

Cohen Center for Holocaust Studies

Annual Report, 2008-2009

Henry F. Knight, Director

A Rich Programmatic Year

Beginning with the Summer Institute in mid-July, the Center's 2008-09 programmatic year has been rich and full. It was complicated by the loss of the Center's administrative assistant, Theresa Masiello, at the end of May, so in addition to a full plate of activities and planning, the summer also involved an extensive search for a new staff person who was hired at the end of the summer in time to begin the new semester and a new job on the same day!

The Summer Institute (July 13-19, 2008) provided an intensive encounter with the Holocaust and its implications for living responsibly in a still genocidal world. Twenty-nine educators from five states and two overseas countries participated in a week-long, intensive study of the Holocaust and contemporary lessons. With guest presenters like Sarah Sibylle Niemoeller von Sell, Ernie Michel, Martin Rumscheidt, René Jacques, Robert Sternberg and nine faculty members from the KSC program in Holocaust Studies, the institute provided a rich environment for institute participants to wrestle with the lessons and legacies of the Holocaust and how they might incorporate what they learned in their settings at home.

Fall programs highlighted the 25th anniversary year for the Center. Major programs included the Annual Holocaust Memorial Lecture in September with noted historian Christopher Browning; the Genocide Awareness Lecture in October with historian Donald Bloxham; the community-wide Kristallnacht Remembrance Event at the Colonial Theatre with Pierre Sauvage; and a symposium on the work of artist Samuel Bak with Gary Phillips, Danna Nolan Fewell, and Bak as a special guest. These major public events were coordinated with other college programming related to the Center. The Thorne-Sagendorph Art Gallery hosted a month-long exhibition of prints, photos, and the paintings of Samuel Bak. A major production, *Inspired by Kaddish*, was produced by the departments of Music, Theatre, and Dance. In addition, the Center hosted two workshops for area educators, one on the reading and teaching of Elie Wiesel's *Night* (*Why do I cry when I pray? Reading and Teaching Elie Wiesel's Night* led by Alan Rosen and Henry Knight) and another led by Pierre Sauvage (*The Challenge of Le Chambon*) following his presentation at the Kristallnacht commemoration.

The programmatic fever of the fall lessened a bit during the winter months but peaked again in April with the annual student trip to the USHMM in Washington, DC and the Hildebrandt Awards Ceremony a few days later. Since the Hildebrandt Award Ceremony occurred during the week of the National Days of Remembrance, the event was a combination recognition opportunity for students and community participants as well as an occasion to commemorate the Holocaust in appropriate ritual fashion. Former faculty member Susan Herman was the guest speaker, although she was only able to be present electronically. Extenuating circumstances had led to her being invited to speak on leadership in the light of lessons learned from the Holocaust in facing contemporary forms of prejudice and hatred. In addition, a new award was established in her honor: the Susan J. Herman Leadership Award in Holocaust and Genocide Awareness. With the establishment of this award, the Center hopes to recognize student and public leaders who demonstrate significant contributions in cultivating a sense of responsibility in this regard.

A workshop for teachers was held in February with Dottie Stone representing the Jewish Federation for the Righteous. The focus was on Resistance and Rescue during the Holocaust and unexpectedly doubled as an opportunity to engage with Stone as a candidate for the visiting position in Holocaust and Genocide

Studies in the division of Arts and Humanities. In this regard, Professor Paul Vincent and I co-chaired a search to hire a full-time visiting professor in Holocaust and Genocide Studies for the academic year (2009-10). This position is the first step in securing the college's first endowed chair on our faculty, The Cohen Chair in Holocaust and Genocide Studies. A major search will be conducted in the coming academic year. Prof. Stephanie Wolfe, who is completing her Ph.D. in International Relations at the University of Kent (Brussels), was selected to fill the visiting position and will join the College in August.

The Cohen Center's programmatic presence on campus and beyond has grown considerably over the last 25 years. A small resource center run part-time by a single, dedicated professor has become a catalytic community presence housing over 5000 volumes of educational materials, sponsoring numerous public programs, and now supporting an academic degree program in Holocaust and Genocide Studies. Its programmatic identity and reach is coordinated through an active advisory council made up of approximately 25 individuals from the college and the community. During the last year we have revised this group's organizing principles and are preparing for the cultivation of the growing influence and connectedness of the Center and its influence in the region and beyond. Through its newsletter, the Center enhances its presence with its growing circle of friends. Published once in the fall and once again in the spring, the newsletter is available in print and electronic formats and now produced in-house by the Cohen Center staff in order to provide more timely news.

