

Faculti Summary

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In this interview with historian Jonathan Sarna, he discusses his book about Abraham Lincoln's relationship with the Jewish community. Sarna's interest in this topic was sparked after writing about Ulysses S. Grant's efforts to expel Jews during the Civil War, which prompted him to explore Lincoln's interactions with Jews, their growing presence in America, and their role in the Civil War.

Sarna collaborates with Benjamin Chappelle, who has a collection of documents related to Lincoln and the Jews. These documents reveal Lincoln's connections and sensitivity toward Jewish individuals, showcasing a broad range of Jewish friends and associates he had throughout his life. Sarna notes that Lincoln's understanding of Jews was shaped by personal relationships rather than abstract notions.

He touches on specific incidents, such as Lincoln's involvement in enabling Jewish chaplains to serve in the military, which demonstrates his fairness and empathy. The discussion includes Lincoln's prompt reversal of Ulysses S. Grant's order to expel Jews from military areas, reflecting his principled stance against scapegoating a group for the actions of a few.

Overall, Sarna argues that Lincoln's policies and rhetoric evolved to be more inclusive, recognizing and accommodating the Jewish community during a time when Jews faced significant discrimination worldwide. Throughout the conversation, Sarna emphasizes the importance of understanding the nuances of Lincoln's relationships with Jews, framing them as both practical and principled.