

Lighting the Flames of Freedom:  
The American Movement to Save Soviet Jewry  
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Individual Website  
Senior Division

My search for a topic began at the onset of summer break. Overall, I could not find a satisfactory subject, despite contemplating Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony, the Dreyfus Affair, and others. Eventually, my father suggested, "you could do the Refuseniks." Curious, I did a google search and learned that there was a movement for Jewish emigration. The Soviet Jewry Movement - both the Soviet and American aspects - captivated me most of all because it was an important part of history that I felt I should have know about but, before deciding it as my topic, didn't. Even as my website approached completion, I believed I needed to narrow my topic, but did not. For me, the significance of the Soviet Jewry Movement lies within the long struggle of thousands, not a single hero or time period. Thus, I decided to investigate the responsibility of American Jews to defend the rights of Soviet Jews.

Since I chose my topic early, I resolved to do preliminary research that I couldn't do otherwise. At camp, I read Gal Beckerman's *When They Come for Us We'll Be Gone*, a saga of the Soviet Jewry Movement, and most of *Fear No Evil*, Natan Sharansky's memoirs. I also searched for resources on the internet, where I learned about the Cleveland Council on Soviet Anti-Semitism Records at the Western Reserve Historical Society (WHRS). There, I found an array of useful primary sources, my favorite of which are the transcripts of telephone conversations between Americans and Soviet refuseniks. August 2013, I interviewed Alexander (Sasha) Lutz, a refusenik who my family helped to receive permission to leave the Soviet Union in the 1970's. Although he currently lives in Jerusalem, we were able to contact him by research and with help from the Jewish Federation. After the district contest, I interview James Torczyner, a founding member of the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry, and Marina Belotserkovsky, a Soviet Jewish emigrant and director of Russian communications at the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.

Originally, I had planned to make a documentary, but realized that I lacked the video editing

skills. Appropriately, I chose to create a website, which has allowed me to include more videos, quotes, and information than any other format could, while not requiring me to fill ten minutes of space - so each image could be used with intention. For the website layout, I chose to let the quotes, videos, music, and pictures speak for themselves with as little narration as possible.

The Soviet Jewry Movement overflows with different rights and responsibilities but, in the end I chose the most compelling one. Jews in the United States believed that they were responsible for the rights of their Soviet counterparts, not just as other Jews but as human beings. The people who fought so long and hard for Jewish emigration truly believed that “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere,” and that “history shall not repeat.” Today, millions of lives have been improved because of the Soviet Jewry Movement. (500 words)