Facilities

The addition of a new faculty member in Holocaust and Genocide Studies requires a reconfiguration of offices of faculty and staff related to the Cohen Center. Our physical home, the Mason Library, has graciously made two offices available to us in this regard and participated in a larger plan for space reconfiguration for the Center and our operating needs. As a result, we will be playing musical offices this summer in anticipation of new hires at the same time we re-work our collections and storage facilities. Given all the ramifications, this activity has required open staff communication and attention to teamwork concerns within our own network of relationships.

Staffing

The work of the Cohen Center is coordinated by a staff of three. During the year we have undertaken an ambitious set of programs detailed above and in our newsletters. We have maintained an active role in the development of the new academic major at the college, conducted two major searches, and participated in the administrative life of the liberal arts division of the college as it plans for accreditation review and assessment in the next two years. I am pleased to report that the Cohen Center and its staff are involved at the heart of Keene State College, its mission and purpose. Our administrative activities, however, have once again been complicated by the recent resignation of Margaret Barney, our Senior Program Support Assistant, due to changes in her family circumstances. Margaret has distinguished herself in only one year of service to the Center and her absence will be felt in significant ways. A search for her replacement will begin immediately.

Educational Outreach

Tom White, the Coordinator of Educational Outreach, was extensively engaged in the leadership of the Summer Institute and the development of the three workshops hosted by the Cohen Center during the year. He made 53 individual visits to schools or community organizations making presentations to over 2900 people. In addition, Tom encouraged outreach efforts of our 85 Cohen fellows. They have been active teaching in their home institutions, sponsoring community programs of their own and in the case of one fellow (Marjorie Margolis), organizing a campaign to interrupt current harassment of Jewish partisans during WWII by the Lithuanian government. Those activities are detailed in Tom's appended report.

The Collection

From its inception, the Cohen Center has been distinguished by its collection of print and other media resources. The collection has grown to a total of 5,653 book and serial volumes, an audio-visual collection (DVDs, Videos, & Audio) of 472 and 168 periodical titles. This year's acquisitions include 28 volumes donated by Richard L. Rubenstein, all of which originated from his private library, as well as 27 books and 3 DVDs purchases funded by a donation from Bruce Levine Mellion. More donations are expected from the Rubenstein library. Faculty in the academic program regularly utilize materials in the collection for classroom presentations, assignments, and resources for student research. We are pleased that area teachers also utilize the collection in support of their work while the general public has more limited access through the library's partnership with the Keene Public Library.

Finances

During FY2009 the College provided the Cohen Center with a budget of \$237,368, of which \$224,719 was earmarked for salaries, wages, and benefits. The remaining \$12,649 was used to support book purchases, travel and conferences, supplies, and the activities of the educational outreach coordinator, as well as to cover some of the Center's overhead costs (e.g., telephone and internet costs). As of June 14, 2009 the Center received donations in the amount of \$1,326,326 in FY2009. Of this amount, \$37,087 was designated for general operations, and \$1,250,000 was designated for the Endowed Chair in Holocaust & Genocide Studies. The remainder went to support the Hildebrandt Awards, the Holocaust Memorial Lecture, the Kristallnacht fund, and the newly established Susan J. Herman Award.

Director's Outreach & Professional Involvement

In addition to administering the programs of the Cohen Center, I have been actively engaged in the classroom and with my own scholarly and professional interests. During the fall semester I joined with Prof. Paul Vincent in leading an upper level seminar, *Re-thinking the Holocaust*. Meeting each Wednesday night with twelve students, we were all given the opportunity to sharpen our understandings of what happened during this pivotal time and to re-engage the significance of those times for now and for the character of civilized life more generally. In the spring I offered a seminar entitled *The Holocaust and the Christian World*. Though the class was small (seven students), the interaction was intense and significant with students feeling very strongly that this course should continue to be offered.

