BOROUGH PARK: Religious History
PRIMARY SOURCE PACKET

Student Name

With nearly 300 synagogues and 50 religious schools, known as yeshivas, Borough Park is as much an enclave of Orthodox Judaism as it is a community of Brooklyn. During the week, its sidewalks are filled with Orthodox families: men with long beards, dark suits, and dark hats; women wearing hats and shatlech, or wigs; little girls in long dresses; and boys sporting dark pants stroll past independently owned shops selling kosher meat, kosher pizza, and kosher wines. And during the Jewish holiday of Purim, which celebrates the rescue of the Jews of ancient Persia from their enemy Haman, the many children of Borough Park parade through the streets costumed as kings, queens, villains—even clowns—in one of several street parties that draw visitors from all over New York City.

Conservative religious beliefs have shaped Borough Park’s recent history, but its colonial past is reminiscent of that of other Brooklyn neighborhoods. Borough Park was a part of New Utrecht, one of the six original Brooklyn towns, and until the early part of the nineteenth century its land was lush with commercial horticultural nurseries, dotted by the homes of the Dutch owners. In 1887 Electus B. Litchfield bought land on which he built a number of cottages in a development that he named Blythebourne. Most of Blythebourne’s residents were Protestant, but in 1902 a Catholic parish, St. Catherine of Alexandria, was founded. Nearly a hundred years later, the church still stands on 41st Street.

The first synagogue in the area was built just after the turn of the century, in 1904, and in 1910 Russian Jews began resettling in Blythebourne from the Lower East Side of Manhattan. During this period the area still had a rural feel; local farms offered fresh eggs and produce to residents of both Blythebourne and Borough Park.

After World War I, New Utrecht trains were elevated, providing more efficient transportation, and low-rise apartment buildings were built to accommodate a growing population. Borough Park attracted more Jewish residents, this time from the Lower East Side and Williamsburgh. By the mid-1920s, Blythebourne had been integrated into the larger Borough Park, although the local post office is even today called the Blythebourne branch.

In 1930 about half the population of Borough Park was Jewish, while Italian and Irish immigrants were among those representing other cultures. During the Depression, everyone shared in the poverty and decline of the neighborhood, even as it continued to draw new residents. Hasidic Jews, primarily of the Bobover sect from Poland, began to arrive at this time. The neighborhood began to change quickly. Most Borough Park Italians relocated to Bensonhurst, and the majority of Hispanic residents moved to Sunset Park.

Today almost all the residents of Borough Park are Hasidic Jews. Other sects are also represented: the area is home to the Satmar, Munkatcz, Gur, and Belzer. In addition, a smaller group of modern Orthodox Jews has also flourished. The largest modern Orthodox synagogue in Borough Park, Young Israel Beth El, is situated on 15th Avenue, almost directly across the street from the main Bobover yeshiva.
1. Look at DOCUMENT 1. List four things that you see:

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2. On DOCUMENT 1, find the area labelled “Blythebourne”. Which Avenues is it between?

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3. Look for the name “Cowenhoven”. How many times do you see it on the atlas page? What do you think it means, and why do you think it is written on the atlas?

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4. List two questions that you have after looking at this atlas page:

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1. Look at DOCUMENT 2. List three observations you can make about the house.

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2. Look at the land around the house in DOCUMENT 2. Based on your observations, what do you think this land would have been used for?

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3. This was one of the earliest houses in Bensonhurst. What would you infer about the neighborhood, based on this house?

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4. According to the caption of this photograph, this house belonged to a Judge. How do you think that other houses in the neighborhood may have differed from this one?

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Convent of Mercy in Brooklyn.—On Wednesday, the 12th of September, six professed Sisters left the Convent of Mercy, in Houston St., to establish a house of their Order in Brooklyn. A fine residence has been provided for them by the Rt. Rev. Dr. Loughlin, near the Cathedral. They will have a large free school under their care, and will attend to the visitation of the sick and the instruction of the ignorant, in accordance with the spirit of their holy rule. In process of time they will hope to establish a House of Mercy adapted to the necessities of the growing Diocese of Brooklyn.—Freeman’s Journal.

