

PSH Faculty members discuss lives of women during the Holocaust

"Women's lives are like everybody's lives—complicated," Dr. Hoffman said, "and sometimes ambiguous."

by Jody L. Jacobs
Staff Reporter

"For me, the study of history is fascinating because it is constantly changing," said Associate Professor of Humanities and History Louise Hoffman at the "Women and the Holocaust" lecture March 21 in the Gallery Lounge.

Hoffman said that in the initial gathering of Holocaust history, little attention was paid to women because their experiences were not seen as different from the experiences of men.

There is a new wave in history to reconstruct the lives of ordinary women and how their experiences varied she said.

This includes studying how those experiences changed depending upon race, religion, and whether the women were victims or victimizers.

"Women's lives are like everybody's lives—complicated," she said, "and sometimes ambiguous."

Hoffman said that as the war progressed it became the responsibility of women to keep families alive and together. They did this usually at the cost of their own health and their ultimate survival.

"These were really horrendous situations," she said.

Eric Epstein, adjunct professor at Penn State Harrisburg said that the issues affecting women were in fact distinct from those of men. He described the decisions that Jewish women found themselves faced with during the Holocaust and how they responded to their situations.

Women would pool their resources together more often than men would for survival he said. If their families had been killed, women would "adopt" another woman from their region, joining in a sister-like bond for reliance and help. Many of these relationships, forged under terrible circumstances, would continue for the rest of the women's lives Epstein said.

One major difference in the way the female experience differed from the male, is that the children always went with the women he said.

As they were the ones responsible for keeping the family together, Epstein said, "Women had to decide what to do with small children and the elderly."

Even before Jews were sent to the concentration camps, Jewish women were the ones who dealt with the problems associated with the physical and verbal abuse, ostracization, and eventual expulsion of their

children from school he said.

Once the Nazis began sending the Jews to the camps, "Children inhibited survival for women," he said.

Epstein described how women would give birth secretly in the camps. Mothers would not hold or know their newborns.

Because there were such strict penalties for having a baby, the children were suffocated by other Jewish women. Epstein emphasized that this was a much kinder fate than what would be experienced by the Nazis.

For women in hiding small children were a great risk as well he said. Often, they too were suffocated so that the entire family would not be given away.

"The sacrifice of children for survival was necessary, but something you never get over," Epstein said. "The guilt would follow you for life."

A result of this experience was that after the war had ended, there was a rush for Jewish survivors to get married and have families. It was also common for children from first marriages to have the same names as children in second marriages he said.

Another way in which women were treated differently was that once they were in the camps, they were desexualized he said. Their heads were shaven, and they lost weight.

"Sisters couldn't recognize sisters," he said.

Women, however, did not experience sexual abuse by the Nazis because it was considered a crime he said.

Sherry Bartush, American studies major attended the lecture. She said that until now, she had only been exposed to Holocaust information from the commercial media.

"I found it fascinating," she said. "I've never been involved in the academic research of the Holocaust before. It makes you consider what information we have been fed by the media and why."

For students who want to learn more about the Holocaust and Jewish culture, there will be a study tour to Poland July 30 to August 12, 1996.

Eric Epstein will also be teaching a "Women of the Holocaust" summer course. This is the initial offering of such a class at this campus. Epstein said that the course will include speakers who are survivors of the Holocaust experience.

"I encourage students to take this course," he said. "They will have the ability to touch history in the flesh—and that ability is dying out."

Casting Her Own Shadow hits bookstores across the U.S.

by Ann E. Mease
Staff Reporter

Women's History month is a celebration of women who have contributed to humanity, socially, academically and religiously. Penn State Harrisburg

has added a Women's Studies curriculum to the Humanities division, with several professors teaching a variety of courses. Dr. Allida Black, assistant professor of American Studies, is teaching Sexuality and Gender.

"Women's History Month is important for two reasons," Dr. Black said. "It allows people who aren't in women's history courses to learn more about what women have done to contribute to America and it puts the pressure on teachers who don't talk about it to deal with it."

In addition to educating students on women's history, Dr. Black has specific goals for her future.

