

OPENING REMARKS

Good afternoon and welcome. We hope you are enjoying this year's diversity conference. We are very proud to be here today to talk a little bit about a recent exhibit that the library hosted.

My name is Pam O'Sullivan and I am head of integrated public services at Drake Memorial Library. That's just a fancy way of saying that I oversee the various library departments that interact with the public. With me is my colleague, Wendy Prince, who is our Evening Librarian and Building Supervisor. She's also the best grant writer we've had on staff since I've been here, and it is largely due to her skill in writing the grant that we were chosen to host Emma Lazarus: Voice of Liberty, Voice of Conscience.

INTRODUCTION

Links

The little and the great are joined in one
By God's great force. The wondrous golden sun
Is linked unto the glow-worm's tiny spark;
The eagle soars to heaven in his flight;
And in those realms of space, all bathed in light,
Soar none except the eagle and the lark.

Emma Lazarus is best remembered for her poem, "The New Colossus." However, in a recent touring exhibit that visited Drake Memorial Library her life and writings highlight the late 19th century immigrant experience, as well as the place of Jewish people both immigrant and "established".

Many groups sought entrance to the United States during Emma's lifetime for a variety of reasons, from escaping war and famine, to religious persecution, to abject poverty. The outcome for our country was incredibly positive, as these immigrants and their descendants made immeasurable advances for the country in arts, politics and sciences.

The United States today continues to be a magnet for those seeking a better life, and as these new immigrants are assimilated into our society, it can have positive outcomes for our culture as a whole. We must keep in mind that most of us came of immigrant stock, and rather than isolating ourselves or the newcomers, embrace the fresh ideas and new customs they bring with them.

WHY EMMA LAZARUS

During the Spring 2012 semester, Drake Memorial Library hosted a national touring exhibit entitled “Emma Lazarus: Voice of Liberty, Voice of Conscience”. We applied for the exhibit for a number of reasons, including the diversity factor. A large national touring exhibit on John Adams had also been mounted in the library and we wanted to balance it with something different. When we heard about the Jewish Writers exhibits, and read about Emma Lazarus being one of the choices, we thought it quite apropos for our college community.

The exhibit was developed by a company called NextBook, a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting Jewish literature, culture, and ideas and the American Library Association Public Programs Office. Of the libraries chosen to host the exhibit, we were among a small number of academic libraries and the only library in the Western half of New York State.

By choosing Emma Lazarus, we hoped to promote both student engagement and community engagement with the library. The series of programs we held which can be found on our Research Guide, were designed to appeal to a cross-section of the library’s constituency while at the same time adding value through being outside the normal realm of what students and the community expected to find in Drake. During the previous exhibit on John Adams, we received some comments that indicated a display featuring a minority figure would be welcomed; since we know Emma was on the way, we had reason to believe we had chosen well.

EMMA’S BACKGROUND

Emma was the fourth of seven children born to a wealthy New York Jewish family. It was a family that could trace its ancestry back to America’s first Jewish settlers who arrived in New Amsterdam around 1654. Her father was a sugar refiner who was eager to see his family integrated more closely into the Christian upper classes, and as such he worked hard at becoming one with their exclusive circle, even to establishing the elite Knickerbocker club with members of the Vanderbilt and Astor families.

On her mother’s side of the family, Emma was connected to a number of well-known and powerful New Yorkers including Benjamin Nathan, a Vice-President of the NYSE. On her father’s side of the family, she was also well-connected; one of her uncles was Jacob Hart Lazarus, a popular and proficient portrait artist.

EMMA’S EARLY LIFE

It should be stressed that Emma was a child of privilege, and her experiences both as a woman and a Jew were affected by this. The attitudes of the time also contributed to her life experiences; for both her gender and her religion meant that some doors were closed to her. Still, she was atypical for a woman of her times.

AN ATYPICAL WOMAN OF HER TIMES

When Emma was in her early 20's, her father built a summer cottage in fashionable Newport, RI, called The Beeches. Emma and her sisters belonged to the Town and Country club headed by Juliet Ward Howe, which met for literary and scientific entertainments.

By the age of 25, she was an acclaimed author and translator. Her translations in particular won her high praise from critics. She had a wide circle of friends that included many of the literary luminaries of the New York scene, including Richard Watson Gilder, an editor of Scribner's Monthly, and his wife Helena. What we do not hear of at any point is Emma entertaining the thought of or preparing for marriage.

