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**LAST CHANCE TO SEE *1917: HOW ONE YEAR CHANGED THE WORLD* AT THE
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORY**

**Co-organized by the American Jewish Historical Society in New York, *1917* is the first
exhibition to illustrate how three events of a single year triggered fundamental changes
that still impact the world today**



1917: How One Year Changed the World at NMAJH. Photo by Matthew Christopher.

PHILADELPHIA—The special exhibition ***1917: How One Year Changed the World*** is on view through **July 16** at the **National Museum of American Jewish History (NMAJH)**. The exhibition looks back 100 years to explore how three key events of 1917—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 provoked its most stringent immigration quotas to date. The exhibition examines this consequential year through the eyes of American Jews, who experienced these events both as Americans and as part of an international diaspora community. Following its run at NMAJH,

1917 will be on view in New York at the American Jewish Historical Society, September 1 – December 29, 2017.

“The conflicts and consequences of 1917 are often overshadowed by later events, but they determined so much about the world as well as American and Jewish experiences thereafter,” says **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.”



Draft of The Balfour Declaration, handwritten on Imperial Hotel stationery, 1917. Courtesy of Martin Franklin.

Through nearly **125 artifacts**—including uniforms, letters, photographs, and posters—and interactive media, *1917* takes visitors on a journey into WWI trenches, revolutionary Russia, and debates over the future of Britain’s colonial empire in the Middle East. The public has the rare opportunity to view **two original drafts of the Balfour Declaration**, never before exhibited in the U.S. Other highlights include a **decoded copy of the Zimmermann Telegram**, which helped propel the U.S. into WWI; a 1919 copy of the **Treaty of Versailles**, the agreement ending the war; an **Uncle Sam costume**, likely used during patriotic wartime events; and the **Medal of Honor** posthumously awarded to Jewish WWI soldier William Shemin in 2015. Visitors will also see Supreme Court Justice **Louis Brandeis’s judicial robes and chair nameplate**, a **postcard written by a young Golda Meir** describing the American Jewish Congress in Philadelphia, and a **letter from the newly formed Soviet government’s Commissar of Foreign Affairs Leon Trotsky**, constituting the U.S.’s first formal notification of the establishment of the Soviet Union. The exhibition concludes with a page from the original **Johnson-Reed Act of 1924**, an act to “Limit Immigration of Aliens into the United States for Other Purposes.”

Before the **United States entered World War I** on April 6, 1917, Americans debated whether the U.S. should join the conflict. Jews anguished over the security of European Jewish communities while also coping with growing intolerance of ethnic minorities at home. Nearly 250,000 Jews eventually served in the armed forces during WWI, including composer Irving



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

Berlin, Corporal Eva Davidson, and 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 the Tsar's antisemitic regime would be swept away and freedom would come to the world's largest Jewish community. Some Americans, both 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.



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

Like many ethnic Americans, Jews hoped the war would bring liberation to their brethren abroad. Issued by Britain on November 2, 1917, the **Balfour Declaration** announced Britain's favorable view of a Jewish home 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. 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, 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.

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.

For more information, visit NMAJH.org/1917. #1917exhibit



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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 \$15.00 for adults, \$13.00 for senior citizens and youth, free for children 12 and under, Museum Members, and active military with ID; reduced prices available if purchased online. Connect with the Museum on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and [Pinterest](#). For more information, visit NMAJH.org or call 215.923.

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.