

Citizenship, Civil Rights, and Jewish Emancipation in Revolutionary France

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Between 1787 and 1788, the Royal Academy of Arts and Sciences in Metz ran an essay competition in which participants were to respond to the question: “Are there means for making the Jews happier and more useful in France?” Home to about 2,000 Jews, Metz had the largest Jewish population of any city in France.¹ In prerevolutionary France, Jewish communities lived under a state of relative autonomy, permitted by the Old Regime to govern themselves, freely practice their religion, and enjoy royal protection, but without the benefit civil rights and at the cost of heavy taxes to the crown. As Catholic Church lost its grip on French politics after the Revolution, France’s Jewish communities saw an opportunity to become full members of French society. The status of these Jewish communities became a point of contention at the National Assembly, as progressive deputies clashed with conservatives over the question of what the doctrine of human rights in this newly secular society would mean for the Jews. The content of these debates reflected the prejudice Jews faced in France under the Old Regime, the enlightened new attitude toward religious tolerance that had begun to arise in France, and illuminated the status of other marginalized groups. This project began as an inquiry into relations between religious outlier groups in France over the course of the Revolutionary period and aims to build upon the field of French Revolutionary studies’ continuity with subsequent events in the history of Europe through a political and cultural framework as it pertains to Jewish emancipation.

Scholarship in the field of French Revolutionary studies has grown more unified and more favorable toward the emancipation of the Jews in Revolutionary France. Previously, the main point of contention concerned the argument that emancipation was harmful to the Jews of France, not

¹ Lynn Hunt, *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History* (Boston/New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1996), 48.

just in Revolutionary times but permanently thereafter, because it eroded Jewish cultural identity. Gary Kates addresses this argument in his 1990 essay “Jews into Frenchmen: Nationality and Representation in Revolutionary France.”² In large part responding to arguments made by the Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg, who claimed that emancipation created the conditions for modern antisemitism. Kates was highly critical of Hertzberg’s approach, which he called reductionist, particularly regarding the emancipation debates and the loyalty oath. To dissect Hertzberg’s argument, Kates returns to the emancipation debates at the National Assembly – the pro-emancipation camp represented chiefly by Count Stanislas Marie Adelaide de Clermont-Tonnerre, and the opposition by the abbe Jean-Sifrein Maury – to place the discussion within the broader context of the changing national identity of the French themselves, from a kingdom to a democratic nation. Furthermore, Kates argues that is in fact Zionist critics like Hertzberg that rob the Jews of this era of their agency by portraying them as having been tricked into forsaking their cultural identity in exchange for second-class citizenship. On the contrary, Kates contends that Jews who took the loyalty oath were taking part in a bold new ideological development. By making the choice to be Jewish, adherents asserted a more personal connection to their cultural identity.

The concept of “emancipation” with which this project is concerned is defined, as it pertains to the historiography of Jews in Revolutionary France, by Ronald Schechter as the “inaugural event” that gave the Jews the opportunity to become equal, active citizens of the nation.³ Schechter saw the teleology of many historians in the field as a problem that prevented them from recognizing emancipation as a product of Enlightenment principles of religious toleration and

² Gary Kates, “Jews into Frenchmen: Nationality and Representation in Revolutionary France,” in *The French Revolution and the Birth of Modernity*, eds. Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein and Ferenc Feher (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 103-115.

³ Ronald Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews: Representations of Jews in France, 1715-1815*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

equality before the law, conceptualizing it instead as the beginning of a century-and-a-half-long campaign to destroy the identity of the Jews, ultimately culminating with the Holocaust. However, Schechter does not claim to be uniquely capable of taking an objective approach to the subject, acknowledging his own ideological biases as well as his identity as a Jewish person himself. In his effort to divorce emancipation from the Holocaust in the historiography of his book, Schechter attempts to avoid the teleological approach as much as possible by considering only what led to emancipation and what directly resulted from it, independent of its indirect consequences over a century later. Schechter also credits Kates as the only other historian he was aware of at the time to address why the National Assembly even bothered to address the Jewish question,⁴ as most historiographies of the French Revolution tend to treat the emancipation of the Jews as an ancillary matter, if they even mention it at all. Indeed, Jewish emancipation and the debate surrounding it was not one of the driving forces of the French Revolution, but it is illustrative of the changes the Revolution brought to France, and eventually to Europe.

