

LEGACY



BIRMINGHAM
HOLOCAUST
EDUCATION
CENTER

Keeping the History and Lessons of the Holocaust Alive

Fall 2017

Where Do We Go From Charlottesville?

Charlottesville – until August, most people associated this small town with university life and the architecture of Thomas Jefferson. Now, Charlottesville has become a wake up call. The events from that weekend in August have caused many Americans to start asking questions. One of the most common questions is simple: Why?

Seeds for the BHEC's new **Community Education Series** were planted months ago, with the publication of Peter Hayes's book, *Why?* The BHEC developed this program in response to many requests for an adult-focused, in-depth study of the Holocaust.

In the wake of Charlottesville and the glaring spotlight placed on the hatred, racism, and antisemitism festering in our nation, this new education initiative takes on an increased urgency. The history and lessons of the Holocaust - which teach the consequences of unbridled hate - are more disturbingly relevant than ever.

Our **Community Education Series** launches this Fall. Beginning Tuesday, October 3, and meeting monthly for eight sessions, participants will study the book *Why? Explaining the Holocaust* by Peter Hayes, Professor of Holocaust Studies Emeritus at Northwestern University and current chair of the Academic Committee of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Based on the very questions Dr. Hayes has been most frequently asked by students, each of the eight chapters addresses a different question about the Holocaust. Each session will be facilitated by a different local Holocaust scholar.

The BHEC's teacher training programs, speaking engagements, and community outreach events are making a significant impact by raising awareness, personalizing the issues, and encouraging a new mindset in response to prejudice and discrimination.

TO REGISTER: Call the BHEC office: (205) 795-4176, or email: info@bhecinfo.org

DETAILS

Time:

6:30-8:30 pm

Location:

BHEC Office
2222 Arlington Avenue
(Ground floor - Bayer Properties Bldg.)

Cost:

\$100 for entire series (includes hardcover copy of *Why? Explaining the Holocaust*)

\$20 for one-time drop-in (subject to availability)

Light refreshments will be served.

SESSIONS & FACILITATORS

Tuesday, October 3 | "Targets: Why the Jews?"

Facilitator: Rabbi Douglas Kohn, Temple Emanu-El

Thursday, November 2 | "Attackers: Why the Germans?"

Facilitator: Dr. Andy Millard, UAB

Thursday, December 7 | "Escalation: Why Murder?"

Facilitator: Ann Mollengarden, Birmingham Holocaust Education Center

Thursday, January 11 | "Annihilation: Why This Swift and Sweeping?"

Facilitator: Mike Gadihe, John Carroll Catholic High School

Tuesday, February 13 | "Victims: Why Didn't More Jews Fight Back More Often?"

Facilitator: Dr. Clark Hultquist, University of Montevallo

Tuesday, March 13 | "Homelands: Why Did Survivor Rates Diverge?"

Facilitator: Amy McDonald, Shades Valley High School

Tuesday, April 3 | "Onlookers: Why Such Limited Help from the Outside?"

Facilitator: Dr. Janek Wasserman, University of Alabama

Tuesday, May 8 | "Aftermath: What Legacies, What Lessons?"

Facilitator: Dr. Dominique Linchet, formerly with Alabama School of Fine Arts

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



All of Birmingham is buzzing about our recent *L'Chaim* event, and the phenomenal “unlike any other” program we’ve had in our Magic City. On behalf of the BHEC, I thank everyone involved with making *L'Chaim* such a huge success. Because of your overwhelming support, and lots of huge volunteer hours, we were able to exceed our expectations! We could not have done that without our generous donors, dedicated volunteers, over the top entertainment, and you!

There has never been a more crucial time to continue to spread the mission of the BHEC. It’s hard to believe that it’s been almost four weeks since the events in a small Virginia town changed us all. It was like a scene from a movie. But they weren’t actors. They weren’t cloaked in disguises. They spewed vitriolic rage while carrying torches in polos and khakis.

The mission of the BHEC is to share the stories, commemorate the events, and promote a moral and ethical response to prejudice, hatred, and indifference. Charlottesville did for the BHEC what it did for many people – reinforced the importance of education.

