



Lesson: Comparing and Contrasting Jewish Soldiers on Both Sides of the Civil War

Grade Level: 4-6

Era: American Civil War, 1861-1865

How to use this lesson: This lesson can be used as practice for comparing and contrasting, during a unit about the Civil War, or both. The amount of background information presented to students can vary or be adjusted based on grade level.

Recommended reading and resources:

Jewish Soldiers in Blue and Gray (2011), available from the National Museum of American Jewish Military History book store, the National Center for Jewish Film

Jewish 48ers in the American Civil War (2020)

The Shapell Roster, available at Shapell.org

Jews and the Civil War: A Reader edited by Jonathan D. Sarna & Adam Mendelsohn

American Jewry and the Civil War edited by Bertram W. Korn

When General Grant Expelled the Jews by Jonathan D. Sarna

Jews in America: Passover Seders During the Civil War by Michael Feldberg, available at <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/passover-seders-during-the-civil-war>

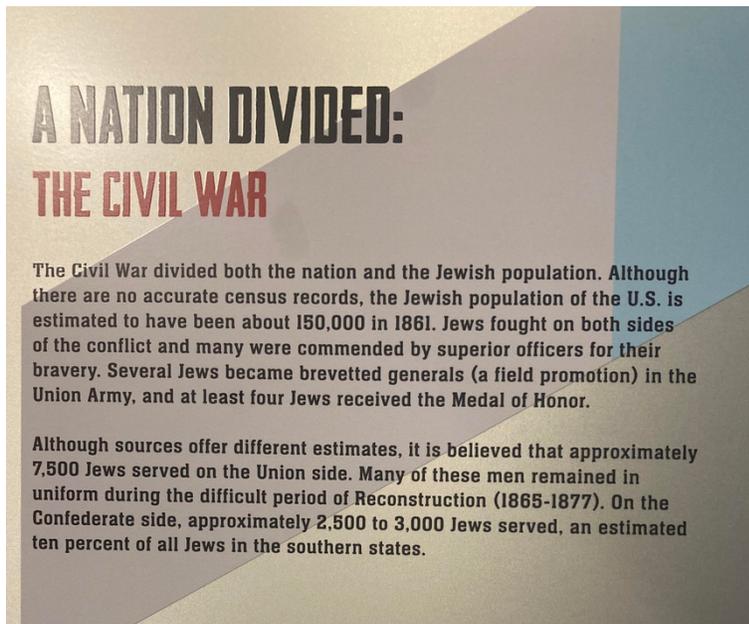
Passover on the Battlefields of the US Civil War by Michael Freund, available at

<https://www.jpost.com/opinion/columnists/passover-on-the-battlefields-307584>

Lesson:

- Review what a Venn Diagram is and how it works.
- Distribute Venn Diagram worksheet to students.
- Discuss and review background information with students.
- Have students fill out the Venn diagram worksheet about Confederate Jews and Union Jews.

Background:



Above: Panel from National Museum of American Jewish Military History, reads:

A Nation Divided: The Civil War

The Civil War divided both the nation and the Jewish population. Although there are no accurate census records, the Jewish population of the U.S. is estimated to have been about 150,000 in 1861. Jews fought on both sides of the conflict and many were commended by superior officers for their bravery. Several Jews became brevetted generals (a field promotion) in the Union Army, and at least four Jews received the Medal of Honor.

Although sources offer different estimates, it is believed that approximately 7,500 Jews served on the Union side. Many of these men remained in uniform during the difficult period of Reconstruction (1865-1877). On the Confederate side, approximately 2,500 to 3,000 Jews served, an estimated ten percent of all Jews in the southern states.



In 1895, Simon Wolf compiled a list of Jewish soldiers on both sides of the Civil War, called *The American Jew as Patriot, Soldier, and Citizen*. Wolf estimated roughly 8,000 total Jews served in uniform during the Civil War. Other estimates suggest around 7,000 Jewish Union soldiers and 3,000 Jewish Confederates.