Frances Malino shares in Kates's criticism of the Zionist interpretation of emancipation, as well as Schechter's objection to the teleological approach which is influenced by hindsight of the Holocaust.⁵ By comparing the French emancipation of the Jews in 1791 to the revisiting of the debates between 1806 and 1808 after the Terror, Malino argues that the lasting legacy of 1791 has been overshadowed in the collective memory by Napoleon rolling back some of the rights and privileges that the Jews had gained after the Revolution, replaced by the Dreyfus Affair and the legacy of Vichy France. Malino is also responsible for the translation and analysis of the Academy of Metz's essay contest, which is a crucial part of this project's argument, as well as biographical

⁴ Ibid, 155.

⁵ Frances Malino, "Jewish Emancipation in France in the Eighteenth Century," in *Discourses of Tolerance & Intolerance in the European Enlightenment*, Edited by Hans Bodeker, Clorinda Donato, and Peter Hans Reill, 130-143, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

information on Zalkind Hourwitz, a Polish-born Jewish intellectual who became French Revolutionary, with his contribution to the Revolution beginning with his winning submission to the contest.

In stark contrast to Schechter's book, which encourages the reader to consider only the influences and immediate outcomes of the Jewish emancipation debates in France so as not to have their judgement clouded by the subsequent history of the Jews in Europe, David Sorkin takes the opposite approach. While still far from teleological, Sorkin expands his historiographical field of view to include all of Europe from the late medieval era to modern times in his book *Jewish Emancipation: A History Across Five Centuries*. Sorkin adds to Schechter's conceptualization of Jewish emancipation, defining it as "first and foremost the Jews' inclusion, elevation, or equalization as a distinct religious group,"⁶ citing that the term "emancipation" first came to be applied to the Jews after the emancipation of the Catholics in England in 1829. Although his historical overview consists of five centuries across an entire continent, the French Revolution is central to Sorkin's research. Sorkin argues that "Full emancipation or equal rights became irrevocably associated with the ideas of 1789,"⁷ in large part because of the precedent set by advancements in religious toleration made at the National Assembly.

France was a majority Catholic country (as it had been for centuries, and remains to this day), but it was not theologically homogenous. On the eve of the Revolution, France was home to sizeable communities of Jews and Protestants. Because of the Old Regime's strong ties to the Catholic Church, these religious outlier groups faced prejudice and repression, but the Revolution opened the door to emancipation. Though they shared the same goal, the experiences of these two

⁶ David Sorkin, *Jewish Emancipation: A History Across Five Centuries*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 2.

⁷ Ibid, 101.

groups and their respective paths to emancipation had little in common. This project analyzes the winning essays from the Royal Academy of Metz's essay contest to reveal competing visions for the Jewish population of France, including a Jewish perspective on religious toleration and human rights in France. It will also focus on the debate at the National Assembly over what rights should be afforded to the Jews under the religious liberty clause of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. In addition, for context, it will also compare this discourse with that regarding other groups hoping to gain citizenship rights after the Revolution. Collectively, these documents reveal that French Jews had to overcome more ideological obstacles to citizenship in Revolutionary France than the Protestants because they were othered in French society by their cultural practices, their status as a distinct ethnic and religious group, and antisemitic prejudices held by French Catholics, yet their eventual success reflects the change in philosophy toward religious tolerance that arose in France along with the Revolution.

This essay begins with a summary of Jewish history in France to provide context for the situation on the eve of the Revolution, which is followed by an analysis of documents written by French Jews of the Revolutionary period. In these documents they describe their situation and argue that they are deserving of citizenship rights. I will then examine the debate at the National Assembly over the rights to be granted to Protestants and Jews under Article X of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, which promised religious liberty, in order to compare these debates with those concerning other marginalized groups for whom the prospect of citizenship and civil rights was also up for debate at the National Assembly. Through this analysis, I will assess the Jewish struggle for emancipation and the legacy of the French Revolution in European and Jewish history.

