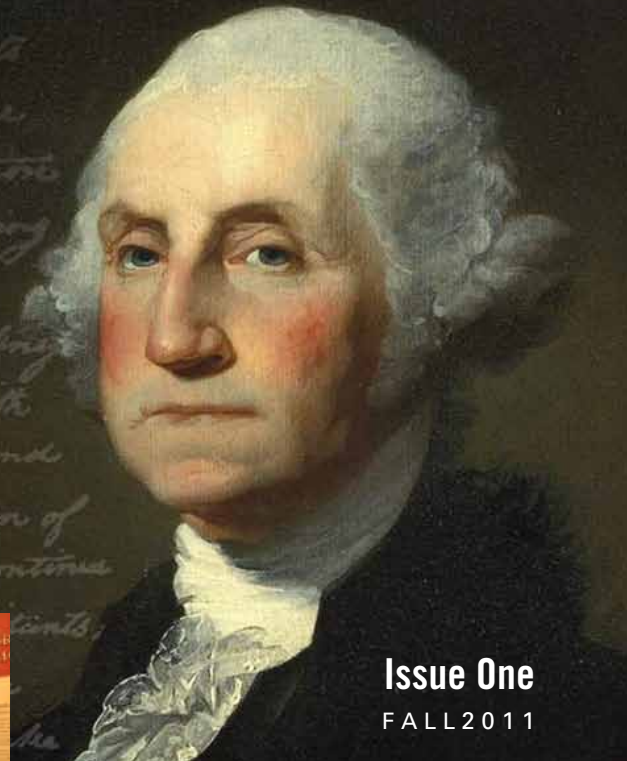


"To Bigotry No Sanction..."

NEWS FROM THE

George Washington Institute for Religious Freedom



Issue One
FALL 2011



AMBASSADOR JOHN L. LOEB, JR. *Chairman*
MICHAEL FELDBERG, Ph.D. *Executive Director*

VISITORS CENTER AT TOURO SYNAGOGUE IN NEWPORT

The Ambassador John L. Loeb, Jr. Visitors Center at Touro Synagogue opened for an **expanded season** on May 1, 2011 and welcomed more than 5,000 visitors through July 31, an increase over last year's attendance. The Center will remain open until December 30. If you haven't yet visited, please seize the opportunity before year-end. You will enjoy the interactive, multimedia exhibits exploring early American Jewish history and the meaning and importance of *George Washington's Letter to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, RI* of 1790. This extraordinary letter is the clearest expression by a president of each American's right to the free exercise of personal religious belief.

Please visit www.loebtouro.org for more about the Visitors Center.

"The citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy – a policy worthy of imitation.

All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship."

– *George Washington*

Letter to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, 1790

THE WASHINGTON LETTER ON THE WEB

Our enhanced website, www.GWIRF.org, features a 34-page Educators Kit for teachers and students to download. It translates the George Washington Letter into six languages; gives information explaining how to conduct school letter reading programs and essay contests; and provides classroom exercises. The website also contains excerpts from letters that our first president wrote to other religious groups, historical information, and materials for use by the press.



GWIRF'S Partners Teach Message of Religious Freedom

The Institute's teaching partnerships with two of the nation's leading civic education enrichment organizations are thriving.



Amb. John L. Loeb, Jr. and Margot Stern Strom, founder and executive director of *Facing History and Ourselves*.

“It is now no more that toleration is spoken of as if it were the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights.”

– *George Washington*

Letter to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, 1790

The George Washington Institute for Religious Freedom (GWIRF) has selected two renowned organizations to carry our first president's message of religious freedom to teachers and students worldwide.

- > A grant from GWIRF has enabled **The Bill of Rights Institute** (www.billofrights.org), based in Arlington, VA to launch an initiative called **Religious Liberty: The American Experiment**. The Institute produced an 80-page teacher training manual with that title. The Institute used the curriculum to conduct ten in-person, full-day workshops across the United States, training more than 500 high school and middle school teachers. They address constitutional issues regarding religious freedom through the lens of George Washington's Letter to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, RI of 1790. The seminars were also offered in two on-line webinars attended by another 60 teachers. Plans are now underway to offer an additional 10 to 14 seminars and webinars in late 2011 through 2012.



- > In partnership with GWIRF, the internationally acclaimed **Facing History and Ourselves** (www.facinghistory.org), based in Brookline, MA has launched a multi-year initiative titled **Give Bigotry No Sanction: Exploring Religious Freedom and Democracy**. This international initiative uses the George Washington letter to stimulate classroom discussions about the place of religious liberty, separation of church and state and cultural diversity in democratic societies. The project began with major events at New York University and the Historical Society of Washington, DC. Upcoming workshops and events are scheduled during 2011-2012 in Memphis, Boston, Denver, Cleveland and San Francisco. The project has a thriving website (<http://nobigotry.facinghistory.org/>) and is developing teacher training materials and a major publication featuring reflections on the Letter by noted scholars, writers and political figures.