"I want to get a tenured track job that allows me to work with students, do my research and speak my mind," she said.

Dr. Black has spent nine years researching, and writing a book about the life of Eleanor Roosevelt. The book, *Casting Her Own Shadow* has just been published all over the country and is available at the campus book store.

"I chose to write a book about Eleanor after doing my dissertation and becoming fascinated by Eleanor's dedication to American society and contributions to the American dream," Dr. Black said.

As a woman who has significant accomplishments, Dr. Black does have two great personal triumphs.

"Finishing graduate school on my own terms with a 4.0," she said said. "And getting the book published."

Dr. Black's second published work offers an insightful

look at the life of one of the great women in American History.

"Eleanor had a fierce commitment to her ideas and realistic politics," Dr. Black said.

When America entered World War I, Eleanor became active in the American Red Cross and in volunteer work in Navy hospitals. After Franklin was stricken with polio in 1921, she became increasingly active in politics both to help him maintain his interests and to assert her own personality and goals. She participated in the League of Women Voters, joined the Women's Trade Union League, and worked for the Women's Division of New York State Democratic Committee.

She helped to found Val-Kill Industries, a non-profit furniture factory in Hyde Park, New York, and taught at the Todhunter School, a private girls school in New York City.

During Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency, Eleanor was as active First Lady who traveled extensively around the nation, visiting relief projects, surveying working and living conditions. She became an advocate of the rights and needs of the poor, of minorities, and of the disadvantaged.

After President Roosevelt's death on April 12, 1945, Eleanor continued public life. Through her active involvement in many controversial causes, Eleanor developed some enemies.

"The Ku Klux Klan had a \$2,500 bounty put on her head," Dr. Black said. There were two members of congress who tried to say she was a communist and have her deported to Africa. The FBI accused her of having black blood to stop her work with minorities, but even under these enormous pressures she continued her work.

Eleanor was next appointed by President Truman to the United States



photo by Tina Shearer

Delegation to the United Nations General Assembly, a position she held until 1953. She was chairman of the Human Rights Commission during the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which was adopted by the general assembly in 1948.

In 1953, Eleanor resigned from the United States Delegation to the United Nations and volunteered her services to the American Associations, and later became chairman of the Associations Board of Directors. She was reappointed to the United States Delegation in the United Nations by President Kennedy in 1961.

Kennedy also appointed her as a member of the National Advisory Committee of the Peace Corps and chairman of the President's Commission on the Status of Women. Eleanor received many awards for her humanitarian efforts.

She was in great demand as a speaker and lecturer, both in person and through the media of radio

and television.

"Eleanor was a prolific writer who wrote over 17 books, 2,500 columns, 300 articles and if you lined up her personal papers they would stretch over six and one half miles long," Dr. Black said.

In 1935 she began a syndicated column, "My Day" for which she continued until shortly before her death. She also wrote monthly question and answer columns for the Ladies Home Journal and McCall's.

In her later years Eleanor Roosevelt lived at Val-Kill in Hyde Park, N.Y. She also maintained an apartment in New York City where she died in 1962. She is buried alongside her husband in the rose garden of their estate at Hyde Park, now a national historic site.

Eleanor Roosevelt is truly one of the most important women of any period in history.

"She overcame obstacles to help people because she believed in democracy and continued to believe that people would accept their responsibilities," Dr. Black said.

