Exhibition Worksheet

“Unique Promise and Imperfect Freedom”
America’s History of Religious and Racial Tolerance

In conjunction with the special exhibition

Beyond Swastika and Jim Crow: Jewish Refugee Scholars at Black Colleges
Introduction

Group-discussion questions may be addressed before or during the gallery activity

What does ‘freedom’ mean to you? What does ‘tolerance’ mean?
What is Racism? Prejudice? Discrimination? Segregation?
What might the following film title mean: “From Swastika to Jim Crow”?
Do you think that today, all students (African-American, Caucasian, Hispanic, Asian, and others) have equal educational opportunities in America?

About the Museum

The National Museum of American Jewish History traces stories of how Jewish immigrants became Jewish Americans and reflects on how history and identity shape and are shaped by the American experience.

Jews have been coming to these shores for over three and a half centuries. Some fled persecution, others searched for opportunity. Arriving from around the globe, speaking different languages, and following different traditions, they shared one hope: a chance to live in freedom. What choices did they make? What struggles did they confront? What have they achieved individually and as people? This Museum tells their stories.

The special exhibition Beyond Swastika and Jim Crow: Jewish Refugee Scholars at Black Colleges tells the story of Jewish professors from Germany and Austria who escaped the Nazi regime and came to the US in the 1930s. Some found positions at historically black colleges and universities in the Jim Crow South. This exhibition illustrates the empathy between two minority groups with a history of persecution who came together in search of freedom and opportunity and shared the early years of struggle in the Civil Rights movement.

Objectives:

During the visit you will explore primary documents and discuss historic examples of religious and racial intolerance in the United States and Europe to:

- Learn about Jewish life in the United States in the 18th and 19th centuries and in the 1930s-40s
- Learn about pre-WWII Jewish life in Germany and about antisemitism in the Nazi ideology
- Learn about the Holocaust and the US role in saving Jews and other victims of the Nazi regime
- Learn about life of African Americans in the American South during the 1930s-60s
- Discuss the circumstances that brought European Jewish professors and African American students together at traditionally black colleges in the American South
- Explore the personal impact students and faculty had on each other, and the impact they had on society at large
Fourth Floor – Foundations of Freedom (1654-1880)

4-1 American Revolution

1. Many immigrants come to America seeking religious freedom. Examine the impact of George Washington’s Letter to the Newport Congregation on advancing religious freedom in America. Explain the meaning of the phrase, “To bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance,” in your own words:

2. Learn about the Maryland "Jew Bill." What surprises you about this story?

4-2 Civil War and Later Periods

1. Was the American Jewish community united on the issue of slavery?

2. Find information about Grant’s Orders #11. How did the Jewish community react to the Orders and what actions were taken? In your opinion, what does this historic situation say about the issue of tolerance and freedom in the United States?

3. As you move through the galleries, find an artifact that interests you.

   What is it?
   How was it used?
   Why did you choose it?
   What do you think this artifact says about religious and racial freedom in the US?

4-3 Late Nineteenth Century

What was life for Jews in America in the late 19th century?

In 1876, American Jews could look back on the past hundred years and celebrate the economic security and religious freedom they had found in the United States. Yet social discrimination and religious prejudice endured even as Jews enjoyed legal equality.
Third floor – Dreams of Freedom (1880-1945)

3-1 WWI and Post WWI Period

1. Find the caricature “History of the US”. What does the cartoon depict, and what do you think it means?

2. Learn the story about the lynching of Leo Frank. How is the story of Leo Frank related to the Ku Klux Klan hood in the glass display?

3-2 Nazi Rise to Power and WWII

1. Find the trunk from the St. Louis transatlantic liner. Learn about the St. Louis story. What surprises you about this story?

3-3 United States’ Reaction to the Holocaust

What do you know about the Holocaust?

The Holocaust was the state-sponsored, systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewry by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945. Six million Jews, including 1,500,000 children, were murdered. For the first time in history, industrial methods were used for the mass extermination of a whole people. Millions more, including Romani (Gypsies), people with physical and mental disabilities, Poles, Soviet prisoners of war, homosexuals, and political opponents, were also targeted for destruction or decimation.

1. What was done to save Jews and other victims of the Nazi regime?
   Individual actions:
   Government actions:

2. Find an artifact that belonged to a Holocaust survivor.
   I see:
   I think:
   I wonder:
   What stands out for you in the story of this survivor?

