Program Description

A people without the knowledge of their past
history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots.
Marcus Garvey

The National Educators’ Institute, The Art and Science of Teaching Jewish History in America, is an innovative program designed to assist secondary-level day school teachers (grades 5-12) in transforming the teaching of American Jewish history by utilizing the trove of artifacts and resources available at the National Museum of American Jewish History. We encourage participation from day schools of all kinds from communities across the United States.

WHEN
Sunday, July 10 (3 pm) to Thursday, July 14, 2016 (12 pm)

WHERE
National Museum of American Jewish History
101 South Independence Mall East, Philadelphia, PA, 19106-2517

THE PROJECT

The Institute is a project of professional development and curriculum reform for in-service teachers aimed at enhancing the teaching and learning of American Jewish history in secondary schools and raising student achievement by improving teachers’ knowledge, appreciation, and aptitude for teaching Jewish history. Linking educators in Jewish day schools to leading scholars of Jewish history and Jewish education, as well as to colleagues across the country, the Institute empowers teachers to re-envision Jewish history education by promoting historical thinking and enabling students to understand and identify themselves with the larger arc of the American Jewish experience. American Jewish history, taught well, can encourage students to appreciate the wonders and challenges of American Jewish life, past, present, and future.

WHY TEACH AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORY?

Study of American Jewish history in schools helps to:

- Contextualize contemporary challenges facing American Jews. It helps American Jews understand where they are by showing them where they have been and allows them better to appreciate what sets them apart both as Americans and as Jews.
- Deepen students’ understanding of America and show them how their ancestors fit into the larger picture of American society.
- Communicate the enduring power of religion in America and show how Jews have formulated religious identity in a distinctively pluralistic setting.
- Bridge the gap between collective experiences and personal stories, helping students to find the links between their own history and the history of the Jewish people.
- Encourage students to integrate Jewish and secular studies by forging chronological and conceptual links between them.
• Provide Jews with a master story that unites them both vertically with their ancestors and horizontally with Jews who live in other communities. This will make students appreciate that they are part of something much larger than themselves and creates a shared sense of community.
• Form the basis for the shared Jewish memories that are basic to both Jewish identity and Jewish community.
• And most importantly, study of American Jewish History helps to appreciate human potential, “the ability of American Jews — young and old, men and women alike — to change the course of history and transform a piece of the world. American Jewish history is, after all, not just a record of events; it is the story of how people shaped events — establishing and maintaining communities, responding to challenges, working for change. That, perhaps, is the greatest lesson of all that American Jewish history can offer our students: that they too can make a difference, that the future is theirs to create.” (Jonathan Sarna, 2004)

THE CURRENT PICTURE

Jewish history in general and American Jewish History in particular as a core component of the day school curriculum has been by and large underdeveloped and under-resourced. Research shows:

• Teachers of Jewish history operate in quasi-isolation throughout the school year, with little opportunity to be exposed to new developments in Jewish historiography or educational scholarship that could enhance their practice.
• In schools where Jewish history and American history are taught as separate courses, there is rarely cross-departmental collaboration, leaving faculty—and, importantly, students—to make the complex connections for themselves. In schools where Jewish history is taught as part of general history courses, it is often squeezed out of the curriculum by the demands and requirements of the general history curriculum.
• Teachers presently lack sufficient age-appropriate and rigorous curriculum materials for the teaching of American Jewish history in day schools, so they spend laborious hours attempting to create materials on their own with little to build on Jewish history education has the capacity to enhance students’ aptitude for historical thinking and problem-solving, making interdisciplinary connections (e.g., history, sociology, geography, literature), developing historical empathy, and contemporary decision-making.

THE AIMS

The aims of the Institute are to:

Advocate for the importance of high-quality Jewish history instruction in schools,
Contribute to the professionalization of the Jewish history teaching field by providing topnotch, high impact teacher training,
Assist teachers in utilizing an expanding corpus of American Jewish historical resources, and
Guide teachers in creating and implementing innovative Jewish history curriculum units and lessons.
THE PLAN

Phase One: Preparation (Winter/Spring 2016)

Wide range of day schools across the United States nominate teams comprised of 2-3 educators. Each team develops a 750-word vision/road map for transforming the teaching of American Jewish history at their school. We ask teachers along with administrators to examine closely how Jewish history is represented in their schools and to reflect on how this representation supports the broader school mission, including the teaching of both Judaic and general studies. We hope that school teams will consist not only of Jewish and general history teachers, but also of teachers in cognate areas (language arts, Judaic studies) and/or administrators (curriculum coordinators, student life coordinators). The proposal considers areas across the curriculum in which the American Jewish experience can be incorporated. Issues to address in the proposal include some or all of the following:

• Instructional aims and student outcomes for teaching Jewish history generally, and American Jewish history in particular;
• How to initiate students into the study of Jewish history;
• How to best balance setting Jewish history within general history content;
• Thematic versus chronological approaches to teaching Jewish history;
• What types of Jewish historical sources to utilize;
• Pedagogical methods for teaching Jewish history;
• Collaboration between Jewish and general history teachers, and potentially teachers in other areas of the school program;
• Challenges and opportunities for curriculum reform, resources and personnel needed, and a timeframe for implementation

Phase Two: Educators’ Summer Institute (July 2016)

Teachers become active, engaged, and reflective participants in an intensive five-day-long institute. The Institute exposes them to new developments in the fields of both history education and Jewish history scholarship and allows them to network with and learn from colleagues facing similar challenges in different school settings. It also enables them to work collaboratively with colleagues from their school to identify the strengths and deficiencies in the teaching of American Jewish history and devise, in consultation with leading scholars of Jewish history and education, a plan for reforming the presentation of the American Jewish past in their schools, with a focus on both content and pedagogy.

Phase Three: Implementation (Fall 2016)

Teachers return to their home schools to implement their newly developed curriculum plans, identifying challenges and noting successes. They obtain custom-tailored support from National Museum of American Jewish History educators over the course of the ensuing months as needed. Teachers will participate in online conferences reporting on the progress of the project implementation and on the evaluation results. Participants will be responsible for completing their final projects and are encouraged to submit their projects to the National Educational Resources for Teaching American Jewish History database.
SPEAKERS AND FACILITATORS

The Institute is co-directed by Dr. Benjamin M. Jacobs (George Washington University), a leading scholar of Jewish history education; Dr. Robert Chazan (New York University), a leading scholar of Jewish history; Dr. Katerina Romanenko, a specialist in informal education (National Museum of American Jewish History); and Ronit Lusky, manager of Museum educational programs (National Museum of American Jewish History). Additional faculty include the Museum's Chief Historian, Dr. Jonathan Sarna (Brandeis University), and other renowned scholars of history and education from the University of Pennsylvania (Dr. Abby Reisman), The George Washington University (Dr. Jenna Weissman Joselit), Brandeis University (Dr. Jonathan Krasner), and the Rochester Institute of Technology (Dr. Owen Gottlieb).

THE COSTS/BENEFITS

The Institute will provide

- Lodging
- Meals: breakfasts, lunches, snacks, and two dinners
- Access to the Museum galleries and resources
- Guided tour of Jewish Philadelphia
- After completing the Institute and submitting their final projects, teachers will receive an honorarium of $500

Participating schools will be responsible for covering travel expenses to Philadelphia.

JOIN US!

If you have any questions, please contact the Museum at teacherinstitute@nmajh.org