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**Historical Fabrications on the Internet:
Recognition, Evaluation, and Use in Bibliographic Instruction**

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Abstract

Although the Internet provides access to a wealth of information, there is little, if any, control over the quality of that information. Side-by-side with reliable information, one finds disinformation, misinformation, and hoaxes. The authors of this paper discuss numerous examples of fabricated historical information on the Internet (ranging from denials of the Holocaust to personal vendettas), offer suggestions on how to evaluate websites, and argue that these fabrications can be incorporated into bibliographic instruction classes.

Although librarians pride themselves on building their collections and choosing materials wisely, misleading and inaccurate information has always found its way into those very collections. This is even more true in the age of the World Wide Web, when librarians have very little (if any) control over the quality of what our patrons access electronically, and the growth of the Web continues, nearly tripling over the last two years to contain about 7 million distinct sites; and when one counts the so-called “Deep Web” (i.e., content retrievable by direct query from searchable databases), it is 400 to 550 times larger.¹ As has been pointed out elsewhere, the Internet is a work in progress, and anyone is free to publish information or an opinion on it.² Or, to put it more bluntly, the “Internet may be loaded and fast (sounds like a used car ad, doesn’t it?), but it’s also filled with gargantuan amounts of trash.”³ The accuracy of medical information in libraries and on the Web is of critical importance, since it could result in illness and/or death. This paper, however, will deal with a subject that it is not quite a matter of life-and-death – it will seek to identify some glaring examples of historical fabrications on the Web, and how librarians (and students) can recognize and determine their unreliability. The present authors believe, however, that these websites *can* (and *should*) be used in bibliographic instruction classes to demonstrate the necessity of critically evaluating *all* information accessed via the Internet.

FABRICATIONS IN LIBRARY COLLECTIONS

There have been many famous *literary* hoaxes over the years – Clifford Irving’s *Autobiography of Howard Hughes* immediately jumps to mind⁴ – but this paper will deal with *historical* fabrications rather than literary ones.⁵ By “historical fabrications,” the present authors are referring to materials that *deliberately mislead* the reader by presenting false information as if

it were true. It is acknowledged that many historical topics are open to debate, such as the origins of the First World War, the causes of the American Civil War, and the merits/shortcomings of various politicians and famous persons. With this in mind, then, an example of a fabrication would be Parson Mason Weems' *A History, of the Life and Death, Virtues and Exploits, of General George Washington*⁶, which went through numerous editions even though many of the "facts" were entirely anecdotal or invented, such as the famous cherry tree incident.⁷

Weems' book is by no means the only historical fabrication that is present in many libraries – others are simply not as well known. For example, *Appleton's Cyclopædia of American Biography*⁸ is a staple in many reference collections around the country, owned by over 300 libraries according to OCLC. Nevertheless, *Appleton's* contains at least 21 spurious articles, and the authenticity of 62 more has been seriously challenged.⁹ A recent study of articles in just Volume 3 of *Appleton's* found 37 authenticated articles, but 6 spurious articles, 13 suspicious ones, and 9 unconfirmed ones.¹⁰ As Allan Nevins explained, the "unknown author of these sketches was paid by space, and to obtain a larger remuneration coolly created heroes out of thin air."¹¹ Another historical set known to contain forged materials is *The Horn Papers: Early Westward Movement on the Monongahela and Upper Ohio, 1765-1795*, by W.F. Horn¹², which actually resulted in the establishment of a committee of historians to investigate its authenticity a half-century ago.¹³ David Rorvik's 1978 book, *In His Image: The Cloning of a Man*, claimed that a human being had actually been *successfully* cloned. The publisher, J. B. Lippincott, was sued for defamation in federal court by a British scientist that Rorvik mentioned in the book as having developed the scientific basis for human cloning. Although a judge ruled that the book was "a fraud and a hoax" in 1978¹⁴, over 1400 libraries own it, according to

OCLC.

An early example of fraudulent hate literature is *Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk as Exhibited in a Narrative of Her sufferings During a Residence of Five Years as a Novice, and Two Years as a Black Nun, in the Hotel Dieu Nunnery at Montreal*.¹⁵ The author claimed to have been a novice and then a nun in Montreal, and described lurid details of routine sexual encounters with priests; any babies born of these illicit encounters would be baptized and then immediately killed. The book was actually a hoax, an example of anti-Catholic bigotry that was widespread in the United States at the time.¹⁶

Holocaust-denial is perhaps the most widely publicized example of spurious historical literature that librarians come into contact with. These deniers (known in France as negationists), who prefer to call themselves “revisionists” in an attempt to gain scholarly legitimacy, claim that the Holocaust is either a hoax or, at the very least, a great exaggeration that “Zionists” (i.e., Jews) use to extort money and to legitimize the existence of the State of Israel. Holocaust-denial is based on deliberate falsifications of the historical record, twisting and/or ignoring the testimony of perpetrators, victims, witnesses, and bystanders.¹⁷ Probably the most famous work of denial is *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century: The Case Against the Presumed Extermination of European Jewry*, by Arthur R. Butz, an Associate Professor of Engineering and Computer Science at Northwestern University.¹⁸ A few other notorious revisionists are Austin J. App¹⁹, Paul Rassinier²⁰, Wilhelm Staglich²¹, Michael A. Hoffman II²², and Robert Faurisson²³. Challenges faced by librarians include whether or not to purchase (or accept donations of) Holocaust-denial, where to classify it, and where to shelve it (e.g., open shelves or restricted access).²⁴

Ironically, two of the most recent controversies regarding allegations of fabricated work

also relate to the Holocaust. Benjamin Wilkomirski's book *Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood*²⁵ was hailed as among the most moving Holocaust memoirs, and received the 1997 Jewish Quarterly-Wingate Literary Prize for non-fiction. Investigators, however, have accused Wilkomirski of being a fraud, saying that his name is really Bruno Grosjean, the son of a Protestant Swiss woman, and that he actually was in Zurich during World War II.²⁶ Questions were also raised regarding the authorship of *Man of Ashes*.²⁷ Supposedly written by Salomon Isacovici, a Romanian Jew who later emigrated to Ecuador, publication of an English-language edition was delayed because Juan Manuel Rodriguez, an ex-Jesuit priest, claimed to have written the book and said that it is fictionalized, while Isacovici's family insisted that Rodriguez had only been hired to polish-up the original Spanish text. The English edition, however, lists *both* men as authors.²⁸

A more controversial, and politically charged, example of material already present in many libraries whose scholarship has been questioned is the emerging field known as Afrocentrism. Afrocentrism is "an insistence by a growing number of black Americans to see the world from an 'African-centered' perspective in response to the dominant 'European-centered' perspective to which they feel they have been subjected throughout their lives."²⁹ When this philosophy is applied to the writing of history, it tends to stress the Black African origins of civilization, as exemplified by the title of George G. M. James' book, *Stolen Legacy: The Greeks Were Not the Authors of Greek Philosophy, But the People of North Africa, Commonly Called the Egyptians*, which is owned by over 700 libraries according to OCLC.³⁰

Although different Afrocentric authors make different claims, the following quote from John G. Jackson is fairly representative: "For the first two or three thousand years of civilization, there was not a civilized white man on the earth. Civilization was founded and developed by the

swarthy races of Mesopotamia, Syria, and Egypt. It was southern colored peoples everywhere, in China, in Central America, in India, Mesopotamia, Syria, Egypt and Crete who gave the northern white peoples civilization.”³¹ Thus, Egypt was a Black civilization, and the Egyptians spoke an African, rather than an Afro-Asiatic, language. Some other prominent Afrocentric authors are Martin Bernal³², Molefi Kete Asante³³, Cheikh Anta Diop³⁴, Chancellor Williams³⁵, and Yosef ben-Jochannan.³⁶ Many scholars and teachers have criticized both Afrocentrist writings and attempts to include it in public school curricula.³⁷

Aside from outright fabrications like Holocaust-denial, librarians have also had to deal with government-sponsored “official” publications, ranging from annual yearbooks that gloss over the excesses of authoritarian regimes to others that twist history, to McCarthy-era propaganda.³⁸ Because of the presence of controversial and unreliable information in libraries, some have called for placing warning labels on these materials.³⁹ The American Library Association, however, strenuously opposes labeling, which it considers to be both prejudicial and a violation of the “Library Bill of Rights.” Warning labels are also misleading since they imply that all materials *without* a label are therefore accurate and reliable, which would be an impossibility to assure.⁴⁰

WORLD WIDE WEB IN LIBRARIES

As has already been pointed out, the quality of information available on the Web runs the gamut from very high to very low, since, in the words of one author, “this unbiased medium will voice the opinions of Ivy League professors, as well as your next-door neighbors.”⁴¹ In many ways, this is a gold mine for Bibliographic Instruction librarians, since it provides much fodder for use in classes dealing with evaluating websites (and sources, in general).

Since the introduction of Internet access in libraries, much of the debate and controversy has centered around questions of *access*, rather than on the issue of quality per se. Because of the tremendous range of materials out there, there have been disagreements among libraries and librarians as to whether or not library patrons should have unlimited access to Internet sites; access to chat rooms and/or e-mail; and printing privileges. And, of course, should children have the same privileges (or, rather, no restrictions) that adults have with regard to computer use?

