

The 31st John Wesley Dafoe Political Studies Students' Conference

"The Legacy of the Great Wars: Marking History and Humanity" was the theme of this year's John Wesley Dafoe Political Studies Students' Conference (JWD-PSSC). The conference, held January 28-30, 2015, at the University of Manitoba, was the highest attended JWD-PSSC conference in its history of thirty-one years. With the confluence of anniversaries of the three great wars – the start of World War One (100), start of World War Two (75) and the end of the Cold War (25) - the theme of this year's JWD-PSSC was suitable. The conference showcased local, national, and international scholars over the course of five panels.

Allan Levine, a Winnipeg writer and historian, opened the conference with a lecture at McNally Robinson. His presentation, "The Impact of World War I and World War II on Canada and the West," focused on the themes of militarism and nationalism, human rights, and the impact on Canada. Dr. Levine's presentation focused on the evolution and history of World War I and World War II, and the transformation of human perspectives throughout the century.



Held at the Great Hall in University College at the University of Manitoba, five interdisciplinary panels spanned Thursday and Friday. The panels allowed the scholars to present for fifteen minutes, with a large window at the end for a question and answer period. The first panel, World War One, featured three scholars. Gene Walz (University of Manitoba) spoke on how there are very few Canadian films on the First World War. Clips were shown from the films, like the 1928 Carry on, Sergeant! Dean Oliver (Canadian Museum of History) gave a broad overview of the factors that caused World War One. Dr. Oliver emphasized how the crisis leading to WWI was one of the most complicated crises, and emphasized the importance that all explanations of the war have political and social bias. David McDonald (University of Wisconsin) gave insight of Russia's imperial period before World War One and their position during the Great War.

The Second World War Panel featured Robert Young (University of Winnipeg), Iain Johnston (Cambridge University), Catherine Chatterley (University of Manitoba) and Stephan Jaeger (University of Manitoba). Topics included the political and social origins of World War Two, Canada's contribution and the significance of the war in museums across the Western world. The Thursday of the conference concluded with The Cold War panel, with the intellectual insight of Jim Fergusson (University of Manitoba), Andrew Burtch (War Museum of Canada), and Kyle Haddad-Fonda (Middle East Institute). The implications of Mutually Assured Destruction, the Civil Defence of Canada during the Cold War, and the Chinese/Arab

perspective during the Cold War made the audience aware of the reason why we include the Cold War in the category of a Great War.

On Friday, two panels concluded the conference. Adam Chapnick (Canadian Forces College), Melanie Morin-Pelletier (War Museum of Canada), James Hanley (University of Winnipeg), and Jody Perrun (University of Manitoba) presented topics on the theme of “The Impact on Humanity” during Panel Four.

The different institutions that came from the Great Wars, the advancements made to medicine, the effect on family morale, and women’s impact during the Great Wars informed the audience on how the history of the Great Wars does not stop at the battlefields.

The impossible question of “What is the Future of War” was asked to the four presenters of the fifth and final panel. Brigadier General Ploughman (Commander, 2 Canadian Air Division) spoke on how future engagements and conflicts are uncertain and will be unstable, and present a challenge to Western militaries due to the frequency of non-state conflicts. War in the 21st century also demands increased precision with minimal collateral damage. Brigadier General Hyde (Deputy-Commander, CANR, 1 CAD) explains the risqué of predicting the future of war, for it is much easier to critique and plan based on hindsight. Brigadier General Hyde emphasized that the nature of war hasn’t changed, just the means available to those involved. Technology was a recurring theme during this panel. Emmanuel Goffi (University of Manitoba) spoke on the impact drones and robots will have on the future of war. Bryan Peeler (University of Manitoba) spoke on the Geneva Conventions and the implications the law of war conflicts.

The John Wesley Dafoe Political Studies Students Conference was an overall success. The conference organizers would like to thank all who attended and the numerous sponsors! For detailed notes on each panel, please email pssc@umanitoba.ca. For a list of sponsors and to keep updated on next year’s conference on “Elections”, please go to http://umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/departments/political_studies/3607.html.