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**REMARKABLE STORY OF JEWISH REFUGEE SCHOLARS AND THEIR STUDENTS AT  
HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES TOLD IN NEW EXHIBITION  
AT REGINALD F. LEWIS MUSEUM\***

**April 8, 2010 (BALTIMORE, MD)** —The relationship between two disenfranchised groups—Jewish professors who fled Nazi Germany and African American students racially segregated in their own homeland — and the unique bond that grew between them is the subject of the powerful exhibition *Beyond Swastika and Jim Crow: Jewish Refugee Scholars at Black Colleges*. This exhibition opens at the **Reginald F. Lewis Museum** on April 23 and will remain on view until September 26, 2010 after a successful run in New York City at the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, the museum that created the exhibition.

*Beyond Swastika and Jim Crow* tells the story of Jewish academics from Germany and Austria who were dismissed from their teaching positions in the 1930s. After fleeing to America, some refugee scholars found positions at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the Jim Crow South. The exhibition explores what it meant to the students to have these new staff as part of their community, how the students were affected by their presence, and what life was like for white, European Jews teaching at black colleges and universities. The exhibition looks at the empathy between two minority groups with a history of persecution, some of whom came together in search of freedom and opportunity, and shared the early years of struggle in the Civil Rights movement.

“A few years ago I saw the PBS documentary about Jewish scholars at black colleges, and I was amazed that this history was not more widely known. This new exhibition—which is based on a book and the documentary—presents a wonderful opportunity to share this story of struggle and resilience with a wider audience,” notes Dr. Michelle Joan Wilkinson, director of collections and exhibitions.

"The museum chose to host this exhibition because it explores a little known aspect of American history, calling attention to the relationship between African American students and Jewish scholars fleeing Nazi terror during World War II," explains Executive Director, Dr. David Taft Terry, "Historically Black Colleges and Universities across the Jim Crow South opened their doors to Jewish refugee scholars, when many

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other southern schools wouldn't have them, allowing them to continue to make impacts in their fields of study, and building meaningful bonds across racial lines."

### **About the Professors and Students Featured in the Exhibition**

Notable professors in the exhibition include: prominent sociologist Ernst Borinski (Tougaloo College), political scientist John Herz (Howard University), and art education pioneer Viktor Lowenfeld (Hampton Institute). Notable students featured in the exhibition include artist John Biggers (Hampton Institute); Dr. Joyce Ladner (Tougaloo College), the first female president of Howard University; and Dr. Joycelyn Elders (Philander Smith College), the first black Surgeon General of the United States.

The refugee scholars who found work at black colleges were often more comfortable in the black environment than their peers at white universities who faced prejudice at their jobs. Some professors, such as Ernst Borinski and Ernst Manasse, felt a deep connection to black students, and spent the rest of their careers at the historically black colleges. Borinski was even buried on the campus of Tougaloo. His tombstone reads, "Ernst Borinski, Inspiring Teacher." Dr. Ladner said of Professor Borinski (whom the students affectionately called Bobo) that he had "an affinity with blacks because they experienced a similar persecution."

Many other professors also developed deep ties to the schools where they taught and had lasting friendships with their black colleagues and students that still endure today, like Professor John Herz who said, "It was a great good luck of mine to find my first teaching job at a black university where I felt I had so much in common with teachers and students." He felt "at home very quickly," at Howard University, where he attended lectures and concerts and spent many of his social hours.

### **The Impact Each Group Had on Each Other**

The mutual respect the students and professors felt for each other resulted, in some cases, in the refugee professors getting involved in the Civil Rights movement officially or unofficially. For instance, Professor Borinski was identified as a "race agitator" for promoting integration both on and off campus. He wanted to be a "facilitator," to "bridge communities," as he felt his contribution to the Civil Rights movement was to get both black and white people into a room together to share ideas. He created the Social Science Forums which hosted lectures and discussions for the community with top thinkers of the time. He would have his students from Tougaloo arrive early and scatter themselves in the room so the white participants would have to sit among the black students. In many cases it was the first time they had had a substantive conversation or dined with someone of another ethnicity. The Mississippi branch of the ACLU gives out an annual award in Professor Borinski's name.