Filters are software programs that block access to certain websites, based on either a predetermined set of criteria or on information that the purchaser of the program inputs. Many parents, of course, have the right to use filters on their *home* computers to prevent their children from gaining access to materials that they find objectionable (which often means pornography). Some groups, however, have called for the installation of filtering devices in libraries, which has been opposed by the American Library Association.⁴² Several U.S. court decisions have struck down attempts by legislators to impose mandatory filtering in libraries, including the U.S. Supreme Court in *Reno v. ACLU*, where the court sided with the ACLU and found that communications on the Internet warrant the same constitutional protections as the written and spoken word, ruling that the provisions of the Communications Decency Act (CDA) relating to “indecent” or “offensive” speech were unconstitutional. A pedigree of CDA, The Child Online Protection Act (COPA), was declared unconstitutional by the Third Circuit Court of Appeals in June 2000.⁴³ Since the courts have left it up to parents to monitor their children’s viewing habits, software companies can expect to profit from these rulings. As the Center for Media Education (a non-profit public interest group) reported in 1999, the sales of Windows and Macintosh filtering software was projected to reach \$75.9 million by the year 2000.⁴⁴

Critics have pointed out that many software filters block more than just porn and

violence, and often also single out websites that espouse left-leaning political views – for example, some sites blocked by four popular filtering programs include *Mother Jones* magazine, Hasbro Toys, the official Pokémon website, and the Smith College Astronomy Department.⁴⁵ In one case which won a “Foil the Filters” contest run by the Digital Freedom Network, a high school student could not access his own school’s website from the school’s library, because the filtering program recognized the word “high” as an offensive drug word.⁴⁶

Although pornography and sexual predators might be the main concern of those who call for filters in libraries, those people might *also* be surprised to see some of the “facts” freely available on the Web.

MISINFORMATION, DISINFORMATION, AND HOAXES

Today, when someone shops in a giant supermarket, one is presented with an unbelievable array of choices that were not available to our parents or grandparents – and the quality of the products varies in principle to the price. If the product is defective, the shopper can return it to the store and receive a replacement/refund. The World Wide Web is a mega-supermarket of information at incredible bargain prices: free. However, it is home to unreliable and sometimes dishonest information providers. Unless one is a subscriber to an information broker service, one cannot get a “refund” for acquiring bad information. Exercising skepticism in reading information over the Internet is incumbent on the user, even more so than on the supermarket shopper. It should be part of basic computer literacy.

The Internet is an effective transmitter of all types of propaganda, and members of organized groups (both legitimate and questionable) know that they can reach a potentially vast audience. The Web makes it possible for anyone with access to simultaneously become writer,

editor, and publisher, with few consequences to themselves since there is no profit margin to worry about. An accidental click on the keyboard while surfing the Internet can retrieve a well-designed and/or alluring website; however, the content might be saturated with misinformation.

The tremendous increase in the use of e-mail has greatly exacerbated the spreading of misinformation, rumors, and urban legends.⁴⁷ Not only false virus rumors are passed along by well-meaning people to all their friends and co-workers, but also chain letters, false medical information (e.g., antiperspirants cause breast cancer), and urban legends (such as the notorious “kidney snatchers”). There are numerous websites devoted to debunking them.⁴⁸

Several authors have addressed the problem of misinformation on the Internet, which can be either accidental or deliberate. In an early article on the topic, Luciano Floridi hypothesized that the Internet, by its very nature being unregulated, had the potential to be a “disinformation superhighway,” although he pointed out, “at the moment [1996] there seem to be no reasons to be worried.”⁴⁹ Mary Ann Fitzgerald pointed out that censorship is “a non-solution” and proposed nine skills for electronic information evaluation, most of which centered on users adopting critical skills when using the Internet.⁵⁰ Philip J. Calvert has pointed out that “misinformation can be information that is incomplete, out of date, confused, or low consensus ‘knowledge,’” most of which pertains to human error. Calvert also presented the results of focus group discussions on the topic conducted with Information Science (IS) faculty and research students at Singapore’s Nanyang Technological University, and IS faculty at Temasek Polytechnic. The consensus seemed to be that teaching information literacy and critical thinking to students would be the most effective way to combat misinformation.⁵¹

Ann Scholz-Crane conducted a survey of 49 lower-level undergraduates (divided into two groups) and had them evaluate two websites, which she then compared with evaluations of

those sites done by four librarians. Her findings indicated that students needed more concrete instruction in evaluating websites than was provided in a simple checklist of evaluation criteria.⁵² To test the accuracy of information retrieved from the Web using a popular search engine, Tschera Harkness Connell and Jennifer E. Tipple chose 60 ready-reference questions to use as their sample. They found that, considering *all pages retrieved* in a search, 64% of the pages contained *no* answer to their query at all (either right *or* wrong), wrong/mostly wrong answers were found 8.8% of the time, and correct/mostly correct answers were found 27.2% of the time. When excluding the pages that contained no answers, the percentages changed to 24.5% wrong/mostly wrong, and 75.5% correct/mostly correct.⁵³

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING INTERNET RESOURCES AND RECOGNIZING FABRICATIONS

In many ways, the same criteria that one uses to evaluate websites in general are also used to detect historical fabrications on the Internet. What follows are some general guidelines for evaluating websites, based on the abundance of articles, books, and Web pages on the subject.

“Don’t check your common sense at the keyboard!” is probably the best (and simplest) advice given in the literature.⁵⁴ Just as consumers in the marketplace should keep in mind the motto “buyer beware” so should Web surfers memorize “reader beware,” especially since there is no authority to seek redress over misinformation unless there is sufficient evidence to show criminal intent. If you ask yourself, “who, what, where, when, and (most importantly) context” each time you read something on a Web page, it is a first step in developing a critical sensibility to evaluate the meaning and tendentiousness of what’s being said.

When people are in a hurry – and let’s face it, that covers virtually all college students – they are prone to simply use the first item they locate, be it a book, article, or Web page. One of the problems for students with viewing materials online is that, “it takes real effort to distinguish among magazines, trade journals, and peer reviewed journals, especially when all you can see is the full-text transcript and not the lurid cover or staid publisher responsibility statement.”⁵⁵ If and when one has (or makes) the time, there are several criteria that one should use when determining the value of an Internet site.⁵⁶

The first step is “to recognize that information does not gain or lose credibility simply by virtue of its format (print or electronic),”⁵⁷ so in many respects, one should ask the same critical questions of Internet materials as one would ask of print materials, beginning with the author. With online resources, “author” can mean the person who wrote the specific item being accessed as well as the person who runs the website. Most reputable sites will list a name, preferably with an e-mail link, as a contact person. The background and credential of the author can be checked in standard biographical sources. If no name is given, another strategy is to check the domain name’s owner through WHOIS <<http://www.whois.org>>, a directory of over 25 million domain and user names. One can possibly find a real address, contacts with phone numbers, domain date origin and updates, and the numerical IP address.

Analysis of the website’s URL (Uniform Resource Locator), or “address,” is another factor in determining the reliability of the information source. The suffix at the end of the URL provides a clue whether the document’s origin is from a government site (.gov), an educational institution (.edu), a commercial site (.com), or from a non-profit group (.org). Combined with information on the author/owner, the domain name will help one to determine the authoritativeness of the information.

The currency/timeliness of the site is important, as well. Many website administrators will place a line somewhere on the page telling the reader the date the site was last updated. Admittedly, this is not *always* important for a site dealing with historical information, but can be crucial for sites dealing with business and medical data.

Links are also very important, meaning both “to” and “from” the site. The other pages that are linked to from the site you are evaluating tell you something about its quality; but even more important are the other sites that link to this one. Many search engines, such as Google <<http://www.google.com/>>, enable you to retrieve Web pages that link to a URL you enter. The quality (or lack thereof) of *those* sites, in turn, can tell you about the original one. Also, the other sites might provide a qualitative or evaluative annotation in addition to simply a link.

Perhaps the most important factor to consider is accuracy, which consists of not only the truthfulness/reliability of the data presented, but also the bias or objectivity of the author/owner of the site. One must determine if the material consists of objective research or personal opinion. Does the author cite sources/references for his/her conclusions? Check them for accuracy. Is it an advocacy site, championing the viewpoint of a particular organization, or the result of a researcher that has carefully sifted through the sources and arrived at various conclusions? With regard to the historical sites and topics discussed further below in this paper, the present authors needed to consult print sources, electronic sources, and even use personal contacts to determine the accuracy/inaccuracy of the material.

Often it is necessary to look for site reviews, which can range from using (online or print) periodical and newspaper indexes, to website directories that evaluate other websites, such as **The Argus Clearinghouse** <<http://www.clearinghouse.net/>> or **Magellan** <<http://magellan.excite.com/>>. **The Internet Scout Project**

<<http://scout.cs.wisc.edu/index.html>> consists of “the best resources on the Internet,” selected by librarians and educators; its weekly *Scout Report*

<<http://scout.cs.wisc.edu/report/sr/current/index.html>>, which can either be subscribed to via e-mail or read directly on the Web, helps one be assured of getting quality control over the information passing over the net without fear of being duped by hoaxes or misinformation.

Clues to a site’s accuracy and validity can also be gleaned from the way that it is categorized by some of the many Web directories, such as **Yahoo** <<http://www.yahoo.com/>> or the **Open Directory Project** <<http://dmoz.org/>>. For example, Yahoo uses both “Revisionists” and “Revisionism” as part of their directory structures.

