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THE AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION SECTION
ON
PEACE & WAR

Newsletter - Summer, 1995

Genocide Task Force Update

PRE-WASHINGTON REPORT OF GENOCIDE TASK FORCE

by Allen Grimshaw

Readers will recall from my last report that after consultation with a number of interested members of our section about the charge of the task force, a consensus had emerged that we should set rather modest goals. The general view seemed to be that sociologists generally know little about genocide and have little, if any, professional interest in the phenomena. (We would like to believe that some substantial proportion of our colleagues have humanitarian and citizen concerns.) We felt that our goals, at least initially, should be to raise sociological consciousness about genocide and to try to get some of our colleagues to incorporate materials on genocide (and war) into more traditional courses in the curriculum. We should be pleased, of course, to encourage and assist colleagues who may want to teach courses which focus on genocide and other peace and war studies topics. We will be delighted to encourage and support colleagues who are doing, or want to do, research. But our first aim should be to draw sociologists' collective attention to the topics of our concern.

Initial steps: The 1996 regional meetings: It is our hope that over the next few years interests in genocide can be reflected in participation in programs at most of the regional sociology meetings as well as through presentation of more programs/papers on the topic at the national meetings. As I write this members of the Task Force have arranged or proposed sessions on genocide at three regional and one national meeting(s).

The Pacific Sociological Association meetings are scheduled to be held in Seattle, March 21-24, 1996. There will be three sessions on genocide or related topics. First, Carol Edelman of Chico State University is organizing an open session, "Perspectives on genocide in the 20th century." Second, the Task Force is sponsoring an open participatory workshop on "War, genocide, and other

We encourage our members to submit articles on any subject that may be of interest to Section members. Deadline for submission to the next edition of the Newsletter is September 20th, 1995. Send material to Dana Eyre, Department of National Security Affairs, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, 93943; (408) 656-2831; or via e-mail to DEyre@nps.navy.mil
large-scale killings as topics in traditional sociology courses." Finally, members of our Section are also organizing an invitational panel tentatively titled, "What's in a name: the ideological semantics of Armageddon, decimation, democide, genocide, holocaust/Holocaust, mass murder, speciescide." I am very pleased to report that David E. Stannard, author of American Holocaust: Columbus and the conquest of the new world and related publications has tentatively agreed to participate in this session--other recruitment is ongoing.

The 1996 North Central Sociological Association meetings are scheduled to be held in Cincinnati, April 12-14. A panel, "Teaching about war and genocide within 'traditional' courses" is scheduled. We will also have an invitational panel similar to that scheduled for the PSA, tentatively titled "What's in a name: ideological semantics of conceptualization and terminology for large-scale killings of human being."

Similar sessions will be held at the Midwest Sociological Society meetings scheduled for Chicago on April 3-6, 1996. The session on terminology and conceptualization will carry the title "Difficulties of conceptualization and sensitivity in identifying, distinguishing, and labeling genocidal events." The teaching session will have the same title as that at the Pacific meetings, "War, genocide, and other large-scale killings as topics in traditional sociology courses."

Kathy Bischoping (York University), another member of the Task Force (for more on Task Force composition see below), has proposed a substantive session on genocide for the 1996 meetings of the Canadian Sociological and Anthropological Association meetings; she has also proposed a session on teaching genocide. There will, of course, be overlap in the content of the sessions. We will, however, be reaching different audiences. We will keep you posted on the response to her proposals.

We will make proposals next year for participation in programs of additional regional societies; we would much appreciate your suggestions about associations/societies which may be particularly interested in our topics--or which may have constituencies which may be "ready" for our message.

As readers will anticipate, recruitment of participants has not and will not be easy for either sessions on the terminology/conceptualization of genocide and other mass killings or those on incorporation of materials into teaching in traditional courses. Scholars of genocide who are the most visible candidates for participation in discussions of conceptualization and terminology are, like all academics, increasingly constrained by the availability of support for professional travel--some are also on very tight schedules.