So where do we go from here? Education. Janusz Korczak, director of the Warsaw Ghetto orphanage, once said, “One who worries about the coming days plants wheat. One who worries about the coming years plants trees. One who worries about the coming generations educates people.” We will continue teaching the history and the lessons of the Holocaust in hopes of benefitting future generations of Alabamians and, as such, citizens of the world.

Starting in October, we will be offering a new community education program entitled, *Why?* based on the book by Peter Hayes. The book explores eight of the most common questions posed about the Holocaust. You can join us for the whole series, for one session, or drop in and out as you like. If you are interested in *Why?*, please contact the office to register as space is limited.

Your support enables us to carry out our mission to educate Alabamians – and we do this together.

Karen Allen



The BHEC film series, “The Holocaust in Film,” will return to Mountain Brook’s Emmet O’Neal Library in January 2018. Dr. Andre Millard from UAB will once again provide stimulating commentary on this year’s selections.

Save the Dates

Thursday, January 18, 6:30 pm

Monday, January 22, 6:30 pm

Thursday, January 25, 6:30 pm

Thursday, February 1, 6:30 pm

Genocide in Lithuania

by Ann Mollengarden, Education Coordinator

My first trip to Lithuania in July gave me the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the Holocaust in this country, where Soviet rule both before and after the war added additional layers of complexity to the history. Along with Amy McDonald of Shades Valley High School, I took part in a 10-day European study program to Lithuania and Poland with the Jewish Foundation for the Righteous.

Having traveled to Poland before, I was anxious to learn more about the events in Lithuania. Here, neighbor turned on neighbor for personal gain and/or ascendancy, killings were carried out by beatings or shootings, and victims were buried in mass graves. It was here that the mass killing of the Holocaust began.

Memorialization in this area is nascent at best. The Soviet post-war verbiage spoke mostly of the fascist occupation, and with Lithuanian independence, there was little interest in taking ownership of the events of the past.

One of the earliest and bloodiest massacres of the Jews of Kovno (Kaunas) took place in June 1941 at the Lietukis Garage during the first days of the Nazi occupation. Several dozen Jewish men were publicly tortured and murdered. A memorial sits in the very center of the city, hidden in a courtyard on a small “green” area shrouded by bushy pine trees. The memorial speaks in the passive voice, with no responsibility, of “those murdered here.”

After June 1941, systematic executions began at the various forts outside of Kovno, especially the Ninth Fort. Here, Einsatzgruppen detachments and Lithuanian auxiliaries shot thousands of Jewish men, women, and children, burning their bodies to destroy the evidence.

With mass killings came the need for mass burials. The killing pits of Ponary outside of Vilna (Vilnius) remain a powerful reminder of the scale of the genocide in Lithuania. After the war, the Jews of Vilnius tried to build a memorial, but Soviet policy would not allow it. In 1991, a memorial was finally completed, recognizing Jewish victims for the first time.

The intolerance and hatred that led to these atrocities is still alive today, in Lithuania and here at home. We must take a stand. Silence is not an option, for NOT taking a stand IS taking a stand.

Education is the key if the imperative of “Never Again” is to become a reality.



Crowd views aftermath of massacre at Lietukis Garage on June 27, 1941.



Site of the Lietukis Garage Massacre, Kaunas.



Drawing by Anatoli Garnik-Gran (Rogovec) of the massacre at the Ninth Fort, 1943.



Memorial at the Ninth Fort.



Murders at Ponary (Yad Vashem).



Ponary pit today.

Learning a Lesson from Germany's Holocaust Education

by Robby Ballard, The Altamont School

This past January, I was fortunate enough to receive the Georgeann Zohar Teacher Research Grant through The Altamont School. The grant allowed me to visit Munich in June of this year to research how the Holocaust and German war atrocities are taught to German students. My goal is to take the generally well-respected and effective mechanisms of Holocaust education in Germany and apply those towards developing a curriculum for educating students in Birmingham about our city's segregationist past. Although the American Civil Rights Movement and the Holocaust are both human rights struggles, their similarity ends there. It is impossible to successfully compare the two. What is possible, however, is applying successful methods for dealing with the darkness of one's own cultural past.

