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**STORY OF LEO FRANK'S LANDMARK TRIAL AND LYNCHING
TOLD IN FASCINATING EXHIBITION**
Seeking Justice: The Leo Frank Case Revisited
at the Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust

NEW YORK, NY— In Atlanta, in 1915, Leo Frank became the only Jew ever lynched in America. His trial, murder, and the aftermath are the subject of a powerful exhibition, ***Seeking Justice: The Leo Frank Case Revisited***. Created by The William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum in Atlanta, this exhibition opens at the **Museum of Jewish Heritage — A Living Memorial to the Holocaust on February 26, 2016 and will be on view through August 28, 2016. A press preview will be held on February 25, 2016 from 6 P.M. to 8 P.M.**

Seeking Justice: The Leo Frank Case Revisited recounts the momentous and tragic events surrounding the 1913 murder of 13-year-old Mary Phagan, a white Christian girl, and the lynching of Leo Frank two years later. Without drawing conclusions regarding Frank's guilt or innocence, *Seeking Justice* invites visitors to explore the fascinating evidence surrounding Phagan's murder and Frank's arrest, trial, conviction, and subsequent lynching by prominent citizens of Marietta, Georgia.

"The complexity and compelling nature of Leo Frank's story has resulted in hundreds of printed articles nationally and internationally, numerous books and movies, and even a Tony-award winning musical. Furthermore, the legal case itself is still taught in law schools today," said Aaron Berger, Executive Director of The William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum. "Visitors will better understand this pivotal point in history and ask themselves, 'How far have we come in the last 100 years?'"

"Leo Frank's story is important, not only for Jews, but for everyone who is interested in the fight for social justice," said Bruce C. Ratner, Chairman of the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust. "We admire The Breman for presenting the story in its historical context, and we are proud to be able to present it to an audience that is not as familiar with the case."

Select photos of the exhibition can be found here: <http://www.mjhnyc.org/lfpres/>

About the Case

The Leo Frank case had as its backdrop a city and a region torn apart after the Civil War and an economy in ruins due to Reconstruction. Though local leaders heralded a vision of the "New South," which promised racial harmony and prosperity in the new industrial age, the reality was far different. The late 1870s through the 1900s was a time of poverty, disease, and child labor. Tensions rose as industrialization, urbanization, and immigration contributed to the uprooting of families and threatened traditional family roles. While Jews had lived comfortably in Atlanta for several decades, Northerners and immigrants — some of whom were Jews — were often blamed for the region's dramatic societal changes. This is the climate in which the two murders took place.

On Confederate Memorial Day, April 26, 1913, Mary Phagan stopped by the National Pencil Company factory where she worked to pick up her paycheck from the factory's superintendent, Leo Frank. Her badly beaten body was found in the factory basement the next morning by night watchman, Newt Lee. Although a number of individuals were questioned by the police, suspicion centered on Leo Frank, the last person to admit seeing Mary alive.

During the trial, the prosecution's key witness against Frank was Jim Conley, an African American who was the factory's sweeper. In sworn affidavits, Conley wove an elaborate story incriminating Frank. Although a handwriting analysis of two notes left with the body cast suspicion on Conley, the jury believed his declaration of innocence, because at the time it was thought that a black person would not have been clever enough to fabricate so convincing a story. Press coverage at first consisted of raw sensationalism. When suspicion focused on Frank, the press became biased against him.

The jury of white Christian men found Leo Frank guilty and sentenced him to hang. After exhausting the appeals process, Frank's new lawyers asked for clemency from Governor John M. Slaton. During his last remaining days in office, Slaton reviewed the more than 10,000 pages of documents pertaining to the case and commuted Frank's sentence to life in prison. Enraged, a group of 25 prominent citizens including a former Georgia governor, a state legislator, and a judge formed a lynching party. The group made a deal with state prison officials to hand over Frank. The mob brought him to Mary's hometown of Marietta where he was lynched. Within an hour-and-a half, 1,000 onlookers had gathered at the scene.

About the Aftermath

Newspapers in Atlanta and throughout Georgia condemned the lynching. The national press that had continuously covered the trial and the appeal process also lamented Frank's fate and portrayed him as the victim of an anti-Semitic plot. For years, an eerie conspiracy of silence settled over Marietta that caused many of Atlanta's Jews to keep a low profile. No one was ever connected to or charged with the murder of Leo Frank. The case, which shook the nation, galvanized the Anti-Defamation League, and revived the Ku Klux Klan.

In 1982, new information from a key witness prompted members of Atlanta's Jewish community to petition for a posthumous pardon. The process ended four years later when a pardon was issued on the grounds that the State failed to protect Frank from the lynchers, rather than as a statement of innocence. It was not until a number of years after the pardon that the names of the members of the lynching party came to light. The story of the trial, lynching, and search for justice for Frank continues to fascinate a national audience. Atlanta and Marietta saw dozens of commemorations honoring the deaths of Leo Frank and Mary Phagan on the centennial anniversary of Frank's murder.

