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**ANNOUNCING 1917: HOW ONE YEAR CHANGED THE WORLD, CO-ORGANIZED BY
THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORY IN PHILADELPHIA
AND THE AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY IN NEW YORK**

**Exhibition is first to illustrate how the events of a single year—America’s entry into
World War I, the Bolshevik Revolution, and the signing of the Balfour Declaration—
triggered fundamental changes that still impact the world today**

PHILADELPHIA—The **National Museum of American Jewish History** (NMAJH) announces the opening of its next special exhibition, *1917: How One Year Changed the World*, on **March 17, 2017**. The exhibition will look back 100 years to explore how the dramatic events of a single year brought about fundamental changes in American politics and culture that reverberated throughout the world and still impact us today. It will be on view at NMAJH in Philadelphia through **July 16, 2017** and then travel to New York for its run at the co-organizing institution, the **American Jewish Historical Society** (AJHS), from September 1 through December 29, 2017.



Leslie's Weekly, 1916.

1917 is the first exhibition to demonstrate how three key events of that year—America’s entry into World War I, the Bolshevik Revolution, and the issuing of the Balfour Declaration, in which Great Britain indicated support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine—brought about political,

cultural, and social changes that dramatically reshaped the United States' role in the world and directly affected everyday Americans. The exhibition will feature **approximately 130 artifacts**, including original drafts of the Balfour Declaration, to be exhibited in the U.S. for the first time, a decoded copy of the Zimmermann Telegram, possessions of WWI soldier William Shemin, Justice Louis Brandeis's judicial robes, and more. Through uniforms, letters, photographs, and posters, as well as films, music, and interactive media, *1917* will take visitors on a journey into the trenches of WWI, revolutionary Russia, and debates over the future of Britain's colonial empire in the Middle East.

"The conflicts and consequences of 1917 are often overshadowed by later events, but they determined so much about the American and Jewish experiences thereafter," said **Josh Perelman**, NMAJH's Chief Curator and Director of Exhibitions & Collections. "While the exhibition is anchored in the past, it has powerful relevance to contemporary issues we are facing today, as a nation and as individuals."

1917 is unique in its presentation of this consequential year through the eyes of American Jews, eyewitnesses who understood and reacted to those events both as Americans and as part of an international diaspora community. American Jews found themselves facing the challenge of articulating identities as Americans and as Jews during a period characterized by nativism and xenophobia. Still, by the end of 1917, the financial and cultural leadership of Jewish life had shifted from Europe to the U.S., and in comparative terms, American Jews had become one of the most secure Jewish communities in the world.



Jacob Lavin (center) with group of American Expeditionary Forces in France. NMAJH, 1996.51.5. Gift of Marilyn Lavin Tarr.

Before the **United States entered World War I** on April 6, 1917, Jews debated whether the U.S. should join the conflict. They anguished over the security of European Jewish communities while also coping with growing intolerance of ethnic minorities at home. Nearly 250,000 Jews served in the armed forces during WWI, including composer Irving Berlin, Corporal Eva Davidson, and recent posthumous Medal of Honor recipient William Shemin. While many immigrant

communities expressed their patriotism in the Armed Forces and on the home front, they still faced a political climate of increasing prejudice and suspicion.

The Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917, a bloodless coup, not only made the utopian ideal of a global revolution appear possible, but also held out a brief hope that antisemitic regimes like that of the Russian Tsar would be swept away and a new world order might take root. Some American Jews and non-Jews saw this as an exhilarating opportunity while others viewed it as a terrifying danger. Socialism's advocacy of civil rights and tolerance of ethnic and racial minorities appealed to Jews. At the same time, the Bolshevik Revolution prompted "red scares" and unleashed forces of intolerance toward immigrants and minority groups across the globe, and particularly in the U.S.

Like many ethnic Americans, Jews hoped the war would bring liberation to their brethren. Issued by Britain on November 2, 1917, the **Balfour Declaration** announced Britain's favorable view of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. It recognized Jewish nationalism (Zionism) as a legitimate political movement, although it did little to address competing Arab and Jewish claims to the land. The ensuing pattern of contradictions and deceptions on the part of European powers seeking to retain their colonial empires, and Britain in particular, has been interpreted in many different ways during the last century. But it is clear that Arabs and Jews became embroiled in a chronic state of conflict over territory in the Middle East, one that continues to this day. In the U.S., leaders like Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis voiced support for Zionism, declaring that "there is no inconsistency between loyalty to America and loyalty to Jewry," while others expressed ambivalence over what it meant to support a nationalist project outside of the U.S. Moreover, as the exhibition will show, the Balfour Declaration had influence outside the Jewish community, capturing the attention of African American nationalist Marcus Garvey, who saw in Zionism a model for black nationalism.



Food Will Win the War poster in Yiddish, 1917. Myrna and Ira Brind Purchase Fund. 1989.20.18.

These three events, the reactions that they triggered, and the conflicts they engendered set the stage for American policies throughout the 20th century and into the present. Beginning with the Immigration Act of 1917, the American government adopted increasingly strict laws limiting who

could enter the country. This culminated with the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, which imposed strict immigration quotas and ended a remarkable period of immigration in American history. This legislation, coupled with intolerance of foreigners and rising antisemitism, changed America's relationship with the world and severely hampered Jews' efforts to escape Nazi Germany little more than a decade later.

The exhibition will be complemented by several public and education programs at NMAJH, to be announced at a later date. For more information, visit NMAJH.org/1917.

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About the National Museum of American Jewish History

The National Museum of American Jewish History, located on historic Independence Mall in Philadelphia, brings to life the more than 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. Connect with the Museum on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [Pinterest](#). For more information, visit NMAJH.org or call 215.923.3811.

About the American Jewish Historical Society

The American Jewish Historical Society (AJHS) is the oldest ethnic, cultural archive in the United States. AJHS provides access to more than 25 million documents and 50,000 books, photographs, art and artifacts that reflect the history of the Jewish presence in the United States from 1654 to the present. At our home on West 16th Street in downtown Manhattan, as well as in our Boston branch on Newbury Street, AJHS illuminates American Jewish history through our many archival treasures, scholarship, exhibitions, and public programs. Among the treasures of this heritage are the handwritten original of Emma Lazarus' *The New Colossus*, which graces the Statue of Liberty; records of the nation's leading Jewish communal organizations, and important collections in the field of education, philanthropy, science, sports, business, and the arts. For more information, please visit www.ajhs.org.