Emancipation in Western Europe

1. "A wise government protects all religions." Bonaparte proclaims freedom of worship, 1802.

Recognizing that Jews were equal to other citizens and the legal abolition of disabilities and inequities were ideals that began to materialize in Western Europe only two centuries ago. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, the manifesto of the French Revolution, inspired by the spirit of the Enlightenment, implied Jewish equality. The law passed by the Constituent Assembly on September 27, 1791, the first act of full emancipation by a Christian state, was perceived by the Jews as an historic turn which heralded a future of happiness. "France... is our Palestine, its mountains are our Zion, its rivers our Jordan. Let us drink the water of these sources: it is the water of liberty...!" (a letter to *La Chronique de Paris*, 1791).

After the French Revolution, emancipation became the central issue for Jews everywhere, but each community had to maintain its own struggle for emancipation. In most places the legal decision was the crowning achievement of a lengthy process of economic and social integration. However, in some cases – as in France itself – emancipation preceded the renunciation of traditional Jewish society: it was the liberals' struggle for the universal application of "natural rights" which ensured the civil equality of the Jews. Comte de Clermont-Tonnere, in his famous speech to the National Assembly (December 1789), explicitly demanded that the Jews not be excluded from article X of the Declaration of Rights ("No man ought to be molested because of his opinions, including his religious opinions"). Therefore, he said, "The Jews should be denied everything as a nation, but granted everything as individuals." The revolutionary French armies were to export this type of emancipation to all the countries they conquered.

Whether it was the result of a deliberate choice (as in France), or imported and enforced (as in Italy and Germany), or a product of an extended process of socio-cultural maturation (as in Austro-Hungary), emancipation was never a linear nor a painless process. The customary religious hostility toward the Jews, characteristic of traditional pre-industrial societies, was reinforced by modern ideologies and political forces, both conservative and revolutionary, which regarded Jewish equality with fear and antagonism. These animosities often merged with the opposition to Napoleon who extended the scope of emancipation with his military victories. Thus, Jewish emancipation in Europe suffered major regression during the years following the Congress of Vienna (1814–1815), which ended the age of the Revolution and sought to reestablish peace in Europe based on the restoration of the old order. Nevertheless, liberal and democratic forces everywhere took up the cause of Jewish emancipation and turned it into a central issue in their political campaign. On the eve of the revolution of 1848, the idea of Jewish equality could no longer be ignored anywhere in the west.

The upheavals which rocked Europe in the mid-nineteenth century

Emancipation in France ... in **the Netherlands** ... in **Prussia**

1791 **1796** **1812**

3. The crucifix on Charles Bridge in Prague. In expiation for a blasphemous act by a Jew in 1696, the community had to finance the Hebrew inscription in gold letters: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts."

1781: *On the Improvement of the Jews as Citizens* by Christian Wilhelm von Dohm. Abolition of the "body tax" (*Leibzoll*) in Austria.
1784. January: Louis XVI abolishes the "body tax" that was levied on the Jews of Alsace.
1785: In an essay competition in 1787, the Academy of Metz sets the following subject: "Are there any ways of making the Jews of France happier and more useful?" Abbé Henri Gregoire wins the prize for his *Essay on the physical, moral and political regeneration of the Jews* (1789).
1787: Comte de Mirabeau publishes his book *On Moses Mendelssohn and on the Political Reform of the Jews*.
1790. January 28: The decree according active civil rights to "Spanish," "Portuguese" and "Avignonese" Jews in France.
1791. September 27: Emancipation decreed for all Jews in France.
1796. September 9: The National Assembly of the Batavian Republic accords equal rights to the Jews of the Netherlands – a typical example of the application of revolutionary ideals in republics established with the help of the French armies; the same step will be taken in Italy, Belgium, and German states.
1801. July 15: Signing of the Concordat: the French government recognizes Catholicism as the religion of "the great majority of Frenchmen".
1808: The consistorial system imposed by Napoleon on the Jews of France represented a step backward in revolutionary ideals; the *decret infâme*, determining Jewish activities, was not renewed after the expiry of its ten-year time limit.
1812. March 11: The Prussian decree of emancipation accords the Jews civil rights, but excludes them from government service; similar to the formulation of Jewish emancipation in Baden (1809), this decree remained one of the most liberal texts in Germany until 1848.
1814. March 29: The King of Denmark

