Unprecedented Times in America

Since the November elections many people have been making the effort to link the politics of today with the past. We’ve heard comparisons to election battles of the Presidential contests of 1800, 1828, and 1884, when Mainer James G. Blaine lost to suspected womanizer Grover Cleveland.

Despite our efforts to make connections to the past, sometimes we have to admit that we have entered a brand new time. As historian Elizabeth Cobbs wrote recently, “It’s the historian’s job to review precedent. But sometimes none is found. Each of the 44 presidents before Donald Trump performed some kind of public service, often in multiple capacities: as governor, congressman, ambassador or soldier. In the 19th century, many had fought in the Revolution or the Civil War. In the 20th, several served in World War I or II. Most were former legislators. Not a single man without any prior experience was elected.”

Every day our various news sources are filled with stories of actions that we find objectionable. The congress seems just as dumbfounded as the general public. At very least, this moment in our history will likely prove to be a great challenge to our democracy and constitutional system of government.

At the Holocaust and Human Rights Center we encourage individuals and communities to reflect and act upon their ethical and moral responsibilities in our modern world. These times are indeed unprecedented, and our efforts to diligently support the tenets of our democracy must, therefore, also be unprecedented.

Among the many updates included in this newsletter is the announcement of our summer seminars, including new programs focusing on civil discourse. For our civil discourse work we’re utilizing a concept attributed to former Secretary of State Condeleeza Rice. During a 2014 speech at a college in Vermont, Secretary Rice was interrupted by protesters. She was not deterred. “Democracy is great,” she said, “sometimes it’s noisy.”

We agree, democracy is noisy, and in these unprecedented days, it’s time for all of us to make some noise.

Reflect and Act –

Summer Seminars Focus on Immigration, The Holocaust, and Civil Discourse

The HHRC’s summer seminars continue to grow in scope and interest. During the summer of 2017 we will host four two-day summer seminars:

The Immigrant Experience in Maine will be held on Tuesday and Wednesday, July 11th and 12th and will focus on both past and present immigration. Representatives from several Maine organizations are on tap to share stories of their experiences as immigrants or working with immigrants. Participants will also learn about the immigration history of Armenians and Swedes in Maine. Additionally, the workshop will include a preview of an upcoming Maine State Museum exhibit focusing on the Jewish communities of Maine. The two day workshop will

In March, for the second year in a row, the HHRC hosted a program in partnership with the Mid-Maine Global Forum (MMGF). *This is ME, Too: From Everywhere to New Mainer* included a panel discussion featuring three New Mainers: Somali refugee Abdi Iftin; Iraqi refugee Nawar Al Obaidi; and Cambodian refugee Makara Meng. The speakers shared stories about their experiences coming to Maine, shared misconceptions and personal stories about their home countries, and answered crowd questions.

*This is ME, Too* was a timely program that earned the HHRC a lot of positive feedback from attendees. The Mid-Maine Global Forum contributes to the local community's understanding of issues of global significance by organizing and disseminating informed public presentations and discussion. HHRC Executive Director Elizabeth Helitzer is a member of the Board of Directors of the MMGF.

Proceeds from the Hearts for Human Rights event support HHRC’s outreach programming for students and communities. Between our silent and live auctions, event sponsorships, donations towards our educational outreach, and ticket sales we netted over $11,000.

Since 2012, we have increased our reach from just over 400 students and community members, to nearly 4,000 people in each of Maine’s 16 counties. We currently offer six different programs, and have a 7th program focusing on Civil Discourse in development.
The HHRC, in partnership with the Kennebec Valley Art Association and the Harlow Gallery, hosted *Equal Protection of the Laws: America’s Fourteenth Amendment*, an exhibit featuring the work of 17 Maine artists inspired by the rights granted by the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

The show included powerful pieces featuring topics like the Black Lives Matter movement, the rights of the LGBTQ community, the struggle for American citizenship, the establishment of child labor laws, and much more. Participating artists were Julian Johnson, Mary Becker Weiss, Mimi McCutcheon, Nancy Bixler, Otty Merrill, Petrea Noyes, Ramona du Houx, Rebecca Spilecki, and Roland Salazar.

