



Baylor University

December 15, 2020

Sunset Advisory Commission
PO Box 13066
Austin, Texas 78711

Dear Commission Members,

I write in support of the work of the Texas Holocaust and Genocide Commission (THGC), an agency currently under review by the Sunset Commission. I am an associate professor of history and director of the Institute for Oral History at Baylor University. I have worked with this group for almost ten years and have been consistently impressed by the high impact and striking quality of their efforts. Their endeavors to bring awareness of the Holocaust and other genocides to Texas students, educators, and the general public is truly innovative and groundbreaking.

My engagement with the THGC began in spring 2011 on an oral history project recording video testimonies of Texas servicemen who liberated German concentration camps in the spring of 1945. These men, all very young at the time, shared the horrors they witnessed firsthand. Most of these experiences had been undocumented. Although we have already lost many of the men who participated in this initiative, the words and images of their testimony live on, through online collections, virtual exhibits, educational conferences, publications, and school curriculum. These now twenty-one interviews are priceless records that reveal both the best and worst of us as a people. I feel honored that it is the voice of our Texas servicemen that are used in Holocaust education efforts throughout the state.

In the next partnership with the Texas Holocaust and Genocide Commission, the Institute for Oral History at Baylor conducted a series of oral history interviews documenting the experiences of Texans who lived through international genocides. This gathered narratives from individuals who lived through the horrors in Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda, Burundi, and Darfur before immigrating to make Texas their home. In the call for proposals for this effort, the THGC requested that an oral historian work in conjunction with a mental health professional, who would provide support for interviewees throughout the project. This is unusual for an agency to take such due diligence to ensure the wellbeing of those that participate in their programs. It is reflective of the care and thoughtfulness the THGC demonstrates in their efforts. These fourteen interviews informed similar educational outcomes as described above. I was particularly impressed by their initiative to use poetry as a tool to understand and interpret the experiences of these genocide survivors, such creative work the THGC does with both teachers and students to accomplish their mission. As a parent with a daughter taking a high school world history course, I was grateful to know that she could learn of these experiences from fellow Texans who had experienced this firsthand, rather than just read a stale description in a textbook. I feel it made her a much more compassionate and informed world citizen. This project was quite a success, even recognized nationally through receiving the Elizabeth B. Mason Oral History Project Award from the Oral History Association in 2018.

These efforts of the THGC are impressive, the work described above was recognized in 2020 by the Texas Historical Commission by granting project personnel the THC's Award of Merit. Great work has been done, but there is so much still to do. The nationally renowned THGC has vibrant and inspiring projects planned, but these initiatives require a reaffirmation by the state that this work is essential. If I can offer further comment on the work of the Texas Holocaust and Genocide Commission, please do not hesitate to reach out to me at 254-710-6290. I appreciate your work on behalf of the state to enable meaningful efforts such as this initiative.

Sincerely,



Stephen Sloan, PhD
Director, Institute for Oral History
Associate Professor, Department of History