Although Jews live all over the world now, this was not always the case. They were expelled from their original homeland in Palestine over 2000 years ago in the year A.D. 70 by the Roman Empire, and they were forced to find homes elsewhere. Everywhere Jews settled outside of Palestine is called the Jewish Diaspora. Diasporic, or dispersed peoples, are peoples that live outside of their original homelands. The Jews wandered throughout the Middle East and North Africa and eventually made their way to Europe and Russia where their numbers continued to grow.

But Jews were not Christians or Muslims, and they were rarely allowed to live in peace in the places they settled. In fact, they were expelled from many European cities and kingdoms including England in 1290, Spain in 1492, and Frankfort in 1614.
Later, during the 19th and 20th centuries, large numbers of Jews had settled in many European countries in Eastern Europe and Russia, especially in an area between Eastern Europe and Russia called The Pale. Although Jews had always been singled out for random persecution due to their religious beliefs and practices that differed so much from Christianity, this persecution began to increase. Eventually *pogroms*, or state sponsored persecution of Jews, were instituted.

Pogroms involved the destruction and confiscation of Jewish property, as ordered by governments, the mass killing of Jews ordered by governments, and government-ordered expulsion of Jews from villages, towns, and cities within the Pale and other areas of Eastern Europe and Russia.

As massive numbers of Jews fled these pogroms, the United States came to be viewed as a safe haven from persecution.

This 1904 image (right) shows U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt demanding that the Russian Tsar stop oppressing and terrorizing Russian Jews. Pay close attention to the detail in the background that shows a Jewish woman and child fleeing from a burning Jewish enclave. So common were these pogroms that between 1880 and 1920, one-third of all Jews in Europe came to America. Although many other groups came to America during this period, the
Jews were unique in that they came to America not from one country or region but from many.

While the United States did not prove to be completely free of persecution, it was mild compared to that which the Jews had experienced for the prior two thousand years in the Middle East, Europe, and Russia. The Jews established ethnic enclaves in eastern cities, the largest of which was on the Lower East Side of New York City, a slum also inhabited by the masses of other immigrants coming to New York during the same period.

Ironically, the Jewish religious beliefs and practices that seemed so strange to Christians were the very thing that protected them from the diseases that ravaged so much of the immigrant population during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. What many people today don’t know is that the most important modern medical advance was the introduction of the now ordinary practice of hand washing.

Prior to the 20th century, the average person did not understand that germs were transferred by touching. Therefore, people rarely washed their hands before eating. So, a mother might change a baby’s diaper or scrub the floors and not carefully wash her hands before preparing food. There was no connection made between this and her family’s subsequent illness. Jewish families were different. Their religion required them to engage in ritual hand washing prior to preparing and eating food. This religious practice, though not related to science, kept them healthier than the larger population and saved them from succumbing in mass numbers to one of the most feared diseases of that time: cholera.

Jews were also healthier due to the dietary restrictions imposed by their religion: the requirement to keep kosher. This meant their food had to be prepared in a careful manner and that there were some unclean foods, such as pork, that they could not eat at all. Again, these were practices based on religious, not scientific, practice; but eventually, science proved these religious traditions to be healthy practices. Consider this: pork, when not cooked properly, caused illness, something that was not discovered until years later. Jewish restrictions against the ingestion of pork, as well as the way they were required to prepare food in general, protected them from disease.

Jews also benefitted from their religious commitment to literacy. All boys were required to learn to read and to study the Torah and, by extension, to learn Hebrew, even if they were living in Europe or Russia where they also spoke the official language or Yiddish. This early commitment to study translated well to success in America where upward mobility was closely connected to formal education.

Another factor related to religious practice benefitted Jews indirectly. This was the fact that the Jewish Sabbath was observed on Saturday rather than on Sunday as was the Christian practice. As such, factories were closed on Sundays but open on Saturday.
This made it impossible for Jews to work in any factories except those owned by German Jews whose textile factories employed many, but not all, Jews who needed work. In fact, their many religious restrictions precluded them from working for Christian employers in nearly every industry. Thus, in order to make a living, Jews had to be resourceful.

So, as in Europe and Russia, they were often entrepreneurs working for themselves and providing services to other Jews: for instance, kosher butchers and bakers were a requirement in every Jewish enclave. Some Jews did not have the skills or the money to rent space and enter business as printers, shoe makers, or carpenters; so they sold their goods on mobile pushcarts. Between 1880 and 1905, the number of pushcart street peddlers in New York City increased by 75%, and most of these were Jewish. In fact, 10% of all Jewish immigrants in turn of the century New York were pushcart peddlers.

**Increase in number of Jewish Professionals in Manhattan 1897-1907**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional</th>
<th>1897</th>
<th>1907</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jewish Doctors</td>
<td>425</td>
<td>1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish Dentists</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish Pharmacists</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This combination of entrepreneurship and high levels of education contributed to Jews becoming the most upwardly mobile and economically successful of all immigrant groups. As shown on this chart, in the 10 years between 1897 and 1907, the increase in the number of Jewish professionals in Manhattan was astonishing! In fact, Jewish upward mobility was double that of other groups.
Mid-20th Century Dominance of Jews in the Professions and as Business Owners

Chart data:
Professionals: Jews – 20%, National Average – 10%
Business Owners: Jews – 35%, National Average – 13%

As shown on the chart above, by the mid-20th century, Jews were enjoying far greater success as professionals and business owners than the national average.

During this period, they had a higher level of education than any other group in America. This was reflected in their high income levels that dwarfed the national average. The story of Jewish immigration to America, though not free of challenges, is certainly one of success.