The history of the Jews in France goes back nearly two thousand years (and, by some accounts, even longer),⁸ but experiences a clean break in 1394 with their expulsion. It is with their gradual return to France in the early seventeenth century that the relevant context for the Jewish experience in the French Revolution begins to take shape. The influx of Jewish migrants to France prompted King Louis XIII to issue a royal edict on 23 April 1615 outlawing Christians from offering Jews shelter in their homes or associating with them on any level.⁹ Sixty years later in 1675, Louis XIV established a protectorate for Jewish communities in France, granting them self-governance and the protection of the crown, in exchange for a series of extortionate taxes and levies.¹⁰ Jews continued to face prejudice from the French populace and extortion from the crown, and despite their relative autonomy they were still barred from owning land and from certain occupations.

In some respects, however, this arrangement was more favorable than the conditions of the Protestants in France. Just ten years after establishing the protectorate, Louis XIV revoked the edict of Nantes, outlawing the practice of Protestant faiths. It was not until the Edict of Toleration in 1787 that Calvinists were once again allowed to worship freely, although they were not granted political rights (the edict also deliberately excluded Lutherans and Jews).¹¹ By the time of the Revolution, France had a total Jewish population of about 40,000. As the size of Jewish communities in France grew, so too did support among Frenchmen – both religious and secular –

⁸ Esther Benbassa, *The Jews of France: A History from Antiquity to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

⁹ “The Code Noir (The Black Code),” *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution*, <https://revolution.chnm.org/d/335>.

¹⁰ Benbassa, *The Jews of France*, 61.

¹¹ “Edict of Toleration” (November 1787), in *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History*, translated, edited, and with an introduction by Lynn Hunt (Boston/ New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1996), 40-43.

for their emancipation. Jews had supporters from members of all three Estates in their pursuit of citizenship.

In January 1789, when King Louis XVI called the Estates-General for the first time in 175 years, the abbe Emmanuel Joseph Sieyes published “What is the Third Estate?” a pamphlet that would define what citizenship was to mean after the Revolution.¹² Sieyes argued that the Third Estate (the commoners, 95 percent of the population of France) performed all the functions necessary for a society to thrive, and that the other two Estates were not needed (although Sieyes represented the Third Estate at the Estates-General, he was personally represented by the First Estate, as a member of the clergy). Defining a nation as “A body of associates, living under a common law, and represented by the same legislature, etc.”¹³ Sieyes contended that the Third Estate represented a nation within a nation. The basis of Sieyes’s idea of citizenship is therefore the concept of an individual’s utility to society.

They could not have known it at the time (though some may have anticipated that political unrest would lead to significant change), but Jews would soon have an opportunity to obtain citizenship in France. In March of 1789, the Academy of Metz published three winning entries to its essay contest. The abbe Henri Gregoire was one of these laureates, for his “Essay on the Physical, Moral, and Political Regeneration of the Jews.” Gregoire is best remembered for his support of the abolition movement in Saint-Domingue and is considered to have been a friend of the Jews at this time, but his support for Jewish emancipation is couched in antisemitic prejudice, and his essay makes many harmful false claims about the Jewish people.¹⁴ Gregoire claimed that

¹² Emmanuel Joseph Sieyes, “What is the Third Estate?” (1789), *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution*, <https://revolution.chnm.org/d/280>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ronald Schechter, “Competing Proposals for the Regeneration of the Jews,” *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History: Selected Papers from the Annual Meeting* (Boulder, Colorado: Western Society for French History, 1996), 486.