Although there is no absolute, guaranteed way for users of the World Wide Web to protect themselves from hoaxes and historical fabrications, using the above criteria will certainly improve one’s chances of accepting reliable information from a website. As has been discussed above, even those democratic societies manifesting authoritarian tendencies realize their attempts to control information through Internet filters has yielded mixed results.⁵⁸ The question remains unanswered whether the Internet will liberalize society or will it become a tool in the arsenal of Big Brother governance. In some cases, even pure democracies have panicked and threatened boycotts of e-commerce companies or taken portals to court for allowing hate literature, forbidden by law, to be sold and disseminated in their homelands.⁵⁹ Whether totalitarian societies can simultaneously enter the information age and tightly control information for its Internet user population is still in question. And as the porousness of information over the net only accelerates with the increase in growth of a Web audience, can government stand idle and ignore pressure to control and change ultimately the nature of the Internet? The following suggestions recognize these paradoxes and are more in the form of aids developed by

information professionals to sharpen awareness in detecting hoaxes and misinformation along your ride on the information highway.

The Web itself is replete with information professionals eager to guide the novice searcher. The knowledge that some of these guides have been prepared by experienced persons affiliated with established institutions in the fields of education and information management is itself a comfort when attempting to sharpen one's awareness in detecting hoaxes and misinformation along the information highway. Some valuable websites which discuss criteria for evaluating materials on the Internet, and provide links to other such sites, are:

- "Evaluating Quality on the Net" <<http://www.hopetillman.com/findqual.html>>, by Hope N. Tillman, Director of Libraries at Babson College [Accessed 4 Sept. 2000].

- "Evaluation of Information Sources" <<http://www.vuw.ac.nz/~agsmith/evaln/evaln.htm>>, maintained by Alastair Smith (Senior Lecturer at the School of Communications and Information Management, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand), part of the *Information Quality WWW Virtual Library* [Accessed 4 Sept. 2000]. Smith's article, "Testing the Surf: Criteria for Evaluating Internet Information Resources"⁶⁰, is also very helpful.

- "Evaluating the Quality of Information on the Internet" <<http://www.virtualchase.com/quality/>>, maintained by Genie Tyburski of Ballard Spahr Andrews & Ingersoll, LLP, part of *The Virtual Chase: Legal Research on the Internet* site [Accessed 4 Sept. 2000].

- "Evaluating Web Resources" <<http://www2.widener.edu/Wolfgram-Memorial-Library/webevaluation/webeval.htm>>, by Jan Alexander and Marsha Ann Tate of Widener University [Accessed 5 Sept. 2000], who have also written a book on the subject.⁶¹

- “ICONnect-Evaluator” <<http://www.ala.org/ICONN/evaluate.html>>, developed by the American Association of School Librarians, a division of the American Library Association, to support “school library media specialists as they assume leadership positions in the use of the Internet in the school community” [Accessed 4 Sept. 2000]. Some of the materials, such as “How to Tell if You Are Looking at a Great Web Site” <<http://www.ala.org/parentspage/greatsites/criteria.html>>, would benefit anyone learning to cope with the massive bits of data overloading the Internet.

B.I. librarians should also familiarize students with the use of virtual libraries in addition to merely using search engines. Although many academic and public libraries have constructed their own virtual libraries (i.e., lists of recommended sites arranged under subject categories), the most famous is **The WWW Virtual Library** <<http://vlib.org/>>, “the oldest catalog of the web, started by Tim Berners-Lee, the creator of html and the web itself.”⁶² Volunteers create and maintain pages of links to sites in their areas of expertise, assuring users of a degree of safety and authority that is usually lacking from search engines, which usually only rank sites according to “relevance,” i.e., the number of times the keyword entered by the searcher appears on the retrieved page.

HISTORICAL FABRICATIONS ON THE INTERNET

In an excellent article on Internet misinformation, Paul S. Piper of Western Washington University Library divided these problematic sites into several (sometimes overlapping) categories: counterfeit, parodies and spoofs, fictitious, questionable, malicious, and product-related.⁶³ The present authors will now examine some malicious and/or counterfeit Web sites that deliberately mislead the public by providing false historical information. As the reader will

see, many of these sites deny the actuality of recognized and accepted historical events, either for personal or ideological reasons.

Holocaust-Denial

1. Institute for Historical Review <<http://www.ihr.org/>> [Accessed 9 June 2000]

According to a literature search, the Institute for Historical Review (IHR) was founded in 1978 by Willis A. Carto (who had earlier founded the Liberty Lobby), whom the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith once described as “the leading anti-Semitic propagandist in the United States” and Lewis Brandon, who in reality was William David McCalden, a British neo-fascist.⁶⁴ The IHR publishes the *Journal of Historical Review (JHR)*, holds conferences, and is affiliated with Noontide Press <<http://www.noontidepress.com/>> [Accessed 9 June 2000], publisher and/or distributor of many “classic” volumes of anti-Semitism, such as the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*, and was affiliated with Carto and the ultra-right Liberty Lobby until mid-1993, when they broke over alleged financial improprieties.⁶⁵ The bulk of the IHR website is devoted to reproducing articles from the *JHR* and other IHR leaflets. Although the IHR’s slogan is “Bringing history into accord with the facts,” the IHR focuses almost exclusively on World War II and the Holocaust. Indeed, a literature search quickly located a content analysis of their journal which showed “that more than half (51.9 percent) of all articles, essays, book reviews, commentaries, and editorials are about revisionism and the Holocaust, with another fifth (20.2 percent) allocated to the Nazis and the equivalency argument that their [i.e., the Nazis’] government was no different from others. We thus argue that the *JHR* could just as accurately be called the *Journal of Holocaust Revisionism*.”⁶⁶ The IHR website is linked to from at least 436 other sites, according to the Google search engine.

A background search on the Web easily located relevant information regarding the IHR, which casts serious doubts on the accuracy and reliability of any information that they provide on their website:

- “Willis Carto and the IHR” is available on the Nizkor Project site

<<http://www.nizkor.org/faqs/ihr/index.html>>, and provides information on the backgrounds of Carto and many members of the IHR’s editorial board and their ties to fringe groups, raising issues relating to bias and objectivity [Accessed 12 June 2000]. While some contributors to the *JHR* have advanced degrees (e.g., Arthur R. Butz), those degrees are not in history.

- “Holocaust Denial: Anti-Semitism Masquerading as History” is available on the ADL’s website

<http://www.adl.org/frames/front_holocaust_denial.html>, and contains information on both Carto, whom it describes as “perhaps the most influential professional anti-Semite in the United States,”⁶⁷ and the IHR, which it refers to as “the world’s single most important outlet for Holocaust-denial propaganda”⁶⁸ [Accessed 12 June 2000].

- “Encountering Holocaust Denial,” by Lin Collette

<<http://www.publiceye.org/magazine/v08n3/holodeni.html>>, originally published in the September 1994 issue of *Public Eye*, details the connections between Carto, the Liberty Lobby, and the IHR, and notes that the “IHR presents a public face that avoids overt anti-Jewish bigotry. However, its fund-raising letters, mailed to ‘supporters of truth in history,’ reveal its directors’ prejudices quite clearly” [Accessed 6 Nov. 2000].

A quick search on *Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe* found numerous relevant court cases, including one where the Liberty Lobby sued Dow Jones & Company (publisher of the *Wall Street Journal*) over an article which called the organization anti-Semitic. In dismissing the case, Justice Robert Bork of the U.S. Court of Appeals, District of Columbia Circuit, wrote that, “We

tend to agree with the district court that if the term ‘anti-Semitic’ has a core, factual meaning, then the truth of the description was proved here.”⁶⁹

The present authors feel that it is not necessary to go into great detail refuting the Holocaust-denial arguments promulgated on the IHR website. To save space, we will point out that there are numerous refutations available online:

- One of the IHR’s most frequently reproduced pamphlet, which is available on the websites of many other sympathetic organizations, is “66 Questions and Answers on the Holocaust” <<http://ihr.org/leaflets/66qna.html>> [Accessed 10 June 2000]. The Nizkor Project has answered the IHR with a document entitled “66 Questions & Answers About the Holocaust: Nizkor’s Response” <<http://www.nizkor.org/features/qar/>>, which provides detailed, documented answers to the IHR’s questions [Accessed 14 June 2000].
- Another handy site is the Simon Wiesenthal Center’s “Responses to Revisionist Arguments” <<http://www.wiesenthal.org/resource/revision.htm>> [Accessed 1 Dec. 2000].
- Many arguments expounded by deniers regarding gas chambers and chemistry are refuted by Richard J. Green (Ph.D., Chemistry) on his Web page <<http://www.holocaust-history.org/~rjg/>>, part of The Holocaust-History Project’s website [Accessed 12 Dec. 2000].
- “Gravediggers of Memory” <<http://www.usfca.edu/fac-staff/neamane/history210/>> is a wonderful website consisting of student essays refuting Holocaust-denial arguments from a Historical Methods class at the University of San Francisco [Accessed 14 Nov. 2000]. Several of the essays deal with materials published by the IHR.

2. Zündelsite <<http://www.zundelsite.org/>> [Accessed 19 June 2000]

Though dedicated to the work of Canadian Ernst Zündel, a German national living in

Canada, a WHOIS search shows that this site is actually run from California by Ingrid Rimland, no doubt to take advantage of the United States' liberal freedom of speech provisions rather than the more restrictive Canadian environment. According to HateWatch, "Rimland has been one of the most visible figures in [the] Holocaust denial movement since 1995, when she appeared on the Internet and other media as the 'press secretary' for Ernst Zundel.... Today Rimland is openly anti-Semitic and pro-Hitler, but these are views she hid or suppressed for some time before stating them openly at the 'Zundelsite.'"⁷⁰ Zündel "gained recognition originally on his bizarre 'flying saucer' claims, that the Nazis had manufactured 'flying saucers' in order to escape Germany as the Allied forces were conquering it during World War II. He speculated that it was possible that Hitler escaped in such a craft and was hiding out in, perhaps, Antarctica."⁷¹ Zündel is the co-author (using the pseudonym Christof Friedrich) with Eric Thomson of *The Hitler We Loved & Why* (Reedy, WV: White Power Publications, 1980), and he created his own publishing house, Samisdat Publications, to publish and distribute materials both inside and outside Canada. For publishing the book *Did Six Million Really Die?*, Zündel was found guilty in 1985 of publishing "false news"; it was overturned on appeal, and a second conviction was also overturned when Canada's Supreme Court ruled that the false news statute was unconstitutional.⁷² The Zündelsite contains both original materials as well as reprints of information from other websites (such as the IHR), and Rimland sends out daily Z-grams via email (which are also posted on USENET). The Zündelsite (including its various mirror sites) is linked to from over 1,000 other websites, according to the Google search engine.

