



THE 50TH ANNUAL SCHOLARS' CONFERENCE

ON THE HOLOCAUST AND THE CHURCHES

THE ACKERMAN CENTER FOR HOLOCAUST STUDIES at THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT DALLAS

March 7-10, 2020

About the Annual Scholars' Conference

Founded in 1970 by Franklin H. Littell and Hubert G. Locke, the Annual Scholars' Conference addresses the historical significance of the Holocaust through scholarship that is interfaith, international, and interdisciplinary. The ASC provides an invaluable forum for scholars to discuss and advance Holocaust research, ensuring the valuable lessons of the Holocaust remain relevant for today's world. The Ackerman Center for Holocaust Studies at The University of Texas at Dallas is proud to be the permanent home of The Annual Scholars' Conference.

This year is a momentous anniversary for not only the Conference, but also for the University. It seems only fitting that we are celebrating fifty years of academic excellence together.



Reflections on the 50th Anniversary of the ASC

Dr. David Patterson, Hillel A. Feinberg Distinguished Chair in Holocaust Studies



I remember the first time I attended the Annual Scholars' Conference in 1985. There I met many of the giants whose works I had studied. Over the years every major scholar in the field of Holocaust studies has passed through the ASC. The conference was founded in 1970, not by Jews but by two Christian theologians, Franklin Littell and Hubert Locke, both now of blessed memory.

I don't recall the exact year, but one year about thirty years ago I was invited to become a member of the Board of Advisors for the ASC. And so began a deeper engagement with this gathering not only of scholars and students but also of witnesses, of people transformed into witnesses through the testimony inherited from the eye-witnesses. And so began for me an even deeper friendship and the ever greater blessing of working with Franklin Littell, Hubert Locke, and Marcie Littell.



Left: Drs. Roemer, Ozsváth, Patterson, and members of the UT Dallas administration signing the agreement with Dr. Marcia Sachs Littell making UTD the ASC's new permanent home.

In 2016 I got a call from Marcia Littell. She explained to me that, after so many years, she was looking for a permanent home for the ASC.

With the indispensable support of Ackerman Center director Dr. Nils Roemer and UTD's leadership (above), it came to pass.

I propose that our continuing confrontation with the Holocaust include a renewed investigation of antisemitism from historical, religious, ideological, and other perspectives. Antisemitism is the single most definitive feature of the Holocaust, and any understanding of the Holocaust has to proceed from some key questions: What is the antisemite anti-? Why the Jews? Indeed, who are the Jews? I think a serious engagement with these few questions might be an occasion for a renewal of Holocaust scholarship in this year of renewal, the 50th anniversary of the birth of Holocaust studies.

The History and Future of the Holocaust and its Memory

Dr. Nils Roemer kicked off the 50th Annual Scholars' Conference on Saturday, March 7th at the opening dinner, which hosted participants and invited guests. Dr. Roemer discussed the impact of the digital age on the field of historical studies. He emphasized the significance of technological innovations that have given researchers new tools and resources that have expanded the trajectory of scholarship.



This unprecedented digital era was the inspiration for this year's conference theme, "The History and Future of the Holocaust and its Memory," which featured three topic tracks: History, Memory and Thought, and Looking Forward.

Michael and Elaine Jaffe Lecture

"Defiance and Protest: Forgotten Individual Jewish Resistance in Nazi Germany"



Dr. Wolf Gruner presented the inaugural Michael and Elaine Jaffe Lecture, “Defiance and Protest: Forgotten Individual Jewish Resistance in Nazi Germany,” where he discussed the idea of resistance as a group effort, rather than a consideration of individual acts on a daily basis. Dr. Gruner shared his research, which included video testimonies from survivors, where they shared their experiences of resistance on a day-to-day basis. He emphasized how, more often than not, their actions were not premeditated, but rather the result of split-second decision making in the midst of impossible circumstances.

He explained that obtaining an exact number of these acts of resistance during the war would be almost impossible because the nature of resistance is difficult to define, especially taking into consideration the varying activities regarded as opposition.

Dr. Gruner is the Shapell-Guerin Chair in Jewish Studies at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, and the Founding Director of the USC Shoah Foundation Center for Advanced Genocide Research.



The Annual Scholars' Conference After 50 Years: What Have We Learned?

Dr. Marcia Sachs Littell, immediate past president of the conference, presented the first of three lunch keynote addresses of the conference on Sunday, March 8. She discussed the origins of the ASC, highlighting the influence of prominent scholars, both then and now, who have shaped the field of Holocaust studies.

The conference now brings scholars from all parts of the world together to discuss issues related to Holocaust history, remembrance, and education in ways that were unimaginable fifty years ago when this conference was founded.

Dr. Littell emphasized the importance of furthering our understanding of the Shoah, and how the future of the discipline is now in the hands of the next generation of scholars, such as those in attendance for this momentous conference.



