

CFP Research Seminar

David Boder: Reflecting on His Work, Life and Legacy 80 Years After



George & Irina Schaeffer
Center for the Study
of Genocide, Human Rights
and Conflict Prevention



Fortunoff Video Archive
For Holocaust Testimonies

The Diana and Eli Zborowski Center for the Study of the Aftermath of the Holocaust, The International Institute for Holocaust Research, Yad Vashem

Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University

The George and Irina Schaeffer Center for the Study of Genocide, Human Rights and Conflict Prevention, The American University of Paris

October 6-8, 2026

The American University of Paris, France

In the summer of 1946, psychologist Dr. David Boder began one of the first audio testimony projects with survivors of the Holocaust. Responding to a call by General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Boder sought to raise awareness among the American public regarding the events of the Holocaust and was also interested in highlighting the plight of Jewish displaced persons in Europe. Through his interview project, he also aimed to gather personal reports "for future psychological and anthropological study." At the same time, he recognized that the survivor accounts he gathered were not "the grimmest stories that could be told--I did not interview the dead." This haunting phrase became the title of his first book on the project in which he published eight of the interviews.

<https://boder.fortunoff.library.yale.edu/>

Boder's interview project included visits to four countries in Europe at a number of locations and included approximately 130 people, both Jewish survivors and non-Jewish bystanders. The interviews were mostly recorded in the language of the interviewees' choice, and the conversations were translated and transcribed in English. The audio recordings and transcriptions are available online through the Illinois Institute of Technology.

<https://voices.library.iit.edu/>

As we mark 80 years since this innovative project, we invite scholars to reflect on Boder's life and work in relation to early post-war Holocaust testimony, but also to the fields of Social Psychology, Ethnography, Oral History, Linguistics, Literature, Social History, Refugee Studies and Jewish Studies.

Some of the questions we seek to address include:

1. What can we learn from the Boder interview collection in terms of Holocaust history and the impact of trauma on survivors' lives?
2. What was the nature of the exchange between interviewer and interviewee? How do we interpret Boder's responses to their testimony?
3. The language of the interview and its translation.
4. How, and to what extent, does Boder's interview technique affect what is said?
5. How has this collection contributed to our understanding of the Holocaust, trauma, and survivor experience?
6. His interviews were among the first to examine the psychological impact of the events on survivors. Was his "Index of Trauma" taken up in psychological literature and treatment therapies? In what ways might we learn from it today?
7. Can we discern issues relating to age and gender in the testimonies?
8. Comparison to written testimonies given in the same early postwar period.

9. The danger of distortion of these interviews through AI.
10. How did Boder's background (Jewish, academic, clinical or otherwise) prepare him for carrying out his interview project? How did it not prepare him for what he heard—and why might that lack of preparedness itself be instructive?
11. Why was it important for Boder to see the interviews as creating a new form of world literature? Why might such an idea be important for us?
12. How does Boder's evolving concept of “the impact of catastrophe on personality” play a role at different stages of his project?

Application process:

Abstracts of no more than 500 words and a short bio of no more than 200 words indicating your academic affiliation and research in the field should be sent to: zborowski.center@yadvashem.org.il and to schaeffercenter@aup.edu.

Proposal due date: March 15, 2026

Travel and accommodation expenses (for the duration of the workshop) will be covered by the host institutions.

Participants will be notified of their participation by April 30, 2026.

Academic Committee:

Sharon Kangisser Cohen, Yad Vashem

Stephen Naron, Fortunoff Video Archive at Yale University

Constance Pâris de Bollardière, The American University of Paris

Alan Rosen, Independent Scholar

Brian Schiff, The American University of Paris