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## Annual Yom Hashoah event honors non-Jewish Holocaust victims

■ The annual interfaith commemoration focuses on non-Jewish victims.

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Posted: Friday, May 2, 2014 12:00 am | Updated: 8:24 am, Fri May 2, 2014.

By BILL SHERMAN World Religion Writer | 0 comments



Collinsville Middle School student Ilya Morrison, 13, lights a candle Thursday during the annual Yom Hashoah Holocaust commemoration at Temple Israel. JAMES GIBBARD/Tulsa World



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The government of West Germany did not acknowledge until 1982 that the Nazis' persecution of the Roma people (Gypsies) during World War II was an act of genocide, Nadine Blumer told a full house Thursday night at Yom Hashoah, the Interfaith Holocaust Commemoration at Temple Israel.

Some 1,000 people attended the annual event, which focused on the 5 million non-Jewish victims of the Holocaust, including the Roma people and other ethnic groups, as well as German disabled children and adults, homosexuals, people considered "asocial," such as alcoholics and criminals, and those who were considered ideologically dangerous.

The Roma are an ethnic group that began moving into Europe 1,000 years ago from the Indian subcontinent, said Blumer, who is working on a post-doctoral fellowship at the Centre for Ethnographic Research and Exhibition in the Aftermath of Violence at Concordia University in Montreal.

She said the Nazis persecuted the Roma people as racial inferiors in a way similar to how the Jews were persecuted. The Roma were subject to forced sterilization, deportation, mandatory labor, medical experimentation, starvation and extermination in numerous concentration

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camps, she said.

She said estimates are that about a half million Roma people died in the Holocaust. They remain today the largest and most marginalized ethnic minority in Europe.

Germany was slow to acknowledge the deaths as a genocide for decades, she said, often because they refused to recognize that the persecution was racially motivated.

But she believes it is now clear that racist ideology motivated the Nazi policies against the Roma from the start of the Nazi rule.

A Roma civil rights movement in the 1970s spawned a debate that raged for years in Germany about non-Jewish Holocaust victims, she said.

A major achievement in the Roma struggle for recognition was the dedication in 2012 of a Roma Holocaust Memorial in the heart of Berlin. A short distance from that memorial are two more memorials to the Jewish victims and the homosexual victims of the Holocaust.

After Blumer's talk, the Rev. Marlin Lavanhar, senior minister of All Souls Unitarian Church, said that for the people in this community, the Roma will no longer be second-class citizens.

He led a candle-lighting ceremony in memory of the various groups of victims of the Holocaust.

The event was sponsored by the Jewish Federation of Tulsa's Council for Holocaust Education, the Tulsa City-County Library and dozens of local interfaith and community organizations.

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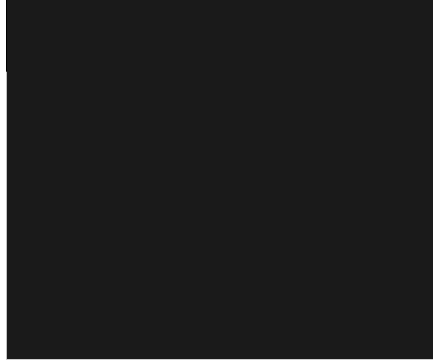
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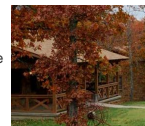
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