

STUDENT CENTER, 23 TO 26 APRIL 2009

Praise for the first-ever International Graduate Students' Conference on Holocaust and Genocide Studies flowed in from every quarter—and was most welcome to the student organizers. Envisioned and mounted by the Center's doctoral students, the conference provided a forum for their colleagues around the globe to present original research papers to an audience of peers and scholars. The call for papers in summer 2008 yielded more than 130 submissions from 22 countries on 5 continents. The tremendous response confirmed that the students had tapped into a strong desire among emerging scholars to establish a community with shared intellectual interests.

INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS' CONFERENCE ON HOLOCAUST AND GENOCIDE STUDIES



Top: Professors Ben Kiernan, Yale University (left) and John Roth, Claremont McKenna College
Bottom: Professor Debórah Dwork and Rosalie Rose, leading Center benefactor

Under the expert guidance of their academic supervisor, Professor Thomas Kühne, a student committee selected 55 papers which they shaped into 18 panels. Simultaneous sessions ran in adjoining rooms of the Clark University Student Center from 23 to 26 April. Clark faculty, visiting scholars from our partner program at the Danish Institute for International Studies, and invited scholars moderated the panels. The distinguished visitors, with expertise in comparative genocide, and Holocaust history and memory, included Professors Yehuda Bauer, Hebrew University; Ben Kiernan, Yale University; John Roth, Claremont McKenna College; Andrea Smith, University of California-Riverside; and Eric Weitz, University of Minnesota. (A complete list of panels, paper titles and moderators can be found on the conference website, www.chgsconference.org). Inspired by the excellence of the papers and the incisive responses by the moderators, lively discussion followed the presentations. Participants forged valuable connections with senior scholars and student colleagues who, in many cases, suggested productive avenues for improving or refocusing research topics.

Avril Alba and Fromson Fellow Jody Russell Manning (right)



The conference papers suggest new directions in Holocaust and comparative genocide research. Presenters considered interethnic relations, the plight of refugees, perpetrators and victims, the Holocaust in Eastern Europe, gender and genocide, legal frameworks as they pertain to genocide, post-genocide identity, collective memory, education, film and other mass media. The composition of the panels reflected the response to the call for papers. The Holocaust was best represented, with other genocides a significant presence as well, including genocides perpetrated against Native Americans and Armenians, in the Balkans, and Rwanda. The excellence of the papers prompted the editor of the interdisciplinary journal *Holocaust Studies* to plan a special issue to communicate important results to a broader audience.

A roundtable discussion closed the conference. Asked to assess the results of the panels within the broader context of future research and scholarship, the invited scholars offered words of advice to the gathered students. Professor Bauer cautioned students against moving too far from the victims in Holocaust and genocide research. Professor Dwork suggested ways that researchers can integrate theory into historical narratives. Broadening the discussion to consider comparative genocide, Professor Kiernan advised the student scholars to explore not only top-down history, but bottom-up theories as well. Professor Roth focused on a question rather than a suggestion: "Why do you do what you do?" Emphasizing gender as an analytical tool, Professor Smith advocated viewing genocide not as a discrete act, but as a continuing process that demands activist attention. Professor Weitz urged students to analyze genocide as a strategy of population management spurred by ideology, but shaped by pragmatism. During the ensuing discussion, first-year Clark doctoral student Cristina Andriani returned Roth's question to the roundtable participants, asking why *they* do what *they* do. Responses varied, although consensus emerged that they study the Holocaust and genocide because they find it singularly meaningful.

The conference marked the centennial anniversary of Sigmund Freud's visit to Clark University. Freud, who fled Nazi persecution, delivered five lectures at Clark (the sole American university where he lectured) as part of a series that recognized the University's 20th anniversary of graduate education. The Graduate Students' Conference honored Freud's visit as well as an important milestone for the Strassler Center: its 10th anniversary of doctoral education. The conference celebrated graduate studies, just as Freud's visit did in 1909.

—Mary Jane Rein



Conference supporters Hanne and Dr. Howard Kulin (left) seated next to Martha Mutisi and Claims Conference Fellow Raz Segal

"I want to express my deep gratitude for inviting me to participate in the conference. It has been for me a great experience. Meeting so many great scholars, and making new friends and contacts was wonderful. To say nothing about the organizational aspects — all was so perfectly planned! I am already looking forward to the next opportunities..."

— Alex Kerner, Tel Aviv University

"Thanks again for a tremendous conference last weekend. I really thought it was very impressive, and very heartening in terms of the future of Holocaust studies as a discipline or at least subject area."

— Dr. Tom Lawson, lecturer in modern history, University of Winchester, and editor, *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History*