Confederacy:

- Roughly 3,000 soldiers
- Judah P. Benjamin: known as "the brains of the Confederacy," prominent Secretary of State, Jefferson Davis' right-hand man, did not practice Judaism and married a non-Jewish woman, but antisemites often brought attention to his heritage; Tennessee Congressman Henry Foote called him "Judas Iscariot Benjamin"
- Moses Ezekiel: Virginia Military Institute's first Jewish cadet, moved to Rome after the war to become a sculptor and artist, designed monument "Virginia Mourning Her Dead" to commemorate the Battle of New Market, in which Moses Ezekiel fought.
- Jews enlisted in the Confederate army to disprove stereotypes and assimilate.
 - Jewish Talmudic tradition calls for loyalty to established government
- No religious denomination was listed in requirements for military chaplaincy.
- Robert E. Lee denied general furlough for Jewish Confederate soldiers to celebrate High Holidays every year, left it to individuals soldiers to ask their commanding officers.
- Passover 1862: celebrated in Charleston, South Carolina with matzah and "a pound and a half of kosher beef."
- Antisemitism:
 - One colonel was so antisemitic that he tried to block the promotion of Jewish Captain Adolph Proskauer by instructing the Committee of Examiners to make Proskauer's examination as difficult as possible. Proskauer passed the examination anyway.



Left: Lt. Jacob Bambege, Co. H., 51st North Carolina Infantry
NMAJMH Collection

Right: "Confederate Memorial"
by Moses Ezekiel, located at
Arlington Cemetery



Union:

- 7,000 soldiers
- Passover 1862: celebrated in West Virginia, received matzah and prayer books from their merchant supplier but had to forage for cider, lamb, and stand-ins for parsley and bitter herb
- C. M. Levy: Personally appointed to assistant quartermaster with the rank of Captain by Abraham Lincoln because Lincoln believed they previously had no Jewish officers. This assumption was incorrect.
- Isaac Leeser: a Philadelphia rabbi who traveled to military hospitals in the North and South, noticed Jewish soldiers who were reluctant to say they were Jewish and declined pray books
- Antisemitism:
 - Jewish people accused of misbehavior (e.g. spying) were always labeled Jewish, but lists of casualties did not report who was Jewish
 - Fight for Union chaplaincy rights: a military chaplaincy law passed in 1861 that required chaplains in the Union to be a "regular, ordained minister of some Christian denomination," thus excluding Jews. After a rejected Jewish chaplain took the issue up with President Lincoln personally, the law was amended in 1862 to read "of some religious denomination."
 - General Orders No. 11: In December 1862, General Ulysses S. Grant issued an order that expelled and barred "Jews, as a class" from a specific area then known as the "Department of the Tennessee" because of its location on the Tennessee river. While the precise extent of enforcement of this order is unclear, it resulted in the expulsion of Jews from Paducah, Kentucky with 24 hours notice. Many Jewish immigrants in the 19th century had come to America fleeing this kind of persecution. At least one Jewish officer, Captain Philip Trounstine, resigned as a direct result of the order.
 - The order was rescinded after the issue was taken up personally with President Lincoln.
- Four Medal of Honor Recipients: Abraham Cohn, Leopold Karpeles, Benjamin B. Levy, David Urbansky
 - The Medal of Honor was created during the Civil War to be presented to those who have performed an act of such conspicuous gallantry as to rise "above and beyond the call of duty."



