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## Judaica Library Collection Policies: Arab-American and Muslim-American Literature\*

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**Abstract:** An overview of the inclusion and treatment of Arab-American literature in a special library primarily concerned with contemporary American Jewish issues, the Blaustein Library of the American Jewish Committee. Mainstream Arab-American literature is interfiled with the regular collection, using a modified Dewey Decimal classification scheme. Extremist material, although housed separately, is classified in the same manner as the regular collection, preceded by a designation signifying literature of an antisemitic nature.

### Institutional Context

The American Jewish Committee (AJC) was established in 1906, and its Library in 1939 (since 1959 it has been known as the Blaustein Library, after the Committee's seventh president). The Library's primary responsibility is to service the research needs of the AJC staff. It is also available for reference use to qualified outside individuals. The collection contains approximately 35,000 books; combined periodical and newspaper titles number about 275; there are also 25 cabinets of vertical file material, an archival collection for the years 1906 through 1933, and a separate collection of historical and contemporary extremist and antisemitic materials. Although the Blaustein Library has a very respectable collection of material dealing with the Jewish situation throughout the world, it is considered by many to be the finest non-academic repository for material concerned with contemporary American Jewish issues.

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### Arab- and Muslim-American Library Materials

The subject of this paper is AJC's collection of Arab-American and Muslim-American material. The Committee is a pioneering organization in the area of interreligious relations and was the first Jewish organization to recognize the emergence of ethnicity in America. Literature on various ethnic groups has always been in the Library, but as the groups have become more numerous, more visible as communities, and more vocal in ideology and organizational activities, the collection has grown to reflect this.

The publications of mainstream organizations, such as the National Association of Arab Americans, the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, and the Islamic Society of North America, are in the open periodicals section. As these publications represent a standard point of view, very rarely is material from them incorporated into the Library's vertical files. In these files are articles and profiles of U.S. communities and groups that have been clipped from general periodicals and newspapers, as well as a growing number of articles on Islamic communities in America taken from the Jewish press.

The fact that the material contained in these files is very current constitutes one of the main advantages for the AJC staff and outside users. The Committee's recent publication *Islam in America* (see Meir & Firestone, 1992 in Appendix) illustrates the scope of the Library's resources. Material used in the preparation of this publication was from the Library's holdings. The publication has been widely distributed within the Jewish, Islamic, and Christian communities.

As one might expect, all the Library's holdings on Arab Americans are not from mainstream groups. The most obvious example of an extremist group is Louis Farrakhan's Nation of Islam. This 10,000-member organization constitutes a true

minority within the overall African-American Islamic community of 300,000. It has unfortunately attracted the greatest media attention. AJC's files on the Black Muslim movement and Louis Farrakhan are very extensive and available to the general public. The Nation of Islam's publications are not, however. They are subscribed to under a fictitious name and received at a post office box. This process is handled by the AJC staff person directly responsible for tracking this material. The publications eventually are sent to the Library, where they are housed in a separate room along with other current and historical extremist and antisemitic material. This entire collection of books and periodicals is cataloged and arranged according to the same system used for the Library's regular collection—a refinement and extension of the Dewey Decimal system.

The 290 numbers which we have chosen to use from Dewey's religion schedule have been adapted to stand overall for "The Jewish Question." In our scheme, the number 291 has been designated to mean antisemitism. The Dewey Decimal Classification has a geographic table; 73 is for U. S. In our classification scheme, 291.73 refers to material discussing antisemitism in the United States. A291.73 represents actual antisemitic material referring to the United States.

Louis Farrakhan material is classified as follows:

326 Intergroup relations  
    .6 Blacks  
    .629(1) Black-Jewish relations  
A326.629 Antisemitic material discussing  
    Black-Jewish relations

Access to anti-Semitic material is limited in our Library.