A search on the Web for background information to see if either Zündel or Rimland can be trusted to provide accurate historical information located much relevant information, including an interesting interview with Zündel by Frank Miele of *Skeptic* magazine. Miele

writes, “Zündel’s ‘game plan,’ as he calls it, is to ‘first, bring down Jewish suffering in terms of numbers and events, both real and imagined, to what it really was, not what they say it was, what they exploit for their own political, financial, and geopolitical purposes.’ When asked to be more precise, he estimated total Jewish deaths from all causes under the Nazi regime as only about 300,000. His second goal is to make the world look at German suffering and the Allied brutality toward Germany and realize that both peoples were victims.”⁷³

Some other informative documents on Zündel and/or the Zündelsite are:

- “Notes on a Discourse Analysis of Selected Zündelsite Materials,” by Gary D. Prideaux, Professor of Linguistics at the University of Alberta, available from Nizkor <<http://www.nizkor.org/hweb/people/p/prideaux-gary/>> [Accessed 22 June 2000]. Prideaux analyzes several documents and concludes that, “These analyses lead to the conclusion that the writers of the passages have in numerous instances singled out Jews as a special, identifiable group. Moreover this group is asserted to possess highly negative and criminal attributes as a group, thereby targeting the group for, e.g., hatred, revulsion, contempt, and loathing. In some passages, overt threats of violence are uttered toward Jews as a group.”⁷⁴

- “Ernst Zundel, Douglas Christie, and the Conspiracy of Holocaust Denial in Canada,” by Gregory Paul Michael Hartnell <http://www.usfca.edu/fac-staff/neamane/history210/greghartnell_canada.html>, and “A Look at Holocaust Denial Through the Works of a Propagandist, Ernst Zundel,” by Shanti Pappas <http://www.usfca.edu/fac-staff/neamane/history210/shanti_zundel.html>, both of which are from the aforementioned “Gravediggers of Memory” site and contain valuable information on Zündel [Accessed 14 Nov. 2000].

Denial of the Armenian Genocide

1. Armenian Allegations: The Facts Concerning the Alleged Armenian Genocide, by Hasan Ozbekhan, President of the Turkish American Friendship Society of the United States, and Professor Emeritus and Chairman of the Graduate Group in Social Systems Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania <http://www.turkey.org/politics/p_armn00.htm> [Accessed 25 Aug. 2000]. Ozbekhan rejects the charge of “genocide,” calling it rather an “inter-communal war,” and states that, “Armenians lost between 525,000 to 600,000 people, and the Turks and other Muslims in Eastern Anatolia lost, say between 2 and 2.5 million.”

According to a WHOIS search, the domain turkey.org is registered to the Foreign Ministry of the Republic of Turkey (i.e, Turkey’s embassy in Washington, DC). As an official site of the Turkish government, it should be assumed that it only provides information approved by, and supporting the positions of, that government. Its objectivity must be questioned.

2. A “Statement” Wrongly Attributed to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, by Türkkaya Ataöv of Ankara University <<http://inter.mfa.gov.tr/grupa/ad/adf/mfa276.htm>> [Accessed 13 Nov. 2000]. Ataöv disputes the legitimacy of a document in which Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic, acknowledged Ottoman responsibility for the Armenian genocide. He argues that the famous quotation is actually from one of Atatürk’s enemies, Nemrud Mustafa Pasha, and he presents quotations from Atatürk regarding the Armenian “exaggerations,” with the purpose of casting doubt on the genocide. This document is on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, and, as with any such document, one should examine it closely for bias before accepting its assertions completely. Thus, a literature search was performed.

The attempted genocide of Armenians during 1915-1917 by the Young Turks continues to be a controversial subject, even though in the opinion of many historians it is well documented. As one author has pointed out, “Unlike the Holocaust, which has been denied by individuals, the Armenian genocide has been continuously denied by Turkish *governments* for eighty years.”⁷⁵ The position of the Turkish government has been summed up as, “it never happened, Turkey is not responsible, the term ‘genocide’ does not apply,” even though a June 1915 telegram from one of the Turkish leaders carrying out the genocide asked, “Are the Armenians, who are being dispatched from there, being liquidated? Are those harmful persons whom you inform us you are exiling and banishing, being exterminated, or are they being merely dispatched and exiled? Answer explicitly....”⁷⁶

While those who deny the Jewish Holocaust often are members of fringe groups and have no academic credentials, several of those who deny the Armenian genocide are scholars who hold academic positions – however, their *motives* for denying the genocide have been questioned. According to an article in the *Encyclopedia of Genocide*, “By the 1970s a handful of scholars emerged in US universities who were working in some capacity or other with the Turkish government in order to help Turkey absolve itself of responsibility for the extermination of the Armenians. Bernard Lewis (Princeton University), Justin McCarthy (University of Louisville), Stanford Shaw (UCLA) and most recently Heath Lowry (Princeton University), are among the most vocal genocide deniers.”⁷⁷ In the 1980s, the Turkish government gave financial assistance to support the establishment of various institutes to further research on Turkish history. Heath Lowry became the first executive director of the Washington, DC-based Institute of Turkish Studies, before becoming the first incumbent of the Ataturk Chair in Turkish Studies at Princeton, also financed through a grant from the Republic of Turkey. It has been documented

in memoranda published in the journal *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* that, “Lowry has been engaged in an ongoing relationship with the Turkish government, and that he has regularly offered advice on denial both to the Turkish ambassador to the United States and to other persons in Turkey,” and “that Lowry apparently seeks to discredit the work of any author who treats the Armenian genocide as historical reality.”⁷⁸ Bernard Lewis was actually found guilty in June 1995 by a court in Paris on civil charges that had been brought against him of denying the Armenian genocide, and was ordered to pay court costs and a symbolic punitive damage of one franc.⁷⁹

There are numerous scholarly books that document the Armenian Genocide, such as those by Richard G. Hovannisian⁸⁰, Donald E. Miller and Lorna Touryan Miller⁸¹, and Vahakn N. Dadrian⁸², as well as collections of documents.⁸³ Robert F. Melson has stated flatly, “The Armenian genocide and the Holocaust are the principal instances of total domestic genocide in the twentieth century. In both cases, a deliberate attempt was made by the government of the day to destroy in whole an ethno-religious community of ancient provenance.”⁸⁴

Among the numerous websites with further information on the Armenian Genocide are:

- Armenian National Institute <<http://www.armenian-genocide.org/>>, a non-profit organization based in Washington, DC, “dedicated to the study, research, and affirmation of the Armenian Genocide. Its overarching goal is affirmation of the worldwide recognition of the Armenian Genocide” [Accessed 13 Nov. 2000].
- Armenian Genocide <<http://www.genocide.am/>>, which includes the text of several valuable articles, including “Remembering and Understanding the Armenian Genocide,” by Rouben Paul Adalian, and “The Turkish Military Tribunal’s Prosecution of the Authors of the Armenian Genocide: Four Major Court-Martial Series,” by Vahakn N. Dadrian [Accessed 13 Nov. 2000].

- Armenian Genocide Home Page <<http://www.armeniangenocide.com/>>, operated by Reynold E. Khachatourian. Extremely valuable, especially for its disturbing photographs [Accessed 15 Nov. 2000].

- Armenian Research Center <<http://www.umd.umich.edu/dept/armenian/>>, located at the University of Michigan-Dearborn [Accessed 13 Nov. 2000]. Contains a valuable page “Useful Answers to Frequent Questions on the Armenian Genocide.”

While some of *these* sites are also affiliated with organizations and therefore should themselves be critically evaluated by any users, the historical information they present is corroborated by the aforementioned books and articles, leading the user to believe that the preponderance of evidence for the Armenian genocide is great.

