

Creating a Primary Source: Time Capsule Letter Assignment

Dear Rachel (Ray) Frank,

I very much enjoyed reading your letter. I found it very surprising to read about the level of division between the Orthodox and Reform community in Spokane, Washington. Like you, I was surprised that the two groups were so resistant to joining together to form an established synagogue. I found it very interesting to learn that you were the first Jewish women in the United States to formally preach to a congregation. I was surprised by the fact that it took until 1890 for Jewish women to deliver sermons. It bothers me to know that even in communities with small Jewish populations, the Reform and Orthodox Jews could not band together to form larger and stronger Jewish communities.

My life as a Jew in 2017 is much different than your experience in the late 1800s. In 2017, where I live in Edison, NJ, there are several different community synagogues. Most of them are Orthodox, but there are also some Conservative and Reform temples. While we don't pray in the same houses of worship, we do all join together for social events and to support Jewish causes. Being an Orthodox Jew in 2017 is easy because there are many kosher restaurants in my town. There are also many yeshiva day schools in the area so it's very easy to get a Jewish education. However, it is very expensive to attend Jewish day school. I attend the Joseph Kushner Hebrew Academy (JKHA) in Livingston, NJ. I travel more than an hour to get to school, but it's worth it for me to be with my friends and receive a great education. At JKHA, I

not only study Judaic subjects and Hebrew language, I also learn math, science, social studies and language arts (English). Students at JKHA also have gym classes twice a week. My favorite thing about going to Yeshiva day school is being surrounded by other kids who share my values and beliefs and being taught by caring faculty who are interested in both my Jewish and secular development. As you can see, living as a Jew in America in 2017 is much different (and I think easier) than living as a Jew in colonial and post-colonial times.

Ariel Hammerman

November 8, 2017

Dear People of the future,

I read a letter written by Bilah "Abigail" Franks to her son Naphthali on July 9th 1733. I learned that she moved New York City with her 9 kids. Abigail got married in 1712 & had many financial problems. Since she had financial problem she had to send her 9 kids back to England so that they would have a better life. This letter was sent to warn her son to stay Jewish. Abigail, why did you think that your son would be influenced by his surroundings? Did he ever hate being Jewish? Also, in the first place, why did you move to New York City? I think that it is very interesting that you send a letter to Naphthali saying that, "You have not seen him in a very long time!" Did your religion impact your financial problems? If so, it is really awesome that you stayed Jewish.

After reading this letter, I realized that my life as a Jew in 2017 is much different. I keep kosher & I am lucky that I have kosher restaurants near me. I live in West Orange, New Jersey but sadly there are no kosher restaurants in West Orange. There are some in Livingston only 10 minutes away from my house. Next, I live in a very nice Jewish community where most people keep Shabbat. On Friday night, when Shabbat starts I light one candle because I am only 12, not married yet. I go to shul every Shabbat day with my 2 sisters, my brother & my dad. My mom comes a little later & I sit with her! Also, last week I became Bat-Mitzvah. I had a fun themed party on

Friday before Shabbat. Then, I led a Kabbalat Shabbat just for women. I was the first woman in my community to ever lead Kabbalat Shabbat. We also had a Shaloh Shodish & a very nice Havdalah to end Shabbat. Lastly, I have the privilege to go to a Jewish School called Joseph Kushner Hebrew Academy with awesome teachers! My life as a Jew is different than others were in the 17 hundreds.

Sincerely,

Ariel Hammerman

Ariel Hammerman

Dear Rachel Calof,

Your letter really inspired me and made me think of Judaism in a totally different way. The way you stood up and defended Judaism, inspires me to stand up for my beliefs in every situation. Your story taught me that I should always be myself and never be ashamed of who I am. When you were forced to eat the non-kosher meat because you would die if you did not eat it made me feel depressed that you did not have the ability to keep the laws of the Torah in order to save your life. Back then being a religious Jewish mother to three children is very hard and a selfless act towards your children and future generations. You, Rachel Calof, had the privilege to be a role model to us, future generations, and be such an amazing example. Even though in the end you ate the meat, your story really made me feel blessed that today we have so much and can do so much with it.

Being a Jew in 2017 gives us many opportunities to do anything we set our mind to. In America people do not define you based on your religion or race or even skin color. In my household we have many different traditions that will stay in our family for years to pass. Some examples are, on Shabbos night me and my whole family sit at our dining room tables singing songs, after this we make a blessing on wine or grape juice, then wash our hands and start to cut the soft and doughy pieces of bread. We all take a piece and my father says a bracha. On Shabbos we usually have some chicken soup, or some kind of meat or steak. Being a Jewish girl in my neighborhood sometimes means going to a yeshiva. I go to a school called JKHA, short for Joseph Kushner Hebrew Academy. In my school everyone knows each other and their families. You can go to anyone's house and know that you are safe and

taken care of. Not only does this give me the option of create lasting friendships, but also it gives me the opportunity to fulfill my jewish obligations and aspirations.