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**Selection and Access Issues**

In most subject areas, the purpose in selecting material for AJC's collection is to make available to the Library's users a broad range of views. The purpose is not to question the right of anyone to advocate positions other than those that are popular in the Jewish community. In my opinion, this set of principles has been far easier to adhere to with regard to Arab-American and Muslim-American material than other subject areas and publications. The widest diversity of publications of the "other point of view" makes our collection more valuable, and to a degree more palatable, to the ideology of the librarian. In disseminating this material, however, discretion and common sense are two essential characteristics.

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This brief description of AJC's collection of Arab-American and Muslim-American material brings to mind an article by Adaire Klein, of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, that appeared in *Judaica Librarianship* (1986-87). The similarities in the methods and criteria used by both organizations in decisions of inclusion, treatment, and accessibility of extremist publications are striking. Klein's paper was more extensive than this one, as she was discussing the main holdings of her library—Holocaust and Holocaust denial literature—while this paper has described a relatively new and small, albeit impor-

tant, component of the collection of the American Jewish Committee's Blaustein Library.

**Reference**

Klein, Adaire. "The Handling of Holocaust Denial Literature in a Special Library," *Judaica Librarianship*, vol. 3, no. 1-2 (1986-1987), pp. 55-57.

**Appendix**

**The Arab-American and Muslim-American Communities; A Selected Bibliography of Mainstream and Extremist Publications**

Abraham, Sameer Y. and Nabeel, eds. *Arabs in the New World*. Detroit: Wayne State University, 1983.

Abu-Laban, Baha; Suleiman, Michael W., eds. *Arab Americans: Continuity and Change*. Belmont, MA: Association of Arab-American University Graduates, 1989.

ADC Times. Washington, DC: American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, April 1992- (quarterly).

*Arab-American Almanac*. 4th ed. Glendale, CA: The News Circle Publishing House, 1992.

Aswad, Barbara C., ed. *Arabic Speaking Communities in American Cities*. Staten Island, NY: Center for Migration Studies of New York, 1974.

Brackman, Harold. *Farrakhan's Reign of Historical Error: The Truth Behind "The Secret Relationship Between Blacks and Jews."* Los Angeles: Simon Wiesenthal Center, 1992.

Caplan, Marc. *Jew-Hatred as History: The Nation of Islam's "Secret Relationship."* New York: Anti-Defamation League, 1993.

Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck; Lummis, Adair T. *Islamic Values in the United States: A Comparative Study*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Haddad, Yvonne; Smith, Jane Idleman. *Mission to America: Five Islamic Sectarian Communities in North America*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1993.

*Islamic Horizons*. Plainfield, IN: Islamic Society of North America, April 1976- (quarterly). (Formerly *MSA News*.)

Lincoln, Charles Eric. *The Black Muslims in America*. Rev. ed. Boston: Beacon Press, 1973.

Little, Malcolm. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. With the Assistance of Alex Haley. New York: Grove Press, 1965.

Martin, Tony. *The Jewish Onslaught: Dispatches from the Wellesley Battlefield*. Dover, MA: Majority Press, 1993.

Medhi, Beverlee Turner, comp. *The Arabs in America, 1942-1977: A Chronology & Fact Book*. Dobbs Ferry, NY: Oceana Publications, Inc., 1978.

Meir, Aryeh; Firestone, Reuven. *Islam in America*. New York: American Jewish Committee, 1992.

*MSA News*. Indianapolis, IN: Muslim Student Association of the United States and Canada, Feb. 1973-March 1976 (monthly). (Succeeded by *Islamic Horizons*.)

Muhammad, Elijah. *The Fall of America*. Chicago: Muhammad's Temple of Islam No. 2, 1973.

Nation of Islam. *The Secret Relationship Between Blacks and Jews*. vol. 1. Chicago, 1992. Authorship attributed to Louis Farrakhan.

Richardson, E. Allen. *Islamic Cultures in North America: Patterns of Belief and Devotion of Muslims from Asian Countries in the United States and Canada*. New York: Pilgrim Press, 1981.

Rudin, A. James. *Muslim-Jewish Relations in North America*. New York: American Jewish Committee, 1994. Paper presented at a Muslim-Jewish Conference at the University of Denver, October 24, 1993.

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