What German schools are most known for in the area of Holocaust education is the mandate that all students must tour a concentration camp in order to graduate from high school. That is only the tip of the iceberg. German schools focus their Holocaust studies not on the atrocities that took place, but on how the vast majority of German society came to accept, indeed appreciate, those atrocities as part of their day-to-day life. To be clear, German students are in no way sheltered from the horrors of the Holocaust. They are all too well acquainted with the ungodly images of industrialized genocide. The focus is simply placed on prevention, rather than shock. German students are taught to understand how breakdowns in society led to an acceptance of Adolf Hitler's psychopathy. As such, they are better able to understand what they must do to prevent such madness from ever reoccurring. They understand, as local Holocaust survivor Max Steinmetz said at his recent appearance at the Homewood Library, "If it happened once, it can happen again." German students are taught to understand that they are not immune from the past and that they must not only learn its lessons, but also use them to forestall future collapses of basic decency. To that end, in a myriad of ways far too numerous to list here, German society is built on personal responsibility, compassion, empathy, and acknowledgment of a historical debt.

At the commemoration of the 40th anniversary of Germany's surrender to Allied forces, while the rest of the world celebrated, German President Richard von Weizsäcker took the occasion to remind his countrymen of their duty. He spoke presciently, imploring all Germans to remember that "Our young people are not responsible for what happened over forty years ago. But they are responsible for the historical consequences." This is the key element missing from Birmingham's Civil Rights education. We are taught to remember, remember, remember. But we are never taught what to do, and how to prevent. We are taught that segregation is evil and that racism is abhorrent, but we are never taught the warning signs of a society falling towards (or still experiencing) such perils. We are taught that segregation is "not our fault." While this is true, it does not absolve us of our debt. As Germany has shown, a debt does not have to be a burden. We can, indeed we must, repay our debt. We can better our society in the process, too. As with any good research trip, I left Germany with more questions than when I arrived. Answering the question of how we apply Germany's lessons here in Birmingham is still a work in progress. The differences in our societies and our pasts are stark, but we are all humans. As such, we are all capable of compassion, empathy, respect, and repaying our debt with honor.

Robby Ballard teaches history at The Altamont School and is a member of the BHEC Teacher Cadre.



Violins of Hope Coming to Birmingham



The violin has played an important part in Jewish culture for centuries. The sound of the violin – both mournful and celebratory – speaks to the Jewish heart. Many of the world’s greatest violinists have been Jewish. During the Holocaust, the violin assumed new roles for the struggling and besieged Jews: comforter, liberator, savior, and even avenger. Wherever there were violins, there was hope.

For the past two decades, Amnon Weinstein has been locating and restoring violins played by Jewish musicians who perished during the Holocaust. Although silenced by the Holocaust, their voices and spirits live on through the violins that Amnon and his son have lovingly restored. He calls these instruments the Violins of Hope. Born and raised in Palestine, Amnon has dedicated his work to his 400 family members who were lost in the Holocaust.

Violins of Hope-Birmingham is a collaborative effort of several Birmingham institutions, including the BHEC, UAB Institute for Human Rights, St. Luke’s Episcopal Church, Red Mountain Theatre Company, and the Alabama Symphony Orchestra. These partners were brought together by Project Coordinator Sallie Downs, under the guidance and support of Co-Chairs Gail and Jeffrey Bayer. While these violins resound with the voices lost to hatred and oppression during the Holocaust, they are being brought to Birmingham to inspire action with their message of hope for the future. Sixteen of these restored violins will be coming to Birmingham next spring for performances and educational programs for students and the community.

The kick-off events in the series included a lecture by Dr. James A. Grymes, author of *Violins of Hope: Instruments of Hope and Liberation in Mankind’s Darkest Hour* at Temple Emanu-El and a full-day teacher workshop.

To learn more about the events planned throughout the year, visit www.bhecinfo.org

Announcing the Siegler Fellowship

To celebrate Ruth Scheuer Siegler’s 90th birthday this past April, her children and grandchildren worked with the BHEC to create a paid fellowship opportunity for a summer graduate/post-graduate research position.

One Siegler Fellowship will be awarded each year to a graduate level university student who will research, prepare, and deliver a presentation on the life of a Holocaust survivor or a Holocaust-related topic. The fellowship will provide a \$1,000 stipend and will cover costs related to the project.