Although more women at this time were making their voices heard in arenas outside the home, the expectation for most was that they would eventually marry and produce a family. We do not know whether Emma felt any such pressure from her family, but given the amount of support they provided her, it seems unlikely.

New York City in the 1880's was the place to be if you had any type of talent at all, and Emma was a vital part of that lifestyle. She attended literary soirees and public lectures, and was most likely a sought-after guest at many of the city's top society doings.

The 1880's were also a time of great upheaval in Russia. With the assassination of Alexander II, harsh laws were enacted against the Russian Jews, many of whom fled to the United States. While Emma was not at the forefront of the protests against the atrocities committed by Russian Christians against the Jews, she seemed to be transformed after meeting some of the immigrants. Her writing changed, taking on a martial tone and she became the American spokesperson for a re-nationalized Palestine.

In addition to being the spokesperson for her religion to her circle of friends and acquaintances, and to the city of New York as a whole, Emma introduced among her own wealthy, settled Jewish circle the lifestyles and political beliefs of the recent immigrants, as well as pushing the need for education and training for these mostly poor and uneducated former farmers and small tradesmen.

After a trip to Europe where she met with some of the most prominent literary figures there, including Robert Browning, her writings and thinking seemed to become more universal, less directly tied to the idea of a Palestinian homeland. Then, following her father's death, she left with her sisters on a projected 18 month tour of Europe. It was during this time that she was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Disease and was dead at the age of 38.

Jewish immigrants in Emma's lifetime (Slide 10)

"1492

Thou two-faced year, Mother of Change and Fate,
Didst weep when Spain cast forth with flaming sword,
The children of the prophets of the Lord,
Prince, priest, and people, spurned by zealot hate.
Hounded from sea to sea, from state to state,
The West refused them, and the East abhorred.
No anchorage the known world could afford,
Close-locked was every port, barred every gate.
Then smiling, thou unveil'dst, O two-faced year,
A virgin world where doors of sunset part,
Saying, "Ho, all who weary, enter here!
There falls each ancient barrier that the art
Of race or creed or rank devised, to rear
Grim bulwarked hatred between heart and heart!"

During Emma's lifetime, there was a shift in climate toward more overt anti-Semitism. As countries like Russia sought to remove the Jews living among them, and the rates of immigration of Jews from Europe climbed, the United States saw a backlash of anti-Semitism as well. Interestingly, members of NYC's Jewish elite were considered immune from this; for example, Judge Henry Hilton, who denied admittance to his hotel German Jewish immigrants, said that those Jews in Emma's circle, who could trace their ancestry in America to colonial times, were the "true Hebrews"...not those dirty, unwashed and uncouth newcomers. However, even among the elite there were subtle forms of discrimination and prejudice, and Emma understood quite well what those polite upper-class exteriors could hide.

While Emma's life was one of privilege, the majority of Jews, particularly recent immigrants faced a very different reality. Like other immigrants of the mid-to-late 19th century, Jews who immigrated to America often came with few possessions and little money. They lived in tenements and took whatever jobs they could find. Because of their religion, they faced a great deal of prejudice, so they tended to live in the same neighborhoods and shop in the same markets. They could be denied jobs, harassed by law enforcement, even looked down upon by other immigrants who were in reality no better off than the Jews.

IMMIGRATION DURING EMMA'S LIFETIME

It was not only Jews who were mistrusted because of their religious beliefs, of course. The large influx of Irish immigrants during and after the Great Famine was looked upon with suspicion in part due to their Catholicism. However, despite the similarities in their conditions, there is no evidence to suggest that the two groups banded together. Newly arrived immigrant groups

tended to stick to “their own kind”; those who had been here a generation or more tended to look down on the more recent arrivals.

Despite the ideas of religious freedom that are considered integral to our government, and the early tolerance shown by some of our founding fathers such as Jefferson and Franklin, the reality is that the backbone of the country was formed on white, western European thought and culture, and these tended to be solidified as the republic grew. And, while the framers of the Constitution managed to inject it with religious neutrality, not all politicians were content with the lack of any requirement for a religious test for citizenship. William Lancaster, delegate to the North Carolina convention to ratify the Constitution, said:

“Let us remember that we form a government for millions not yet in existence.... In the course of four or five hundred years, I do not know how it will work. This is most certain, that Papists may occupy that chair, and Mahometans may take it. I see nothing against it.”