This year's milestone 50th Annual Scholars' Conference was expanded to include a fourth day, which allowed for more presenters than ever, bringing over seventy scholars from around the globe together to present their current research and discuss both the past and the future of Holocaust studies.



Mitchell L. and Miriam Lewis Barnett Lecture

"Holocaust Childhood: Wounds that Never Heal"

In a special public event in conjunction with the 50th Annual Scholars' Conference on the Holocaust and the Churches, Robert Ratonyi presented the Mitchell L. and Miriam Lewis Barnett Lecture, "Holocaust Childhood: Wounds that Never Heal," where he shared his experience of growing up as a Jewish child in Hungary during the Holocaust. He was introduced by his wife, Eva, a 1976 UT Dallas alumna who is also a Hungarian Holocaust survivor.

In March of 1944, Ratonyi was only six years old when the Final Solution was implemented in Hungary at an accelerated pace not seen in any other country during the Holocaust. Between May 15th and July 9th, approximately 440,000 Hungarian Jews were deported to Auschwitz; most were killed upon arrival.



Ratonyi opened his discussion with two questions: how did the Holocaust happen in an era of culture and intellect that still allowed the perpetration of Nazi atrocities, and in the aftermath of the Holocaust, how can we prevent future genocides?



Recalling the summer of 1944, he discussed the cruelty of the Arrow Cross militia that terrorized the ghetto population into submission and the conflicting realities of a war that was ending in the west while the nightmare facing the Jews of Hungary was only just beginning.

He concluded his lecture by providing answers to the questions he posed earlier, remarking that one should never stand silent to the suffering of others. He expressed concerns about world-wide rising antisemitism as one reason he chooses to continue to tell his story, in the hope that his experience can help to combat the diseases of the heart like racism, discrimination and antisemitism that contributed to the Holocaust.

New Digital Studies of the Holocaust



The second day of the conference began with a special panel presentation titled “New Digital Studies of the Holocaust” that discussed an ongoing innovative collaborative research project currently underway at the Ackerman Center.

Dr. Roemer leads the interdisciplinary team (left) Dr. Sarah Valente, Shefali Sahu, Amal Shafek, and Piyush Kamdar.

Each member presented his/her contribution to the project, which aims to introduce new ways of seeing and remembering the Holocaust. Visualizing the deportations of Jewish victims from countries on the periphery, such as Western Europe, North Africa, and Latin America, opens up windows into the entirety of the Holocaust.

This ongoing research project is discussed in further detail on pages 78 - 79.

The Role the Holocaust Plays in Interfaith Relations: Opportunities and Risks

Ackerman Advisory Board member Rabbi Nancy Kasten and Rev. Dr. George Mason from Faith Commons, an organization dedicated to promoting interfaith cooperation, facilitated a discussion on the role that the Holocaust plays in interfaith relations following lunch on the second day of the conference.



Participants were divided into small groups and asked to respond to a series of questions intended to generate discussions about how Holocaust studies in general, and the Annual Scholars’ Conference in particular may contribute to developing responses, adaptations, and resistance to current assaults on civil society.

One participant shared that the study of the Holocaust prepares us to resist assaults on civil society even in their infancy, realizing that it is much easier to address such assaults while they are still small and before they have the opportunity to mature.

The Eternal Flame Award

This prestigious honor is given to acknowledge individuals whose words and actions have endeavored to assure that we remember the horrific past and the murder of six-million Jews during the Holocaust and to build a better future for all humanity.

Dr. Martin Rumscheidt, this year's Eternal Flame Award recipient, taught at the University of Windsor in Ontario and Atlantic School of Theology in Halifax. The primary foci of his teaching and research are German Protestant theology in the 19th and 20th centuries, theologians Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Shoah, and increasingly the possibilities of new Jewish-Christian relations.



75 Years Later:

The Enduring Legacy of the Nuremberg Trials



Ben Ferencz, Chief Prosecutor at the Einsatzgruppen Trial, spoke as part of a keynote panel to attendees of the 50th Annual Scholars' Conference on the Holocaust and the Churches via Skype during a special presentation. Michael Bazylar, Professor of Law at Chapman University, moderated the session and delivered a lecture on "The Road to Nuremberg."

Following presentations by Michael S. Bryant and Kristen Nelson on The International Military Tribunal and the legacy of Nuremberg, Ferencz spent half an hour answering questions from Bazylar and members of the audience.

Ferencz stated that it only took him two days to rest his case and convict each of the Einsatzgruppen defendants of crimes against humanity, and that "instead of being ashamed of what they had to do, killing all the Jewish children, they boasted about it...no one, no one, showed any signs of remorse at any time."

Ferencz celebrated his 100th birthday the day following the conference. Those present at this special presentation sang "Happy Birthday" to Ferencz before the close of the session.