The first Siegler Fellow, Paige Estefan, recently completed her Master’s degree in History at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. She has served as an intern and a volunteer in the BHEC Archives. This fall, Paige begins work on her PhD in History at Mississippi State University.

Paige said this about her experience: “This summer I was fortunate enough to be chosen as the first Siegler Fellow. My research consisted of piecing together the experiences of Ruth Scheuer Siegler throughout the Holocaust and creating a meaningful narrative that will allow others, in turn, to teach and continue her story of hardship and perseverance. The work I did, while at times emotionally challenging, was incredibly gratifying. It was an experience I will never forget and will always cherish.”

The deadline to apply for a Siegler Fellowship is January 1, and the selected student will be notified no later than March 1. For information about applying, contact rebecca@bhecinfo.org



Ruth Siegler and her family on her 90th birthday.



L'Chaim
 HONORING
Cathy O. Friedman



"WE WERE HONORED TO BE A PART OF SUCH A WONDERFUL EVENT. IT WAS MOVING, ENTERTAINING, CHALLENGING, AND INSPIRING...THERE ARE FEW GREATER GIFTS JUDAISM HAS GIVEN TO THE WORLD THAN TIKKUN OLAM--TO FIX WHAT IS BROKEN."
 -David Reynolds
 Steel City Men's Chorus

"L'CHAIM SHOULD HAVE BEEN PERFORMED AT THE KENNEDY CENTER AND BROADCAST ALL OVER THE WORLD. THE MESSAGE WAS LOUD AND CLEAR."
 -Lynn Raviv

"L'CHAIM WAS A WONDERFUL TRIBUTE TO THE AMAZING CATHY FRIEDMAN AND A GREAT WAY TO HELP OTHERS LEARN OF THE VALUABLE WORK OF THE BHEC."
 -Keith Cromwell
 Red Mountain Theatre Company



"I STILL HAVE A DIFFICULT TIME COMPREHENDING THAT THE HOLOCAUST WAS NOT AN ACCIDENT OF HISTORY. IT HAPPENED BECAUSE INDIVIDUALS, ORGANIZATIONS, AND GOVERNMENTS MADE CHOICES TO LEGALIZE DISCRIMINATION, PREJUDICE, HATRED, AND ULTIMATELY MASS MURDER. WE BECOME WITNESSES TO THIS FOCUSED EVIL BY MAKING SURE THAT EVERY STORY IS TOLD, EVERY EXPERIENCE IS SHARED, AND EVERY EVENT IS COMMEMORATED. THIS, MY FRIENDS, IS WHAT THE BIRMINGHAM HOLOCAUST EDUCATION CENTER DOES DAILY."

-CATHY O. FRIEDMAN

"IT WAS AN ABSOLUTE JOY TO CELEBRATE CATHY AND THE GREAT WORK OF THE BHEC! WHAT A BEAUTIFUL PROGRAM FROM START TO FINISH. THANK YOU, CATHY, FOR YOUR WORK TO MAKE BIRMINGHAM AND THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE."

-Natalie Kelly

"Y'ALL HAVE DONE IT AGAIN- TRANSFORMING OUR COMMUNITY'S AMAZING TALENT AND PASSION INTO A FABULOUS EVENT TO FUND THE IMPORTANT WORK OF THE BHEC. I ESPECIALLY LOVED HEARING FROM THE TEACHERS- THE TRUE TESTAMENT OF THE WORK YOU DO."

-Elaine Witt

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BHEC Welcomes Returning Teachers

As the summer came to a close, the BHEC welcomed teachers returning from their summer learning experiences. The Brenda and Fred Friedman Teacher Scholarship recipients had the opportunity to immerse themselves in Holocaust education, learning the history and pedagogy at top institutions across the country. They will return to their schools and communities with the skills to become leaders in their field. Our congratulations to the 2017 Brenda and Fred Friedman Scholarship recipients:



U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum Belfer Conference

Corey Evans, Southeastern School, Remlap*
Kaetlyn Hermann, James Clemons High School, Madison*
Amanda Kennedy, Parrish Elementary, Parrish*
Brian Pike, Central High School, Lineville*
Maryann Pledger, Shades Valley High School, Birmingham*
Kathryn Woddail, Park Crossing High School, Montgomery*