Comments from LVC visitors:

“ Best museum I've seen in years. I especially enjoyed the interactive video on the colonial residents of Newport.”

– S.B., Auburn, MA

“ I hope that many school groups will have the opportunity to visit this outstanding facility.

Thanks to Ambassador Loeb.”

– W.H., Durham, NC

WHAT TEACHERS ARE SAYING ABOUT OUR WORKSHOPS

“I just taught the Muslim experience in America through the Park51 controversy and saw so many parallels to the Newport experience of a minority religious community being surrounded by a majority community. ... I could see that my colleagues were having 'ah-hah' moments and making their own connections.”

– Vanguard High School, New York City

“The seminar was tremendous. My knowledge and understanding of religious freedom increased tremendously.”

– Dobbins CTE High School, Southampton, PA

“The intellectual stimulation, exchange of ideas, materials and lesson plans will greatly enrich my classroom.”

– West Middle School, Rochester Hills, MI



New York City Students bring Letter to Life



Scott Stringer and students at FHHS

> Just before Washington's Birthday, 2011, students at the Facing History High School in Manhattan met with Borough President Scott Stringer to read and discuss our first president's *Letter to the Hebrew Congregation*. To prepare them for the experience, the students were asked to write their own version of the Letter in contemporary terms, addressed to whichever group of

Americans they thought would benefit from receiving a message about religious freedom.

The students engaged Mr. Stringer and Ambassador John L. Loeb, Jr. in a spirited discussion of religious, ethnic and cultural differences in New York and the world, and how to safeguard freedoms through participation in the political process.

> In conjunction with *Respect for All Week* in the schools, the New York City Department of Education distributed notices about the Letter Reading materials on the GWIRF website and urged teachers to incorporate the Letter into their classroom instruction about *Respect for All*.



This year's winners of the George Washington Letter Essay Contest at Rogers High School standing in front of Touro Synagogue. Teacher Coleen Hermes with students Kayla Fisher, First Place; Chase Ceglie, Second Place; and Gabrielle Hermes, Third Place

AWARD TO NEWPORT TEACHER

Coleen Hermes, Chair of the Social Studies Department at Rogers High School in Newport, RI, received the Rhode Island National History Day *Teacher of the Year Award* at the senior high school level. She initiated and supervises the George Washington Letter Essay Contest, an annual program at Rogers sponsored by GWIRF since 2008.

Facts & Figures

- > Over 1,000 middle and high school teachers across the country participated in seminars and workshops utilizing the George Washington Letter as the centerpiece to begin the discussion about religious freedom and separation of church and state in their classrooms
- > Over 70,000 high school students participated in school essay competitions addressing the relevance of the Letter today
- > 30,000 juniors and seniors in high schools throughout the state of Rhode Island participated in the George Washington Letter Reading Program on his birthday in 2010, and this program was repeated in 2011

MISSION OF THE GEORGE WASHINGTON INSTITUTE FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

To create greater awareness of the historic roots of religious freedom and the importance of separation of church and state in the United States, by introducing teachers and students to the principles expressed in George Washington's Letter to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island of 1790.

“Happily, the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.”

– George Washington

Letter to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, 1790

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Facts & Figures

- > Over 5,000 visitors were welcomed at the Loeb Visitors Center between May 1 and July 31 of this season, and more than 20,000 since its opening in 2009

In the News

- > Since January 2010, the George Washington Letter has been featured in countless publication articles. Among them are:

- *The New York Times Magazine*
- *The New Yorker*
- *Financial Times*
- *The Wall Street Journal*
- *The Forward*
- *Viewpoint Magazine*
- *Newport This Week*
- *The Providence Journal*
- *The Newport Daily News*
- *Westchester County Business Journal*
- *Montgomery Gazette (Maryland)*

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Please consider a fully tax-deductible contribution to the George Washington Institute for Religious Freedom.
- If you know of a high school that would like to introduce the George Washington Letter into its curriculum, please send us its name.
- If you know of a teacher who would like training in use of the Letter, please send his or her name.
- If you want to offer suggestions for additional activities, please contact us.

WHO TO CONTACT IF YOU WANT TO HELP

If you want to support our efforts to teach George Washington's message of religious freedom in any of the ways listed above, please contact Judith W. Ringer, Director of Development, at 212-509-1500, ext. 15 or e-mail her at: jringerjloebfdn@aol.com.

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