



New Exhibit Looks At How 1917 ‘Changed The World’

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PHILADELPHIA (CBS) — A new exhibit that opens in Old City on Friday looks at how one year changed the world.

The National Museum of American Jewish History’s newest exhibit, “1917: How One Year Changed the World,” explores how key [events](#) reshaped America’s role in the world.

Rachel Lithgow, Executive Director of the American Jewish Historical Society says the [events](#) of 1917 led to America’s most stringent immigration policies to date.

“So the number one issue is, I think, xenophobia, the idea of being afraid of the ethnic ‘other,’” she said.

Lithgow notes that some policies, like immigration, identity, and gender, are still being debated today.

“We’re still having conversations about legislating reproductive rights,” she said.

The exhibit explores America’s entry into WWI, the Bolshevik Revolution, and the Balfour Declaration — of which an incredible original first draft is on display.



On recognizable Imperial Hotel stationery: The very first draft of what later came to be “The Balfour Declaration,” stating that the British would recognize a Jewish homeland in Palestine. (credit: Hadas Kuznits)

“The Balfour Declaration reassures the Jewish people that the English in theory would support the creation of a Jewish home in Palestine,” said Lithgow, “The birth of a nation, essentially is on one sheet of hotel stationery.”

She says it’s not a cliché that history repeats itself.

“I do think that that every 100 years or so, a society needs to examine itself and ask those hard questions, including: ‘what does it mean to be American?’” she said.

Lithgow points out, in 1917, the US Army was, for the first time, comprised mostly of foreign language speaking immigrants.

“And when these soldiers came back and realized that the freedom and democracy that they were fighting for didn’t apply to them, there were consequences,” she said.

So what can be learned from history 100 years later?

“The people that we try to oppress, end up being society’s most valuable assets,” said Lithgow

The exhibit runs through mid-July.