



CHGS News September 2013

From The Director



Syria: If not now, when?

"If I am not for myself, then who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, then what am I? And if not now, when?" Said Rabbi Hillel, one of the most influential sages and scholars in Jewish history.

It is unlikely that Barak Obama had this phrase of the Talmud in mind last week during the Moscow's G8 summit. However, he seems to have performed a political interpretation of this often quoted Jewish aphorism when he tried to convince his fellow world leaders of the necessity of joint military action against the criminal Assad regime in Syria.

The figures of the Syrian tragedy are well known. 100,000 people killed in two years, two million refugees living in bordering countries, four million displaced within the country and, only a few weeks ago, a lethal chemical weapons attack against the civilian population, in a clear violation of international law. No other government has dared to cross the line of chemical weapons use since the 1980s. The situation has reached a tipping point and it requires a meaningful response by the international community. But what sort of action should be taken?

It seems we are always fighting the previous genocide. Violence unfolding before our eyes usually lacks the unambiguous quality of retrospective moral outrage, naming and condemnation. It is entangled in a complex constellation of forces and unpredictable developments that lead to the fact that the realpolitik, immediate interests and geopolitical concerns are weighted against human rights ideals.

What will be the consequences of military action in Syria? Have all other measures and means of pressure been exhausted? Will the envisioned bombing raids serve to protect civilians?

On September 11 the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies and the Human Rights Program will host a panel discussion in which Syrian community members, experts and scholars will discuss ways to take action without vast and devastating consequences.

Alejandro Baer

Special Program Announcement

Countering Mass Atrocities in Syria: Between Human Rights Ideals and Geo-Political Concerns



Panel Discussion

Wednesday, September 11

4:00 p.m.

New Room Announced: Now in Room 125 [Willey Hall](#)

As the situation in Syria grows evermore difficult, maintaining its position in center stage as the world watches mass atrocities unfold, tensions over what action to take (or not to take) continue to escalate. Russia stands firm in its decision to block a UN backed intervention, and the United States looks to take matters into its own hands with military action. In the anticipation of a potential confrontation, experts and scholars hope to find a way to take action without vast and devastating consequences.

Panelists:

Sarah Parkinson, Assistant Professor, Humphrey School of Public Affairs, Ragui Assaad, Professor, Planning and Public Affairs at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs, Ron Krebs, Associate Professor Department of Political Science, Dr. Wael Khouli and Mazen Halibi, members of the Syrian community.

Moderated by Barbara Frey, Director Human Rights Program and Alejandro Baer, Director Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies.

Sponsored by the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, the Human Rights Program and Institute for Global Studies.

For more information contact: 612-624-9007

CHGS Articles

Remembering the Holocaust in the High School Classroom - An Exercise in Divergent Thinking

By Dawson McCall



CHGS Summer Institute: Holocaust Memory

Memory is a tricky thing. Biased and imperfect, it can be willfully deceitful and innocently forgetful. Collective memory is no different, and is perhaps more problematic in that it is often formed and framed by people and institutions with ulterior motives. Even more importantly, collective memory defines our popular conceptions of history's meaning.

Popular histories are powerful forces in shaping identity and purpose for all societies. Yet, they rarely do justice to the delicate intricacies of the central questions that the pressing issues of human existence ask of us. Popular history marginalizes some of the most essential questions that we face, and yet, it is often the only history to which many young people are exposed.

With this in mind, the primary role of the high school history teacher must be to expose students to a study of history that allows for asking serious, difficult questions about serious difficult events. The nature of humankind, the justifiable use of military force, definitions of race, the roots and motivations of stereotypes - these have been with us for centuries, they are ambiguous and moral to their core, and absolutely necessary for human development and progress.

Like many history teachers, I begin my year by asking students to consider a series of questions about the nature of history. One of the questions that I always ask is very simple - Why do we study history? Invariably, the first answer from students is that we study history to learn from our mistakes. This answer, to be sure, is justifiable. Yet, students often come to the conclusion that the study of history has several valuable purposes that require deeper reflection and analysis - and they are right.

