

Controversial Materials in the Jewish Library

Introduction to a Panel Discussion

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Association of Jewish Libraries,
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Washington, DC*

This panel will explore the acquisition and cataloging of controversial materials in a Jewish library. For the purposes of our discussion, we will define a "Jewish library" as a library which is partly or wholly under Jewish auspices—though in a generic sense the issues raised today will pertain in some degree to most public and/or private libraries. Since the category of "controversial material" is by itself quite broad, we will concentrate on exploring only one such area: the literature of Holocaust denial. Despite this exclusive focus on one genre, we expect that the insights and methods outlined today will be applicable to other categories which constitute controversial literature in a Jewish library, such as the anti-Zionist polemics of both the extreme religious right and the secular left; anti-Semitism (e.g., *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* or Henry Ford's *Dearborn Independent*); and various and sundry examples of anti-Israel hate literature.

The works which we will be discussing today—in one form or another—deny the historicity of the Holocaust. Today, less than 45 years after the end of World War II, with the eyewitness testimony of survivors and liberators still readily and abundantly available, we have witnessed a persistent effort by a small cadre of right-wing fanatics to characterize the Holocaust as a hoax. Though examples of this type of literature date from the end of the Second World War, intense attention has been drawn to this genre only since the late 1970s with the publication of *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century* (Torrance, California, 1976) by Arthur Butz, a Northwestern University engineering professor. The "revisionists" declare that the Holocaust is a myth advanced by the Jews to gain power, that the crematoria were actually delousing stations, that "only" several hundred thousand Jews—not six million—died during World War II, that Anne Frank's diary was a hoax, and on and on. . . .¹

The battle against these lies has been joined on several fronts. Efforts have been redoubled to record for posterity the eyewitness testimony of survivors and liberators and to make these available for researchers in Holocaust centers and archives. Information has been circulated to the media exposing these fanatics, and their claims have been authoritatively discredited in the scholarly literature.² Remedies have also been sought through the courts. In the most celebrated case, one man—a survivor of the Holocaust—took a publisher of these lies to court to force the publisher to make good on an offer of a reward to anyone able to prove that "Jews were gassed in gas chambers in Auschwitz." The case, which was settled out of court, resulted in an "official and formal" public apology by the publisher and his cronies to the plaintiff and to "all other survivors of Auschwitz" and in a substantial financial award.³ Of course, we here today are not in need of a court's validation to confirm the reality of a tragedy which touched every house in Israel. We view these lies as an insult to the memory of the victims as well as an infliction of further pain on the survivors. We know the assertions of these pseudo-historians to be blatantly false, malicious, and ultimately dangerous.

In light of our unequivocal rejection of the message contained in Holocaust denial literature, how do we respond to a central credo of our profession—a credo that eschews censorship in all of its forms (explicit or implicit) and promotes an individual's absolute right to information? Whether these works should be made available to our various constituents is, therefore, the starting point of our discussion.

The issues raised here today have a special relevance for our Canadian participants, in light of the recently completed court case involving Ernst Zundel—a Canadian

brought to trial and convicted of knowingly publishing materials which were false, claiming that the Jews invented the Holocaust in a sinister plot to seize power. We will learn more about this case from Professor Richard Menkis, who served as an advisor to the Crown in its prosecution of Mr. Zundel. Professor Menkis, (now of the University of British Columbia) will also provide the historical framework within which this literature may be viewed. [*Prof. Menkis' paper was not submitted for publication. —Eds.*]

How should works which characterize the Holocaust as a hoax be classified?⁴ This problem is at the core of Professor Weinfeld's presentation, which questions the Library of Congress (LC) classification of the Butz book in D 810.J4, placing it alongside a respected work such as *The War Against the Jews 1933–1945* by Lucy Dawidowicz, also classified in D 810.J4. By not discriminating between works of history and works of pseudo-history, Professor Weinfeld feels that we accord pseudo-history credibility by association. He wonders how a title which is viewed by respectable academic historians as "out-of-bounds" and as lacking any semblance of historical validity, can be classified and shelved by librarians alongside books that fall within the rather accommodating parameters of respectable academic scholarship. He draws our attention to the different classification numbers which exist within the LC system for evolution as a science (in the QH class) and for the expression of the creationist ideology (in the BS class) and asks why a similar distinction in classification has not been drawn between history and pseudo-history.⁵

