

## ARTS & BOOKS

### [No sanction to bigotry, no assistance to persecution: 350 Years of Jewish Life in the USA](#)

By Caroline ADAM

**Two major exhibitions on Jewish history are being shown on the East and West coasts. Both tell the stories of adults, children, immigrants and victims...**

The exhibition "From Haven to Home : 350 Years of Jewish Life in America," was first shown at the Library of Congress in 2004 as a commemoration of the first Jews who left Brazil and arrived in New Amsterdam in 1654 and who settled permanently in America. The exhibition was then displayed in Cincinnati and New York City. It has now stopped over at the Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles, which is one of the most prominent in Jewish cultural centres on the West coast.

The exhibition is a tribute to the Jewish immigrants who fled their native countries hoping to build a new home for themselves in the United States. It features more than 200 treasures of American Judaïca, coming from the Library of Congress. The exhibition includes films, pamphlets, sound recordings and also letters from Presidents, such as George Washington declaring to the Newport Hebrew Congregation in 1790 that America "to bigotry gives no sanction, to persecution no assistance." \*

The curators did not aim at creating a " hall of fame" for Jews, but rather to illustrate the United States' commitment to religious freedom. The Jews who were persecuted in Europe and elsewhere came to America to enjoy this freedom and practise their religion. Michael Grunberger, head of the Library of Congress, says that the exhibition also aims at recognizing "the immigrants as being agents for their own acculturation and how they worked hard to become Americans." \*\*

A new culture and a new religion, namely American Judaism, were born as a result of this freedom and acculturation.

While the Skirball Centre exhibition goes until February 12<sup>th</sup>, another exhibition has just opened on the East coast at the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York. "Life in Shadows : Hidden Children and the Holocaust" focuses on the terrible fate of Jewish children during the Second World War. The items on display are quite mundane: a child's worn clothes, a photograph of an 8 year-old Jewish girl in a Catholic orphanage, but the stories behind the artefacts are always very poignant. \*\*\* The objects remain, but the stories still need to be told.

Sources: \* <http://www.skirball.com/>

\*\* "Breathing Free in America," *Los Angeles Times* 12 January 2006.

\*\*\* "Holocaust Children's Objects: Ordinary but Powerful," *The New York Times* 24 January 2006.