In addition to getting involved in campus life and the political landscape, the professors, who came from a formal and rigorous academic background, did their best to instill high standards of learning. Many of the professors encouraged the students to learn more about their own history and culture like Professor Lore Rasmussen who took her students to a field to pick cotton. She often used unconventional and innovative teaching methods to give her students concrete experiences that brought them closer to their backgrounds.

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Likewise, Professor Lowenfeld encouraged his students, many of whom had never been exposed to art before, to explore their heritage and their struggles through art. The renowned artist John Biggers, who had been studying to be a plumber when he met Professor Lowenfeld, said, “I fell in love with art,” Biggers said. “Art became the way we could speak.” Several of the other students of the refugee scholars went on to become top notch educators themselves.

### **Exhibition Highlights**

The exhibition is inspired by Gabrielle Simon Edgcomb’s landmark book *From Swastika to Jim Crow: Refugee Scholars at Black Colleges* (Krieger Publishing Company, 1993) and the subsequent PBS documentary by Joel Sucher and Steven Fischler of Pacific Street Films. The exhibition includes artifacts, photographs, and two new films, by Sucher and Fischler, featuring both the professors and the students.

Exhibition highlights include:

- Receipts for the \$28 in fines Professors Lore and Donald Rasmussen paid for having lunch with a black civil rights colleague at a black café in Birmingham. Eating in a public place with someone of the other race without a seven foot high separation wall was considered “incitement to riot.” Professor Lore Rasmussen and her husband were arrested. When Professor Lore Rasmussen was free to go, she was not allowed to ride home alone with her black student, so she stayed in jail with her husband until bail was posted for them by a black dentist.
- Paintings by Professor Viktor Lowenfeld and his student John Biggers show their influence on each other’s work. Biggers went on to get his Ph.D. from Viktor Lowenfeld at Penn State University, and then chaired the art department at Texas State University (later Texas Southern University), where he stayed until his retirement in 1983. His work is in the permanent collections of the MoMA and the Smithsonian American Art Museum, among other institutions.
- Menorah and spice box brought from Germany by Professor George Iggers to the United States. He taught at Philander Smith College in Little Rock, Arkansas. Professor Iggers and his wife, Wilma, were involved in the Civil Rights movement and spearheaded a challenge to the Little Rock Board of Education in the 1950s. Professor Iggers was one of the first white members of the black fraternity Phi Beta Sigma.

### **About the Exhibition**

*Beyond Swastika and Jim Crow: Jewish Refugee Scholars at Black Colleges* was created and is circulated by the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust. This exhibition is made possible through major funding from the Leon Levy Foundation. Additional support provided by the Helen Bader Foundation; The Lupin Foundation; The Blanche and Irving Laurie Foundation; public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts, a state agency; the Alpern Family Foundation; and the Charles and Mildred Schnurmacher Foundation.

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## **BEYOND SWASTIKA PROGRAMMING**

The museum has developed a dynamic lineup of programs in conjunction with this special exhibition, along with a film series that documents black and Jewish life and the interactions between the two groups.

**Sunday, April 25, 3 to 5 p.m.**

### **“From Swastika to Jim Crow” Film Screening**

The museum and Maryland Public Television host a screening of this documentary, by Joel Sucher and Steven Fischler of Pacific Street films, that brings to light the story of German refugee scholars, expelled from their homeland by the Nazis, who later found new lives at HBCUs. A panel discussion will follow the documentary.

Panelists include:

- **Valerie S. Thaler, Ph.D.**, faculty affiliate of the Baltimore Hebrew Institute
- **John Milton Wesley**, media director of “Bridge between the Cultures” project of Cune Press and alumnus of Tougaloo College, an HBCU
- **Leo Bretholz**, Jewish Holocaust Survivor and co-author of *Leap Into Darkness*
- **Dr. Larry Martin**, Professor of History, Coppin State and Board Member of Black/Jewish Forums of Baltimore, Inc. (BLEWS)
- **Dr. Renee Royak-Schaler**, Visiting Associate Professor Epidemiology & Preventive Medicine, Greenbaum Cancer Center, University of Maryland School of Medicine
- **Carla Borden**, Research Associate, Smithsonian Institution

**Museum admission required.**

**Sunday, May 2, 2 p.m.**

### **“Black, Jewish and American” Lecture**

Dr. Carolivia Herron, founding member of Jews of African Descent, shares her experiences and insights on cultural blending, similarities and differences.

