

# AMONG THE RUSSIAN REFUGEES

## SOURCE A

OBITUARY BY JAMES T. HOFFMAN  
THE AMERICAN HEBREW

*"Our next personal meeting was on Ward's Island, on the day of the memorable riot. She had been paying a visit to the refugees housed there, and though unacquainted with the language of these poor people she tried to calm and pacify them in a manner so full of kindness and sympathy that it spoke louder than words."*

## SOURCE B

ARTICLE ATTRIBUTED TO EMMA  
LAZARUS, NEW YORK TIMES

*"Every American must feel a thrill of pride and gratitude in the thought that his country is the refuge of the oppressed, the 'home of hope to the whole human race,' and however wretched be the material offered to him from the refuse of other nations, he accepts it with generous hospitality. ... This is not a matter that concerns the Jews alone; it is rather one phase of the general emigration question, which is of vital importance to the whole people."*

## SOURCE C

JEWISH REFUGEES LEAVING CASTLE GARDEN



## AMONG THE RUSSIAN REFUGEES, 1880 'S

### SOURCE

**Source A:** James T. Hoffman, director of the Hebrew Technical Institute, which trained young immigrant men skills, wrote a reminiscence of Emma for a special memorial issue of the *American Hebrew*.

**Source B:** This article, "Among the Russian Jews," appeared in the *New York Times* on March 26, 1882. While it was unsigned, the fact that Emma was on the island the day described makes it likely she was the author.

**Source C:** An image of Jewish Immigrants From Russia Recently Arrived At New York City, Leaving Castle Garden Immigration Station For Wards Island, 1882

### BACKGROUND

In 1882, a sudden increase—2000 a month—in the number of Russian Jewish refugees arriving in New York harbor profoundly impacted Emma's life. The situation in Russia had become very difficult. Pogroms, attacks on Jewish life and property, spread from town to town. Moreover, a series of laws made it extremely difficult for Jews to make a living, and their economic condition had already been difficult. So they started to leave Russia, leading a wave of migration that would eventually bring over 2 million Jews to America, many of them settling in New York.

Many in the New York Jewish community, even families like the Lazaruses who had been in the country for generations, felt a sense of responsibility for their co-religionists. When existing shelters were overrun, financier Jacob Schiff built a shelter on Ward's Island for the new arrivals. In March Emma visited the island and, shocked at the terrible conditions, vowed to help.

In the ensuing months Emma spent time with the refugees, taught them English, helped raise funds, and wrote countless poems and articles on the issue of antisemitism and the plight of the refugees. She crossed the city, traveling from her comfortable brownstone to the crowded streets of the Lower East Side. She also wrote to move people beyond their comfort zones---in publications with a general audience like *Century* or the *New York Times* she explained the history and plight of the Jews in Russia; and in publications with Jewish audiences like the *American Hebrew* she urged the community to act more, to give more, and to understand their sense of connection.

### GUIDING QUESTIONS

*As you read the source consider how it informs these questions:*

- The NYT article describing the refugees at Ward Island was published without an author's name. Emma's biographer, Esther Schor, believes this to be by Emma as she visited the island that day and wrote for the Times. She also found language in the article that reminded her of "The New Colossus." What might that be?
- What was it about Emma Lazarus that enabled her to connect with the refugees on Ward's Island? How can people connect with others even if they are different? Why is it important to connect despite difference?
- How do the refugees look in the picture? How does the artist draw the refugees? To what extent is the artist sympathetic and to what extent is the artist critical?

### HISTORICAL NOTES

*Definitions of terms used in the source.*

**Castle Garden:** From 1855-1890, this was the immigration reception center for New York City. Approximately 8 million people came through Castle Garden, mostly from Ireland and Germany in the beginning and later from Italy and Eastern Europe. In 1890, the US government deemed immigration a federal responsibility and started to plan a larger immigration processing center. Eventually they decided to build it on Ellis Island. Ellis Island opened in 1892 and closed in 1954.