Leo Frank's New York Connections

- Leo Max Frank was born in Cuero, Texas, in 1884. A few months after his birth, the family moved to Brooklyn, New York, where he grew up. Leo attended Pratt Institute and graduated from Cornell University in 1906 with a degree in mechanical engineering. Leo accepted the invitation of his uncle, Moses Frank, to manage Atlanta's National Pencil Company as a promising career move.
- When a subsequent direct defense appeal to the Georgia Supreme Court was denied, several well-known national Jewish leaders became more proactive in Frank's defense. They believed that an open campaign to present his case to the public was necessary to save him. By February 1914, even Adolph Ochs, publisher of *The New York Times*, who had long been known for keeping his paper out of Jewish issues, brought the power of his paper to Frank's defense.
- Leo Frank is buried in Mount Carmel Cemetery in Queens (Section 1, Block E, Path 41). This was one of the most important Jewish cemeteries of its day (also buried there is Yiddish writer Sholem Aleichem). The centennial of Leo Frank's death was marked with a small ceremony on August 17, 2015.

About the Exhibition

The culmination of 20 years of research, the exhibition includes artifacts and documents only recently made public. The case that sparked decades of debate is outlined utilizing artifacts, photographs, and documents relating to both the murder and the lynching. Original newspapers chronicling the case and interviews with descendants of Leo Frank, Mary Phagan, and other key players in the trial bring new insight to these unsolved murders and the events that led up to them.

Exhibition highlights include:

- Frank's stately desk from his office at the National Pencil Company along with his 1906 Cornell University diploma, illustrating his success as well as his potential to move up the social and corporate ladder.
- Frank's diary from jail which shows his frustration with the judicial system.
- Trial notes and a scrawled deathbed statement from Jim Conley's attorney, William Smith. The desperate deathbed note from 1949 avows, "I believe in the innocence and good character of Leo Frank."
- The door to the infirmary at the State Prison in Milledgeville, Georgia, which was opened to kidnap Leo Frank on the morning of August 16, 1915. It was not damaged in any way, providing evidence that the prison guards complied with the mob.
- "Souvenir" wood pick, made from the tree where Frank was lynched and an accompanying note. Both speak to the normalcy of lynching and witnessing the vigilante crime at the time of Leo Frank's murder.
- Filmed interviews with descendants of the major figures including Mary Phagan Kean, Mary Phagan's great-niece; Cathy Smithline, Leo Frank's great-niece; Elizabeth Slaton Wallace, great-niece of Governor John Slaton; Chuck Clay, great-nephew of Eugene Herbert Clay who was a member of the lynch party; Roslyn Spector, great-niece of Lucille Selig Frank who was the wife of Leo Frank.
- Personal objects belonging to Mary Phagan including a bonnet, nightgown, and a pair of baby shoes. The gallery is designed to recreate her close-knit family life in her working class home.
- Letters, including one from Governor Slaton, in which he discusses his decision to commute the sentence; and one from Judge Leonard S. Roan to the attorneys for Leo Frank in which he discusses his doubts about Frank's guilt. Gov. Slaton wrote that the case, "afforded an opportunity to personally carry into effect what I have always thought was the obligation incumbent upon any man — to do what he thought right regardless of the opinions of others." Slaton was hung in effigy and called "king of Jews" for his role in the case.

Seeking Justice: The Leo Frank Case Revisited was created by The William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, Atlanta, GA.

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Related Public Programs

Sunday, March 6, 3 P.M.

Leadership in Times of Tension: The Leo Frank Case and the Role of Professionals Today

With author Steve Oney, theologian Keith L. Magee, and others TBA; moderated by journalism professor Andie Tucher, Columbia University
The infamous 1915 lynching of a Jewish man in the U.S. inspires a conversation about the dangers of hate speech and xenophobia, both then and now, and the responsibility of professionals in fostering civil discussion.

\$15, Free for Members and Students with Valid ID

Co-sponsored by Fellowships at Auschwitz for the Study of Professional Ethics (FASPE)

Monday, March 7, 7 P.M.

An Evening on Parade

With composer, lyricist, and playwright Jason Robert Brown, playwright Alfred Uhry, and historian Steve Oney; moderated by Julie Burstein (*Spark: How Creativity Works*)

Performers Sebastian Arcelus as Leo Frank and Stephanie Block as Lucille Frank, joined by Jesse Warren-Nager, Caitlin Houlihan, Caitlin Kinnunen, and Allie Trimm

Featuring live performances from *Parade*, a musical based on the trial of Leo Frank and the 1999 Tony Award® Winner for Best Book of a Musical and Best Score, the creative team behind the show discusses how history can inspire art.

\$20, \$15 Members and Students with Valid ID

Tickets include same-day admission to the exhibition *Seeking Justice: The Leo Frank Case Revisited*.

Purchase tickets at www.mjhync.org or 646.437.4202.

About the Museum of Jewish Heritage

The Museum's exhibitions educate people of all ages and backgrounds about the rich tapestry of Jewish life over the past century—before, during, and after the Holocaust. The special exhibition *Nazi Persecution of Homosexuals 1933-1945* is on view through February 29, 2016. *Seeking Justice: The Leo Frank Case Revisited* opens on February 26, 2016 and will be on view through August 28, 2016. The Museum is also home to the award-winning *Keeping History Center*, an interactive visitor experience, and Andy Goldsworthy's memorial *Garden of Stones*. The Museum offers visitors a vibrant public program schedule in its Edmond J. Safra Hall and receives general operating support from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and New York State Council on the Arts.

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