**Museum admission required.**

**Saturday, May 22, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.**

### **Teaching Tolerance: Stories for Children (For ages 6-8)**

Children listen to the story, Nappy Hair by Carolivia Herron, which is based on her own experiences as a child and a person of African American and Jewish heritage. After the reading, children create a self portrait through collage, celebrating their own rich history.

**Museum admission required.**

**Sunday, May 23, 2 p.m.**

### **Lecture: The Experiences of Blacks in Germany during the Nazi Era**

**Dr. Larry L. Martin, Professor of History, Geography and Global Studies, Coppin State University**

Dr. Larry L. Martin, Professor of History, Geography and Global Studies at Coppin State University and Board Member of Black/Jewish Forum of Baltimore, Inc. (BLEWS), discusses the little-known history of the extinction of Afro-Germans, European Blacks, Africans and African Americans during the Nazi Era.

**Non-members, \$6.**

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**Sunday, June 6, 2 p.m.**

**Kosher Soul with Michael Twitty**

Michael Twitty, a culinary historian of Afro-American Foodways, shares his eclectic experiences in defining his identity within contemporary American culture.

**Museum admission required.**

**Sunday, June 13, 2 p.m.**

**On-Point: The State of African American and Jewish Relations**

Members of the Baltimore Jewish Council and African American panelists explore issues of equality and ethnic difference.

**Museum admission required.**

**Thursday, July 8, 7 p.m.**

**The Immigrant Experience**

Join the Reginald F. Museum and the Jewish Museum of Maryland for the screening of the film, "Lives Lost, Lives Found: Baltimore's German Jewish Refugees, 1933-1945," winner of a Gold Muse Award for Best Video by the American Association of Museums. The viewing will be followed by a discussion with two of the film subjects, Herta Baitch and Martha Weiman. **Museum admission: \$5.**

**Saturday, July 24, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.**

**Workshop: Rites of Passage for Youth (For ages 9-12)**

Children explore how Jews and African Americans celebrate "coming of age" in their communities by participating in rites of passage ceremonies and hands-on character building activities. **This program is presented by Edna Lawrence of *A Grandmother's Pilgrimage* and Concerned Black Men. To register please call 443-263-1829. Non-members, \$4.**

**Monday, August 2, 1:30 to 3:30 p.m.**

**Diversity Teachers Workshop**

In this workshop, teachers will examine the relationship between African Americans and Jews in America. Teachers will tour the special exhibition, *Beyond Swastika and Jim Crow*. To register, contact Terry Taylor at 443-263-1829.

**This workshop is in conjunction with the Summer Teachers Institute 2010 presented by the Baltimore Jewish Council, The Jewish Museum of Maryland and the Maryland State Department of Education. For more information on the Teachers Institute contact Deborah Cardin at 410-732-6400, ext 236.**

**Saturday, August 14, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.**

**Story Hour: Mrs. Katz and Tush by Patricia Polacco (For ages 6 to 8)**

Hear a story about the friendship that develops between a Jewish senior citizen, and a young black boy. A craft activity celebrating their friendship will follow the reading.

**Museum admission required.**

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**Sunday, September 12, 2 p.m.**

**Empowering Acts**

Ernst Borinski, a sociology professor at Tougaloo College, helped to change Mississippi's racial status quo. Former students, Dr. Joyce Ladner and John Wesley Smith examine the leadership role he played in the integration struggles of the 1950s and 60s and share their personal experiences. **Museum admission required.**

**BEYOND SWASTIKA AND JIM CROW – SUNDAYS @ 2 FILM SERIES**

The museum presents a film series that explores the unique relationship between African Americans and Jews. **Museum admission required.**

**Sunday, July 4 and July 11, 2 p.m.**

**“Blacks and Jews” (85 minutes)**

Confronting ethnic relations head-on, *Blacks and Jews*, a PBS documentary, explores the shared history and roots of conflict between the two communities. Heading an African American and Jewish production team, filmmakers Deborah Kaufman, Bari Scott and Alan Snitow go behind the stereotypes and explosive headlines to reveal riveting stories that tread provocatively on the fault lines of racial coalition and conflict.