Denial of the Ukrainian Famine/Genocide

1. Lies Concerning the History of the Soviet Union, by Mario Sousa, Member of the Communist Party Marxist-Leninists Revolutionaries Sweden, from the December 1999 issue of Northstar Compass <<http://www.northstarcompass.org/nsc9912/lies.htm>> [Accessed 18 Aug. 2000]. The author writes that, “There is a direct historical link running from: Hitler to Hearst, to Conquest, to Solzhenitsyn,” and blames Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels for spreading the story about a genocidal famine, in order “to prepare world public opinion for the ‘liberation’ of the Ukraine by German troops.” A clue that this site might have a particular bias is evident on its main page, where it states that it is operated by the “Organizing Committee for International Council of Friendship and Solidarity with Soviet People,” which is “Dedicated to the Re-Establishment of the Soviet Union as a Socialist State,” as well as its own description that “Northstar Compass is a monthly magazine containing the latest news and views of the struggles

of the Soviet peoples against Yeltsin's capitalist regime and its imperialist backers."⁸⁵

2. The Hoax of the 1932-33 Ukraine Famine <http://www.plp.org/cd_sup/ukfam1.html>, which originally appeared in the 25 Feb. 1987 issue of *Challenge-Desafio*, newspaper of the Progressive Labor Party [Accessed 13 Nov. 2000]. Concentrating on trying to debunk both the acclaimed film *Harvest of Despair*, and Robert Conquest's book *Harvest of Sorrow*, the author of this Web page asserts that, "This film is a fraud. This essay will show that it uses lies, misleading film, and Nazi collaborators, to attack Stalin, the Soviet Union, and the whole idea of communism, while promoting nationalism and fascism." Wanting to absolve Stalin and the Soviet Union of any blame, the author openly admits that "any attack on the then-socialist Soviet Union is an attack upon all workers today." This website is operated by the Progressive Labor Party (PLP), which also publishes a political journal called *The Communist*, as well as *PL Magazine: A Journal of Communist Theory and Practice*. The purpose of the PLP can easily be summed up from one of its Web pages: "The historical experience of revolutionary communist movements shows that the dictatorship of the proletariat turned into its opposite because of key weaknesses within the old communist parties and their strategic political line. These weaknesses eventually led to the re-establishment of full-blown capitalism in once-socialist countries. The obscene anti-communist, anti-worker lies and actions of a Gorbachev or a Deng have their roots in these weaknesses."⁸⁶

It should be fairly obvious that any information from these two sites questioning the Ukrainian famine should be considered biased and unreliable, since it is clear that both would like to rehabilitate the image of Soviet-style communism. A search of the literature reveals that the question of the Ukrainian famine was thoroughly investigated and documented in a report to

the U.S. Congress in 1988.⁸⁷ There seems to be little scholarly debate over the *actuality* of the Ukrainian famine – a 1987 book by Canadian Douglas Tottle was the only book located supporting the view echoed on the aforementioned websites⁸⁸ – although scholars differ in their opinions regarding how much grain Stalin was sitting on (i.e., how much he was holding back from Ukraine), and whether or not the famine constitutes *genocide*. Robert Conquest is a strong and convincing proponent of the relationship between official Soviet policies and the famine.⁸⁹ Conquest also located a document in (then-) newly opened Russian archives from Stalin and Molotov to local party officials, in which those local officials were ordered to *prevent* a mass exodus of peasants from Ukraine and Kuban’ in search of bread.⁹⁰ Mark B. Tauger has argued that the 1932 grain harvest was much too small, which caused the famine on its own, rather than being a result of a deliberate decision by Stalin.⁹¹ A later article co-written by Tauger demonstrates that “Stalin was not hoarding immense grain reserves in these years,” although the authors admit that, “These findings do not, of course, free Stalin from responsibility for the famine.”⁹² Barbara B. Green has argued that the famine was not an intentional act of genocide, but rather a result of Stalin’s forced collectivization.⁹³ See also the aforementioned award-winning documentary film, *Harvest of Despair: The 1932-33 Man-Made Famine in Ukraine*, produced by the Ukrainian Famine Research Committee of St. Vladimir’s Institute, Toronto.⁹⁴

On the Web, the following sites offer information on the famine:

- Several relevant articles, including a bibliography on the famine, are available from InfoUkes, a Canadian-based information resource about Ukraine and Ukrainians, at <http://www.infoukes.com/history/famine/index.html> [Accessed 7 Sept. 2000]. (Aside from the two sites discussed above, InfoUkes also provides links to some other sites that deny the Ukrainian famine at <http://www.infoukes.com/history/famine/revisionists/index.html>.)

- The website of *The Ukrainian Weekly*

<http://www.ukrweekly.com/Archive/Great_Famine/index.shtml>, published by the Ukrainian National Association, contains a wealth of information, including a chronology, numerous articles, and eyewitness accounts [Accessed 15 Nov. 2000].

Although *these* sites must also be critically evaluated by any users, especially since some are affiliated with organizations, the historical information they present is corroborated by the aforementioned books and articles, leading the user to believe that the preponderance of evidence for the actuality of the Ukrainian famine/genocide is great.

Denial of the Nanking Massacre/the Rape of Nanking

The Japanese government has steadfastly refused to apologize for the so-called Nanking (or Nanjing) Massacre, where as many as 300,000 Chinese noncombatants were slaughtered in cold blood, and tens of thousands of Chinese women were raped, some of whom were then forced into sexual slavery as “comfort women.” The wartime atrocity was thrust into the public sphere with the publication of Iris Chang’s book, *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II* (New York: BasicBooks, 1997). The book was hailed in the media as a fair and balanced portrayal of that terrible event. However, Chang and the book were attacked in the Japanese press. Japanese revisionists claimed that Chang inflated the number of those killed, used unreliable sources, and placed false captions on the photographs in the book.⁹⁵ Japan’s ambassador to the United States told reporters that, “The book contains many extremely inaccurate descriptions and one-sided views on the case. It’s not a good thing that such a book has been published and has attracted great attention.”⁹⁶ Writer Akira Suzuki’s 1973 book, *The Nanking Massacre Illusion*, was revised and republished to answer Chang.⁹⁷ There are also

several websites that echo these charges against Iris Chang:

1. Iris Chang's Errors <<http://www.jiyuu-shikan.org/nanjing/>> [Accessed 7 Sept. 2000] states that, "Iris Chang's 'Rape of Nanking' is a book that fails to heal but rather sears all efforts for good international relations because it prioritizes passion at the cost of basic historical facts." The bulk of the site consists of quotations from Chang's book, followed by refutations from primarily Japanese sources. This site is operated by the "Association for the Advancement of Liberalist View of History," whose purpose is "getting different viewpoints together, free, active, rational debate, and overcoming taboos and restraints of ideology to pursue historical truths."⁹⁸

2. The Other Side, Nanking Massacre

<<http://members.tripod.com/~funktomoya/massacre/sample01.htm>> [Accessed 7 Sept. 2000].

The unnamed author of this site blames the Chinese for the massacre, saying that the Chinese used guerrilla warfare where the soldiers pretended to be farmers, so the Japanese had no alternative but to treat the farmers as if they were soldiers. The author states that General Matsui "never encouraged his soldiers to execute the civilians, to rape ladies and children, and to rob civilian's properties ... [but rather] ordered [them] to treat the civilians as kindly as the troops could," and concludes that less than 2,000 innocent civilians were killed.⁹⁹

Deniers of the Nanking Massacre use the same methods as deniers of the Holocaust: look for any error or inconsistency and then try to cast doubt on the entire event (*Falsus in Uno, Falsus in Omnibus*). While the merits of Iris Chang's volume can be debated, there are many *other* books that document what happened in Nanking¹⁰⁰, including the diaries of eyewitness John Rabe, a Schindler-like Nazi industrialist who helped to set up an "International Safety

Zone” to shelter and protect the victims.¹⁰¹ Chang’s book received many favorable reviews – Peter Li, Professor of East Asian Studies at Rutgers University, commented that “Chang has produced, as much as possible, a balanced and multi-sided view of the tragedy at Nanking¹⁰² – although errors have also been pointed out. As Jeff Kingston of Temple University Japan observed, “In writing such a flawed and sloppy work, Chang inadvertently provided ammunition to the denial camp, allowing them to sidetrack the debate into arguments over details, numbers, dates and locations that attempt to distract attention away from the overwhelming evidence of widespread atrocities.”¹⁰³ A planned Japanese-language version of the book was canceled.¹⁰⁴

Among the many websites that document the tragedy are:

- Nanking 1937 <<http://www.princeton.edu/~nanking/html/main.html>>, which is a companion website to a conference and exhibition held at Princeton University to commemorate the massacre’s sixtieth anniversary [Accessed 15 Nov. 2000]. There is only brief textual material, but fourteen photographs and links to other sites with information on the massacre.

- WWW Memorial Hall of the Victims in the Nanjing Massacre (1937-1938)

<<http://www.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/NanjingMassacre/NM.html>> [Accessed 15 Nov. 2000], contains many photographs, articles, and links to other sites, as well as three brief video clips (in .mov format) taken from a 16mm film that missionary John Magee made during the massacre¹⁰⁵ to document the Japanese crimes.

It seems clear to the present authors that the preponderance of evidence for the Nanking Massacre is great, despite any alleged flaws in Iris Chang’s book, and that several people have attacked her book as a convenient smokescreen, attempting by doing so to cast doubt on the Massacre itself.

Afrocentrism

The World Wide Web is an important forum for competing claims among disenfranchised groups. Certain African-Americans espousing an idealization of Africa and its history, and the legacy of slavery here, feel other groups (even those who have also been historically mistreated) are given undue attention at their expense. Afrocentrists of different varieties feel particular frustration with the Jewish-American community. Some of these websites promote their agenda in addition to books written (or endorsed) by professors whose scholarly patina adds intellectual and monetary value to the websites' agendas. Some unwary readers might assume the irrefutability of arguments advanced on a site simply because it includes footnotes or endnotes. A few interesting manifestations of this type of website are discussed below.

1. The Blacks and Jews Newspaper <<http://www.blacksandjews.com/>> is unguarded in its Afrocentric sentiments [Accessed 9 Sept. 2000]. The origins of slavery in the New World is a particular focus of this Web page, and among its aims is the “dissemination of accurate information about the historical relationship between Blacks and Jews.”¹⁰⁶

Although a disclaimer states the site does not belong to the Nation of Islam (NOI), one can nonetheless easily link from this site to the NOI homepage. The reader can order a copy of the NOI's controversial (and anonymously written) *The Secret Relationship Between Blacks and Jews*¹⁰⁷, with 1275 footnotes among its 334 pages. A WHOIS search reveals that this site is registered to “Latimer Associates,” the publisher of *The Secret Relationship*. According to the unnamed author of this Web page, the book's footnotes show that “the irrefutable record of Jewish historical compliance with Black oppression is no longer a ‘secret.’”¹⁰⁸ Scores of Jewish scholars are selectively quoted on this Web page lending credence to the Afrocentrists' claims.