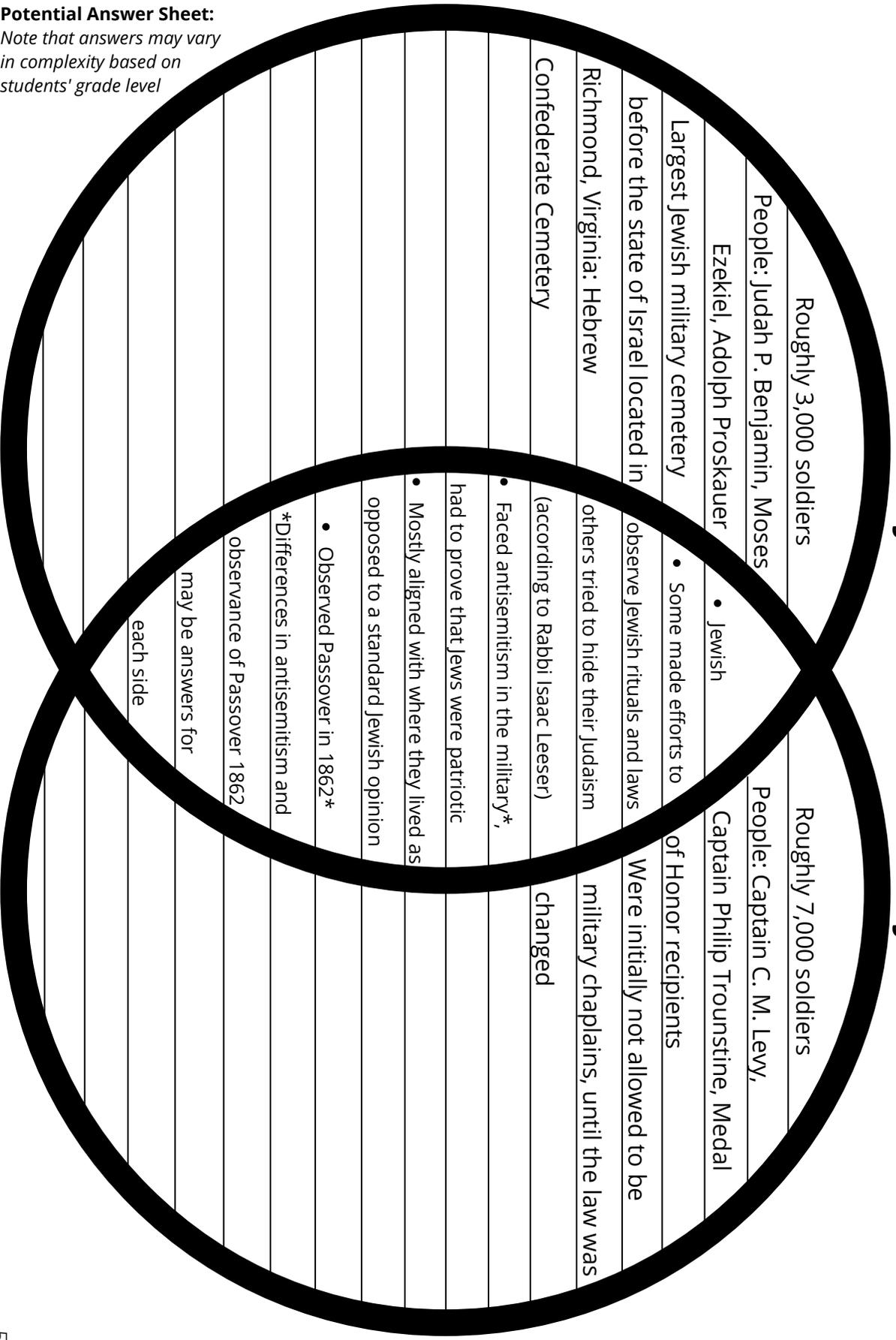
Left: Medal of Honor recipient Abraham Cohn with his wife, Fanny (née Zeller), and son, Eugene.
NMAJMH Collection

Right: August Bondi in uniform of Fifth Kansas Cavalry
NMAJMH Collection



Confederate Jews

Union Jews



Roughly 3,000 soldiers

People: Judah P. Benjamin, Moses

Ezekiel, Adolph Proskauer

Largest Jewish military cemetery

before the state of Israel located in

Richmond, Virginia: Hebrew

Confederate Cemetery

Roughly 7,000 soldiers

People: Captain C. M. Levy,

Captain Philip Trounstine, Medal

of Honor recipients

Were initially not allowed to be

military chaplains, until the law was

changed

- Some made efforts to

- Jewish

- observe Jewish rituals and laws

- others tried to hide their Judaism

- (according to Rabbi Isaac Leeser)

- Faced antisemitism in the military*, had to prove that Jews were patriotic

- Mostly aligned with where they lived as opposed to a standard Jewish opinion

- Observed Passover in 1862*

*Differences in antisemitism and

observance of Passover 1862

may be answers for

each side

Potential Answer Sheet:
Note that answers may vary in complexity based on students' grade level

Confederate Jews

Union Jews