Jewish Foundation for the Righteous Summer Institute

Jessical Badio, Berry Middle School, Hoover*
Rachel Povolacs, Carroll High School, Ozark*

Jewish Foundation for the Righteous European Study Program

Amy McDonald, Shades Valley High School, Birmingham*
Tricia Skelton, Opelika Middle School, Opelika*

Facing History and Ourselves

Gail Harper Yeilding, Chelsea High School, Chelsea

Jewish Foundation for the Righteous Advanced Seminar

Steve Benton, Thompson Sixth Grade Center, Alabaster
Amy McDonald, Shades Valley High School, Birmingham*

** pictured above*

Creating Connections in the Classroom

by Kate Gholston & Tricia Skelton, Opelika Middle School

We began working together at Opelika Middle School (OMS) three years ago. As sixth English Language Arts teachers, teaching a topic like the Holocaust becomes a delicate balance of introducing historical facts while also creating a human connection to the stories. We must also take into consideration our students' age and maturity levels. The programs offered by the BHEC have been monumental in helping us develop an age-appropriate curriculum with meaningful content.

The sixth grade history curriculum includes WWII and the Holocaust, so it is a natural connection to include literature set during that time period in our English classes. This year we are looking to change things up a bit. We are taking on the theme/question: What Makes a Hero? This thematic question will allow us to focus on those who intervened and helped. Using Alexandra Zapruder's *Salvaged Pages*, JFR's profiles of rescuers, and numerous other sources provided at workshops, our students will be reading biographies of rescuers, analyzing historical documents, reading memoirs like Roman Kent's "Lala", participating in book studies and literature circles, and reading and then creating original poetry. Meanwhile in history class, these same students will be learning about the historical aspects of the Holocaust.



Our school is made up of a diverse population, both culturally and economically. It always amazes us to see these students relate and connect to figures like Anne Frank, Roman Kent, Irena Sendler, and [Alabama survivor] Henry Stern. While teaching this unit, we are reminded that empathy and the need to stand up for what is right are universal traits. In this day and age, these lessons are more important than ever.

Tricia (left) and Kate (right) are members of the BHEC Teacher Cadre. They have attended BHEC workshops and advanced training seminars as Friedman Scholarship recipients.

BHEC Partnering with "Facing History and Ourselves"

In today's world, questions of how to best build and maintain democratic societies that are pluralistic, open, and resistant to violence are more relevant than ever. The BHEC is proud to be partnering with Facing History and Ourselves this fall to present four teacher workshops in the state.

The Facing History curriculum is based on the text *Holocaust and Human Behavior* and provides current scholarship on the history of the Holocaust while helping students connect that history to their own lives and the choices they make.

We greatly appreciate the support of our host institutions as well as the Alabama Humanities Foundation, the Jewish Federation of Huntsville and North Alabama, the Jewish Federation of Central Alabama, and the Birmingham Jewish Foundation.

Birmingham

Tuesday, November 7, 2017, University of Alabama at Birmingham

Huntsville

Wednesday, November 8, 2017, University of Alabama in Huntsville

Troy

Tuesday, November 14, 2017, Troy University

Livingston

Wednesday, November 15, 2017, University of West Alabama

Visit www.bhecinfo.org for more information.



FACING
HISTORY
AND
OURSELVES

People make choices. Choices make history.

From the Archives: The Relevance of the Bombs of Buchenwald

by Melissa Young, Archivist

Working in the BHEC archives is always a pleasure, but occasionally I find things that make my job even more special. Recently I was cataloging a box of files when I discovered an interesting letter addressed to Travis Ray Carter, a liberator of Buchenwald whose story was featured at *L'Chaim* in 2015. It reminded me that history is complex and people—especially policymakers—often make individual choices that can have a substantial effect upon the lives of others.

The letter was from Bernard Mercer, a colleague of Carter's who served as an operational and briefing officer under Jimmy Doolittle in the 8th Air Force during World War II. In 1944, Mercer participated in strategic missions targeting "factories, air fields, oil producing (plants) and submarine facilities." He noted three occasions when his unit "laid on" the Buchenwald industrial complex and stated they were "quite successful in destroying and disabling a major portion of the factories."