We know this literature to be patently false and harmful, presenting a point of view that is anathema to the institutions within which we serve. Are we justified then in expending a portion of our limited resources to acquire such works? And if we acquire one

of these titles, how should we catalog it? Should we restrict access to the book or pamphlet? Should we treat this material as we treat other "restricted" items, controlling, and thereby limiting, our clientele's access to it? If we decide to restrict the material, what criteria should we establish to determine who gains access? Where should such an item be classified? In anti-Semitism? In history? Should a new category be established for "pseudo-history?" And what subject headings should be assigned to books which characterize the Holocaust as a hoax? Was LC's initial decision to include these titles under the subject heading **Holocaust—Historiography** appropriate, or did it, as some have stated, lend to the works in question a patina of legitimacy? Is the replacement heading, **Holocaust, Jewish (1939–1945)—Errors, inventions, etc.**, an improvement? These difficult questions will be tackled by our final speaker, Mrs. Adaire Klein, Librarian of the Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles, who will carry the discussion from the theoretical to the practical. She will outline the policies of the Wiesenthal Center in connection with this type of material and describe one library's answer to the questions raised above.

Notes

¹References to this literature are included in Robert Singerman's comprehensive *Antisemitic Propaganda: An Annotated Bibliography and Research Guide* (New York and London, Garland, 1982). On the Anne Frank diary, see Ditleb Felderer, *Anne Frank's Diary—a Hoax* (Torrance, CA, Institute for Historical Review, 1979). Francis X. Clines in "Anne Frank Again Focus of Challenge," in *The New York Times* (April 21, 1987), reports on a critical edition of the diary which is being prepared, in part, to counter these outrageous allegations. The new edition, which is being translated into English, will include some previously omitted materials as well as documentation authenticating the diary.

²A succinct overview and critique of this genre can be found in "Lies About the Holocaust," by Lucy Dawidowicz, in *Commentary*, v. 70 (December, 1980). Other publications which address Holocaust denial literature include: Alison B. Carb and Alan M. Schwartz, *Holocaust 'Revisionism': A Denial of History: An Update* (New York: Civil Rights Division, Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, 1986) and an earlier version by Alan Schwartz, "Holocaust 'Revisionism': A Denial of History," in *Facts*, v. 26, June 1980: 1–17; Erich Kulka, *The Holocaust Is Being Denied!* (Tel-Aviv, Committee of Auschwitz Camps Survivors in Israel, 1977); Arthur Suzman, *The Holocaust* (Johannesburg, South African Jewish Board of

Deputies, 1980) and his earlier work *Six Million Did Die* (Johannesburg, South African Jewish Board of Deputies, 1978).

³This case was reported on extensively in the press. See, for example, "Holocaust Doubters Settle Auschwitz Survivor's Suit," by Myrna Oliver, in the *Los Angeles Times* (July 25, 1985), which includes the text of the apology.

⁴Subsequent to this panel discussion, an article by F.K. Donnelly, titled "Catalogue Wars and Classification Controversies," describing the cataloging dilemmas posed by this type of literature, appeared in the *Canadian Library Journal*, v. 43, no. 4 (August, 1986).

⁵At a meeting following the panel presentations, Rabbi Theodore Wiener of the Library of Congress' Subject Cataloging Division explained the rationale behind LC's classification policy in this matter and reported that the Library is considering establishing an additional classification number corresponding to the subject heading **Holocaust, Jewish (1939–1945)—Errors, inventions, etc.**

Dr. Michael Grunberger is Head of the Hebrew Section of the Library of Congress.

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OF
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The Classification of Holocaust Denial Literature by the Library of Congress

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Introduction

In 1985, the *Bulletin of the Canadian Association of University Teachers* published two articles, one by me and a reply by Vincent Richards, an Alberta librarian and past president of the Library Association of Alberta, on the subject of libraries and Holocaust-denial literature (see boxes). At the time, I decided not to respond to his article.

The recent discovery that a 1985 doctorate had been granted by the university of Nantes, in France, to a Holocaust denial dissertation, and the resulting furor in France, has prompted this belated reply. The stamp of higher academic sponsorship, even if awarded through misjudgment, should not be permitted to blur the distinction between fact and fantasy. As Kurt Waldheim has discovered, historical memories can be short, and selective. Scholars must work in tandem with librarians in the discovery and dissemination of the truth about our world.