4. Gabriel Riesser, by Moritz Oppenheim, between 1838 and 1840.

resulted, admittedly, in only a few formal changes. Popular anti-Jewish feelings, the reticence of governments, and nationalist fermentation in multi-national empires, all still played a central role in restricting the full and legal admission of the Jews into society. But as the West was shedding, at an uneven but irreversible pace, its feudal and traditional structures, and entering a liberal, bourgeois, individualist and industrial age, the equality of all citizens was becoming an essential condition of modernity. When Switzerland granted the Jews equal rights in 1874, the process that had begun in Paris almost a century earlier was completed: Jewish emancipation in the West was by now an established political and legal fact. This nineteenth-century achievement, however, was rather fragile, and was therefore easily destroyed in certain European countries with the rise of twentieth-century racist ideologies. This goes to show that legal equality and full political participation do not necessarily lead to social acceptance and recognition.

2. One hundred years of Philathropin, *a modernized Jewish school founded in Frankfort in 1804.*

... in Denmark — ... in Sweden — ... in Austria

1849 — 1865 — 1867

authorizes the Jews in his kingdom to engage in all professions.

1819. August: To the rallying cry *hep! hep!* (derived perhaps from the initials of *Hierosolyma est perdita*) anti-Jewish riots break out in Wuerzburg, quickly spreading to neighboring states. The riots expressed the anger of many Germans at the improvement in the situation of the Jews.

1830: Louis Philippe is king of France; the 1830 charter abolishes the notion of "state religion" which was introduced by the Restoration.

1831: Gabriel Riesser (1806–1863), a Jewish notary from Hamburg and a champion of emancipation, begins publishing his journal *Der Jude* ("The Jew"). Publication of the journal ceased in 1833, but Riesser continued his struggle to attain equal rights for German Jews.

1837: Danish Jews become eligible for municipal election.

1848: Demolition of the Ghetto walls in Rome. The German National Assembly proclaims the emancipation of the Jews.

1849. March 4: The Imperial government introduces a constitution guaranteeing equal rights to the Jews of Austria; suppressed in 1851, emancipation will be re-introduced in 1867 and henceforth maintained.

June 5: Adoption of a liberal constitution in Denmark: article 84 implies emancipation of the Jews.

1865: The Jews of Sweden are accorded the right to vote.

1866: Deletion by law of the Christian portion of the oath of loyalty enables Jews in England to be elected to public office.

1871. April 22: Granting of equal rights to the Jews of Bavaria completes the process of emancipation in the German Empire.

1874: The granting of equal rights to the Jews in Switzerland completes the process of emancipation in Europe.

5. The Jew, a member of the National Guard but still a coward. Antisemitic lithograph by H. Gerhart, Vienna, 1848.

French Patriots

1. Sukkah decoration. A man carrying the symbols of the Festival of Tabernacles on his way to the synagogue. Bischwiller (Haut-Rhin), 18th century.

When the French Revolution brought about the downfall of the Ancien Régime, there were approximately 40,000 Jews living in France, more than half of them in Alsace and Lorraine. Theirs was a highly heterogeneous population: well-integrated "Portuguese" Jews in Bordeaux and Bayonne, and "Papal Jews" in Avignon, barely tolerated their Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazi brethren who had acquired nothing of French culture. They were further divided over attitudes towards the Revolution. On the whole, however, French Jews supported the Revolution but did not actively participate in it. Nevertheless, although not immediately felt, the outcome of the Revolution marks the beginning of the history of modern French Jewry. Extracted with great difficulty by the more advanced elements in the National Assembly and based on broader arguments than the Jewish question, the principle of equal civil rights granted the Jews the legal emancipation that enabled their integration into French society.