*Equal Protection of the Laws: America’s Fourteenth Amendment* was supported by grants from the Maine Humanities Council and the Maine Arts Commission.

The exhibit also inspired *Created Equal*, a writing and performance project by UMA drama professor Jeri Pitcher, created in partnership with UMA’s writing center and current and former UMA students.

The project began with group meetings and discussion about issues relating to the 14th amendment. Students shared personal stories and received suggestions from others, which were incorporated into the creation of the text for the play. The project was supported by UMA’s Diversity Committee and the Maine Arts Commission. *Created Equal* was performed at the Klahr Center on March 9th and 10th, 2017 to enthusiastic audiences.

We are grateful to Deb Fahy and the Harlow Gallery for their support in bringing this exhibit from an idea to a reality. It was timely and encouraged a great deal of conversation.

### HHRC Begins the Bias Incident Notification Network (BINN)

The HHRC has embarked on a new project: The Bias Incident Notification Network (BINN). The statewide network is being established to fill the need for a broader communication tool for Maine and to fulfill a portion of our mission:

*To encourage individuals and communities to reflect and act upon their ethical and moral responsibilities in our modern world.*

HHRC Executive Director Elizabeth Helitzer and board members Melissa Breger and Betsy Parsons have started the effort by creating objectives and a process. Once participants have signed up, the committee will be expanded to include interested community members. The two objectives are to:

- Alert concerned Mainers about verified bias incidents against Maine people and/or property
- Encourage swift individual and community action in response, and share those responses with the Bias Incident Notification Network.

For more information about the Bias Incident Notification Network, or to sign up and participate, visit [www.hhrcmaine.org/BINN](http://www.hhrcmaine.org/BINN).

Flers, like the one at left, have been distributed in Maine and reinforce the need for BINN.
The Whitefield 4th of July Parade is an annual celebration of free speech, featuring provocative and timely statements from a group of artists and activists in the community. The HHRC exhibit, *Pay Attention: It’s Independence Day!* showcased photos and original artwork from the last decade and a half of unique parade themes.

The colorful show was popular with students and the Klahr Center's walls were bursting with artwork and signs from past parades.

Past themes have included global warming, the fate of bees, capitalism, immigration, buy local, energy policy, homeland security, our carbon footprint, and more.

On March 28th we held a community program in conjunction with the exhibit which featured Whitefield artist Natasha Mayers and Deb Fahy, director of the Harlow Gallery. They talked about making art in these contentious political times. The event also featured UMA graduates Kim Carter and Amanda “Mars” Shafer who performed excerpts from the original play *Created Equal* about the influence of the 14th Amendment and the struggle for true equality among different minority groups in the U.S.

*Pay Attention: It’s Independence Day!* was created in partnership with Natasha Mayers, the USM Galleries, and Artists Rapid Response Team [ARRT].

The HHRC’s 29th Annual Meeting is Set for Sunday, June 11th in Falmouth

*Portland City Councilor and Activist Pious Ali Selected as Gerda Haas Award Winner*

The Board and staff of the HHRC will honor students and individuals in Maine who are doing outstanding work in the fields of Holocaust and human rights awareness and education at our annual meeting on Sunday, June 11th at the Woodlands Club in Falmouth, Maine.

The recipient of the Lawrence Alan Spiegel Remembrance Scholarship is Gabe Gervais, a senior at Erskine Academy. This year's Mathilda Schlossberger Outstanding High School Student of the Year is Sam Clermont, a senior at Gray-New Gloucester High School. Julia Pols, an 8th grade student at Brunswick Junior High School, has been named the Mathilda Schlossberger Outstanding Middle School Student of the Year.

The recipients of this year's Holocaust Professional Development Grant are Sarah Bailey, a history teacher at South Portland High School, and Gary Carter, a literacy teacher at Richmond Middle School.

The HHRC will be presenting the Gerda Haas Award for Excellence in Human Rights Education and Leadership to Pious Ali.

A Youth and Community Engagement Specialist at the University of Southern Maine's Muskie School of Public Service, Pious Ali has spent the better part of his life focused on community engagement. He has created...
meaningful and ongoing dialogue across cultural, ethnic, socioeconomic, and faith-based barriers.