the moral degeneracy of the Jews was visibly evident in a number of their physical characteristics, particularly their hooked noses. Gregoire also sets himself apart from the Academy's other two laureates by blaming the Jewish religion for this degeneracy, where most others did not argue that there was such a connection.¹⁵ The second laureate, a man known to history simply as Thiery, was far more charitable to the Jews in some respects, invoking John Locke's language of natural rights, yet still arguing against full equality, suggesting that Jews should continue to be restricted from certain professions.¹⁶ Although both Thiery and Gregoire regarded the Jewish religion as inferior to Christianity, Thiery was more sympathetic to and supportive of the Jews' right to freely practice their religion, himself being a Protestant as opposed to Gregoire's position as a Catholic clergyman.¹⁷

The third and final winning essay in the contest was authored by a man named Zalkind Hourwitz. The only Jewish entrant into the contest, Hourwitz was originally from Poland and migrated to Metz. Hourwitz's answer to the question of how to make the Jews happier and more useful in France was simply "Stop making them unhappy and unuseful,"¹⁸ claiming that France's refusal to grant citizenship to the Jews was self-sabotage. Despite his bold and decisive tone to begin with, however, Hourwitz's rhetoric shifts, adopting a more assimilationist position, and he begins bargaining with the reader, offering certain changes in behavior on behalf of all Jews in exchange for the rights that come with citizenship. For example, in exchange for the right to purchase land, Hourwitz proposes that Jews will think of themselves less as foreigners and more as French, in addition to increasing property value. Throughout the course of his essay, Hourwitz's

¹⁵ Ibid, 486.

¹⁶ Ibid, 485.

¹⁷ Malino, "Jewish Emancipation in Eighteenth Century France," 140-141.

¹⁸ Zalkind Hourwitz, "Vindication of the Jews" (1789), in *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Documentary History*, translated, edited, and with an introduction by Lynn Hunt (Boston/New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1996), 48-50.

proposals take the form of a mutually beneficial arrangement for Jews and French gentiles. Although he could not have read Sieyès's pamphlet before writing this essay ("What is the Third Estate?" was written in January 1789, whereas "Vindication of the Jews," while published in March 1789, was most likely written sometime between 1787 and 1788), Hourwitz's framing of Jews as potentially useful to France as citizens is sure to have ingratiated him and his ideas to those who had read and positively received Sieyès's pamphlet. Hourwitz's embrace of this new concept of citizenship as espoused by Sieyès won him the support of revolutionaries in Paris, who would also go on to welcome Jews as active participants in the Revolution.¹⁹

In a deft utilization of commonly held antisemitic prejudices of the time to appeal to his audience, Hourwitz not only acknowledges but in fact plays into negative Jewish stereotypes to argue his case for citizenship. It should be noted that when Hourwitz authored his essay, Louis XVI had not yet called the Estates-General. While Hourwitz was almost certainly aware of the economic crisis and mounting tensions, he had no way of foreseeing that there would be a revolution in 1789. This means that if he were attempting to appeal to someone with legislative authority, it would have to have been the king himself. The far more likely scenario is that Hourwitz saw the Academy's essay contest as an opportunity to advocate for the emancipation of the Jews on a platform that would reach an audience who otherwise may not have engaged with his ideas. Regarding the perception that a disproportionate number of Jews are merchants, Hourwitz proposes: "They must be permitted to practice all of the liberal and mechanical arts and agriculture, which will diminish the number of merchants among them and in consequence the number of knaves and rogues."²⁰ In other instances, he argues that Jewish merchants would be less inclined to "cheat" their customers if they were allowed to freely conduct business in French

¹⁹ Malino, "Jewish Emancipation in France in the Eighteenth Century," 141.

²⁰ Ibid.

communities as fellow citizens, and that Jewish children will grow up to be more French if they are allowed to attend French public schools. The direct exchange of rights for assimilation seems to suggest that this was a deliberate tactic by Hourwitz. However, he also proposes banning the use of Hebrew and Yiddish in business and stripping the rabbis of their authority over Jewish communities without suggesting any citizenship benefits in return, suggesting that Hourwitz may indeed have harbored these beliefs about his people to some extent.