First, history is about learning from our successes - learning from the times when people have struggled to survive against all odds; when small groups of people have come together to define themselves in the face of adversity and ultimately been victorious. This memory was displayed to me on my second day of class this year when, after having mentioned Auschwitz-Birkenau in our first class, a young man approached me with a picture of a recent visit that he had made to Poland. The image was one of his brother carrying an Israeli flag through the gates of Auschwitz. He said that it served as a reminder that the Jewish people were ultimately victorious over, what he termed, "the worst atrocity in the history of modern man." He went on to

say that the picture reminded him of the commonality of humanity and the commonality of human struggle, since we are still struggling to make sense of this event and its meaning today. This young man had found a repository for his historical identity, taken from what is certainly the most heavily planned, systematic attempt at genocide in recorded history, and applied it to his world - the purpose for the study of history on display in my classroom. This victory, the victory of the Jewish people over absolute tyranny and destruction, is the ultimate testimony to those millions who did not survive - this is their legacy to my student and the millions in the world who draw meaning from the memory of the Holocaust. This, first and before anything else, is why we study the Holocaust.

The second conclusion that my students often come to is the importance of what educators will often refer to as divergent thinking, or the potential to consider ambiguous answers to seemingly simple questions. Answers to questions like the role of collective guilt for all Germans in the Holocaust cannot be answered, or even discussed, without recognizing that societies always have layers of participants who react to things differently. People rarely act collectively in one single way for anything. Recognizing the people, in Germany or Denmark or throughout occupied Europe and beyond, who risked their lives to save others from the horrors of the Nazis is one stark way of showing that human nature is ambiguous. On a larger level, the recognition that the Holocaust, no matter how unique, is only one of multiple genocides in our modern history, and that genocide is not relegated to one region or one ethnic, national, racial, or religious group, can help students come to terms with the realization that we all have the potential to take part in something as gruesome as genocide - this is a humbling realization and should help students consider their own potential, for good and bad, in the world.

The third conclusion that students come to is that history is defined by perspective. When I had the opportunity to attend the Holocaust in European and American Memory Summer Institute at the University of Minnesota in July of this year, one of the most striking discussions for me centered on the different ways in which male and female Holocaust survivors remembered similar experiences. The idea that people who had experienced the same treatment, for the same reason, by the same people could remember things in absolutely different terms was a great example of the necessity for understanding divergent thinking. The recognition that people have different memories and therefore different definitions of the world is a mark of emotional maturity and intellectual development, and is an enormous component in making historical study a creative process - one of purposeful self-exploration and questioning.

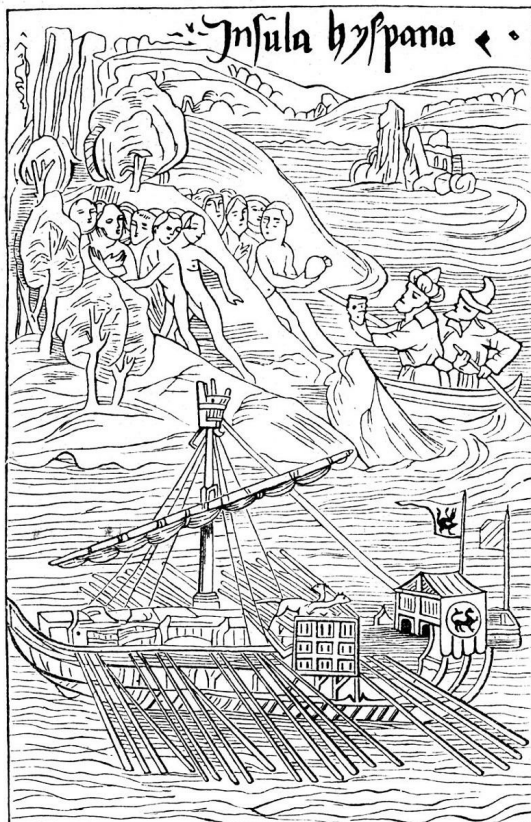
The study of the Holocaust is a vehicle to force students to recognize the importance of perspective and ambiguity in the world. It serves as a reminder that even the most heinous acts and tragic experiences have a meaning and a message. It provides a medium with which to illustrate to students that history can be a story about triumph and success. Most importantly, it is a vehicle to force students to grapple with moral abstractions in their own lives. Questions that revolve around collective guilt or the acceptance of harmful stereotypes are things that high school students deal with on a daily basis - they often times know what is right in abstraction, but have trouble projecting these values in the real world. Understanding and

discussing these same problems through the historical context of an event like the Holocaust forces students to recognize that these issues are transcendent, that they have been around for a long time, and that they apply to our real world, right now.

