



RESOURCE GUIDE

JEWISH AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

OVERVIEW

Jewish American Heritage Month (JAHM) is an annual recognition and celebration of American Jews' achievements and contributions to the United States since arriving in 1654 from Brazil. Since 2006, JAHM has been celebrated and federally recognized each May. It was inaugurally proclaimed by President George W. Bush. This month recognizes an almost 400-year history of Jewish involvement in American culture and the about 7.6 million American citizens that identify as Jewish, whether by culture, ethnicity or religion. Prior to May 2006, Jewish American Heritage Week was celebrated during a week in April or May, originating in 1980 when President Jimmy Carter designated April 21-28 the first Jewish American Heritage Week.



Jews have made significant contributions to American culture since settling in New Amsterdam, or present-day New York. Although, until about 1830 majority of the Jewish population lived in South Carolina. The number of Jews in America significantly increased during the mid to late 1800s as many of their birth countries implemented antisemitic laws and restrictions. In 1850, America's Jewish population was about 17,000. By 1880, it grew to about 270,000. Now, New York alone is home to about 1.6 million Jewish Americans.

In 2007 the Jewish American Heritage Month (JAHM) Coalition was created by the Jewish Federations of North America, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, the Jewish Women's Archive, and the American Jewish Historical Society. This coalition was created to fund, encourage, and support future programming during JAHM. The coalition is made up of the directors of many of the major national Jewish cultural and historical organization and in 2009, it appointed a national coordinator to oversee functions.

America has benefitted from the contributions of Jewish people and their influence is marked in history. Notable Jewish Americans include Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the first Jewish woman and second woman to serve on the Supreme Court, Sandy Koufax, one of the greatest Major League Baseball pitchers of all time, and Stan Lee, whose creative work has entertained and inspired generations. Jewish American Heritage Month is the opportunity to acknowledge how Jewish Americans are interwoven into the foundation of America.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- Engage with friends and family in discussions of Jewish history and experience in America and common misconceptions. For example:
 - Did you know about the diverse nature of the Jewish community and that there are Jews all over the world?
 - Did you know that Jews make up only 2% of the world, which is less than most celebrities' social media followings?
 - Did you know that the Jewish community was the most active community next to the Black community in the Civil Rights Movement, standing arm in arm with Dr. King?
 - Did you know the quote etched into the Statue of Liberty, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to be free," was inspired by a Jewish American poet?
 - Be critical of the history of antisemitism and prejudice against Jews in the United States has partaken in and discuss how these hateful narratives were created. For example:
 - Have you heard about the story of Leo Frank and similar stories of antisemitism in the American south?
 - Did you know that the United States government turned away 900 Jewish refugees fleeing the Holocaust in 1939 on the USS St. Louis, where one-third went on to be murdered by the Nazis?"
 - What do you think has caused the rampant rise in antisemitism over the last ten years?
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ACTION STEPS

- Speak up when antisemitic remarks are made and educate those saying them on why they are inappropriate and promote negative stereotypes.
- Encourage your local, state, and federal officials to vote in favor of policies that combat antisemitism, protect religious spaces, and create action to decrease hate crimes.
- Participate in cross-cultural dialogue with people of the Jewish community to better understand the importance of the religion and the values and tenants that it follows.
- Do not be afraid to ask difficult questions that may arise from working to educate yourself through readings, videos, and conversations.
- Explore your organization's practices and policies to identify and eliminate any that are discriminatory towards the Jewish religion, culture or ethnicity.

RESOURCES



WEBSITES

- [The Anti-Defamation League](#)
- [Jewish American Heritage Month](#)
- [Weitzman National Museum of American Jewish History](#)
- [William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum](#)



VIDEOS/FILMS

- An American Tail (1986) - children's film
- Gentleman's Agreement (1947) - film
- Hester Street (1975) - film
- GI Jews: Jewish Americans In World War II (2018)
- Jews And Baseball: An American Love Story (2010)



READINGS

- [Judaism as an Ethnicity](#)
- American Jewish Thought Since 1934: Writings on Identity, Engagement, and Belief by Michael Marmor and David Ellenson
- Coming to Terms with America: Essays on Jewish History, Religion, and Culture by Jonathan D. Sarna
- American Jewish History: A JPS Guide by Norman H. Finklestein
- America's Jewish Women: A History from Colonial Times to Today by Pamela S. Nadell
- Blacks and Jews in American: An Invitation to Dialogue by Terrance L. Johnson and Jacques Berlinerblau