

UC SANTA BARBARA

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George J. Wittenstein Lecture Series at UCSB Honors Civic Courage

To commemorate and continue the legacy of civic courage demonstrated by Santa Barbara cardiologist George J. Wittenstein, a lecture series at the University of California, Santa Barbara has been established in his honor. As a university student in Germany during World War II, Wittenstein was a member of two resistance groups that actively opposed Adolf Hitler's Nazi regime.

The George J. Wittenstein Lecture Series will bring to the UCSB campus prominent humanities scholars whose work focuses on the history of National-Socialism; influential German writers, artists, and philosophers who demonstrate strong civic engagement; and contemporary human and civil rights issues.

The inaugural lecture will feature Geoffrey Hartman, a professor emeritus and senior research scholar of English and comparative literature at Yale University. He will speak on "Shoah Literature: The Universal Aspect" at 8 p.m. on Tuesday, October 23, in 1701 Theater and Dance Building. Shoah, or Ha-Shoah, is the Hebrew word for Holocaust.

"We are privileged to have George Jürgen Wittenstein living in our community," said Elisabeth Weber, chair of the Department of Germanic, Slavic and Semitic Studies at UCSB. "He was actively involved in the White Rose and Freedom Action Bavaria."

Speaking about the series, Weber continued: "The series is designed to inspire people to become active citizens and to uphold and defend democratic principles. While some talks may have an explicitly political dimension, others will deal with literature and philosophy—two areas that were extremely important to White Rose members, including Dr. Wittenstein, who continues to be greatly interested in them."

The Munich-based White Rose consisted of a group of friends, predominantly medical students, who appealed to the German people to defy both Hitler's dictatorship and the apathy of their fellow citizens. Members of the White Rose wrote, printed, and disseminated six leaflets that denounced the National Socialist regime's criminal activities and goals. It was the only German group specifically to condemn the extermination of European Jews. Six members were convicted of high treason and executed.

Already a member of the German armed forces, Wittenstein escaped apprehension by the Gestapo by volunteering to serve on the front line—the only place the German secret police would have no jurisdiction over him. He was assigned to the Italian front to serve as a physician. There he collected the weapons of wounded soldiers and contributed them to a secret arsenal maintained by Freedom Action Bavaria, a resistance group that consisted of military officers based in Munich.

Wounded in 1945, Wittenstein immigrated to the United States a few years later and continued his surgical training at Harvard University, the University of Rochester, and the University of Colorado. A Santa Barbara resident for almost 50 years, he has worked in private practice, as a professor of surgery at UCLA, and as chair of the Department of Surgery at the UCLA-Olive View Medical Center.

In recognition of his civic courage and participation in the White Rose and Freedom Action Bavaria, as well as his contributions to German cardiac surgery and to promoting scientific exchange between the United States and Germany, Wittenstein was awarded the Commander's Cross of The Federal Republic of Germany and the Bavarian Service Medal, the State of Bavaria's highest honor.

The George J. Wittenstein Lecture Series will continue throughout the academic year. Other prominent scholars giving talks include Alexander Gelley, professor of comparative literature at UC Irvine; Claudia Koonz, professor of history at Duke University; Amir Eshel, professor of German studies and comparative literature at Stanford University; and Saul Friedländer, professor of history at UCLA.

For more information about the series, visit www.gss.ucsb.edu/wittenstein.

Related Links

[George J. Wittenstein Lecture Series](#)

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