Beginning last August, I joined my colleagues on the Council for Holocaust Studies in crafting a successful proposal for instituting a new undergraduate major in Holocaust and Genocide Studies. Under the leadership of Paul Vincent, the director of the academic program in Holocaust Studies, the Council put together the rationale, curriculum, and necessary structure for providing an interdisciplinary major and re-configured minor in Holocaust and Genocide Studies. After an intensive six-month process, the proposal was adopted by our Board of Trustees in February. Needless to say, we are proud to claim that Keene State College will be the first undergraduate institution in the nation with a major in Holocaust and Genocide Studies.

One of my scholarly and professional commitments involves midrashic work with biblical texts in an intentionally interfaith setting. Consequently, I have developed a group of Keene State faculty and local professionals who have agreed to share such an enterprise with each other. I am pleased to report that we have met on a number of occasions during the year grappling with biblical texts utilizing a self-consciously post-Holocaust perspective. Meeting at the Cohen Center approximately every six weeks, the group works for two hours on a designated text exploring what it means for critically informed, people of faith to relate to each other and the text as active representatives of their faith traditions while holding their conversation accountable to unsettling questions posed by the Shoah. Our conversations have been rich and the nurture of mutual respect that has had significant impact beyond our specific group. In this regard, the Cohen Center's Advisory Council has recommended that I host a public version of our

midrashic dialogue to introduce others in our community to the possibilities of this type of respectful, interfaith encounter.

I continue to be engaged in professional responsibilities beyond those of the Cohen Center. They include serving on the Reader's Committee for the Elie Wiesel Prize in Ethics Contest for the Elie Wiesel Foundation for Humanity and on the Church Relations Committee for the USHMM in Washington. This year I was a featured speaker at the Association for Holocaust Organizations Annual Meeting in Portland, ME ("One Knight at a Roundtable: Jewish-Christian Relations After the Shoah – Thoughts for a Conversation"), Elms College's 70th Anniversary Interfaith Kristallnacht Remembrance, a recent symposium at Case Western Reserve as well as speaking in several events in Keene area settings.

In late October, 2009 I was invited to participate in the 80th birthday celebration for Elie Wiesel hosted by Boston University. The event led me to engage in an ongoing writing project under the rubric "Before Whom We Stand." Several variations of the document have emerged, each written in distinctive voices for different occasions. Drawing on an initial lecture I gave at Elms College, I expanded those remarks into a formal essay presented to Wiesel later in the fall as one of several such presentations made in his honor. That essay was then shortened and reconfigured as a chapter in a book of letters and essays for Pope Benedict XVI called *No Going Back: Letters to Pope Benedict XVI on the Holocaust, Jewish-Christian Relations & Israel* edited by Carol Rittner and Stephen D. Smith (Quill, 2009). This collection was prepared and published to coincide with the Pope's visit to Israel in May of this year. A final and expanded rendering of the project was presented in late May as a lecture at *Jesus in the Context of Judaism and the Challenge to the Church*, a symposium sponsored by the Rosenthal Center for Jewish Studies at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. Other writing projects included three entries on Psalms 71, 81, 139 for *Feasting on the Word*, a Commentary produced by Westminster John Knox and edited by David Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, which were put to rest this past summer. Two occasional pieces were written and published this fall:

Blessed Be the Ties That Bind, written for the on-line newsletter *Teaching Diversity* # 5, Fall 2008.

Fire in the Public Square, an op ed. piece written to respond to the rhetoric of the US Presidential campaign. It was published by *The Keene Sentinel* on Nov. 1, 2008.

In addition, two book reviews were prepared, one on *Covenantal Conversations: Christians in Dialogue with Jews & Judaism* edited by Darrell Jodock (Fortress Press) for *Shofar* and one on *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* by Susannah Heschel (Princeton University Press) for *The Christian Century*. Another review on *The Holocaust and the Churches* by Mordecai Paldiel remains pending with the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*.