It was Napoleon who made them realize the full significance of their new citizenship. Faithful to his policy of centralization, the Emperor created institutions designed to integrate the Jews into the French state system. In 1808 he set up a special body which was fashioned on the arrangements introduced for French Protestants: a Central Consistory, a vehicle guaranteeing state supervision of religious affairs. Brandishing the banner of "Religion and Homeland," the Consistory attempted to accelerate the modernization of French Jewry. Its success was undeniable even though in certain parts of France, particularly in Alsace and Lorraine, a traditional Jewish existence persisted until the end of the nineteenth century.

Legal emancipation led to a profound transformation of Jewish society. Jews became fluent in the French language, flocked to the cities (Paris above all), entered into new careers and professions, became involved in political life, and enthusiastically welcomed the values of French civilization, its culture and education. Relations with the non-Jewish society varied according to social and geographical distribution. Hostile manifestations persisted: traditional anti-Judaism persisted in eastern France, while modern antisemitism, evidence of the growing integration of the Jews, was rearing its ugly head in Paris and other large urban centers. All these, however, could not reverse the progress of emancipation, acculturation, and assimilation.

The unlimited trust which Jews placed in the French system survived even after the 1870 defeat, and the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine to Germany. Moreover, thousands of Jews migrated to France after the disastrous Franco-Prussian war. Their love for France was further augmented by the establishment of the Third Republic, which was explicitly committed to the principles of 1789. The emergence of an antisemitic political movement in the 1880s following the tragic Dreyfus affair, failed to change these sentiments. Thus, the nascent Zionist movement had few adherents among French Jews.

The two dominant traits of Jewish society in France – its strong attachment to the promises of the Revolution and the homogeneous character it acquired after a century of acculturation – were seriously challenged in the twentieth century. Prior to World War I, and particularly in its aftermath, a wave of Jews from eastern Europe flooded France, soon becoming the majority of French Jewry. Adopting French culture was not their first priority. They remained foreigners, on the margins of the "old" community, evoking the same attitude that the "Portuguese" of Bordeaux had displayed towards Ashkenazi citizens of France 150 years earlier. Even in its darkest hour, facing persecution and extinction, the French community was incapable of surmounting its differences. The Nazi occupier and the Vichy regime, however, made no distinction between "old" and "new" French Jews.

Emancipation	The Consistory	French citizenship to Algerian Jews	Drumont's *La France juive*
1790–1791	1808	1870	1886

2. "I gain from all of you," says the Jew at the top of the "real" social hierarchy. An antisemitic caricature. France, c. 1880.

1789. August 26: The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen.
1790. January 28: Jews of Portuguese, Spanish, and Avignonese origin are granted equal rights.
1791. September 27: The National Assembly grants civil rights to the Jews of Alsace and Lorraine; the process of emancipation of French Jews is now complete.
1799. November 9: A *coup d'etat* brings Napoleon Bonaparte to power.
1806. October 6: The Assembly of Jewish Notables is required to answer twelve questions, intended to inform the authorities about the nature of Judaism and to test the knowledge of French among the Jews.
1807. February–March: The "Grand Sanhedrin" meets in Paris, presided by David Sintzheim of Strasbourg; it was convened by Napoleon in order to codify the decisions of the Assembly of Notables.
1808. March 17: Establishment of the Central Consistory of French Jews.
1830: Conquest of Algeria.
1840: A blood libel affair in Damascus; Adolphe Cremieux and Salomon Munk are members of a delegation sent to Damascus to free the prisoners.
1848: Adolphe Cremieux is appointed Minister of Justice.
1852. December 2: Napoleon III is crowned emperor.
1860: Founding of the *Alliance Israelite Universelle*, an organization based on the French ideal of "regeneration" and on the Jewish notion of solidarity, dedicated to the modernization of Jewish communities in North Africa and the Near East.
1869: Zadoc Kahn is appointed *Grand Rabbin* of France.
1870: The Franco-Prussian war. The Cremieux Decree: the Jews of Algeria receive French citizenship (from 1865