

Gary Phillip Zola

Gary Phillip Zola is the Executive Director of The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives (AJA) and the Edward M. Ackerman Family Distinguished Professor of the American Jewish Experience & Reform Jewish History at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) in Cincinnati. The AJA is the world's largest free-standing research center dedicated solely to the study of the American Jewish experience. He received both his rabbinic ordination (1982) and his Ph.D. in American Jewish History (1991) from HUC-JIR.

Professor Zola became the AJA's second director in 1998, succeeding his teacher and mentor, Professor Jacob Rader Marcus (1896-1995), the prodigious scholar who first defined the field of American Jewish history. It was Marcus who founded the AJA in 1947 and served as its director until his death in 1995. Under Professor Zola's leadership, the AJA's renowned collection has grown and the center's dynamic array of programs is now housed in a world-class complex of three interconnected structures including the newly erected Edwin A. Malloy Education Building and the Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati's International Learning Center. Zola is widely recognized by colleagues as an innovator in his field, who has enlarged the public's access to the AJA's holdings, expanded The Marcus Center's programmatic activities, and encouraged the institution to make use of 21st century technologies.

Professor Zola is also known as a historian of American Jewry who specializes in 19th-century American Judaism and the history of American Reform Judaism. Since 1998, Zola has been the editor of The Marcus Center's award-winning biannual publication, *The American Jewish Archives Journal*. His own published volumes include *We Called Him Rabbi Abraham: Lincoln and American Jewry* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2014); *American Jewish History: A Primary Source Reader* (co-edited by Marc Dollinger and published by Brandeis University Press, 2014); *The Americanization of the Jewish Prayer Book* and *The Liturgical Development of Congregation Ahawath Chesed, New York City* (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. In addition to these volumes, Zola has published dozens of scholarly articles and book reviews.

President Barack Obama appointed Dr. Zola on three separate occasions (2011, 2014, and 2017) to serve as a member of the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad, an independent agency of the Federal government. Established by Public Law in 1985, the Commission exists to foster the preservation and protection of the cemeteries, monuments, and historic buildings associated with the foreign heritage of United States citizens. Although HUC-JIR presidents have received such appointments, Professor Zola is the first regular member of the College-Institute's faculty to serve on a standing Commission of the United States Government in the history of the school.

Prior to joining the Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad, Dr. Zola served as the organizer and chair of the congressionally recognized Commission for Commemorating 350 Years of American Jewish History, a consortium of leading research institutions established to promote the study of American Jewish history during the 350th anniversary of Jewish life in America (2004-2005). In 2006, Dr. Zola became the first American Jewish historian to receive appointment to the Academic Advisory Council of the congressionally recognized Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission.

In addition to these national activities, Dr. Zola has been recognized for his commitment to the betterment of community life in Cincinnati, Ohio. Thomas More University conferred a Doctor of Humane Letters degree, *honoris causa*, on Dr. Zola for his "dedication to the principles that are the foundation of our nation" in September of 2018. Lighthouse Youth Services of Cincinnati gave its "Beacon of Light Humanitarian Award" to Dr. Zola in 2016. In 2012, he received the "Distinguished Service Award" from BRIDGES for a Just Community (formerly the National Conference of Christians and Jews). The National Underground Railroad Freedom Center gave him its "Martin Luther King, Jr. Legacy Award" that same year. In recognition of his service to the citizens in the Greater Cincinnati metropolitan area, the Cincinnati Human Relations Commission gave Dr. Zola the "Bishop Herbert Thompson, Jr. Outstanding Humanitarian Award" in 2009. In 2004, the Jewish Federation of Cincinnati conferred its "Distinguished Leadership Award" on Zola for his service to Cincinnati's Jewish community.

Dr. Zola and his wife, Stefi, reside in Cincinnati, Ohio. They have four grown children (Mandi, Jory, Jeremy, and Samantha) and three grandchildren.