

National Museum Explores America's Favorite Pastime

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Jackie Robinson signs autographs on the first day of Spring Training, 1948

Jackie Robinson signing autographs on the first day of spring training with the Brooklyn Dodgers, March 6, 1948, Donated by Corbis

There are people whose contributions to baseball history went far beyond mere batting averages or stolen bases. They didn't just play the game, they changed the game. For generations of American Jews and other minorities, they served as athletic, cultural, and ethical role models. In March, the **National Museum of American Jewish History** (NMAJH) opened a groundbreaking new exhibition highlighting these game changers and—just as importantly—the fans, ideals, and culture they inspired. *Chasing Dreams: Baseball and Becoming American* is the first large-scale exhibition to use the story of Jews and baseball as an opportunity to highlight ways in which our national pastime is part of the history, and ongoing story, of how immigrants and minorities of many different backgrounds—including Italians, Asians, Latinos, African-Americans, and many others—*become* American, to feel a part of the society in which they might otherwise be on the margins. The exhibition is co-curated by Dr. Josh Perelman, chief curator and director of collections and exhibitions at NMAJH, and Ivy Weingram, associate curator. **It will be on view at the Museum through October 26, 2014.**

With major support from the National Endowment for the Humanities, in close collaboration with Major League Baseball, and featuring important loans from the Baseball Hall of Fame, *Chasing Dreams* features **more than 130 original objects**, including game-worn uniforms, game-used objects, correspondence, newspaper accounts, board games, awards, baseball cards, signed baseballs, Jewish ritual objects, ballpark giveaways, stadium seats, Little League memorabilia, and more. Objects from the Museum's collection will be complemented by loans from public and private collections, as well as the Museum's public collecting initiative on [Tumblr](#). Original films feature interviews with baseball executives and everyday fans. Interactive displays will offer visitors various opportunities to play, participate, and learn.

“Since the nineteenth century, baseball has been an exhilarating metaphor for America, a land of so much promise and opportunity,” says Perelman. “And for minority communities in this country, the sport has long served as a path to learning and understanding American values, representing a shared American identity and sometimes highlighting our differences. It is, in short, a mirror of America.”

Visitors to *Chasing Dreams* will explore baseball's legends and myths, its heroes and flops, its struggles and its moments of triumph. The exhibition will celebrate well-known Jewish heroes such as Hank Greenberg and Sandy Koufax and iconic baseball pioneers like Jackie Robinson, Joe DiMaggio, Roberto Clemente, and Ichiro Suzuki, as well as baseball's extended family of vendors, team owners, minor leaguers, amateur players, scouts, broadcasters, journalists, novelists—and especially, fans. *Chasing Dreams* explores how baseball has served as an arena in which values, identity, ethnicity, and race have been projected, contested, and occasionally solidified. It poses questions such as: Why have so many immigrant groups and minority communities identified with, taken pride in, and felt connected to the nation's pastime? Did baseball impact how American Jews established affinities with other racial and ethnic minorities? What does it mean that Jews consider Jackie Robinson to be one of their own heroes?

Chasing Dreams addresses these questions through the exhibition's four key sections:

Introduction to the exhibition and early baseball history: Establishes the exhibition’s principal themes and immerses visitors in the early history of the game and its key figures, from Lipman Pike to Helen Dauvray and Barney Dreyfuss, co-inventor of the World Series.

Shaping Identity: Examines baseball as a lens through which to learn and understand the values of a rapidly changing nation. Features players such as Hank Greenberg and Joe DiMaggio, who proved their mettle on the field and in their conspicuous patriotism. Highlights Moe Berg, who showed that a catcher could also be a spy and Thelma “Tiby” Eisen of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, who proved that women could play at a competitive level.

Overcoming Adversity: Explores how baseball has been intertwined with the history of racial, ethnic, and gender integration, as well as the complexities of Jewish racial identity. Beginning with Jackie Robinson’s debut, this gallery features notable barrier-breakers such as Hank Aaron, Roberto Clemente, Ichiro Suzuki, and Justine Siegal, the first woman to pitch major league batting practice. Special attention will be paid to Sandy Koufax, whose unparalleled athleticism yielded millions of flashbulb memories and whose decision not to pitch the first game of the 1965 World Series because it fell on Yom Kippur unexpectedly made him a hero.



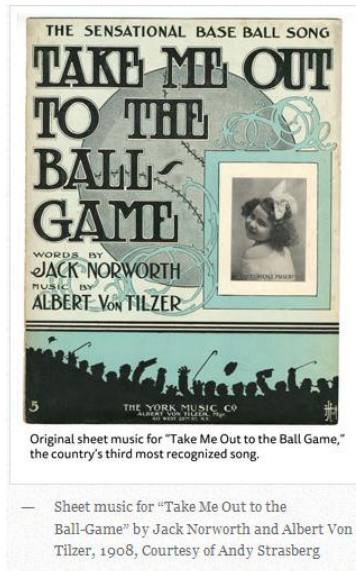
Hank Greenberg connects with the ball for a third inning homer against the Philadelphia Phillies, 1947

— Hank Greenberg hitting a third inning homer against the Philadelphia Phillies, April 29, 1947, Donated by Corbis

Family and Community: Examines how baseball has impacted communities, shaped relationships within families and established new, personal meanings for each generation of fans in Little League, at camp, or through ballpark concessions. This section will feature memorabilia culled from the Museum’s Tumblr-based public collecting initiative, objects related to broadcasters and journalists such as Mel Allen, more recent players like Shawn Green and Brad Ausmus, and an illustrated timeline of notable events in baseball history.

