

Dr. Gary P. Zola Promoted to Professor of the American Jewish Experience



Rabbi David Ellenson, President of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) has announced the promotion of Dr. Gary Phillip Zola to Professor of the American Jewish Experience, as of July 1, 2009. Dr. Zola serves as the Executive Director of The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, the world's largest freestanding research center dedicated solely to the study of the American Jewish experience.

"We recognize Dr. Zola's multifold contributions to his students, the faculty, and our academic programs as a teacher, mentor, and scholar of American Jewish history and the history of American Reform Judaism," said Rabbi Ellenson.

In his academic capacity, Professor Zola edits The Marcus Center's award-winning biannual publication, The American Jewish Archives Journal — one of only two academic periodicals focusing on the total historical experience of American Jewry. In 2006, Dr. Zola became the first American Jewish historian and the first American rabbi to receive appointment to the Academic Advisory Council of the congressionally recognized Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission.

Dr. Zola is the second director of the American Jewish Archives, having succeeded his teacher and mentor, Dr. Jacob Rader Marcus (1896-1995), a pioneering scholar in the field of American Jewish history and the institution's founding director. Under Zola's

leadership, the physical home of the American Jewish Archives (AJA) tripled in size. The AJA's Malloy Education Building, dedicated in 2005, houses electronic classrooms, distance learning centers, and public exhibition galleries.

While serving as Executive Director, Dr. Zola has initiated an impressive array of innovative historical programs and projects that have captured the attention of both the Jewish and general communities. The national commemoration of the 350th anniversary of Jewish life in America constitutes the most notable example of Zola's contribution to the field. He is widely acknowledged as the initiator of this national commemoration marking the arrival of the establishment of New Amsterdam's first Jewish community in 1654. Zola was the organizer and chair of the congressionally recognized Commission for Commemorating 350 Years of American Jewish History, a consortium of research institutions established to promote the study of American Jewish history and thereby enhance the significance of the 350th anniversary. The Commission represented a historic collaboration of the Library of Congress, the National Archives and Records Administration, the American Jewish Historical Society and The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives. In his capacity as Commission chair, Rabbi Zola was invited to serve as guest chaplain at the U.S. House of Representatives (September 21, 2004) and the U.S. Senate (May 26, 2005). He participated in opening ceremonies for the Commission's historical exhibitions held at the Library of Congress (September 8, 2004), the Cincinnati Museum Center (February 13, 2005), the American Jewish Historical Society (May 16, 2005), and the HUC-JIR Skirball Cultural Center (November 8, 2005). On September 14, 2005, Zola delivered the invocation at the 350th Gala Dinner in Washington, D.C., where President George W. Bush delivered the keynote address.

Dr. Zola is a historian of American Jewry. He is widely acknowledged as an expert on the development of American Reform Judaism. His published volumes include *The Americanization of the Jewish Prayer Book* (New York: Central Synagogue, 2008); *A Place of Our Own: The Rise of Reform Jewish Camping in America* (co-edited with Michael M. Lorge and published by the University of Alabama Press, 2006); *The Dynamics of American Jewish History: Jacob Rader Marcus's Essays on American Jewry* (Brandeis University Press, 2004); *Women Rabbis: Exploration and Celebration* (HUC-JIR Alumni Press, 1996) and *Isaac Harby of Charleston* (the University of Alabama Press, 1994), a major biographical study on the life of one of the founders of the first organized effort to reform Judaism in the United States of America. His scholarly articles have appeared in publications including *American Jewish History*, *American Jewish Archives*, *Southern Jewish History*, *Canadian Jewish History*, the *Journal of Reform Judaism*, and the *Hebrew Union College Annual*. Dr. Zola is currently working on a volume that is tentatively titled, *He Was Like One of Us: American Jewry and the Idealization of Abraham Lincoln*, which is expected to appear in 2010.

On December 6, 1999, Zola appeared on ABC's "Nightline" which brought the voice and message of Rabbi Stephen S. Wise to its listeners. The show was prompted by the rediscovery of hundreds of aluminum disk recordings that are now being preserved at the AJA. A noted interpreter of the American Jewish experience, Dr. Zola has been

quoted by the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Sun-Times*, and numerous national publications.

Prior to assuming leadership of The Marcus Center, Zola served for more than 15 years as the National Dean of Admissions, Student Affairs and Alumni Relations for HUCJIR. During his tenure as the school's chief admissions officer, Rabbi Zola admitted more than 800 students to the College-Institute — more than any other admissions officer in the history of the institution. In this capacity, Zola served as Production Consultant for the movie "Rabbi" -- a one-half hour documentary on the work of the American Reform rabbi (1989).

Dr. Zola joined the national administration of the College-Institute upon his ordination as Rabbi in June of 1982. Before entering HUC-JIR's Rabbinical School, Zola served as the Assistant Director of the Union of American Hebrew Congregation's first summer camp: Olin-Sang-Ruby Union Camp Institute located in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin. He also served as the regional director for the Chicago Federation of Temple Youth, and the Northern Federation of Temple Youth. Today, Rabbi Zola is a lifetime honorary member of the North American Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY). He has held the title "Reform Jewish Educator" since December 1984. Dr. Zola is a member of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), and he served on the Editorial Board of the Journal of Reform Judaism (the CCAR's quarterly journal known today as the CCAR Journal) from 1985-1990. In addition to his involvement in the Central Conference of American Rabbis, Rabbi Zola has been active in both national and local Jewish communal affairs. He is currently a member of the Board of Trustees of the American Jewish Committee and the Jewish Community Relations Council, Cincinnati Chapters. Dr. Zola has also served as the president of the Martin Luther King Coalition and on the Boards of the Jewish Federation of Cincinnati, the Glen Manor Home for the Jewish Aged, and the Hillel Jewish Student Center. From 1993-94, Rabbi Zola served as President of the Greater Cincinnati Board of Rabbis. Zola has been serving as the rabbinic consultant to the Ethics Committee of The Jewish Hospital, Cincinnati, since 1993. In both 1988 and 1992, the American Center for International Leadership invited Dr. Zola to be one of two rabbinic delegates on the Religion Commission of the first U.S.A./U.S.S.R. Emerging Leaders Summit. In May of 2009, the Cincinnati Human Relations Commission gave Dr. Zola the Bishop Herbert Thompson, Jr. Outstanding Humanitarian Award in recognition of his service to the people of the greater Cincinnati metropolitan area. The Jewish Federation of Cincinnati recognized Dr. Zola's service to Cincinnati's Jewish community in 2004 by conferring on him its Rabbinic Leadership Award.

Rabbi Zola was born on February 17, 1952, in Chicago, Illinois. He is the son of the late Roy M. and Estelle (Chessen) Zola. Upon graduation from Evanston Township High School, he obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree, with distinction, from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor (1973), and a Master of Arts degree in Counseling Psychology from Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois (1976). He earned a Master of Arts in Hebrew Letters (1981) and a Master of Philosophy (1988) from the College-Institute. Rabbi Zola received his Ph.D. in American Jewish History from the College-Institute on

May 29, 1991. Dr. Zola and his wife Stefi have four children: Mandi, Jory, Jeremy, and Samantha.