Several scholars from outside the regions where we are arranging meetings have already told me that they could not make so long a trip. There are, on the other hand, very few of us who have regularly included material on war and genocide in other "traditional" courses--this means that participants in such sessions will in many if not most instances have to spend considerable time in preparation of their contributions.
We solicit your suggestions for possible participants in the invitational sessions. We solicit volunteers already incorporating appropriate materials into courses and willing to share their experience–or volunteers who are willing to do the work required to show how traditional courses can be enriched by inclusion of materials on war and genocide. Members of the Task Force of the Section on Peace and War Studies, and of the Association of Genocide Scholars will be available to help with suggested materials. I am confident that colleague anthropologists, political scientists, historians, and sociologists whose work does not focus on war/genocide will also be helpful in this important and worthwhile effort. We will look forward to hearing from you, either about participation in 1996 sessions or with suggestions about Task Force involvement in regional meetings in later years.

Association for Genocide Scholars: the Williamsburg meeting: The first conference of the Association was held in Williamsburg, Virginia, June 14-16, 1995. The two and a half days of sessions included some of the most interesting, instructive, and sometimes distressing papers and discussion I can remember.

There were research papers, luncheon roundtables, and considerable extra-meeting talk. Session titles included: (1) learning from the implications of Rwanda, (2) genocide in the near past and potential threats, (3) genocide in the far past and present: victimization of "the other", (4) "controversies about the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust" (employ of upper or lower case for genocide and holocaust is clearly an important issue for some scholars), (5) prevention of genocide and early-warning (two sessions, one on empirical work and one on proposals).

There were some forty of us at the conference, mostly academics, representatives of not-for-profits, and a few activists (and some students), mostly from the USA and Canada with a smattering of participants from the UK and elsewhere, mostly with backgrounds in the social sciences and history, some from quite different intellectual origins altogether. A goodly amount of published material was on display. Work is being done.

Our colleague Helen Fein, a major mover in the creation of the Association was elected the first president. Another conference will be scheduled for 1997. Some rapporteurs’ notes and lists of participants will be available for distribution.

Roger Smith, a political scientist at William and Mary, our host, and with Helen Fein a co-founder of the Association gave a paper entitled, "Genocide and the politics of rape." His report was truly distressing. In subsequent discussion he acknowledged that interviewing could become extremely distressing–he and others reported that interviewing of survivors of genocide in various manifestations can be done only a few days at a time. I found myself understanding why many of our colleagues find other arenas of research more attractive. I will keep you posted.
Composition of the Task Force on genocide, politicide, and democide: I have now been joined on the Task Force by the following colleagues:

Kathy Bishopting, Department of Sociology, York University, North York (Toronto), Ontario, Canada M3J 1P3
(kbishop@vm1.yorku.ca)
(after October, kbishop@yorku.ca)

Rhoda Howard, Professor of Sociology and Director, Theme School on International Justice and Human Rights. McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada L8S 4L9
(howardr@mcmail.cis.mcmaster.ca)

Erik Markusen, Department of Sociology, Southwest State University, Marshall, Minnesota 56258
(markusen@ssu.southwest.msu.edu)

I met Rhoda and Eric at the Genocide meetings in Williamsburg, like others I met there they astounded me with their range of knowledge and insights. Both are rejoining the ASA and joining our Section in order to participate in Task Force and Section activities. They are most welcome. Kathy was initially recommended by Helen Fein, we have been corresponding.

The Section Board specified no set number of members in establishing our Task Force. I am sure we will have room for colleagues who are interested in the phenomena we are charged to make more visible to our sociologist colleagues. We will be delighted to hear from you.

Session on Gender and Genocide at ASA: Helen Fein has organized a special session for the Washington meetings; the title is "Gender and genocide from ancient to modern times." Helen will make a presentation on women as victims over time. Roger Smith (who I mentioned earlier in reporting on the Williamsburg meeting) will make a presentation on women as perpetrators. I suspect the session will be well attended and that early arrival will be prudent.

We need help! It will be clear from the above that while our goals are relatively modest (although informing the seemingly indifferent mass of our colleagues about the realities of war and genocide is certainly not a trivial aim), their achievement will require very substantial efforts on the part of large numbers of people. We will welcome and attend to your suggestions about possible participants in the regional programs already planned and projected for the future. We particularly need volunteers to prepare materials which will enable us to demonstrate the sociological relevance and critical importance of materials on war and genocide throughout our disciplinary curriculum. Send us your suggestions. Join us in efforts directed to incorporating materials on war and genocide into sociological classrooms.

We look forward to working with you.

PEACE!
Allen Grimshaw for the Task Force on Genocide