JOURNALISM AND THE HOLOCAUST

Every January 27th, people around the world gather in remembrance of the Holocaust on International Holocaust Remembrance Day. This year, the Ackerman Center honored the victims with presentations featuring Dr. Nils Roemer, the Stan and Barbara Rabin Professor of Holocaust Studies, Dr. Mary Catherine Mueller, a UT Dallas alumna and lecturer at Southern Methodist University, and Sarah R. Valente, a PhD candidate conducting original research on the Holocaust in Brazil. They lectured on how the media portrayed the end of WWII, the liberation of the camps and the victims. All three noted that the media had a tendency to recognize that there were victims of a horrible atrocity but referred to them by their nationalities rather than as Jewish victims.

Dr. Roemer highlighted publications from the United States, raising questions on why the U. S. chose to enter the war so late and how it viewed the Japanese versus the Germans.
He mentioned famous publications, many which regarded the victims as Polish or Czech rather than Jewish. This trend continued in the displacement camps, which indicates a lack of understanding and recognition for the uniqueness of Jewish victims. He ended his talk with a famous Anne Frank quote: “All people are really good at heart,” provoking the audience to question the nature of humanity, good and evil.

Dr. Mueller discussed local media responses in the Dallas Morning News, specifically focusing on the shift in rhetoric when survivor testimonies of their experiences and numbers started appearing by 1945. She noted that the tone changes from a celebration of a military victory to a revelation of the Nazi death machine and questions over what truly happened.

Valente examined the media responses in Brazil. Brazil entered the war later due to longstanding trade relations with Germany. Like Dr. Roemer, she also noted the focus on victims’ nationalities rather than their Jewish identities. She went through several years of different publications, noting that they were reporting on Nazis experimenting with killing techniques as early as 1942.

This year’s International Holocaust Remembrance Day coincides with the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. However, this declaration is not a law and cannot be enforced as there is no universal definition for the term “genocide.” Therefore, it is a global responsibility to stand up in defense of human rights.

After the talk, the audience engaged in a Q&A and participated alongside the Jewish campus organization Hillel International in the social media campaign “#WeRemember” featured on the Ackerman Center’s Facebook page to honor the memory of those who perished and those who survived.