After splitting from the Estates-General in the summer of 1789, the National Assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, a document that codified the natural rights of all French men. Article X of the Declaration read: “No one should be disturbed for his opinions, even in religion, provided that their manifestation does not trouble public order as established by law.²¹” In addition to this clause, the Assembly also adopted the following criteria for citizenship: “(1) to be French or to have become French, (2) to have reached one’s majority [be a legal adult, the age was set at 25], (3) to have resided in the canton for at least one year, (4), to pay direct taxes at a rate equal to the local value of three days of work, (5) to not be at the moment a servant, that is to say, in personal relationships that are all too incompatible with the independence necessary to the exercise of political rights.”²² Together, these two documents ostensibly open the door to citizenship for the Jews, but it also presents some new problems. Regarding Article X of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, the qualification that the “manifestation” of one’s religious beliefs must not “trouble public order” is nebulous almost to the point of meaninglessness, and anti-Jewish could (and would) argue that the Jews’ very

²¹ “Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen” (1789), in *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History*, translated, edited, and with an introduction by Lynn Hunt (Boston/New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1996), 77-79.

²² Jacques Guillaume Thouret, “Report on the Basis of Political Eligibility” (29 September 1789), in *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History*, translated, edited, and with an introduction by Lynn Hunt (Boston/New York, Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1996), 82.

presence troubled public order. Clauses 1, 3, and 4 of the conditions for eligibility were also problematic. Jews were certainly not considered to be French, but could they become French? And if so, how? Were the segregated Jewish communities in eastern France considered to be within the eligible canton? Finally, would the taxes the Jews paid to the crown cover the tax specified in the conditions, would Jews be required to pay both taxes, or would the protection tax be abolished along with the monarchy?

The issue of the rights of Jews as citizens was first raised at the National Assembly in conjunction with that of Protestants, under the umbrella of non-Catholics. Under the Old Regime, the kings of France maintained close ties with the Pope. As the Jewish diaspora brought large numbers of Jewish migrants to France and the Protestant Reformation gave rise to various new branches of Christianity, France was becoming less theologically homogenous, though it remained a majority Catholic country. To reform French society, National Assembly also saw fit to reduce the influence of the Catholic Church over French politics. Part of this meant granting rights to non-Catholics and other groups that had previously been denied them. The first official motion regarding the rights of non-Catholics was proposed by a Brunet de la Tuque, but there was some ambiguity as to whether this covered all non-Catholics, or if it referred to the Edict of Toleration's terms of non-Catholics, i.e., Calvinists exclusively.²³

The debate over the political status of Jews began in earnest when Stanislas Marie Adelaide de Clermont-Tonnerre, a liberal nobleman from Paris, responded to the motion proposed by de la Tuque. In a speech to the National Assembly, Clermont-Tonnerre issued an ultimatum regarding religious liberty: "either you admit a national religion, subject all your laws to it, arm it with temporal power, exclude from your society the men who profess another creed and then, erase the

²³ Hunt, 86.

article in your declaration of rights [freedom of religion], or you permit everyone to have his own religious opinion, and do not exclude from public office those who make use of this permission.²⁴”

This was a rhetorical proposition, as Clermont-Tonnerre was a student of the Enlightenment, like Hourwitz, and believed it was self-explanatory that there could be no law regarding religion that would be compatible with the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen other than complete freedom thereof.

Clermont-Tonnerre came to the defense of the Jews in his speech arguing that men should not be considered ineligible for citizenship due to their profession or religious beliefs, rebuking antisemitic stereotypes much like how Hourwitz had in his prior essay. Believing that only the morals of any religion should be scrutinized for inclusion in society, Clermont-Tonnerre argued that, of the many accusations made against the Jewish people in response to his motion, only the accusation of usury was of significant concern, and dismissed the rest, like Jewish dietary restrictions and marriage customs, as “religious oddities,” differences that would be smoothed over as Frenchmen and Jews became accustomed to each other. As for the accusations that Jews were inclined to commit usury, Clermont-Tonnerre placed the responsibility squarely on Old Regime laws restricting the Jews’ freedom of profession and argued that, given alternative opportunities for work and the right to own land, fewer Jews would turn to usurious banking practices to get by, again echoing Hourwitz’s arguments that Frenchmen’s problems with the Jews would be remedied by emancipation.