Document 3b: Convent of Mercy, 12th Avenue and 64th Street. Brooklyn Eagle Postcard Series, [1907].
1. Look at DOCUMENT 3a. According to this newspaper article, what was going to be established in Brooklyn?

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2. According to DOCUMENT 3a, what kinds of services would this organization provide for Brooklyn?

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3. Look at DOCUMENT 3b. According to the caption, what is this building and what neighborhood is it located in?

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4. What religious group would have established the building depicted in DOCUMENT 3b? How do you know that?

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The First Peoples Church was built around 1900 and was located on the southeast corner of Twelfth Avenue and 45th Street. It later became a Christian Science Meeting Room. In the 1970s, it was sold to a Yemenite Hebrew congregation. The steeple has since been removed.

1. Look at the building in DOCUMENT 4. Make three observations about this building:
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2. According to the caption for DOCUMENT 4, what was the original purpose of this building?

3. According to the caption for DOCUMENT 4, how is this building used now?

4. How does the caption of DOCUMENT 4 say that this building has been altered for its current purpose?
First public school in Blythebourne was located on 14th Avenue and 53rd Street. It was known as the Third District School House of West Brooklyn. A new addition was built around 1915 on 14th Avenue. The building was later sold to Kamenitz High School and is presently owned by the Satmar Yeshiva. The original (back wing) structure was recently demolished.

1. Look at DOCUMENT 5. What was this building originally created for?

2. According to the caption of DOCUMENT 5, what was the original name of this building, and who owns it now?

3. Compare the building in this photograph to schools in your neighborhood today. Does it look similar or different? How?

4. Why do you think it would have been necessary for this building to change from its original purpose into a Yeshiva?
Borough Park: Religious History
Document 6a: [Synagogue of Congregation Beth El of Borough Park]. [190-?]. Brooklyn Daily Eagle photographs, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn Collection. Summary: Synagogue at 12th Ave. and 41st St. with two projecting rectangular towers, sloping roof, and wooden stoop; large medallion over entrance reads, "Congregation Beth El of Borough Park"; man standing on bare plot before temple.
Phenomenal Situation in Brooklyn Realty Market.

Moneyed interests from many states, attracted by the promising conditions existing in this borough, have obtained holdings — Records for activity have been broken despite the heat of a stifling summer — Market steadily advancing.

In Borough Park the land company has sold several houses and many of those erected recently in the vicinity of Twelfth avenue, Forty-eighth and Fiftieth streets are now occupied. The north corner of Twelfth avenue and Forty-first street has been purchased by Congregation Beth-el of Borough Park and a house of worship will be erected upon the lots as soon as possible.
1. Look at DOCUMENT 6a. This is a Jewish synagogue. Identify at least two details on the building that would tell you it is a Jewish building.

2. Read the headline of DOCUMENT 6b. What do you think this newspaper article is about?

3. Read the adapted transcription of DOCUMENT 6b. According to the article, what is happening in Borough Park?

4. DOCUMENT 6b mentions that Congregation Beth-El was planning to build the synagogue portrayed in DOCUMENT 6a. Why do you think this synagogue was necessary, based on the newspaper article?
Young Folks League of Borough Park

The Young Folks League has now taken upon itself many duties to aid the Temple and Sunday school. It has taken upon itself to furnish the Sunday school with a library. The Junior League of Temple Emanu-El is much imbued with the public spirit. Last Saturday and Sunday a cake and candy sale was held, the proceeds of which went to the Sunday school library.

Hebrew Educational Alliance.