-Alexis Sohnen

Avi Wagner

Mrs. Levenson

Social Studies Period 3

8 November 2017

The letter by Rebbeca Samuels was a letter to her parents and family in Germany, where she was born. She wrote the letter to them to inform them about the lack Jewishkite in Petersburg, Virginia, and her experience. Rebbeca wanted to move from Petersburg, Virginia, to Charlestown, South Carolina, due to the lack of Jewishkite in Petersburg. This was surprising to me because I thought more Jews would have moved to the Americas to be religious freely and not lose their ways. Rebbeca had a husband named Chaim, whom she had two children with, a son named Sammy and a daughter. By reading this document I realized that it was greatly challenging to try and keep your religion freely and in a community. This document should not fade into the background, like the way the Jews religion did, it should live on so people never forget how it was when Jews were first coming to America.

The Jewish life for me is easy for me because in Northern America I am free to be Jewish and not need to worry about being killed or arrested due to my religion. Plus, I live close to a modern orthodox synagogue named Aabj&d. The fact that I also go to a Jewish day school named Kushner where I learn Hebrew and Tanach, and live and grew up in a religious modern orthodox home. All these factor in to making it very easy for me to be religious and an educated Jew. I keep Shabbat and I go to shul almost every Shabbat and daven. My mom and dad did not grow up religious but my mom did go to a Jewish day school, and decided that she wanted to have a religious life style.

Rachel, when i read about everything you had to go through, i was really surprised by how hard it was for you to keep religion when you were living. Today, life for jewish people is much simpler and i am very thankful for that. I cannot believe that you had an arranged marriage. That seems crazy! Stuff like that rarely ever happens to jews today. Also i really am sorry that you had to eat traif to keep yourself and your baby healthy. I'm sure that there was an alternative to traif but i understand that there was no equality in your time. Also i just want to say that you remind me of cinderella the princess because you were a servant and you had a cruel stepmother. I just want you to know that things get better later. Right now there are so many jews and they can be who they want to be religiously.

I am very lucky to be living in 2017. I get to be whatever i want. And one of the many things that i am able to be is jewish. I have an amazing life in terms of judaism. My father is the rabbi of our shul and because of that we live next door to shul which makes it very easy for my family to go to shul. Also i live in a community that is mostly jewish which makes my shul pretty full during davening because a lot of people care about judaism. Near me there are a lot of supermarkets so i never have to worry about not having kosher food. In addition to my community i also have the opportunity to go to a jewish school. Everyday we daven and we learn torah and hebrew. i am very lucky to be able to be exposed to judaism on a daily basis. Every shabbos is the same in my house. We start by lighting candles, we sing, then throughout shabbos we have many meals then we always end

shabbos with a musical havdalah. I love that i have a jewish life and that i do not have to worry about ever having to eat traif or not have enough jewish people surrounding me i live a great jewish life.

Gila Klibanoff

Elr Brickman

Ms. Levenson

Socila Studies Period 3

11/8/17

Rachel Frank, I was surprised by many events that happened during your time period as a religious Jewish woman. First off, I would have never believed that a woman could be a rabbi until I read about you. What I found interesting was that you were the first person to preach formally in the united states. Also how you had the courage to go up and speak formally in the first place. There was something that bothered me a lot was that there were not many religious Jews during your time, and I find that scary because as people start to lose faith in a religion they will forget it and that religion will disappear. I also found it shocking that this letter seemed to be written to keep the Jewish tradition alive.

Life right now in 2017 in the United States of America, as an orthodox Jew, there are many surprises. We have Israel and that is a place where we can all be free as Jews, except for the occasional terrorist attacks. Today we have many different places where we as Jews are free to pray to G-d in our communities. There are so many shuls. We have at least fifteen in new jersey. Shabbos is the best part. Every family comes together in shul and talk with each other. This is what it is like to be an orthodox Jew in 2017 in America.

Kayla Klibanoff

Mrs. Levenson

Social Studies Period 3

7 September 2017

Dear Rachel "Ray" Frank,

I read your letter and it seems that it's very hard for you right now. Living as a Jew in a Non- Jewish community seems very difficult, but I am happy to know that there is someone still trying to keep the Jewish traditions and beliefs alive. As you are a Jewish woman speaker, I want to know what that is like in the colonial times, and how you are trying to inspire people in this civilization. I wanted to know why people really call you "Girl Rabbi of the Golden West, and how that impacted your view about the people around you. I also wanted to know why aren't there any other Jewish women speakers, or even Jewish speakers? Anyway I hope you inspire people to keep the Jewish traditions alive.

For me, living as a Jew in 2017 is actually very easy in many ways but also difficult in others. I live in a community where Judaism seems very big. I go to shul for most shabboses, and also on the holidays. I am also very fortunate to live so close to most of my family. I am able to celebrate many of the holidays with my cousins and grandparents. But there are a few difficult aspects of being a Jew. When my family goes away on a vacation it is very hard to find a kosher place to eat, so we then have to bring our own food for most places we go. I think that living as a Jew in 2017 is pretty easy because I feel that I am accepted for who I am.