Clermont-Tonnerre also responded to the notion that Jews could not be integrated into French society because they had their own laws and were considered to have constituted their own

²⁴ Stanislas Marie Adelaide de Clermont-Tonnere, “Speech on Religious Minorities and Questionable Professions” (23 December 1789), in *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History*, translated, edited, and with an introduction by Lynn Hunt (Boston/New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1996), 86-88.

nation. Again, Clermont-Tonnerre pointed out France's own responsibility in this development and proposed his plan for the regeneration of the Jews: that by granting Jews citizenship as individuals, revoking their legal protection and autonomous status, and by abolishing independent Jewish courts and subjecting them to French laws, the Jews could indeed be regenerated into Frenchmen.²⁵ This reflects Clermont-Tonnerre's conceptualization of "inclusive" human rights—that the nation of France need not recognize the Jews' special status as a nation within the nation, but that Jews as individuals were eligible to become citizens of France.²⁶

Notably, religious minorities were not the only group for whom Clermont-Tonnerre advocated – he also came to the defense of actors and executioners. These professions were considered taboo under the Old Regime, and prior to the Revolution they were prohibited from voting or holding office.²⁷ Executioners were tasked with conducting death sentences, and as such were shunned as if they were murderers, despite the legally sanctioned nature of their killings. Actors, on the other hand, were considered immoral and deceitful because they took the appearance of others on stage. However, despite their dubious reputations, prejudices against actors and executioners were not as strong as those against Jews, as the taboos surrounding these professions were already somewhat antiquated. Clermont-Tonnerre quickly dismissed the exclusion of executioners from eligibility for citizenship on the grounds that if the law ordered the death of a guilty person, it was the job of the executioner to carry out the will of the law. Regarding actors, Clermont-Tonnerre issued a similar ultimatum to the one he issued regarding religious liberty: that because theatrical productions were permitted under law, the nation should either outlaw such productions, or end the stigma associated with actors.²⁸

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Hunt, 86.

²⁷ Ibid, 86.

²⁸ Clermont-Tonnerre, "Speech on Religious Minorities and Questionable Professions" (23 December 1789).

Clermont-Tonnere's proposal was met with resistance from, unsurprisingly, members of the Catholic clergy, especially regarding his vision of Jewish emancipation. The abbe Jean-Sifrein Maury had a particularly vitriolic response to Clermont-Tonnerre. While Maury rebuked Clermont-Tonnerre's statements on actors and executioners, he did so only briefly, and did not address Clermont-Tonnerre's arguments specifically, deeming the matter unworthy of the National Assembly in comparison to that of the Jews. Invoking the idea of the Jews as a distinct nation, Maury argued that Jews were no more capable of becoming French citizens than were Englishmen and Danes.²⁹ Furthermore, Maury argued that not only was Jewish assimilation impossible, but that it was not in the best interest of the French at all, on the grounds that Jews had neither the ability nor the inclination for agriculture, and could not make themselves of use to French society. Maury invoked the stereotype of the Jewish banker and the transient nature of Jewish communities since the diaspora to argue that the majority of Jews had no agricultural experience, and, because of the sabbath and the fifty-six (by Maury's count) additional festivals they celebrated each year compared to Christians, that even if Jews were able to plow fields, they would simply not have the time. According to Maury, it was also in the interest of the Jews' safety that they remain segregated, on account of the risk of antisemitic hate crimes.