The HHRC will also recognize Holocaust survivor Edith Lucas Pagelson, and human rights activist and educator Reza Jalali.

Edith Pagelson’s father was a decorated hero of WWI. Together with her mother Flora and younger sister Suse the family lived in Worms, Germany. Edith’s parents attempted to send Edith and Suse out of the country. Suse made it to England, but Edith did not escape. In the Theresienstadt concentration camp, Edith witnessed the spectacular farce the Nazi’s orchestrated to fools the International Red Cross. Edith’s father did not survive Theresienstadt, but she and her mother Flora were sent to Birkenau, Auschwitz, and Stuthoff. Edith and Flora were reunited with Suse in America following the war. Edith is a resident of Falmouth, Maine and has shared her story with thousands of Maine students.

Reza Jalali is a writer, educator, and refugee activist. As a board director of Amnesty International, Jalali has led delegations to refugee camps in Turkey and Bosnia, and the United Nations conferences. In 1992, he visited the White House as part of a national delegation to discuss the plight of Kurdish refugees fleeing Iraq. Jalali has taught at the Bangor Theological Seminary and the University of Southern Maine. He is a faculty member of the USM Honors Program and advises Muslim students at Bowdoin College.

The Annual Meeting has been made possible with the generous support of Sustainer Sponsor Judy & Leonard Lauder, and Supporter Sponsors Michael L. Schuman, M.D. and Dhara (Patricia) Williams, and Steven Adelsberg.

Current Klahr Exhibit -

**Heroism in Unjust Times: Rescuers During the Holocaust**

*May 3rd through August 11th, 2017*

Despite the potentially fatal consequences, thousands of individuals risked their lives to help those targeted by the Nazis. *Heroism in Unjust Times: Rescuers During the Holocaust*, celebrates and honors those righteous individuals. The exhibit also shares stories of individuals and their descendants who were saved by these rescuers and settled in Maine and nearby.

An opening program featured Julie Lanoie, whose grandmother Allegonda Balte-Peper was involved with the Dutch Resistance and cared for some 45 Jews, in addition to hiding her Jewish husband, Philip Peper, in their home; and Walt Bannon, whose grandfather August Felix Florin was involved with the Belgian resistance. Artifacts include items about Portuguese consul Aristides de Sousa Mendes, who issued thousands of visas illegally to Jews and others targeted by the Nazis; Oskar Schindler, responsible for saving approximately 1,200 Jewish men, women and children; Raoul Wallenberg, who saved as many as 100,000 Hungarian Jews; Father Bruno (Henri Reynders), who protected 300-400 children, most of whom were Jewish; and Muslim-Albanian families who saved Jews.

*Heroism in Unjust Times* is supported by Kennebec Savings Bank, and is presented in partnership with the Sousa Mendes Foundation, Yad Vashem, Darrell English, Julie Lanoie, Joan Lanoie, Jennie Blair, Mona Pearl Treyball, Walt Bannon and Jean-Claude van Itallie.
also feature conversations with recent immigrants, and an up to the minute report on immigration-focused efforts in the Maine Legislature.

For the second year in a row, the HHRC will partner with Facing History and Ourselves, to present Democracy at Risk: Holocaust and Human Behavior on Wednesday and Thursday, July 19th and 20th.

In today’s world, questions of how to best build and maintain democratic societies that are pluralistic, open, and resilient to violence are more relevant than ever. Studying the Holocaust allows students to wrestle with profound moral questions raised by this history and fosters their skills in ethical reasoning, critical thinking, empathy, and civic engagement—all of which are critical for sustaining democracy.

This workshop is intended for middle and high school teachers of history, literature and humanities. Independent evaluation has shown that implementing Facing History’s approach improves students’ higher-order thinking skills, increases students’ civic efficacy and engagement with civic matters, and increases students’ tolerance for others who hold contrary views from their own.

In August, the HHRC will embark on a new project focusing on civil discourse. The Democracy is Noisy project will include two summer seminars, which will then be developed into a Civil Discourse program for schools and communities during the 2017/2018 school year.