I was surprised when I read the letter because I knew the War Refugee Board and several Zionist groups had been denied when they pled for military intervention to prevent further loss of life at Auschwitz. Historians have argued for decades about the level of assistance Allied forces could have given victims of Nazi persecution. Many still question the government's claims that military action would have harmed operations necessary to end the war or allowed Hitler to blame our bombs rather than German bullets for the murder of Jewish inmates.

A little research allowed me to discover both Buchenwald and Auschwitz were bombed in August of 1944. Unfortunately, as Mercer suggested in his letter, neither attack was designed to hinder extermination practices. Both camps were hit for the reasons he stated: they contained armaments and/or synthetic oil factories, which were considered appropriate military marks. Yet the air raids he mentioned are evidence of the distinct possibility of striking railways or crematoriums. Historians like Stuart Erdheim use the Buchenwald assault in particular to demonstrate the precise range and capability of various aircraft and the ability to destroy specific targets with a limited loss of inmate life. Buchenwald prisoners who experienced the attack substantiate these theories, noting U.S. airmen's purposeful avoidance of camp buildings.

More than 300 people were killed in both attacks, many slave laborers who had no access to shelters in the factories in which they worked. Nevertheless, the air raids often gave inmates the hope they needed to survive and resist. Survivors of both camps describe the strength the raids gave them because they seemed to signal the war's end. Buchenwald itself contained a small percentage of women in its population and held a large group of political and military prisoners as well as Jews. After the Allied bombing, several inmates—some Communist partisans—began collecting smuggled weapons that were eventually used to overcome SS guards just before the camp was liberated by Americans like Carter.

Holocaust historians who conclude Allied policies were politically, rather than militarily (or morally) motivated are probably correct. But in mid-1944, someone decided to focus upon Auschwitz and Buchenwald. Even if the camps were determined to be justifiable targets only because of their industrial capabilities, Allied commanders were quite aware of their status as concentration camps, for their pilots avoided hitting as many prisoners as possible.

What Mercer's letter ultimately left me with was a gentle nudge of self-examination that encouraged me to carefully consider my own words and decisions especially when I am put in leadership positions. My actions may matter to others more than I consciously realize or wish to admit. This becomes especially relevant in light of the president's recent behavior regarding the violence that occurred in Charlottesville. Whether one supports Republican politics or not, I think we can all agree that those in positions of power should be intensely aware of what they say or do. It is important to reflect upon the consequences of political statements, policies, or conduct, which can ripple far beyond any individual moment.

Perhaps this is a valuable lesson for all of us.



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- Aaryn Johnson,
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- Megan Noojin,
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Email address corrections to: info@bhecinfo.org**

Come visit with us!

2222 Arlington Avenue South • Birmingham, AL 35205
10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. Monday-Thursday; weekends by appointment

Dates to Remember

Teacher Cadre	September 14	Facing History & Ourselves	
	October 19	Teacher Workshops	
	January 30	UAB, Birmingham	November 7
	March 15	UAH, Huntsville	November 8
Why? Community Education Program		Troy University, Troy	November 14
1 - Why the Jews?	October 3	UWA, Livingston	November 15
2 - Why the Germans?	November 2	The Holocaust in Film	January 18
3 - Why Murder?	December 7	Emmet O'Neal Library	January 22
4 - Why This Swift & Sweeping?	January 11		January 25
5 - Why Didn't More Fight Back?	February 13		February 1
6 - Why Did Survivor Rates Diverge?	March 13	Yom HaShoah	April 8
7 - Why Limited Outside Help?	April 3	Violins of Hope	April 14
8 - What Legacies? What Lessons?	May 8		

The mission of the Birmingham Holocaust Education Center (BHEC) is to educate the people of Alabama about the history of the Holocaust so that new generations will apply the lessons of the Holocaust to the construction of a more just, humane, and tolerant future. By preserving and sharing the stories of local Holocaust survivors and commemorating the events of the Holocaust and the lives of those who perished, the BHEC seeks to promote a moral and ethical response to prejudice, hatred, and indifference for the benefit of all humanity.