Slide 11: Emma wrote:

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glow world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame,
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

. While invoking her Classical education in the writing of the sonnet, she differentiates our colossus from that of the ancient wonder at Rhodes. While she welcomes on the one hand, the line “The wretched refuse of your teeming shores” seems to underscore the reality of the treatment new immigrant groups generally were subjected to—second-class citizens in a way.

EMMA'S WRITINGS AND INVOLVEMENTS

After reading George Eliot's "Daniel Deronda", Emma began to take more of an interest in the plight of Jews who immigrated to the U.S. due to pogroms against them in their native Russia. One result of her new-found zeal to help her fellow Jews is the volume "Songs of a Semite The dance to death and other poems." It also deals with her crusade for a Palestinian homeland, several decades before the concept of Zionism was articulated.

THE BANNER OF THE JEW.

Wake, Israel, wake ! Recall to-day
The glorious Maccabean rage,
The sire heroic, hoary-gray,
His five-fold lion-lineage :
The Wise, the Elect, the Help-of-God,
The Burst-of-Spring, the Avenging Rod. *
From Mizpeh's mountain-ridge they saw
Jerusalem's empty streets, her shrine
Laid waste where Greeks profaned the Law,
With idol and with pagan sign.
Mourners in tattered black were there.
With ashes sprinkled on their hair.
Then from the stony peak there rang
A blast to ope the graves : down poured
The Maccabean clan, who sang
Their battle-anthem to the Lord.
Five heroes lead, and following, see,
Ten thousand rush to victory !
Oh for Jerusalem's trumpet now,
To blow a blast of shattering power.
To wake the sleepers high and low,
And rouse them to the urgent hour !
No hand for vengeance— but to save,
A million naked swords should wave.
Oh deem not dead that martial fire,
Say not the mystic flame is spent !
With Moses' law and David's lyre,
Your ancient strength remains unbent.
Let but an Ezra rise anew,
To lift the Banner of the Jew !
A rag, a mock at first — erelong,

When men have bled and women wept,
To guard its precious folds from wrong,
Even they who shrunk, even they who slept.
Shall leap to bless it, and to save.
Strike ! for the brave revere the brave !

*The sons of Mattathias — Jonathan, John, Eleazar, Simon
(also called the Jewel), and Judas, the Prince.

MODERN IMMIGRANTS slide 15

The United States has remained a beacon of hope for the poor and oppressed of other nations throughout the 20th and into the 21st century. Yet, Americans in general are increasingly concerned about immigration, feeling that immigrants are a burden to the country and create strains on the health care system while taking jobs and housing. Others worry about the cultural impact of the latest group of immigrants. It is a highly divisive issue—according to Pew Research Center, about as many Americans believe that immigrants strengthen our society as believe that they threaten traditional American values. The issue of illegal immigrants is a particularly divisive one.

While news sources tend most often to highlight illegal Latino immigrants, the increase in Muslims immigrating to the United States began after 2001 to seem like a potential threat to the war on terrorism in this country.

In 2005, Steven A. Camarota, director of research at the Center for Immigration Studies, wrote;

“... a large Middle Eastern immigrant population makes it easier for Islamic extremists to operate within the U.S. The September 11 hijackers used Middle Eastern immigrant communities for cover. The *Washington Post* has reported that two 9/11 hijackers who lived in San Diego got help from "mosques and established members of [the city's] Islamic community" to "find housing, open a bank account, obtain car insurance—even, at one point, get a job."

Most immigrants, however, come to the United States for the same reasons people have come here since the earliest times: in search of a better life, free of religious persecution and where their basic civil rights will be honored. We must be cautious in evaluating these newcomers as individuals rather than lumping them into a single group, and recall that the Lady still stands in New York Harbor as a symbol of freedom from oppression and the beginnings of the golden American dream.

Emma Lazarus in her world: Life and letters by Bette Roth Young Google books
[Emma Lazarus in Her World: Life and Letters - Bette Roth Young - Google Books](#)

Jewish Women's Archive :Women of Valor

[Women of Valor - Emma Lazarus - Introduction | Jewish Women's Archive](#)

Songs of a Semite: The Dance to Death, AND OTHER POEMS,
EMMA LAZARUS NEW YORK . OFFICE OF "THE AMERICAN HEBREW, 1882
[Songs of a Semite : The dance to death and other poems : Lazarus, Emma, 1849-1887 : Free Download & Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

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