



Focus on Religious Freedom

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"America didn't create religious liberty. Religious liberty created America."

Gov. Bobby Jindal

America As a Religious Refuge in the 17th Century - Part 2

The Jews first migrated to the American colonies when they fled from Brazil where they had settled upon fleeing the Portuguese Inquisition in the 1500's. But a Portuguese conquest of their area of Brazil in 1654 confronted the Jewish population with the prospect of a new Inquisition. Avoiding this new threat, a shipload of 23 Jewish refugees arrived in New Amsterdam (soon to become New York) that same year. This small community attracted more refugees and in the following decades, still seeking religious freedom, Jewish communities grew in Newport, RI, Philadelphia, PA, Charleston, SC, and Savannah, GA.

An Independent Spirit Grows in the Colonies:

Over the next 100 years, diverse circumstances and ideas converged to inspire colonists to believe that individual freedom, not government domination dictated by powers far removed from their circumstances, was their God-given right.

Increasing population and prosperity, religious freedom in the individual colonies, the philosophy of the Enlightenment that men had certain fundamental rights which no government had the right to infringe upon, plus the 15 year long spiritual revolution of the First Great Awakening, all came together to form a new sense of identity. By the mid-1700's, colonists had been living in America for 150 years, each colony had formed its own government and people were used to a great degree of freedom.

However, the British Parliament was incrementally passing more trade laws, taxes, and restrictions to benefit Britain more than the colonies. While the colonists had asked for the same political rights as people in Britain, the king had refused. Thomas Paine, political philosopher and activist, wrote,

"It is repugnant to reason to suppose that this continent can longer remain subject to any external power ... there is something absurd in supposing a Continent to be perpetually governed by an island."

Paine also wrote,

"Let a crown be placed thereon, by which the world may know, that so far as we approve of monarchy, that in America the law is King. For as in absolute governments the King is law, so in free countries the law ought to be King; and there ought to be no other."

(wikipedia.org/history of Jews in Brazil; myjewishlearning.com/Jewish-immigration; loc.gov/exhibits/religion; lotusarise.com, 4/18/20; charismamag.com, 7/31/19)