Moreover, this website claims that both *The Washington Post* and a Professor Ralph A. Austen (whose Jewish religion is apparently of importance to the online author) somehow confirm the scholarly accuracy of the NOI's book. Here is a classic example of using an *argumentum ad verecundiam*: the respected authority of an institution and an academic to bolster a problematic position among scholars. So why should an unsuspecting reader question the accuracy of the claims made on this website and in *The Secret Relationship* (which it wholeheartedly promotes)? Should one believe the quotations are accurate and not taken out of their original context? How many Web readers have the time to verify the accuracy and context of the quotes, rather than just accepting them on face value?

From the many instances cited of Jewish participation in the slave trade to the Americas, what time period is being referred to? Sixteenth, seventeenth, or eighteenth century? Many of the quotes from the Jewish scholars are in the seventeenth century, yet it was in the *eighteenth* century when the largest number of African slaves reached the Americas, mainly from *British* ships and sponsors who were predominantly *Christian*.¹⁰⁹ Who were these slave traders even if some were of the Jewish faith? When they acted as slave traders why is their Jewishness singled out and not their national origin? Is the author suggesting the slave traders' Jewishness contains a genetic or religious component compelling them to become slave traders in the first place? Was a genetic or religious component evident in the behavior of Christian and Muslim slave traders, White and Black, who were numerically more important to the slave trade than the Jews?

During the period leading to the American Civil War, opinion on the morality of slavery was divided across the entire spectrum of ethnic, geographic, racial, and religious groups. Jewish Americans were not monolithic in their opinions on this issue, and geography, not religion, was the key factor in explaining their behavior: the Northern Jews were naturally more

sympathetic toward abolitionism than their Southern brethren. Yet the Blacks and Jews Newspaper uses *one quote* by Bertram W. Korn to assert the “Jews participation in every aspect and process of the exploitation of the defenseless blacks”¹¹⁰, inferring *all* Jews were exploiters of Blacks even though Korn was referring only to *some* Jews.

The Web page author also uses this particular chapter in history as evidence of a continuing history of hostility from Jews toward Blacks. One quote from their online page – “Jews were the only group in this country who arrogantly threatened to protest the visit of revered African National Congress Chairman and now President Nelson Mandela to the United States in 1990”¹¹¹ – is a blanket indictment of the *entire* Jewish-American community, and, of course, there is no source identified for this statement. It strains credulity to believe every major Jewish-American organization was opposed to Nelson Mandela’s visit. On the same page the social scientist Richard Herrnstein, co-author of *The Bell Curve*, is identified as “among the most prominent Jewish scientists and scholars who maintain that Black people are intellectually deficient.”¹¹² No mention is made of the book’s other author, Charles Murray, presumably because he is not Jewish.

The author behind the Blacks and Jews Newspaper employs similar methodology to deniers of the Holocaust in building his/her argument: assertions are not always footnoted, such as quotes from various Jewish scholars (e.g., Louis Epstein, Jacob Rader Marcus, and Isaac Mayer Wise); some referenced quotations are sandwiched together although they appear on different pages (e.g., the conflation of quotations by Seymour B. Liebman from *New World Jewry 1493-1825: Requiem for the Forgotten*); and blanket assertions such as the aforementioned one regarding *The Washington Post*. In fact, a search of the *Post*’s archive found quite the opposite: rather than locating an article that endorsed the ideas behind *The Secret*

Relationship, an article by columnist Richard Cohen was retrieved regarding the misuse of academic freedom at Wellesley College, where Professor Tony Martin was using *The Secret Relationship Between Blacks and Jews* as a text for his class. Cohen wrote, “Wellesley and the rest of American higher education cannot allow themselves to be used by bigots who abuse academic freedom.”¹¹³ In fact, the outlandish claims made by the author of *The Secret Relationship* and by Professor Martin aroused such anger that the American Historical Association in February 1995 declared “false any assertions that Jews played a disproportionate role in the exploitation of black slave labor.”¹¹⁴ Respected historians of slavery David Brion Davis¹¹⁵ and Seymour Drescher¹¹⁶ have written balanced treatments of this subject and rejected as anti-Semitic the claims made in the NOI’s book. Both the Simon Wiesenthal Center¹¹⁷ and Anti-Defamation League¹¹⁸ have issued exposes of the inaccuracies in *The Secret Relationship*, and it has also been thoroughly debunked in books by Harold Brackman¹¹⁹ and Saul S. Friedman.¹²⁰

2. The Afrocentric Experience <<http://www.swagga.com/>>

Operated by Obi Okara (a.k.a. Everton Swagga Powell)¹²¹, this website’s welcome message states that it “is dedicated to the empowerment and the enlightenment processes of all people through out the world especially those of African descent in Africa and the African diaspora” [Accessed 10 Oct. 2000]. This site, which is linked to from about 237 other sites according to Google, offers an African perspective on the news, commentaries on psychological inferiority, and an array of links with reference information on African kings and queens, slave revolts, time lines, and Black inventors. According to information on this website, all of the following Egyptian rulers are “African”: Akhenaton, Hannibal, Imhotep, Khufu (Cheops),

Menelek II, Tutankamun, Ramses II, Cleopatra, Hatshepsut, Makeda (the Queen of Sheba), and Nefertiti.¹²² It further states that Africans also invented: civilization, democracy, chess, the alphabet, writing, math, engineering, paper, boats, pyramids, calendars, domestication of animals, art, literature, philosophy, spiritual systems, monotheism, mining, medicine, stone architecture, universities, agriculture, labor, and economics.¹²³ A partial review of some inventors find the site's claims at odds with *Famous First Facts*¹²⁴, a standard reference book on verifying such information. Moreover, this type of exercise of listing firsts in science for personal self-congratulation distorts the contributions of those Black inventors who in the history of science were involved in other phases of the inventive process, even if they were not part of the invention's genesis.

There are numerous examples on this site relating to Black inventors of stretching the historical truth either by providing incomplete or misleading information, or by making patently false claims. Was the gas mask created in 1914 by the Black inventor Garret A. Morgan? Well, *Famous First Facts* states that the "gas mask resembling the modern type was patented by Lewis Phectic Haslett of Louisville, KY. who received a patent on June 12, 1849."¹²⁵ In the book *Black Inventors From Africa to America*¹²⁶, Mr. Morgan is credited with a patent for a safety helmet he called a "Breathing Device" which acted as a gas mask, although he did not originate the idea. The Web page's claim that the mask saved many lives during WWI is also contradicted in *Black Inventors*: "there is no evidence that the army purchased Morgan's inhalator."¹²⁷ There are also some uncategorical falsehoods presented regarding Black inventors: the wrench was invented by Solymon Merrick, not John A. Johnson¹²⁸; the elevator was Henry Waterman's invention, not Alexander Miles¹²⁹; the refrigerator was from Thomas Moore, not John Standard.¹³⁰ Here the "facts" are stretched beyond recognition and so broadly interpreted that one can conclude that

what's here is simply propaganda. Not only is the accuracy of the information in question, but one must also question the integrity of the unidentified Web page author in presenting such distortions to the user.

With regard to claims that the ancient Egyptians were Black, Frank M. Snowden, Jr. (Professor of Classics Emeritus, Howard University) makes a convincing argument that many Afrocentrists mistakenly use “Black,” “African,” and “Egyptian” interchangeably, ignoring the differences between the Egyptians and their Black southern neighbors, the Nubians.¹³¹ Frank J. Yurco, an Egyptologist affiliated with both the Field Museum of Natural History and the University of Chicago, has argued that the ancient Egyptians were multi-racial due to intermarriages, and that their skin colors ranged from very light in the North to much darker in the South. He concludes by saying, “How then can we be so presumptuous as to assign our primitive racial labels onto so wonderful a culture.”¹³²

Although this is a very touchy subject, the preponderance of evidence seems to be with the critics of Afrocentrism, in the opinion of the present authors, and that the operators of the Blacks and Jews Newspaper and The Afrocentric Experience provide opinions rather than objective historical information.

Conspiracy Theorists

Political conspiracy theorists who articulate popular, deep-seated suspicions among the American people, especially over government investigations into the assassinations of prominent political leaders, can easily be found on the World Wide Web. The ease in registering a website has given the conspiracy theorists a forum that they would not otherwise have since their theories are not prominently reported in the major newspapers. The murders of John F. Kennedy and

Martin Luther King, Jr., have their conspiracy adherents represented by two of the more interesting websites on this topic, which will be discussed below.

It should be noted that it is not the purpose here to rebut every allegation of a conspiracy because the labyrinthine nature of assassination conspiracies makes it necessary to research many books to find explanations for each of the conspiracy theorist's accusations. Those books are available in many public libraries. Part of the problem in deciphering the mountains of information, most of which comes from government documents and court transcripts, is their presentation on the website. Is there an easy way to evaluate the charges and rebuttals? Can you determine an effort of fairness by the online author in the presentation of just the facts?

