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Press release

FORCED LABOR 1939 - 1945 MEMORY AND HISTORY

A digital archive for education and research

A cooperation between the Foundation "Remembrance, Responsibility and Future",
Freie Universität Berlin and the German Historical Museum

Life Story Interviews for the Classroom: Keeping memory alive and imparting history

Berlin, June 15th, 2010. One of the aims of the project "Forced Labor 1939-1945. Memory and History" is to incorporate the often neglected subject of Nazi forced labor into the school curriculum. The interdisciplinary project team presented new multimedia teaching materials with life story interviews particularly suited for schools. This project is based on a collection of nearly 600 audio and video interviews with former forced laborers.

A digital interview archive has been created in a joint effort between the Foundation "Remembrance, Responsibility and Future", the Freie Universität and the German Historical Museum. The new educational materials and an expanded version of the online archive were presented at the Sophie-Scholl-Oberschule. Contemporary witnesses, students and teachers spoke about forced labor in Nazi Germany and about how we can remember this today.

"For a long time victims kept silent. Society didn't want to acknowledge their experiences and memories," said Günter Saathoff, Chair of the Foundation "Remembrance, Responsibility and Future" at the press conference. "Keeping the memory of forced labor during the time of National Socialism in Germany alive is especially important in our time. We consider it our duty to make it possible for contemporary witnesses to tell about their suffering and their experiences, also in the classroom."

The Foundation laid the cornerstone for this endeavor with their funding of the interview project "Documentation of Life Story Interviews with Former Slave and Forced Laborers" in the years 2005–2006. Nearly 600 interviews with contemporary witnesses from 27 countries were collected. Historians, IT-specialists and media experts from the Freie Universität developed a digital archive and made the interviews available online for the first time in January 2009. The project team has been working on the development of materials and has expanded the archive content and functions. The new version of the archive is now available with more sophisticated search functions as well as with transcripts and German translations.



The new teaching materials include a DVD with five representative contemporary witness interviews as well as films about the collection and with historical background, multimedia learning software, and an accompanying teachers' book. Guided by teachers or by self-study on their own computer, students can learn more about the subject of forced labor. "At the Freie Universität multimedia contemporary witness archives play an important part in research and teaching as well as in the area of technical development. The potential of oral history for a variety of disciplines and usage scenarios is particularly relevant," explained Prof. Dr. Nicolas Apostolopoulos, Director of the Center for Digital Systems (CeDiS), where the archive and the educational materials were developed. "It is of great concern for us to develop digital technologies, provide wide access to the resources and make these available with didactic and well thought out materials, especially for historical-political education in schools and other extracurricular institutions."

Bodo Förster, history teacher at the Sophie-Scholl-Schule said that there is a great demand in schools for multimedia teaching and learning materials on the subject of Nazi forced labor that take into account the requirements of schools. "At our school the subject of forced labor plays an even larger role than in many other schools because our building was used from 1943 to 1945 as a forced labor camp for families whose members deemed 'capable of work' were forced to build the bunker on Pallasstraße," said Förster. "The material from the project 'Forced Labor 1939-1945' definitely supports our efforts to convey this subject while adding a multimedia edge and personal touch that makes it much easier to arouse interest in students than your usual history textbook."

Miriam Mogge was involved in the development and testing of the learning software in her last school year before graduating from the Sophie-Scholl-Schule. She also got to know the contemporary witness, Jutta Pelz-Bergt, who had been interviewed for the archive. "Meeting people who were exploited and tortured during the Nazi era is certainly the most profound way to engage with the subject. The films and the archive are a very important resource for later generations who someday won't have the opportunity to meet eyewitnesses," said the 19-year-old.

Availability, Access and Additional Information:

Cooperation is being planned with the Federal Agency for Civic Education. The educational materials from the project "Forced Labor 1939-1945" (DVD, learning software and teachers' book) will then be available through the program of the Federal Agency for Civic Education.

Access to the archive and additional information on the project can be found here:

www.zwangsarbeit-archiv.de/en/

Interview excerpts from the online archive are also integrated into a multimedia PC station located within the permanent exhibition of the German Historical Museum.

Photographs of former forced laborers and background materials are available to members of the press at: www.zwangsarbeit-archiv.de/presse/pressematerial

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