Women's History Month

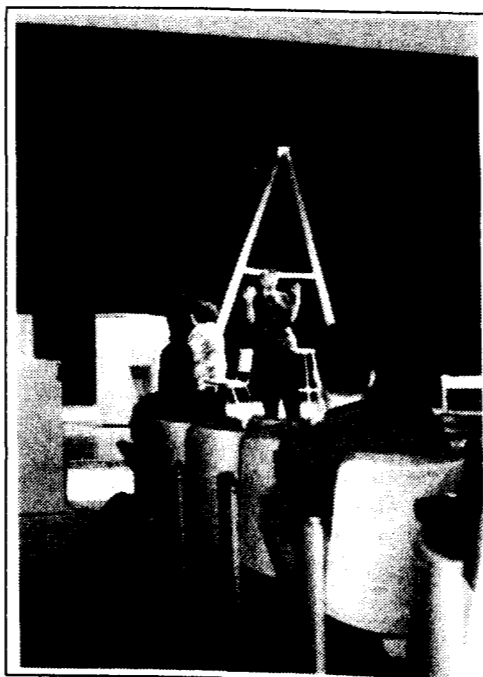


photo by Danielle Hollister

PSH Professor Dorothy E. King performs "Living Herstory", Friday, March 22 at 12 noon in the Olmsted Theatre. Vocalist Felicia Brown-Haywood accompanied King as part of Penn State Harrisburg's Women's History Month celebration.

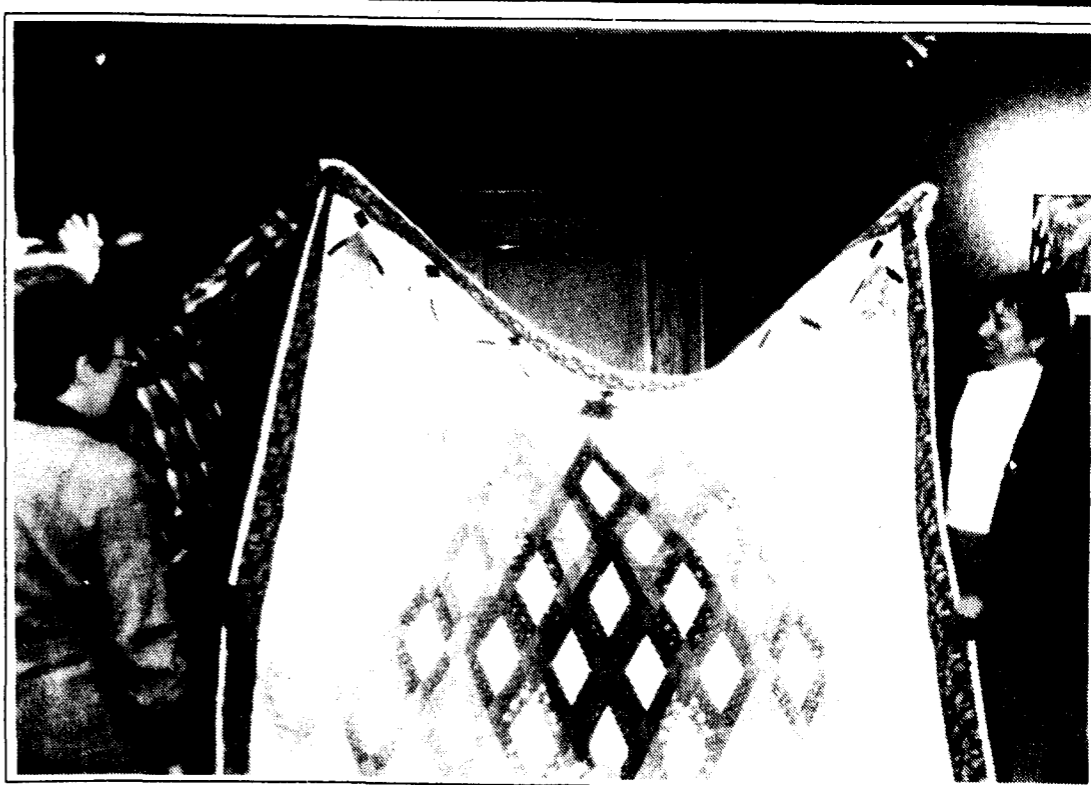


photo by Tina Shearer

Dr. Clem Gilpen, assistant professor of community systems and Afro-American studies, displays a quilt he had crafted to give to his grandmother as a gift.

Dr. Yvonne Milspaw, associate professor of English and humanities at Harrisburg Area Community College, gave a presentation on "Quilts and Women's Social History" on Tuesday, March 19 in the Gallery Lounge. Topics discussed ranged from the various techniques used in quilting to the historical significance of their design.