

INTRODUCTION

Mark Zaurov and Klaus-B. Günther***

The 6th Deaf History International Conference took place in Berlin from July 31 to August 4, 2006, studied the European tragedy that occurred to Deaf People during the Second World War and was especially concerned with the overarching theme “Overcoming the past, determining its consequences and finding solutions for the present.” It was organized by the staff of the 6th Deaf History International (DHI) consisting mostly of members of the *Interessensgemeinschaft Gehörloser jüdischer Abstammung in Deutschland* (IGJAD, Association of the Deaf of Jewish Ancestry in Germany), in cooperation with the department of sign language education at Humboldt University in Berlin.

These proceedings contain the most important findings from the Conference written from a global perspective and illustrated with photos, with the aim of elucidating the history of the Deaf and associated complications, and how it was affected by social maldevelopments. The authors are researchers and experts in their respective fields. Several Deaf Jewish survivors, the participants in the Conference Panels, gave a first-hand accounts of their World War II and Holocaust experiences. A selection of visual material from the exhibition is reproduced here as well.

This publication is intended for Deaf historians, sociologists, geneticists, as well as educators and sign language researchers, in Germany and elsewhere. It offers a diverse range of interrelated interdisciplinary insights and will appeal to a wide reading public – those interested in Jewish Deaf History.

The proceedings are divided into four parts. The first part contains the lectures on *Applied Deaf History*, which encompass the Deaf History discipline in the traditional sense.

Günther List discusses marginalization and integration in the field of history, which frequently neglects the history of minorities. Newby Ely follows with his investigation of a minority that to date has not been mentioned by mainstream history: Deaf Japanese in the USA who were interned during World War II without due process. Ylva Söderfeldt Garmland draws on publications by the Swedish Deaf during the 1920s to show how Deaf societies functioned in practice. Arkady Belozovsky also presents a topic that has not yet been addressed by historians: the situation of Deaf intellectuals during the Stalinist purges.

Paddy Ladd expounds on “Deafhood,” a term recently adopted by the sign language community and of great significance to the cultural identity of the Deaf. He explains why the relationship between Deafhood and Deaf History is important. Jordan Eickman gives, by way of Deaf History, an example of the practical application of the concept “Deafhood,” which has contributed substantially to the spreading of the Deaf cultural identity.

Paul Johnston paints a picture of the Deaf cultural identity via artistic expression, namely via the Deaf View of Image Arts (De’Via), which was established in the 1980s. He presents a historical review of art, and constructs a theoretical framework for De’Via. Finally, Uzi Buzgalo shows his works of art, and what motivated their creation. His pain-

things revolve around his experiences as a Deaf Israeli and are of interest in conjunction with De'Via.

The second part is concerned with sociological and political perspectives of Deaf History, with a view toward issues in genetics.

To this end, Carol Padden reviews Deaf memories, stories and the formation of legends of how people became deaf, be it through illnesses or accidents. The incidence of deafness will potentially be much reduced in the future due to genetic testing, and she outlines the resulting consequences. In a related presentation, Teresa Blankmeyer Burke sets up a philosophical discourse that contrasts ethics and genetics, which have the aim of eliminating “defective” genes, with the perspective of the Deaf, who would like to preserve their genes.

Hans-Jürgen Stepf looks back on the forced sterilization of the Deaf to eliminate hereditary conditions, and connects it to contemporary genetics research. Iris Groschek introduces her research on the Deaf Hitler Youth and forced sterilization in those times, primarily in Hamburg. In addition, contemporary witnesses and survivors of these legally sanctioned compulsory measures also contribute their experiences. The panel which included eyewitnesses of the Deaf Hitler Youth and a person who was forced to be sterilized is moderated by Mark Zaurov. The transcription from International sign to English and transcription errors are the responsibility of the editors.

The third part refers to the Deaf Holocaust. Mark Zaurov introduces the topic, summarizes the current state of research and discusses possible solutions to problems and future goals.

Simon Carmel reports on his method of researching Deaf Holocaust survivors. Douglas Bahl examines Deaf children's transports, and Rabbi Fred Friedman raises the question of whether Deaf Jews should identify themselves as Jewish or Deaf first, in light of ignorance, anti-Semitism, and the Holocaust. This part then concludes with contemporary witness and Holocaust survivor panels, and the documentary on the *Israelitische Taubstummenanstalt* (Israelite Institution for Deaf-Mutes) in Berlin-Weissensee.

The highlights of the conference were the panels of Deaf Holocaust survivors and eyewitnesses (both moderated by Mark Zaurov) who shared their experiences during the Deaf Holocaust and World War II. These have been transcribed and included in the conference proceedings. Attending the panel discussions was a highly moving experience for the conference participants.

The fourth part addresses the interrelationships between science, pedagogy, and society.

Klaus B. Günther goes on a trip back through time and illuminates the long road to the recognition of sign languages in deaf education in Germany. John Hay reports on the evacuations of British schools for the deaf during World War II, and the impact on education.

Eeva Saalmi also tours through time to show how society turned away from the concept of the deaf-mute and embraced the concept of the native sign language user. Furthermore, she outlines the history of the sign language community in Finland.

Ellen Roth and Douglas Goldhammer give an introduction to the history of the Jews, and, drawing on sources from the Torah and the Kabbalah, document how society was made accessible to Deaf Jews.

The closing panel discussion between Mark Zaurov and Klaus Guenther reviews the experience of the conference and sums up the feelings of the organizers.

The conclusion by Mark Zaurov is inspired by the challenges this conference had to face and the papers presented: questions of terminology and methodology, the struggle for participation by Deaf scholars in Deaf History research, and the campaign to gain recognition in both the hearing (in contrast to Deaf) and Deaf (in contrast to simply Jewish) organizations.

Our goal was to contribute to a very special and barely researched field within World War II studies: the history of Deaf Jews and Deaf Germans in this particular time. Most of the papers, reports and interviews were delivered in signed languages and gained a visual immediacy, both intellectually and emotionally captivating the audience. The transcriptions of these signed texts in this volume make the scholars' critical views, as well as the tremendously veracious interviews and reports bearing witness to the shattering experience of the survivors available to the general public.