The Jews of Borough Park are making preparations to look after the educational and social activities of the children. They have organized a Hebrew Educational Alliance which already has several hundred members. At this entertainment Friday evening Dr. M. A. Meyer of Temple Israel will speak on “Mind vs. Morals.”

Hebrew Educational Alliance of Borough Park

The Literary Club of the Young Women’s Auxiliary of the Hebrew Educational Alliance held its monthly literary meeting last Thursday. The subject for discussion was, “American Women Are More Broad Minded Than the Foreign Women.” On Wednesday the regular monthly whist of the club, the last of the season, was held in the main hall of the Hebrew Educational Alliance. The officers of this club are: Dorothy Lerner, president; Mildred Horowitz, vice president; Susa Feldman, secretary; M. J. Ottenberg, treasurer; M. Rosenleeth, recording secretary; Sophie Frank, sergeant-at-arms.
1. DOCUMENT 7a mentions two organizations. What kinds of activities did these groups organize? List at least three:

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2. DOCUMENT 7b is about a specific club organized by the Hebrew Educational Alliance. Who was this club for? What kinds of activities did they plan?

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3. Why do you think it was necessary for organizations like the ones mentioned in DOCUMENT 7a and 7b to be established?

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4. What year are these documents from?

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1. Look at DOCUMENT 8. Describe the people you see in the photograph.

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2. According to the title of DOCUMENT 8, what are these people doing? What do you think that is, based on the photograph?

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3. What year is this photograph from? What kinds of activities do you think were common for people to do for fun during this time period?

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MAIMONIDES MEDICAL CENTER
Tenth Avenue & 48th Street

Maimonides traces its lineage back to 1911 when neighborhood women founded the New Utrecht Dispensary at 37th Street. By 1916, the dispensary was also a full-fledged hospital located on 44th Street. Immediately following World War I (and the Great Influenza Epidemic) the first of a series of name changes, moves and hospital mergers took place. In 1919, the hospital changed its name to Israel Hospital of Brooklyn and merged with Zion Hospital. Zion Hospital traced itself back to 1913 when it was founded as the Borough Park Sanitarium. The merger took place in 1920 to form United Israel Zion Hospital. Their new building opened in 1922 and was located at Tenth Avenue and 49th Street.

In 1947, Maimonides Hospital of Brooklyn formed when United Israel Zion Hospital merged with Beth Moses Hospital. In 1966, the designation "hospital" would be replaced by Medical Center. (Courtesy Maimonides Medical Center)

To Break Ground Sunday For Hospital in Borough Park

On the high ground overlooking the residential section of Borough Park, a site has been purchased for the Israel Hospital of Brooklyn on Tenth ave., running from 48th to 49th sts., covering the full 200-foot block front.

Lewis Allen Abramson has drawn the plans and specifications for the new building. The lower floor will have provisions for a large dispensary, in order to accommodate thousands who are at present crowding the limited space in the New Utrecht Dispensary, 1246 42d st. The upper floors are to be subdivided into public and semi-public wards. Accommodations are also being arranged for a limited number of private patients.

At a meeting of the Board of Directors, held Thursday evening, $50,000 was raised to start the project. Ground will be broken next Sunday afternoon, May 18. On Sunday morning an automobile parade will be held throughout Borough Park, Bath Beach, Bensonhurst, Bay Ridge, Flatbush and neighboring communities. All automobile owners are invited to participate in this parade.

The Israel Hospital is to be a strictly kosher hospital, although conducted on non-sectarian lines. Contributions should be sent to Nathan Schoenfeld, 4908 17th ave.

1. Read the caption for the image in DOCUMENT 9a. According to this caption, what did the Maimonides Medical Center originally begin as, and when?

2. According to the caption in DOCUMENT 9a, what are some of the other institutions that joined together to become Maimonides Medical Center?

3. DOCUMENT 9b shows us the Israel Hospital, which became part of Maimonides Medical Center. According to the last paragraph of DOCUMENT 9b, what was special about the food at Israel Hospital? What do you think was the reason for that?