3. Has racial or religious prejudice ever put any of your family members or friends in danger?

4. Do you think individual actions can make a difference against inhumane treatment or policies?
Second Floor – Challenges of Freedom (1945-Present)

2-1 Social Action Movements

What do you know about Jewish participation in the Civil Rights Movement?

After struggling for centuries to attain the benefits of American freedom, many Jews considered it their responsibility to fight for social justice for all Americans. Believing that a peaceful world without discrimination would be a better world for all, many Jews joined other Americans in fighting for civil rights, protesting against the war in Vietnam, campaigning for women’s equality, and seeking to free Soviet Jews.

1. Find the quote from Rabbi Joachim Prinz where he asserts that:
   "the most urgent, the most disgraceful, the most shameful and the most tragic problem is silence."
   What do you think he meant?

2. Find a photograph of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel and Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
   What do you see in this image? Why do you think Jews and African Americans partnered in the fight for civil rights?

3. Find an artifact related to the Civil Rights Movement that interests you.
   I see:
   I think:
   I wonder:

If time permits, watch the videos on the big screens. What discrimination issues did the protesters in the video address through words and deeds?

2-2 Modern Times

1. What is one thing in this gallery that interests or surprises you?
   I see:
   I think:
   I wonder:

   How does this artifact reflect upon the issue of tolerance and freedom in the United States?
Special Exhibition – Beyond Swastika and Jim Crow

5-1  Jewish Life in Nazi Germany

1. Find an artifact that provides evidence of the Jewish status in German society prior to Nazi rise to power in 1933.
   What is it?
   Who owned it?
   Why did you choose it?

2. Find a photograph of the entry way to Erlangen University in Germany in 1938. What is hanging over the entrance? How did the Nazi legislation “Restoration of the Civil Service” affect Jewish life in Germany?

3. Find an artifact that provides an example of a refugee scholar attempting to find employment in the United States. What stands out for you in her/his story?

5-2  Life in Jim Crow South

1. Explore images and artifacts representing life of African Americans in the South at a time when there was discrimination and segregation. What do you see in this gallery that reflects these terms?

2. Locate Donald Cunnigen’s Vacation Bible School certificate. Why do you think Donald Cunnigen went to Bible School? [Look for Donald Cunnigen fraternity sweater at the end of the exhibition.]

3. Find examples that tell what refugee Jewish scholars and African Americans in the south had in common.

   Look at the cartoon entitled “Oppressed people at home and abroad,” April 9, 1938. What do you see in this image? What is this cartoon trying to say?

   If time permits, watch the film in which scholars and students reflect on their parallel experiences. How do they describe their feelings about each other’s experiences?
5-3 Jewish Professors in Historically Black Colleges

1. Find a photograph depicting the art class of Viktor Lowenfeld, a professor of art at the Hampton Institute in Virginia. What do you see in this image?

2. Look at the painting by Viktor Lowenfeld.
   I see:
   I think:
   I wonder:

3. Look at the artwork and quotes by John Biggers. What impact his teacher Viktor Lowenfeld had on his life?

If time permits, explore the following gallery to find examples of interactions between other teachers and students.

5-4 Legacy

1. Explore this gallery and find artifacts or documents that provide examples of the refugee Jewish scholars’ stance against discrimination and racism in the Jim Crow South.

2. Find one more example of the interaction between the Jewish scholars and their students.

5-5 Documentary

1. Watch the film in which students reflect on the impact their teachers had on their lives. Write down three words that describe the students’ feelings toward their teachers:

2. Have you had a teacher or a mentor who has especially inspired you?
Conclusion

After visiting the Museum and the Special exhibition what is your response to the following quote by Martin Luther King III?

"The history of Americans of African descent and Jewish descent is a story of two groups of people who have suffered uncommon persecution but who have persevered with uncommon faith. This is our common ground. We share the dream of a beloved community where one can live without the threat of racism, poverty, or violence. We share the dream of a beloved community where the worst of the human spirit is defeated by our best."

Martin Luther King III, 2009

What was your favorite artifact?

Six Word Memoirs

Legend has it that author Ernest Hemingway was once challenged to write a story in only six words. His wrote: “For sale: baby shoes, never worn.”

Describe your impression from the Museum visit in just six words.

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