Maury's own antisemitism is self-evident, but the language he uses in invoking common stereotypes is truly exceptional. Regarding his agriculture argument, Maury refers to the Jews as "the scourge of agricultural provinces," and claims that in Poland, which had a much larger Jewish population than France, "sweat of Christian slaves waters the furrows in which the opulence of the Jews germinates, and they, while their fields are thus cultivated, weigh the ducats."³⁰ Describing

²⁹ Jean-Sifrein Maury, "Speech" (23 December 1789), in *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History*, translated, edited, and with an introduction by Lynn Hunt (Boson/New York, Bedford/St. Martin's, 1996), 88-89.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

the Jews as a scourge reduces their humanity, and the imagery of Christian slaves subjugated by Jewish overlords for their own enrichment is clearly intended to make Christian members of the audience at the National Assembly wary of Jewish enterprise, also playing into the stereotype of Jewish opulence. Furthermore, Maury's language describing Jewish real estate interests, his reasoning as to why the Jews would be susceptible to hate crimes, sounds more befitting of an invading military force than a segregated religious minority: "In Alsace they hold 12 million mortgages on the land. In a month, they would become owners of half this province, in ten years, they would have entirely conquered it, and it would be nothing but a Jewish colony."³¹ Maury's extreme wariness of the Jews, despite their relatively small numbers and already segregated status, speaks to the centuries-old antisemitic prejudices still present in French society. Maury, himself a convert from Calvinism to Catholicism, offered no such opposition to the concept of rights for Protestants, justifying that they shared the same religion and laws as French Catholics. The exchange between Maury and Clermont-Tonnerre was so heated that the subject of Jewish emancipation would be tabled for a month, prompting Jews to appeal to the assembly directly.

On 23 January 1790, a group of Jewish petitioners presented their case for citizenship to the National Assembly.³² The Assembly had granted citizenship rights to Protestants the previous month, which in turn sparked a debate over Jewish emancipation, but the issue was then adjourned without having reached a conclusion. The stated reason for the adjournment was that the Assembly needed more time to ascertain what the Jews' true desires were, an explanation that the petitioners criticized, responded that they wished for no more and no less than to be made citizens. The petitioners' argument consisted of four main components, each of which echoed Hourwitz's own

³¹ Ibid.

³² "Petition of the Jews of Paris, Alsace and Lorraine to the National Assembly" (28 January 1790), in *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History*, translated, edited, and with an introduction by Lynn Hunt (Boston/New York, Bedford/St. Martin's, 1996), 93-97.

arguments in his essay from before the Revolution. Hourwitz's essay made him popular in reformist circles, and he became a committed supporter of the French Revolution.³³ Between the amount of support voiced by gentiles for the Jewish cause, and the similarities between Hourwitz's arguments and those of the Jewish petitioners, the influence that Hourwitz's essay had on the discourse is readily apparent.

The petitioners' argument consisted of four main components: explaining why granting the Jews citizenship rights was the only just course of action, detailing the ways this arrangement would benefit both Jewish communities and France itself, refuting negative antisemitic stereotypes, and asserting that upon being made citizens, the full array of civil rights that comes with that distinction should be afforded to them all at once, and not gradually.³⁴ To begin with, the petitioners appeal to the status of the Protestants, noting the logical inconsistency that one religious outlier group once persecuted by the Catholic Church in France should be granted citizenship while another was not. They further Enlightenment principles of religious freedom and toleration and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, arguing that "civil rights are entirely independent from religious principles."³⁵ The following part of the petition adopts the same strategy Hourwitz used in his essay of appealing to French antisemitism, proposing that Jews will be likely to abandon the practices for which they are maligned if they became citizens. The petitioners' refutation of these stereotypes (mainly usury) places the onus on the French, effectively arguing that is the French's own actions that have created the situation, but that they could make it right by granting the Jews citizenship.

³³ Hunt, *The French Revolution and Human Rights*, 48.

³⁴ "Petition of the Jews of Paris, Alsace and Lorraine to the National Assembly" (28 January 1790).

