

# Professor breaks down impact of Anne Frank



Jeffrey Shandler, professor in the department of Jewish Studies, addresses the crowd last night at the Douglass Campus Center about the far-reaching legacy of Anne Frank.

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By Taylor Londino / Contributing Writer

The story of Anne Frank, a Jewish girl who kept a diary while hiding from Nazi raids, has not been confined to her diary.

Professor Jeffrey Shandler, a professor in the Department of Jewish Studies, demonstrated the expanse of the cultural phenomenon in society surrounding Anne Frank and her infamous diary since its original publication in 1947 last night at Traves Hall in the Douglass Campus Center.

Shandler said this “Anne Frank Phenomenon,” a term he coined, includes musical compositions, films, plays, YouTube videos, poetry, dance and much more.

“There are few publications that have inspired engagements that are as extensive and diverse, ranging from dramatization to parody,” Shandler said.

What makes this case exceptional is the fact that Frank never participated in her fame, he said.

“To read the diary, or to see a play or film or exhibition about Anne Frank — to discuss the diary in a classroom or hear her name invoked in a poem is to encounter and to share in the Anne Frank Phenomenon,” Shandler said.

Shandler said the diary has evolved over the past 65 years. Not only was the journal edited by Frank herself during her lifetime, but also by her father, Otto Frank. Numerous revisions and versions of the book have shown the full scope of the diary, he said.

“[The diary has become] intellectual property to be regulated for copyright and moral reasons, and treated with appropriate respect,” Shandler said.

He said discussion and argument about over-moralizing or revising the original diary has persisted.

The diary — now seen as a rite of passage for all students learning about the Holocaust — is particularly relatable and effective for young readers, he said. It is an essential primary source about the Holocaust and a cultural account especially for Jews, but he said other groups could strongly relate to her hardship.

Shandler said many readers view her almost as a saint and her writings as sacred. She is at the center of monuments and a symbol of martyrdom for many.

“At the heart of the Anne Frank Phenomenon is her status as a celebrity,” he said.

But with this reverence also comes irreverence from Holocaust deniers, he said, who aim to discredit the journal.

Karen Small, the associate director of the Allen and Joan Bildner Center for the Study of Jewish Life, said the center was very fortunate and excited to sponsor such an accomplished member of the University faculty as a speaker.

“It was just a natural choice to have him present to the community about his recently published work, ‘Anne Frank: Unbound,’” Small said.

She said the center serves as a bridge between the University and the community by running programs that look at a range of Jewish issues from a scholarly perspective.

“Here’s an opportunity to hear new research, new perspectives about Anne Frank and what she means and has come to mean in the world, as a symbol, as an icon,” she said.

Small said the Department of Jewish Studies and the Bildner Center work closely together.

Shandler is the faculty advisor for the program involving workshops for schoolteachers on teaching the Holocaust.

“It’s the kind of book that I feel that everyone has read at some point in their life. I’m looking forward to the lecture because I know that it will bring a different way to look at Anne Frank and her diary writing. It’s a closer examination of her writing and the diary,” she said.

Andrew Getraer, executive director of the Rutgers Hillel Foundation, said Anne Frank is a subject which everyone in both the Hillel community and American society is somewhat familiar with.

He said people should want to learn more about the story of Anne Frank and get a broader perspective. The diary is relatable to all kinds of people because it is such a universal story, he said.

“It’s an adolescent girl confronted with terrible trauma and tragedy who perseveres and shares what’s going on in her heart and her mind,” Getraer said.

Shandler said the influence of digital technology has made it possible to spread Anne Frank’s story universally.

“Within this culture of open sharing of information and creative work, which has its own social practices and also its own efforts, Anne Frank and her diary are in effect, unbound,” Shandler said.

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