I am pleased that I have been able to remain active with my teaching and writing while guiding the work of Center. I am looking forward to the first year with our new major at the College, teaching two courses: *The Traditions of Abraham* (Fall 2009) and *Religion and Violence* (Spring 2010). In addition, I anticipate a rich programmatic year for the Center with two major events planned for each semester, the initiation of home dialogue groups (a new feature), the continuation of the interfaith midrash group, and in cooperation with clergy colleagues in Keene, organizing an interfaith clergy dialogue group for southwestern New Hampshire and southeastern Vermont.

Coming Attractions

- A Summer gathering to cultivate friendship circles of dialogue and inquiry, July 23, 2009
- A late summer midrash-in-the-round, August 12, 2009

- Sept. 21, 2009 – 12th Annual Holocaust Memorial Lecture with Gerda Weissmann Klein and announcement of CCHS name change to Cohen Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies
- Oct. 9, 2009 – Workshop on “Facing a Difficult History” with guests Ernie Michel, Martin Rumscheidt, Abraham Peck, Rene Jacques, Stephen Lewy, and Ursula Mahlendorf (Germans with contrasting legacies linking them to Nazi Germany and the Shoah).
- Nov. 9, 2009 – Kristallnacht Remembrance with Rabbi Leo Trepp (only surviving rabbi who witnessed the events of November 9/10, 1938)
- Mar. 23/25, 2010 – Genocide Awareness Lecture – invitation extended to Jerry Fowler, for Director, the Committee on Conscience (USHMM) and Director of Save Darfur
- Apr. 14, 2010 – Cohen Center Recognition Dinner and Hildebrandt Awards Ceremony with Michael Berenbaum as guest speaker
- April 23-25, 2010 – Student Trip to USHMM, Washington, DC
- June 2010 – European Study Mission

Development Plan – 2009-2010

In cooperation with the Development Office and others on the College Advancement team, the Center will seek to increase its annual gift support to the General Fund from ~ \$35,000 to \$50,000. To accomplish this, the Center will host a summer gathering of friends of the Cohen Center, an early fall reception for friends and Cohen Center Fellows prior to the 12th Annual Holocaust Memorial Lecture, an *After Event Reception* following the community-wide commemoration of Kristallnacht on Nov. 9, 2009, a recognition dinner for Cohen Center honorees in mid-April to enrich the Hildebrandt Awards Ceremony, and an educational mission to central Europe anchored by members of the Cohen Center Advisory Council, the College’s Council on Holocaust and Genocide Studies as well as other friends of the Center and the College’s academic program in HGS. Gift solicitation strategies include a fall semester appeals letter (from HFK) to be mailed in mid-August and a spring semester appeals letter (from a student beneficiary of the program) to be mailed in January, 2010. Student follow-up calls will be made in February as a component of other student calls coordinated by the Development Office. In addition, I will be undertaking personal visits with interested individuals and selected groups throughout the year to cultivate relationships with the Cohen Center and its various and related programs.

COHEN CENTER FOR HOLOCAUST STUDIES
Educational Outreach

Cohen Center Coordinator of Educational Outreach, Tom White was active in numerous ways representing the Cohen Center and guiding its educational outreach to the local, regional community and beyond. Tom made 53 visits to area schools or community organizations making presentations to over 2900 people during the year. He coordinated three professional and personal development workshops focused on the theme, *Interrupting Prejudice: Disrupting Hatred*. Among the guest presenters were scholars Alan Rosen (Bar Ilan University and Yad Vashem) and Pierre Sauvage (Chambon Foundation), as well as Dottie Stone. Some 84 people attended the workshops held in Keene. In addition, the Cohen Center Web Site, which Tom White maintains, continues to receive steady use and improvement.

Other significant forms of outreach in the community included continuing our local partnership with Cheshire TV (e.g., broadcasting Pierre Sauvage's *Weapons of the Spirit* in conjunction with our Kristallnacht Remembrance) and developing a local partnership with the Colonial Theatre in Keene as the new venue for our community's annual commemoration of *Kristallnacht*. This year's Remembrance utilized the talents of Theater staff, and cooperation of numerous community volunteers, civic officials, and downtown merchants. This year's keynote speaker Pierre Sauvage focused on the rescue work of Le Chambon sur Lignon as a way of continually reminding our community not to be apathetic or indifferent in the face of suffering. The Keene Sentinel's Steven Hooper made a short film of the event that is currently available on our website.