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Despite the pleas of the Jews of Paris, Alsace, and Lorraine, the matter of Jewish emancipation would not be resolved until 27 September 1791, over a year later and just days before the dissolution of the National Assembly. The motion to lift the adjournment on the Jewish debate, proposed by Adrien Jean Francois Duport, called into question the integrity of the new constitution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen if Jews were to continue to be barred from citizenship. Duport asked the Assembly to declare the Jews able to become active citizens, arguing: "I believe that freedom of worship no longer permits any distinction to be made between the political rights of citizens on the basis of their beliefs and I believe equally that the Jews cannot be the only exceptions to the enjoyment of these rights, when pagans, Turks, Muslims, Chinese even, men of all these sects, in short are admitted to these rights."³⁶ Duport's both reinforces Clermont-Tonnerre's argument and rebukes Maury's, establishing that citizenship in the nation was not contingent on origin or religious belief. The actual text of the law decrees that any man who meets the eligibility criteria for citizenship and takes the civic oath has the right to become a citizen. The second clause revokes the special status of Jewish communities in eastern France, treating the civic oath as a renouncement of the privileges it afforded.³⁷

Sorkin argues that Duport's amendment represents a clean break with the Old Regime in terms of the historiography of the Jews in France, overturning more than a century of laws legislating the othering of Jews.³⁸ Some historians, primarily of the Zionist school of thought against which Kates and Malino argued, contend that this revocation of the Jews' special status set in motion the sequence of events that led to the Holocaust, on the grounds that it damaged the

³⁶ Adrien Jean Francois Duport, "Admission of Jews to Rights of Citizenship" (27 September 1791), in *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History*, translated, edited, and with an introduction by Lynn Hunt (Boston/New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1996), 99-101.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Sorkin, *Jewish Emancipation*, 99.

Jews' identity of a distinct nation. However, Sorkin argues that the abolition of this arrangement was necessary for equality and the incorporation of Jews into French society. However, the delay between the adjournment of the debate over Jewish emancipation and the law that made it reality – a gap of 21 months – fundamentally changed the context. According to Sorkin, by failing to make Jews eligible for active citizenship concurrently with Protestants, actors, and executioners when the issue was first brought to the floor, the National Assembly reframed the emancipation of the Jews as a matter of legal consistency, instead of an enthusiastic embrace of equal rights and religious toleration.³⁹

While the emancipation of the Jews at the National Assembly was a fundamentally positive development in the history of France and the Jewish people, its impact is diluted somewhat by the Assembly's failure to decisively refute antisemitic prejudices and make citizenship available to Jews swiftly. It did, however, represent the French Revolution's embrace of Enlightenment principles which would later spread throughout most of Europe. Of course, the history of the Jews in Europe, sadly, cannot be told without addressing the Holocaust. The near eradication of Jews throughout Europe can make the struggle to become equal citizens in France seem insignificant, especially because these two events, representing the nadir and zenith of Jewish history in Europe, respectively, were separated by a mere 150 years. While it is true that the emancipation of the Jews in France did not prevent the Holocaust, it did prevent the Holocaust from happening in France.

The field of French Revolutionary studies has something of a blind spot when it comes to Jewish history. The historiography is far from settled, but the breadth of scholarship on the topic seems sparse compared to other aspects of the French Revolution. This is somewhat understandable, as the Revolution was not born out of a desire to emancipate the Jews, but it is

³⁹ Ibid, 100.

relevant nonetheless as it informs the context for mankind's most heinous act. A part of this lull in scholarship may be due to the lack of available primary sources in English, since French is a widely spoken language, closely related to English, and most scholars of Revolutionary France either already speak French or learned it over the course of their studies. However, while this is true, more widely available primary sources translated into other languages can only help the field grow. Furthermore, primary sources by Jewish writers from the period are exceedingly rare, even though their perspective on the debate as it was ongoing may help to settle the more contemporary divide in the field as to whether emancipation truly facilitated Jewish agency. An excellent place to start would be the translation and increased distribution of *Ha-Me'assef*, a Hebrew periodical that reported on the events of the French Revolution as they unfolded.

Finally, scholars should again consider the brief time frame between the French Revolution and the Holocaust. In just 150 years, Jews in France experienced their emancipation, and nearly their extermination. Reflecting on the ephemeral and immaterial nature of human rights, societies could find themselves losing rights they considered essential to them without being fully aware of it as it happens.