1. Citizens for Truth About the Kennedy Assassination

<<http://www.webcom.com/ctka/index.html>> [Accessed 16 Sept. 2000]

President John F. Kennedy's assassination is believed by some conspiracy theorists to be the first in a chain of planned deaths orchestrated by powerful individuals in the military-industrial complex, including the murders of Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and even the attempted assassination of George C. Wallace. You can view these sentiments from the website of the Citizens for Truth, which also published *Probe Magazine*

<<http://www.webcom.com/~ctka/pr-main.html>> [Accessed 16 Sept. 2000], a "publication the national security state does not want you to read," offering archives of free articles on the world of political conspiracy. The melodramatics of the presentation should be the first sign to caution any reader of what is being presented. (Ironically, the national security state obviously is not powerful enough to stop anyone from reading this material over the Internet.)

One of the best sites with information to answer and refute those who promote the JFK

conspiracy theories is the Kennedy Assassination Home Page

<<http://mcadams.posc.mu.edu/home.htm>> [Accessed 21 Oct. 2000], run by John C. McAdams, Associate Professor of Political Science at Marquette University (Ph.D., Harvard). McAdams defends the conclusions of the Warren Commission and provides answers to the major questions that are repeatedly asked by the conspiracy sites, such as whether there were shots fired from the grassy knoll area of Dealey Plaza, and if a single bullet hit both President Kennedy and Governor Connally. McAdams also offers a photo gallery, recommended books on the subject, and links to other assassination sites (including conspiratorial ones). While the author's biases are manifest, there is clearly an attempt to be fair which cannot be said for many of the conspiratorialists.

2. The Assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.

The assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., by the lone gunman James Earl Ray has been corroborated twice by the U.S. Justice Department, once by the U.S. House Select Committee on Assassinations, and also by the district attorney's office of Shelby County, Tennessee. Nonetheless, even as well-meaning a source as the King family itself and their very worthwhile and admirable organization, the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change <<http://www.thekingcenter.com/>>, publicly declared in a June 9, 2000 press release: "this conspiracy involved agents of the governments of the City of Memphis, the state of Tennessee and the United States of America. The overwhelming weight of the evidence also indicated that James Earl Ray was not the triggerman and, in fact, was an unknowing patsy."¹³³ A Memphis civil jury had promulgated this conspiracy theory in December 1999, which only reinvigorated the family's claims and its continuing search for justice regarding the murder of

MLK. Transcripts of the Memphis civil jury trial can be viewed through the King Center website <<http://www.thekingcenter.com/transcripts.htm>> [Accessed 24 Sept. 2000], and the civil trial and verdict were analyzed (and applauded) by the aforementioned *Probe Magazine*.¹³⁴

Parascope Magazine investigates conspiracies at the normal and para-normal level. Its interest in the King assassination led one of its editors, Charles Overbeck, to write a special report, “The Assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr: An Overview” on its website.¹³⁵ Mr. Overbeck makes a number of charges against both the FBI and individual law enforcement officers, stating, for example, that “in April, Hoover approved the plan which led to King’s switch to the Motel Lorraine.” No source is cited for this serious allegation meant to implicate J. Edgar Hoover in the King assassination. According to the Rev. Billy Kyles and Ralph Abernathy, two close confidants of Dr. King, the Motel Lorraine was a favorite of King’s and that Dr. King always stayed in the same room (number 306).¹³⁶ Overbeck writes of a mysterious Memphis city official who on the day of the assassination ordered the relocation of two Black firemen and a Black police officer named Edward Redditt. This is false. It was Officer Redditt who ordered the removal of the firemen because he thought they would interfere with his surveillance of Dr. King.¹³⁷ The merits of the government’s surveillance and paranoia regarding Dr. King are not the issue here; rather, the issue is, what should one think when, after some quick fact checking, one finds that the “facts” presented by the conspiratorialists to be fictitious? If their methodology is faulty and they provide incorrect information, one must then be concerned with the quality of all the other evidence they present.

The latest investigation by the US Justice Department (DOJ) can be viewed at <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/crim/mlk/part1.htm> [Accessed 8 Oct. 2000]. Naturally, neither side of the “MLK conspiracy” presents the opponent’s point of view; however the DOJ’s table of

contents *does* offer the origin of accusations made by those personally involved in the assassination (Loyd Jowers), and a rebuttal to those allegations by the DOJ. The government's case is laid out with the standard outline of headings and subheadings so the viewer can easily connect to any major headings of the report. In contrast, the King Center only provides links to volume numbers of the civil trial transcripts with additional links to the family press conference and a plaintiff summary and analysis by a reporter from *Probe Magazine*. It's impossible to search by subject because only volume numbers are search accessible.

The plaintiff in the case is the King family while the defendants are Loyd Jowers and others unknown who played a part in Dr. King's assassination. Oddly enough, Mr. Jowers (now deceased) is the primary witness for the plaintiffs. Mr. Jowers' account of the assassination has changed over the years but in his last testament he accepted blame for a role in the conspiracy to assassinate Dr. King. On the DOJ website, Mr. Jowers' charges are laid out with counter-evidence contradicting him; in contrast, the transcripts of the Memphis civil trial reveal no contradictory evidence was presented which would give jurors any reason to doubt a conspiracy existed. In fact, this trial is so stacked against the government that both sides in the case – plaintiff and defendant – provide evidence that support each other's story. The DOJ's report concludes that Jowers "has contradicted himself on virtually every key point."¹³⁸

By providing access to the Memphis civil trial transcripts (and labeling them as the "Conspiracy Trial Transcripts") without mentioning (or providing access to or links to) any of the materials that contradict it, such as those on the DOJ website, the present authors believe that the King Center is only performing a disservice by perpetuating a conspiracy theory, rather than allowing users to see *all* the information and make up their own mind.

3. The Reformation Online <<http://www.reformation.org/>> [Accessed 15 Nov. 2000]

This site, registered to Bible Believers Press, consists of ugly anti-Catholic bigotry, blaming Catholics (and/or the Pope) for everything from the Irish potato famine to the assassinations of both JFK *and* Lincoln. The fabrications on this site are self-evident.

Deceptively Named Sites

“Cybersquatting” is the process of registering famous brand names (or in some cases, the names of celebrities) as Internet domain names, either to make immediate money by generating traffic to a website that users mistakenly go to thinking that it is an official site for the product or person, or with the intention of trying to make money in the future by selling the name to the appropriate owner or celebrity. This is either entrepreneurship or extortion, depending on which side you’re on. In 1998, ten newspapers discovered that fake domain names (for example, atlantaconstitution.com) had been registered to one individual and were linked to White supremacist websites rather than to the newspapers’ official sites.¹³⁹ In some cases, civil rights organizations and other anti-fascist groups have registered racist and/or offensive domain names in order to keep them unused – for example, the ADL registered kike.com, and the NAACP registered nigger.com.¹⁴⁰

The parties involved in cybersquatting domain name disputes have begun to turn to the Geneva-based World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), a specialized agency under the United Nations system of organizations, which had already established an Arbitration and Mediation Center for the resolution of international commercial disputes between private parties in 1994. WIPO’s “Domain Name Dispute Resolution Service”¹⁴¹ has made numerous high-profile decisions, including ruling in favor of the singer Madonna in her dispute with Dan Parisi,

who had registered the domain name madonna.com.¹⁴² Among the many other domain names that Parisi has registered is whitehouse.com, a pornography site.

Some “deceptively named” sites are obvious parodies, and are clearly labeled as such. Others, however, appear to the naked eye to be “official,” sometimes mimicking the exact layout of the official site. As one author has noted, the problem with many of these sites is when search engines retrieve underlying pages which “appear as discrete bits of information divorced from the site as a whole,” often making it harder for users to see that the information comes from a parody (or fake) site.¹⁴³

1. RTMark [or ®TMark] <<http://rtmark.com/>> [Accessed 6 Oct. 2000]

Reminiscent of the Yippies of the 1960's, the RTMark website practices anti-establishment sabotage, only today it occurs on the World Wide Web. Inviting similar minded pranksters from around the world, RTMark acts as a clearinghouse for projects that simulate legitimate Web pages of corporations, politicians, and governmental organizations which do not meet RTMark's criteria of social responsibility. According to its own website, it “supports the sabotage (informative alteration) of corporate products,” and its “only ethical compunction” is that it “will never promote a project that is likely to result in physical harm to humans.”¹⁴⁴ It is an amorphous organization without members except for the founder, computer consultant Zack Exley, and several other spokespersons. According to Exley, the rationale for this is, “We behave like a corporation and stay anonymous to limit liability.”¹⁴⁵

At first sight the World Trade Organization/GATT Web page <<http://gatt.org/>> displays a World Trade Organization banner and below it a bullet list linking you to a site map or information about the WTO [Accessed 7 Oct. 2000]. A frame to the left provides one with

various trade topics and resources. All of this is merely bait, however, for the user who might think that he/she was connected to the WTO's official site. Except for the photograph of the Director-General Mike Moore of the WTO, the rest of the site was created by RTMark and *not* the WTO. If one clicks on the link to the Director-General's homepage, one gets instead a diatribe against globalization. When the Director-General issued a press statement expressing concern over the duplicity practiced by RTMark, their spokesperson Ray Thomas said, "Mike Moore must have a very low opinion of people to think they won't figure it out."¹⁴⁶ The more discerning readers would probably realize this site is a parody, but for others unfamiliar with the issues it remains problematic. In fact, the RTMark site was chosen as an entry in the prestigious Whitney Biennial because of its artistic design and its effectiveness at mimicry. Exit Art, an avant-garde gallery in Manhattan, presented an exhibition in September 2000 on parodies of bio- and gene technology with RTMark as one of the exhibitors. If Ray Thomas really believes in the sophistication of the reading public, why go through this elaborate charade of verisimilitude?

