

‘Patriot Rabbi’: How Jewish Colonial Settlers Helped Shape America’s Fight for Freedom

JERUSALEM, Israel – America was founded as a Christian nation. Yet, early on in the country’s history, some Jewish settlers came to dwell in the Colonies alongside their Christian neighbors. *CBN News* talked with Jewish commentator and historian Gil Troy and discovered that the settlers were among the most patriotic of the British colonists fighting to become the first citizens of a free America.

PAUL STRAND: Looking at America’s 250th anniversary, we’re also looking at Jews in America at that time of the Revolutionary War era, talking to a Jerusalem Post commentator and scholar, and historian, Gil Troy.

In America, I understand there were very few Jews there at the start. Do we have rabbis or spiritual leaders to thank for the fact that that community did manage to thrive and become a real presence in America?

GIL TROY: It was a small community, but it was a very patriotic community, and there was one particular hero, Gershom Mendes Seixas, who was known as the Patriot Rabbi. When he was 23 years old, he was born in 1742, so in 1766 he has the nerve to throw his hat in the ring to lead the synagogue, Sha’arey Yisrael, which today is the Spanish and Portuguese synagogue still existing.



To order Sid Roth’s new book, The Glory Story, visit .

It was founded in 1654. And he beats out older European types.

Why? Because they wanted an authentic American voice, an authentic American Jewish voice. And so, on the 250th anniversary of this extraordinary country, the land of possibility I call it, America, we celebrate this connection between the civic, theological, and patriotic dimensions of the American Jewish community and America.

PS: One thing I like about him is the fact that he really had a communal sense. And I think he started the first works for the poor in New York City. He started a burial society so that even the poorest Jew could still be buried with dignity. And what I liked about his patriotism is that I think he, he had his whole congregation, he said, "Let's flee New York" when the British were invading, and I think he himself fled holding onto the Torah scrolls and saying, "I will not let the British have these."

GT: He was a proud American.

PS: Yeah.

GT: Right? And the congregation had chosen well. And the burial society was a free burial society for Jews, but it inspired other New Yorkers. The charitable initiatives were for all New Yorkers. And indeed, during the revolution, he said, "Let's leave." And they took the Torah scrolls and their sacred objects, and they went to Connecticut, and then eventually, he ended up in Philadelphia. And he meets this guy named George, George Washington. And he becomes friends with the greatest hero of the American Revolution, George Washington.

PS: And that led to something interesting, which is that when General Washington became President Washington, there were only three clergymen he invited to stand with him as he was sworn in, and one of them was Seixas, and he was the only Jew there. So that's pretty amazing.

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