**Sunday, July 18 and 25, 2 p.m.**

**“Black Israel” (88 minutes)**

This engaging documentary is a vibrant portrait of pluralistic 21<sup>st</sup> century Jewish identities across the globe. It documents Africans from Nigeria, Togo, the Congo, Zaire, Lagos, Ethiopia and African Americans who have emigrated to Israel to work or to study Judaism.

**Sunday, August 1 and 8, 2 p.m.**

**“Keep on Walking -- Joshua Nelson: The Jewish Gospel Singer” (53 minutes)**

Filmed on location in Newark, St. Louis, Stockholm and Jerusalem, this documentary is a celebration of an exceptional young man, Joshua Nelson, an African American who is Jewish, who is both a singer in the tradition of Mahalia Jackson and a Hebrew teacher.

**Sunday, August 15 and 22, 2 p.m.**

**“Wondrous Oblivion” (103 minutes)**

“Wondrous Oblivion” is a coming of age film of a Jewish boy, David (Sam Smith), born in the family of two Holocaust survivors in 1950s England: Victor (Stanley Townsend), a Polish émigré, and a very young Ruth (Emily Woof), from Germany. The boy has an empowering passion for cricket, obvious from his massive card collection of cricket celebrities. His destiny changes when a Jamaican émigré family comes next door, and sets up an improvised cricket court. Dennis Samuels (Delroy Lindo) teaches the boy the craftsmanship of the sport, and becomes his close friend.

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**Sunday, August 29 and September 5, 2 p.m.**

**“Delta Jews – Jews in the Land of the Blues” (57 minutes)**

For over a century, the largely rural region of the Mississippi Delta has been home to a thriving Jewish community, rooted generations-deep in its rich soil. Jews became an integral part of Delta life, forging a hybrid identity that was deeply Jewish and distinctively Southern. This documentary traces the history of the community and its relationship to white and black neighbors.

**Sunday, September 12 and 19, 2 p.m.**

**“Pushcarts and Plantations: Jewish Life in Louisiana” (54 minutes)**

This documentary explores the 300-year history of Louisiana Jewry. From its beginnings in the 17<sup>th</sup> century to its emergence into the 21<sup>st</sup>, this community has been an important part of the American Jewish experience. Throughout the film, both young and old come together to describe the traditions, customs and experiences that make their communities unique.

**About the Museum of Jewish Heritage**

The museum’s three-floor core exhibition educates people of all ages and backgrounds about the rich tapestry of Jewish life over the past century—before, during, and after the Holocaust. Special exhibitions include *Traces of Memory: A Contemporary Look at the Jewish Past in Poland* on view through August 15 and *The Morgenthau: A Legacy of Service*, now on view. The museum offers visitors a vibrant public program schedule in its Edmond J. Safra Hall. It is also home to *Keeping History Center*, an interactive visitor experience, and Andy Goldsworthy’s memorial *Garden of Stones*. The museum receives general operating support from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.

**About the Reginald F. Lewis Museum**

The Reginald F. Lewis Museum is Baltimore’s premier facility highlighting the history and accomplishments of African Americans with a special focus on Maryland’s African American community. A Smithsonian affiliate, the museum is the East Coast’s largest African American museum occupying an 82,000 square-foot facility with ample permanent and special exhibition space, interactive learning environments, auditorium, resource center, oral history recording studio, museum shop, café, classrooms, meeting rooms, outside terrace and reception areas. The museum is located near Baltimore’s Inner Harbor at the corner of Pratt and President Streets. For more information, please call 443-263-1800 or visit the museum’s website at [www.AfricanAmericanCulture.org](http://www.AfricanAmericanCulture.org).

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