4. Compare the buildings in DOCUMENT 9a and DOCUMENT 9b. Are these the same building? Give reasons for your answer.
YIDDISH NEWSPAPER STAND
13th Avenue & 49th Street

This photo was taken during the intermediate days, *chal ha'modeh*, of the Jewish holiday of Succos. Chassidim dress in holiday or Sabbath attire, donning their fur-trimmed hats or *shiteimlech*, yet they are permitted to shop or drive cars. There are about 20 different chassidic sects in Borough Park. The most prominent are the Bobover, Netzer, Gerer and Munkotch chassidim. The chassidim moved into the neighborhood after World War II. They are primarily Holocaust survivors. All of their villages in Eastern Europe were destroyed by the Nazis.

1. Look at the photograph in DOCUMENT 10. List three things you see in this photograph that portray Jewish characteristics of the neighborhood:

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2. According to DOCUMENT 10, how many Chassidic sects lived in Borough Park when this was written? Name three of them.

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3. According to DOCUMENT 10, when did these people move to Borough Park, and why?

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4. Use your knowledge from other primary and secondary sources: do you agree or disagree with the author of DOCUMENT 10 as to when the Chassidim moved to Borough Park? Why or why not?

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CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS
OF
Congregation and Hebrew School Sons of Judah

BOROUGH PARK
Brooklyn, N. Y.
1944

ORDER OF BUSINESS
1—Opening of meeting by the President.
2—Reading and adopting of the minutes of the last meeting.
3—Reading of the minutes of the meeting of the Board of Governors.
4—Action on the recommendations of the Board of Governors.
5—Reading correspondence and action on same.
6—Proposing candidates for membership.
7—Report of Membership Committee on proposed members.
8—Installation of new members.
9—Reports of Committees.
10—Recess for payment of dues.
11—Suspension for non-payment of dues.
12—Unfinished business.
13—General welfare of the Congregation.
14—General Jewish welfare.
15—Income and expense.
16—Closing of meeting.

Constitution and By-Laws of CONGREGATION AND HEBREW SCHOOL SONS OF JUDAH
5311 Sixteenth Avenue
Borough Park

Founded, May 16, 1921
Synagogue Dedicated, June 15, 1924

Revised Constitution and By-Laws Adopted at the Special Meeting Held March 7, 1944
Brooklyn, New York

1. DOCUMENT 11 shows the constitution and bylaws of an organization in Borough Park. What was the name of this organization, and when was it started?

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2. According to DOCUMENT 11, who could be a member of this organization?

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3. Why do you think that a set of rules like those in DOCUMENT 11 would be published by an organization? Explain how you think they might be useful:

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4. What organizations are you a part of? List one rule that you have to follow in order to be a member:

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Summary: Orthodox Jewish man with furred hat standing with child (partly hidden) before stoop of building in Borough Park; face of boy with furred hat and costume beard in right foreground; seven children in costume for Purim festivities (bunny, fire fighter, etc.) standing on top of stoop; woman standing in the doorway behind children.
Summary: Five young Jewish men, dressed in colorful vests and yarmulkes as part of Purim festivities, walking on sidewalk in Borough Park.
1. Look at DOCUMENT 12a. Describe five details you observe about various people in the photograph:

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2. According to the caption for DOCUMENT 12a, what are these people celebrating?

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3. Look at DOCUMENT 12b. List two similarities you see between the people in DOCUMENT 12a and in DOCUMENT 12b:

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4. What specific details in these images show that these people are celebrating something?

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GLOSSARY

**Enclave**: a portion of territory within or surrounded by a larger territory whose inhabitants are culturally or ethnically distinct; a place or group that is different in character from those surrounding it.

**Horticulture**: the art or practice of garden cultivation and management

**Realty**: property; often relating to real estate

**Sect**: a group of people with somewhat different religious beliefs from that of the larger group to which they belong.