Dawson McCall is a Social Studies teacher in Louisiana, who attended the CHGS Summer Institute: Memory of the Holocaust in Europe and America held at the University of Minnesota July 8-11, 2013. A follow up to the institute is scheduled for Saturday, November 9 on the 75th anniversary of Kristallnacht on Commemoration and Memory. Information on the workshop will be posted on the CHGS homepage soon.

Events

The Discovery of the "New World" and Traditions of Othering



A lecture by Pedro Martínez García
Friday, September 20, 2013
Room 1210 [Heller Hall](#)
12:15 p.m.

The arrival of the Castilian caravels in 1492 on the coast and islands which at first sight were identified as the Orient and the resulting encounters with the first natives oddly coincides with the end of the so called "coexistence of the three cultures" in the kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula. Contemporary Christian Castilians set aside their Jewish and their Morisco others to engage with "new others" in uncharted territories, where concepts like conversion, conquista, and cohabitation evolved and were adapted to new contexts. This moment is often considered a symbolic turning point between the Middle Ages and Modernity.

In his talk, Dr. Martinez will focus on the traditions of othering in the early modern Iberian Atlantic World, paying special attention

In This Issue

[Syria: If not now when?](#)

[Countering Mass Violence in Syria](#)

[Remembering the Holocaust](#)

[Discovery of the New World](#)

[Transmission of Trauma](#)

[Graduate Workshop](#)

[Book of the Month](#)

Syria

[The Responsibility to Protect](#)

[World Report: Syria](#)

Upcoming Events

[O'hannessian Chair Lecture](#)

[Erasures: Gender, Violence and Human Rights](#)

Campus Events

[IAS Speaker Series: \[Unspoken\]\(#\)](#)

Community Events

[Sky Tinged Red](#)

Support CHGS

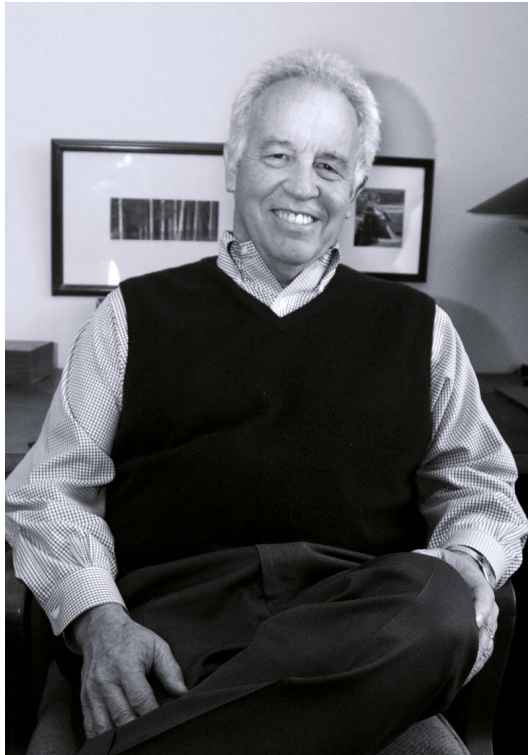
CHGS is an academic research

to the European perceptions of the natives of the "New World" through chronicles and travel narratives.

Pedro Martínez García is a lecturer in the Chair of Early Modern History, University of Bayreuth, Germany. Since 2008, he has been writing his dissertation entitled "Face to Face with the Other: Travel Narratives and Alterity from the Late Middle Ages to the Early Modern Period" at the University of Valladolid (Spain) and the University of Bayreuth (Germany).

Sponsored by: Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, Center for Early Modern History, Department of Spanish and Portuguese.

The Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma: Recovering Humanity, Repairing Generations



A lecture by Jeffrey Prager
Saturday, October 5
20 [Mondale Hall](#)
9:00 a.m.

In this presentation, UCLA Sociology Professor Jeffrey Prager explores the difficulties in overcoming a traumatic past: how psychic trauma restricts individuals from fully engaging their post-traumatic world and how, unless treated, the trauma gets passed on to the next generation, emotionally and often unconsciously.