Dear Rebecca Samuels,

Hello, my name is Sarit Greenwood, and I am a student in 7th Grade at the Joseph Kushner Hebrew Academy. Recently in class, several of my fellow students and I were assigned with the task of reading your letter to your family in Hamburg, Germany. When reading your letter, I was surprised to hear that despite many people coming to America to practice the religion of their choice, it wasn't always so easy to do so. You said in your letter that Jews were the minority, and assimilated into the secular community around them, which was the reason you wanted to move to Charlestown. After learning this, I also was surprised that you yourself had not assimilated with the Jews around you, and that you and your husband, Chaim, had persisted with keeping Jewish laws and traditions.

It seems like Jewish life back in the 1700s and in the 21 century differed drastically. Despite the fact that Jews are still a minority, there are close to 6 million people practicing Judaism in the 21 century. In my hometown of West Orange, New Jersey, there is a vibrant Jewish community, with over ten different synagogues within an hour walk from my house. I go to a Jewish Day school, where I learn how to read, write, and speak hebrew, and learn Tanach and Talmud. On Shabbat, I go to AABJ&D, one of the many local synagogues, and attend Teen Minyan, a service for kids of ages 11-19. Currently I am learning and preparing for my Bat Mitzvah this November. It is so easy to be Jewish when here are other Jews around you!

Sincerely,

Sarit Greenwood

Sarit Greenwood

In the letter written by Rachel Calof there was a good life lesson for all to learn of the importance of keeping your religious values. Rachel came from Kiev Ukraine to America to meet her unknown husband. It is described in her letter that in America she never had welcoming and loving home to go to. In America she had three sons and had difficulties during birth. When one of her children was born it was a joyous day, until they slaughtered the ox and found out that it was treigh. When she saw the meat was treigh she refused to eat it. Later that week she began to feel ill because she hadn't eaten the meat. The circumstances permitted her to eat the meat and after she felt better. This shows how hard it was to keep her religion in that time period and how little jews there were. The lesson to be learned from Rachel Calof's letter is that if you are in a time period that it is easy to keep religion you should observe as much as possible. If you don't live in a time period like that you should try to observe as much as you possibly can.

In the year 2017, in Livingston New Jersey, in the U.S.A, life is not hard for a jew and you can observe freely. I am Jordan Serviss and I attend a nearby yeshiva and to a local shul with many jewish friends in the neighborhood. Being a jew in 2017 was a piece of cake. It is not like any other times where jews are murdered or have to practice secretly. It is very open and not dangerous, jews can just practice freely along with every other religion. We can build the sukkah on our law, put the menorah in our window for all to see, and just be jewish with no threats. It is not just the people not caring if someone is jewish, all of the supermarkets have a designated aisle for kosher meat and kosher food is found in mostly all aisles. I am lucky to be able to practice my religion freely, but can't imagine what I would do if that was taken from me. To whoever finds this letter my advice to you is take advantage of your ability to be who you are and your religion. Although if you are in a difficult time my advice is to try your best to observe and stay true to who you are. The most important thing is that you keep your religion no matter what and stay true to who you are.

Rebecca Samuel was a Jewish woman from the colonial times in 1790. She once lived in Hamburg, Germany and then moved to Petersburg, Virginia. Rebecca Samuel had two kids and she felt that in Petersburg, Virginia there was a lack of Jewish life so she wanted to move to Charleston, South Carolina, where there were more Jews. Rebecca wrote this letter to her parents and family in Germany as a complaint. From this document I learned that in the colonial times, it was very difficult to be a religious Jew and that Jews were the minority in the thirteen colonies.

Being a Jew in the year 2017, I learned that my Jewish life now, is different than the Jewish life of people in the colonial times. I live in West Orange, New Jersey and I am privileged to go to a Jewish school and a Modern Orthodox shul. In my opinion, I think that I am very involved in my shul being the only woman to go to D'Shon, the evening prayer service, almost every night. One thing that I look forward to every week is Pse, Shabbat. Every Friday night to Saturday we have a special day of rest consisting of special prayer services,

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delicious meals and time spent with family and friends. Every Friday night, I go to shul and come home to sing Shalom Aleichem and Eishet Chayil. After that I get a bracha from my parents and then my dad makes kiddush followed by washing our hands and then making Hamotzi. After that we eat a delicious meal and on the Shabbat where it gets dark early we have an oneg with sr. teens, our teenager youth group. Then I go to sleep and the next day I go to teen minyan, a service just for teenagers. After that I go home eat lunch and go to shul again in the afternoon. Then Shabbat ends and everything is back to normal. That is what my Jewish life is like in 2017 and thank you for reading my story.

Ali Reisk

אלי רייסק