The first of these workshops is scheduled for Wednesday and Thursday, August 2nd and 3rd. for teachers and life-long learners The program, which is being developed in partnership with Maine’s First Amendment Museum in Augusta, will feature resources from a variety of sources including Teaching Tolerance, the Margaret Chase Smith Library, the Marlin Fitzwater Smith Library, the National Institute for Civil Discourse, the Newseum, Facing History and Ourselves and others.

We will conclude our summer seminars on Tuesday and Wednesday, August 8th and 9th with a seminar for students in grades 8 through 12. The session will include discussion and immersive exercises using materials that were reviewed in the teacher program. Presenters will include educators, elected officials, and representatives of organizations in Maine who are fighting to improve the level of civil discourse in our state.

Each seminar is $100 per participant, and includes lunch on both days. For teachers, each seminar includes 12 contact hours that can be used towards recertification. To ensure that there is time for discussion and sharing of resources, seminars are limited to 30 participants per session.

Limited scholarships are available for those who live beyond 80 miles from Augusta. Special hotel rates are available for all participants.

For registration or more information visit www.hhrcmaine.org/summer-seminar-2017/.

Klahr Exhibit -

Seeking Assistance in the Development of an Exhibit Honoring Maine in World War I

A century ago - April 6th, 1917 - the US entered World War I, which had been raging since the summer of 1914. Among those enlisting was University of Maine Engineering student Harold T. Andrews, who had completed his sophomore year in the spring of 1916 and was working at an oil company in New Jersey. On May 15th, 1917 he joined Company B of the 11th Engineers. He was immediately sent to the front near Gouzeaucourt in northern France.

Corporal Andrews was part of a team of engineers who would assess and repair rail lines that had been seized from the Germans in France. Just six months after he enlisted, his group was attacked by Germans who

Continued, next page.
broke through the lines. Unarmed, Andrews and his team fought with picks and shovels, but were no match for the enemy.

On November 30th, 1917 he became the first Mainer to die in the war. He is buried in New British Cemetery near the site where he fell.

A description of his life and death is contained in a letter from his mother written early in 1919. She concludes “Such in brief is a summary of the short career of my soldier boy.”

The letter from Harold Andrews’ mother to the President of the University of Maine is one of the pieces we have found so far. In the letter she shares the pride her son felt as a college student.

By the end of the war, 33,000 Mainers had enlisted, and most everyone had contributed in some way to the effort. In the fall the HHRC will be presenting an exhibit focusing on letters and stories of Mainers in World War One, including the story of Harold T. Andrews.

As we plan the exhibit, we are actively looking for items from people with a connection to Maine. We are particularly interested in letters of accounts at home and from Mainers overseas.

If you have any items you would be willing to share, please contact program director David Greenham at david.greenham@maine.edu.

The exhibit will run from August 25th through October 6th, and will launch a writing project that will continue through 2018, culminating with a series of public programs leading up to the centennial of Armistice Day, the end of World War I, on November 11th, 1918.

**Thank You, Thank You, Thank You!**

*The HHRC cannot exist without the support of our many friends and donors.*

*Thank you to those who made donations between September 2, 2016 and April 30, 2017*

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Part of the performance of Created Equal, which was supported by the HHRC, included Saudi Arabian UMA student Zaid Dajani’s story of being detained for 8 hours at Dulles airport, handcuffed to a chair, without being permitted to speak to a lawyer or his parents. He was eventually released without an explanation.
Among the items in our current exhibit is Allegonda Peper-Balte's Righteous Among the Nations medal. Awarded on May 6, 2007, by the Holocaust Heroes and Martyrs Remembrance Authority, established by Yad Vashem, it is the only civilian medal Israel awards and it is given to non-Jews who saved the life of a Jew during the Holocaust at a personal risk to themselves.

In the center, the inscription in Hebrew: "A token of gratitude from the Jewish people". At the bottom, the inscription in French: "The grateful Jewish people" and the French translation of "whoever saves one life, it is as if he saved an entire universe."
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Jolene Twombly-Wiser’s students from Oxford Hills Middle School visited the Michael Klahr Center in January for a presentation of “The Message Matters,” and to view the latest exhibits. Each year the Klarh Center welcomes over 5,000 visitors for classes, programs, events, and educational outreach.
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