Within this thematic exploration, *Chasing Dreams* also provides several opportunities for pure, playful fun. Museum goers are invited to interact with a simulation game created specifically for *Chasing Dreams* called **Catching History**. Visitors are invited to “field” balls hit by a variety of baseball greats and are rewarded with facts and trivia for every play. An interactive, touchscreen database entitled **People of the Game** will provide an encyclopedic exploration of approximately 200 Jews in the major leagues—each represented by a baseball card, as well as biographical and statistical information—and an opportunity to build one’s own virtual “dream team” which visitors can then e-mail to themselves. The Museum’s concourse level will feature **Koufax on the Concourse**, an interactive experience complete with Koufax’s rookie jersey and a pitcher’s

ground that invites baseball fans of all ages to don a reproduction jersey, then pick up a ball and try their hand at pitching like the indomitable Dodgers' ace. As a celebration of passionate fandom, the Museum's first floor will feature nearly 100 original baseball cards, along with some of their stories.



Chasing Dreams will be complemented by a dedicated website, educational and public programming, school curricula, and a family guide. Title I schools are eligible to bring their students to the exhibition free of charge and additional funding is available to subsidize other schools and camp groups. A fully illustrated, 256-page companion book will also be available. The book includes original pieces by more than 40 notable authors, including **John Thorn**, the Official Historian of Major League Baseball who often appears on ESPN, MLB, The History Channel, and other television outlets as a sports authority and commentator; **Ira Berkow**, former *New York Times* sports columnist and recipient of the Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting; **Doug Glanville**, retired major league player for the Philadelphia Phillies, Chicago Cubs, and Texas Rangers, an ESPN baseball analyst, and a regular contributor to ESPN.com and *The New York Times*. The book and related exhibition merchandise, including a set of baseball cards developed

by Jewish Major Leaguers, Inc. for the Museum and the American Jewish Historical Society, will be available at the Museum Store onsite and [online](#).

After closing in Philadelphia, *Chasing Dreams* will tour to museums nationwide. A panel version of the exhibition (without artifacts) will also travel to ballparks, historical societies, libraries, community centers, and synagogues.

Additional information about **public programming**, the Museum's **Tumblr public collecting initiative**, and the **companion volume** is available at the *Chasing Dreams* [pressroom](#).

Chasing Dreams has received the endorsement of MLB Commissioner Allan "Bud" Selig. The full project team in addition to Mr. Selig includes John Thorn (chief historian for Major League Baseball), Daniel Okrent (author of the baseball classic *Nine Innings* and first public editor of the *New York Times*), Josh Perelman (chief curator and director of collections and exhibitions at NMAJH), Martin Abramowitz (founding president of Jewish Major Leaguers, Inc.), Rabbi Rebecca Alpert (author and professor of religion at Temple University), Adrian Burgos, Jr., (author and director of graduate studies and professor of history at the University of Illinois), Jeffrey S. Gurock (Libby M. Klaperman Professor of Jewish History at Yeshiva University, as well as author and past-chair of the Academic Council of American Jewish Historical Society), Jane Leavy (journalist and Sandy Koufax biographer), Peter Levine (author and sports historian), William Ressler (assistant professor of strategic communication at Ithaca College), Steven A. Reiss (author and sports historian), Justine Siegal (barrier-breaking pitcher, coach and founder of the non-profit organization Baseball for All), Scott Simon (author, journalist, and host of NPR's Weekend Edition), Ivy Weingram (NMAJH associate curator and co-curator of *Chasing*

Dreams) and Beth Wenger (director of the University of Pennsylvania's History Department and Jewish Studies program).

To date, major support for *Chasing Dreams* has been provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities, Major League Baseball, the Annette M. and Theodore N. Lerner Family Foundation/Washington Nationals, the Marc and Diane Spilker Foundation, Leon Wagner, Harriet and Larry Weiss, Judy and Fred Wilpon/NY Mets, and Sam Wisnia.

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The National Museum of American Jewish History, located on historic Independence Mall in Philadelphia, brings to life the 360-year history of Jews in America. Tracing the stories of how Jewish immigrants became Jewish Americans, the Museum invites visitors of all backgrounds to share their own stories and reflect on how their histories and identities shape and are shaped by the American experience. An open door for all, NMAJH honors the past and contributes to a better future by sharing the power of imagination and ideas, culture and community, leadership and service, in ways that turn inspiration into action.

The National Museum of American Jewish History is located at 101 South Independence Mall East at the corner of Fifth and Market Streets in Philadelphia. Museum hours are Tuesday to Friday, 10:00 am – 5:00 pm, and Saturday and Sunday 10:00 am – 5:30 pm. NMAJH is closed most Mondays, including federal holidays and some Jewish holidays. Museum admission is \$12.00 for adults, \$11.00 for senior citizens and youth, free for children 12 and under, Museum Members, and active military with ID. For information on the Museum, the public may call 215.923.3811 or visit the website at NMAJH.org.