in the campaign against the Mormons. Apparently, however, no "Moses ambulances" were ever built. Moses subsequently reentered the army to serve the Union during the Civil War.

Since soldiering was viewed as a somewhat disreputable occupation, very few Jews entered the regular army as enlisted men. Quite a few, however, were members of the volunteer organizations in the individual states known as the "organized militia" or, more commonly, as the National Guard. In the 1850s, in line with the growth of "ethnic" National Guard units, Jews in New York City formed military companies of their own. Troop K, Empire Hussars, was composed entirely of Jews, as was the Young Men's Lafayette Association. A third unit, the Asmonean Guard, consisted of both Jewish and Christian employees of The Asmonean, one of the earliest Anglo-Jewish weekly newspapers. "Our employees," commented the
newspaper, "have been seized with this military mania, as they have
enrolled themselves into an independent corps."

Occasionally, Jewish militiamen were obliged to take part in
activities on the Sabbath. Their presence in the 1851 procession
honoring Louis Kossuth, which took place on a Saturday, brought an
angry rebuke from Samuel Isaacs, a hazan at a New York synagogue
and subsequent owner of the Jewish Messenger. "What plea," he asked,
"can such men offer for so grossly violating the sanctity of the holy
Sabbath?" In response, E. I. Louis, commandant of a New York militia
unit, pointed out that Jewish soldiers had marched on orders from
military authorities. "Does the Reverend gentleman," he asked,
"intend to counsel the inhabitants of New York of his persuasion to
disobey the laws of the land?" And in December 1860 a candidate was
rejected by the Cincinnati Zouave Guard because of his "Jewish
parentage." The Israelite, which was published in the city, responded
that the company ought to be disbanded, for it was "dangerous to arm
such men," who "erect an inquisition right among us in defiance of all
principles set forth in the declaration of independence and the
constitution."

Jews also volunteered for service in specific military campaigns.
Meyer M. Cohen, a Charleston schoolteacher and lawyer who had
served in the state legislature, was among the volunteers who arrived
in St. Augustine in January 1836 to fight in the Second Seminole War.
Unlike most of the volunteers who soon returned to Charleston,
Cohen chose to remain. He was commissioned a staff officer and
participated as a lieutenant of the so-called "Left Wing" in General
Scott's unsuccessful three-column movement against the Seminoles.
After returning to Charleston in May, Cohen wrote a book about his
experiences which was published in 1836 as Notices of Florida and the
Campaigns. Another Jew who volunteered to fight the Seminoles was
Leon Dyer, who had been Baltimore's acting mayor during the bread
riots caused by an economic crisis in 1834. He later joined a New
Orleans volunteer unit as a private and rose to the rank of regimental
quartermaster and assistant commissary.

After serving in Florida, Dyer returned to New Orleans and joined
another military unit, the Louisiana Grays, to fight for the
independence of Texas. He was commissioned a major in the army of
the Lone Star republic. Several other Jews also took part in the Texan
war. Perhaps most prominent was Dr. Moses Albert Levy of
Richmond. Upon arriving in Texas, Levy was assigned to the post of surgeon-in-chief of the Texas Volunteer Army. When the Texans retook the Alamo at San Antonio in 1836, Dr. Levy played an active part in the engagement and was cited for bravery. To his sister in Richmond, Levy described his role:

I worked in the ditches, I dressed the sick and wounded, I cheered the men, I assisted the officers in the counsels, for five days and nights I did not sleep that many hours, running about without a coat or hat, dirty and ragged, but thank God escaped uninjured.

The largest and most controversial military undertaking between the Revolution and Civil War was the Mexican War of 1846–48. It aroused considerable public opposition, both as a war of aggression and on the grounds that it was intended to add slave states to the Union. Although no Jewish leaders raised their voices against the Mexican War and no Jewish community took a public stand in opposition, a smaller number of Jews volunteered for service than in the nation’s earlier wars. After General Scott occupied Mexico City in 1847, Rebecca Gratz reported that she and many of her friends in Philadelphia had refused to participate in the victory celebrations:

I feel so much more sorrow and disgust, than heroism in this war... When we were obliged to fight for our liberty—and rights—there was motive and glory in the strife. But to invade a country and slaughter its inhabitants, to fight for boundary or political supremacy, is altogether against my principles and feelings.

Nonetheless, some Jews did volunteer to serve in Mexico. One of them, Jacob Hirschorn, later recalled his experiences in graphic detail. Enlisting as an immigrant boy of sixteen in the First Regiment of New York Volunteers, Hirschorn sailed for Mexico late in 1846. He took part in the siege of Vera Cruz, where “the bombardment commenced by land and sea forces:

So awful a sight, but still grand, I have never seen, especially at night, when one could follow the bomb-shells with the eye, as they were fired from the huge mortars on the frigates and
line ships. The houses in the city began to burn, and after two
days’ bombardment, the castle and city capitulated, the
Mexican flag came down, and the ‘Stars and Stripes’ were
hoisted.

After Vera Cruz, Hirschorn participated in all the battles that led to
the capture of Mexico City and was one of the two hundred special
volunteers who on September 13, 1847, stormed the heights of
Chapultepec by clambering up scaling ladders. “The Mexicans,” he
later recalled, “fought bravely; we forced them back however, and
finally entered the city, opposed by the retreating enemy, who
defended every foot of ground stubbornly.” For his service in Mexico,
Hirschorn was promoted to corporal and awarded the Silver Star
Medal. As has been noted, Uriah P. Levy, then on the inactive list,
sought unsuccessfully to participate in the Mexican War. His younger
brother, Jonas, however, did command a steamship, The American,
which transported men and supplies to the war zone. After the
capture of Vera Cruz, General Scott
appointed Jonas Levy captain of the port.

In the aftermath of the Mexican War,
the issue of slavery in the territories
came to dominate American politics. By
the mid-1850s civil war between pro-
and antislavery settlers was raging on
the plains of Kansas. Three Jewish
volunteers, August Bondi, Jacob
Benjamin, and Theodore Wiener, joined
up with John Brown during his
involvement in Bleeding Kansas. Bondi,
at the age of fourteen, had taken part in
the March 1848 revolution in Vienna. Six
months later, fleeing the counter-
revolution, the Bondi family migrated to
the United States and settled in St. Louis. In 1855 Bondi decided to
go to Kansas “to repel and punish the Border Ruffian invasion from
Missouri.” The three Jewish volunteers fought in several engagements
under Brown’s leadership. Only Wiener was present at Potawatomie,
where Brown’s men killed five proslavery settlers. Wiener and
Benjamin subsequently left Kansas, but Bondi remained for the rest of
his life. He became an active member of the Free State Party and in 1857 stumped the entire territory for the antislavery cause.

No Jews served with Brown in the assault on Harper's Ferry in October 1859. But Lieutenant Israel Green commanded the Marine contingent that stormed the engine house where Brown and his men had taken cover. In the affray, Green struck Brown with his light dress sword and as the old man fell, Green beat him on the head until Brown was unconscious. Brown subsequently complained that Green had delivered “several Saber cuts” to his head and “Bayonet stabs” to his body after his surrender, a charge that Green later denied, insisting he had exercised proper restraint.

Despite the failure of his attempt to spark a slave rebellion, John Brown’s raid pushed the country even closer to civil war. When the war came, it would find American Jews, like the rest of the nation, divided.