Transmission of trauma is possible over many generations and interferes with a healthy engagement in the present-day world.

Prager considers specifically the South African case,

institution dedicated to educating all sectors of society about the Holocaust and other genocides. CHGS relies on your [generous support](#) to help us maintain and create our internationally recognized resources and programs.

Follow Us!



especially their establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission at the end of apartheid, to describe the necessity of the public world recognizing the sufferer and collectively acknowledging various forms of private pain and suffering. [Jeffrey Prager](#) is Professor of Sociology at UCLA and a practicing psychoanalyst. He is a former Co-Dean of the New Center for Psychoanalysis in Los Angeles, where he serves as a member of the Senior Faculty. He has published widely at the intersection of sociology and psychoanalysis, especially in the areas of trauma, recovered memory, racial conflict, intergenerational transmission of trauma, forgiveness and reconciliation.

Sponsored by the Department of English, University of Minnesota, and the Minnesota Psychoanalytic Society and Institute, and co-sponsored by AAPCSW, Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, Center for Victims of Torture, Human Rights Center, and Institute for Advanced Studies (IAS).

The event has been organized by Elise Sanders, Hal Steiger, and Regents Professor Madelon Sprengnether. For more information please visit the Department of English website.

Announcements

2013-2014 Holocaust Genocide & Mass Violence Studies Workshops Announced



The Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, the Human Rights Program and the Department of Sociology have just released the fall semester schedule for the Holocaust, Genocide and Mass Violence Workshops for graduate students and faculty.

The first meeting will take place on Thursday, September 19, in Room 710 Social Sciences. Upcoming meetings include; [Courtney Gildersleeve](#), graduate student, Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature, "Poetry, Damaged Life, and One Poem by Agha Shahid Ali" on October 3 at 3:00 p.m. and [Prof. Mark Goodale](#) from the School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University will do a special presentation on Thursday, October 17 at 3:00 p.m.

The workshop was founded in 2012 to foster interdisciplinary

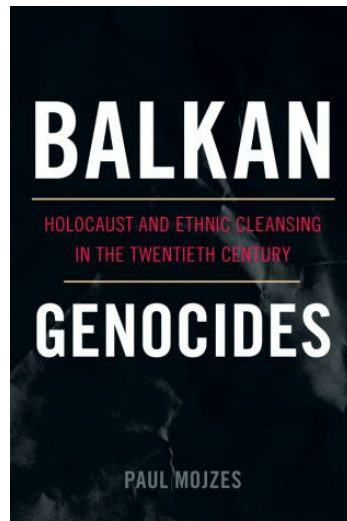
conversations on the subject areas of Holocaust Studies, genocide and memory, peace and conflict studies, human rights, nationalism and ethnic violence, representations of violence and trauma, conflict resolution, transitional justice, historical consciousness and collective memory. Twelve students, visiting professors and faculty members gave papers throughout the 2012-2013 academic school year. A complete list of presenters and topics is available by clicking the following [link](#).

For more information about participation in the workshop please email Wahutau Siguru at siguru@umn.edu.

Book of the Month

[Balkan Genocides: Holocaust and Ethnic Cleansing in the Twentieth Century](#)

By Paul Mojzes



During the 20th century, the Balkan Peninsula was affected by three major waves of genocides and ethnic cleansings, some of which are still being denied today. In *Balkan Genocides* Paul Mojzes provides a balanced and detailed account of these events, placing them in their proper historical context and debunking the common misrepresentations and misunderstandings of the genocides themselves.

A native of Yugoslavia, Mojzes offers new insights into the Balkan genocides, including a look at the unique role of ethno-religiosity in these horrific events and a characterization of the first and second Balkan wars as mutual genocides. Mojzes also looks to the region's future, discussing the ongoing trials at the International Criminal Tribunal in Yugoslavia and the prospects for dealing with the lingering issues between Balkan nations and different religions. *Balkan Genocides* attempts to end the vicious cycle of revenge which has fueled such horrors in the past century by analyzing the terrible events and how they came to pass.

For more information please click [here](#).

WWW.CHGS.UMN.EDU