This year marked a subtle, but significant shift in the Outreach. Following up on the new requirements for Fellows (graduates of the Summer Institute) we were able to foster more decentralized educational opportunities and support initiatives of our educators. Deb Barry (2008 Fellow) partnered with Portsmouth Community Radio to develop a seacoast film festival ("Hope and Remembering: Honoring and Healing") that incorporated films with post film discussion with an impressive group of presenters. The festival was so successful that it "spun off" into another series in Hanover, NH in conjunction with Dartmouth Hillel. Livia Gardianova (2008 Fellow from Slovakia) developed a series of responses from her students' trip to Auschwitz, titled, "Impressions of Auschwitz" that can be found on the Center's web site. Both of the 2008 Slovakian Fellows have been active and have already begun discussions with Marjorie Margolis to develop a student to student discussion in the fall. Important progress was also made with Holocaust education at the middle school level – especially in Manchester, NH. The Outreach also continued its relationship with Osher Life Long Learning Institute and developed a new Outreach to Vermont educators by working with the Vermont Association of Social Studies teachers. Fellows were also able to utilize speakers associated with the Center including: survivors Stephan Lewy and Tom Weisshaus, Dr. Martin Rumscheidt (son of perpetrators), Rena Jacques (German witness), and Gretchen Steidle (Global Grassroots).

Perhaps one of the most significant event of the year was the April 16, 2009 program, “Resistance Continued: Courage in the Face of Adversity” an event to honor Dr. Rachel Margolis. Dr. Margolis is a Holocaust scholar and survivor who fought with the Vilna Ghetto partisans. In an ugly manifestation of antisemitism, she along with former Jewish partisan colleagues, are currently being harassed in Lithuania as “war criminals.” This event, in conjunction with the showing of the film, *Defiance* was designed to demonstrate the respect and debt the world owes people like Dr. Margolis and to reaffirm her life. Marjorie Margolis, a Cohen Center teacher, is the cousin of Dr. Margolis and helped to publish Rachel’s memoir of her war experiences. Marjorie and Tom White were able to garner international support for the program. U.S. Congressman Paul Hodes (D-NH) spoke and Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) sent a representative to speak on her behalf. In addition, letters and certificates honoring Dr. Margolis were received from: The US Ambassador in Lithuania; The Irish Ambassador to Lithuania; The American Jewish Committee; ADL; House of Lords, UK; NCSJ; Holocaust Council of MetroWest; and Embassies/diplomats to Lithuania: Czech Republic; Finland; Sweden; UK; Canada; Austria; France. All of these documents were sent to Dr. Margolis in Israel.

Tom White, Coordinator of Educational Outreach

COHEN CENTER FOR HOLOCAUST STUDIES

Development Plan – 2009-2010

Financial Goal: To increase annual gift support to General Fund from ~ \$35,000 to \$50,000.

Key events:

Summer *Gathering of Friends* at KSC Camp to various circles of CC friends to an evening of dinner and conversation about ways the Cohen Center can enrich the difference our friends make in the various communities they represent.

September 21 Pre-Lecture Reception for Cohen Center Fellows, Friends of the Cohen Center to announce the change of the Center's name to the Cohen Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies.

November 9 *After* Event to acknowledge the work of those who tend our shared responsibilities for one another in the Keene community and surrounding region.

March *date* – Pre-Lecture event goal to be determined

April 14 Cohen Center Recognition Dinner and Hildebrandt Awards Ceremony to honor key persons in our community who contribute to the work of the Center and provide leadership in Holocaust and genocide awareness. Hildebrandt Awards and Susan Herman Leadership Award in Holocaust and Genocide Awareness will be given at the dinner before adjourning to Yom HaShoah Commemoration event that will follow.

Central European Summer Educational Mission for CC Advisory Council, KSC HGS faculty and interested friends of the Cohen Center.

Communication strategies:

Appeal Letter to Cohen Center Friends database in mid-August, 2009 (from H. Knight)

Appeal Letter to Cohen Center Friends database in January, 2010 (from student)

Phone calls from students to persons who have not responded to either letters in February, 2010

Individual cultivations of Friends of the Center

Visits with top tier of donors

Visits to potential "friends of the Center"

Identification of foundations and other supporting organizations