Other targets of RTMark sabotage have been: Texas Governor (and then-presidential candidate) George W. Bush <<http://www.gwbush.com/>> (also documented at <http://rtmark.com/gwbush/>), New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani (<http://yesrudy.com/>), and Shell Oil <<http://rtmark.com/shell/>> [All accessed 7 Oct. 2000]. Parodies of politicians are fair game according to the Federal Communications Commission and Federal Election Committee, despite Bush election campaign efforts to silence RTMark on grounds of copyright infringement in using the Bush domain name and failure to register as a political committee. First amendment protections got RTMark off the hook in this case, however, but the legality of soliciting actual sabotage of a corporation's reputation has not yet been tested in the courts. If "bad faith" could be legally proven against future cultural saboteurs, this matter might be regulated under the

provisions of “The Trademark Cyberpiracy Prevention Act,” passed by the 106th Congress and awaiting the President’s signature.¹⁴⁷ RTMark sets a precedent where misinformation and calculated hoaxes are openly acknowledged and promoted over the Internet, although their legality as instruments of free speech have yet to be fully tested in the courts.

2. Martin Luther King, Jr. - A Historical Examination <<http://www.martinlutherking.org/>>

[Accessed 25 Aug. 2000]

As noted above during the discussion of his assassination, American civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr., was a target of J. Edgar Hoover and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) while he was alive. This website, which was publicized in *Salon*¹⁴⁸, was established by the racist group Stormfront in order to defame the memory of King. Although many of the allegations about King have been around for years, particularly in White supremacist publications, this site is especially tricky because of the domain name – the suffix “.org” often implies, in many peoples’ minds, a legitimate nonprofit organization. However, this site repeats (or links to other sites that repeat) many allegations about King that either can’t be proven (for example, that he was a Communist), or that have little relevance to his accomplishments in civil rights, such as the fact that he plagiarized material for his doctoral dissertation.¹⁴⁹ As *Salon* pointed out, “The site uses government documents, such as [Sen. Jesse] Helms’ [anti-King congressional] testimony, and information from the FBI campaign against civil rights leaders, as its sources. Civil rights groups and historians fear the appearance of official sources adds to the potential for gullible people to be taken in by half-truths and revisionist versions of history.”¹⁵⁰ This site is a favorite of many B.I. librarians, who use it to demonstrate how deceptive domain names, and the opening pages of some websites, can be.

USENET Newsgroups

USENET is a worldwide forum consisting of thousands of newsgroups which operate like electronic bulletin boards. Anyone with access to a newsgroup server can post and read messages, and many ISPs (Internet Service Providers) provide access for their users; for example, the ISP Mindspring.com offers its subscribers access to over 23,000 newsgroups alone. Newsgroups can also be accessed through individual websites like Deja.com <http://www.deja.com/usenet/>, which displays and archives newsgroup postings in a searchable, user-friendly format. Without borders to control delivery of information the USENET network supercedes what sovereignty a nation's postal service may possess.

USENET newsgroups proliferate each day and the number of articles (i.e. messages) posted to these bulletin boards grows exponentially as every subscriber has instant access to someone else's opinion. The desire to connect to someone, perhaps thousands of miles away, in a matter of seconds, who shares the same interest as you, and get quick feedback is truly phenomenal, yet the potential to spread hoaxes and misinformation, however unintentional, may be unavoidable. E-mail and Internet netiquette codes of conduct are voluntary and content neutral. Some newsgroups are moderated by administrators who may put restrictions on message content, especially with regard to advertising, but generally content is not censored. You may be warned by the ISP to be careful out there on the Web not only because of a possible offense to frail sensibilities, but also to ensure the legal liability of the ISP is never in question. With misinformation already common on the Internet, the reader should not be surprised to learn that fraud has followed closely behind, as unscrupulous persons attempt to take advantage of false data for their own financial gain, particularly as e-commerce, online investing, and online

auctions continue to proliferate. There have been several cases where people have posted fake messages in order to manipulate stock prices for their own gain.¹⁵¹

For Holocaust-deniers, the newsgroup of choice is alt.revisionism, where their messages are also usually challenged and refuted by others. A popular forum for JFK conspiracy theorists is alt.conspiracy.jfk. Another site of interest is soc.history.what-if, but it should be clear from the name that everyone knows that the postings are speculative, discussing alternate history (e.g., “What would have happened if Napoleon won the Battle of Waterloo?”). Information retrieved from USENET newsgroups should be treated as suspect until it can be verified.

Personal Vendettas

As we have seen above, RTMark is one example of an organization specializing in parodies of other websites. However, the Web has also been used to conduct campaigns against specific companies, often providing forums for people to air grievances and complaints against the companies. (The present authors are not making value judgments about the worthiness of such causes, which may or may not be well-meaning.) Perhaps the most famous example is McSpotlight <<http://www.mcspotlight.org/>>, which brags to be the “biggest, loudest, most red, most read Anti-McDonald’s extravaganza the world has ever seen.”¹⁵² Other groups register domain names containing the name of the targeted company followed by “sucks,” such as AOL Watch <<http://www.aolsucks.com/>> [Accessed 6 Nov. 2000], which (obviously) is not a fan of America Online. In some cases, the company itself has registered the “-sucks.com” name, to protect its product(s) from being disparaged – for example, Target Corp. owns the rights to targetsucks.com, but (of course) has no intention of ever using the domain name for an actual website.¹⁵³

While the airing of grievances against large, multinational corporations might be accepted (or at least expected), using the Internet to conduct vendettas against specific individuals might not be as well known. In some instances, White supremacists have targeted individuals who have vocally opposed their messages of hate. A recent report by HateWatch detailed several examples of this, such as e-mail harassment and cyberslander (trying to intimidate someone by making threats or spreading lies about them online), computer hacking, and “webjacking,” which involves intervening in the IP name resolution process to automatically redirect users from a website whose address they typed to a different website.¹⁵⁴ Another report explained how a woman who actively opposed Holocaust-deniers on the alt.revisionism USENET newsgroup became the subject of a website that claimed that she “sells her children for sex. Another site listed her home address and the names of her children and neighbors, and used an Internet mapmaker to give directions to her home.”¹⁵⁵

Another frequent target is civil rights attorney Morris Dees, who co-founded the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1971. The SPLC established Klanwatch in 1981 to track KKK activities, publishes *Teaching Tolerance* magazine and a quarterly *Intelligence Report*, and currently monitors more than 500 racist groups. As one might imagine, then, Morris Dees has made many enemies and has himself become a target of those who either oppose his work or his methods. **DeesWatch** <<http://www.deeswatch.com/>> [Accessed 13 June 2000], run by Marc Slinger, visually resembles the SPLC’s Klanwatch site, which might lead one to believe that its purpose is merely parody. On the contrary, Dees himself is the subject, as the site describes itself as “a clearing house for all anti-Dees information and opinion available” and states that it “looks forward to many more years of being a thorn in the side of this evil demagogue.”¹⁵⁶ Many articles critical of both Dees and the SPLC are

reproduced, clearly with the intent to damage the reputations of both.

Pseudo-Historical/Scientific Claims

Social scientists are not the only ones subject to controversy over interpretation of past and present events. While the name Immanuel Velikovsky might not have much significance for many people in today's world, and while the controversy he stirred is often a mere footnote in scientific discussions, he created a firestorm beginning in 1946 when excerpts from his forthcoming book appeared in the *New York Herald Tribune*, creating a controversy that would last for decades. To a small group of revisionist researchers who support him – some of whom operate a website devoted to Velikovsky at <http://www.knowledge.co.uk/velikovsky/index.htm> [Accessed 11 Oct. 2000] – he is a modern-day Galileo who was unfairly hounded and persecuted by the mainstream scientific community; to his detractors, he was a quack, a pseudoscientist.

The most intense period of this brouhaha that engulfed the physical scientific community began in 1950 after Velikovsky's *Worlds in Collision* was published.¹⁵⁷ In that book and in several others¹⁵⁸, Velikovsky, a Russian doctor and practicing psychoanalyst who had been living in the United States since 1939, argued that the catastrophic events depicted in the Old Testament's Book of Exodus – plagues, floods, volcanic eruption, parting of the sea, all of which contributed to a great disruption in civilization in approximately 1500 BC – actually happened and were of a *cosmic* origin. He based much of this on the similarities found in his reading of the literature and myths of ancient Occidental and Oriental peoples, which, to him, indicated that they were witnesses to these cosmic events, since (to him) they were all describing the same events.

Velikovsky's theories have been nicely summarized thusly: "Venus was [a comet] born out of Jupiter, passed close to earth with catastrophic effect several times around 1500 B.C., sent Mars into close encounters with earth in the eighth and seventh centuries B.C., and is now a planet whose characteristics reflect that violent history. The time scale of historical and prehistorical events has to be changed from the conventionally accepted one, particularly for the Mediterranean cultures. The catastrophes caused by Venus were only the latest of a number of similar cosmic events."¹⁵⁹

This controversial view was challenged as pseudoscience by astronomers, archaeologists, linguistic experts, and historians. Isaac Asimov wrote of Velikovsky, "If anyone reads *Worlds in Collision* and thinks for one moment that there is something to it, he reveals himself to be a scientific illiterate.... This is not to say that some of Velikovsky's 'predictions' haven't proved to be so.... However, any set of nonsense syllables placed in random order will make words now and then, and if anyone wants to take credit for Velikovsky's lucky hits, they had better try to explain the hundreds of places where he shows himself not only wrong but nonsensical."¹⁶⁰ Many of the responses to Velikovsky's theories were published in the book *Scientists Confront Velikovsky*¹⁶¹ including a harsh chapter by Carl Sagan that made him the chief nemesis in the eyes of Velikovsky's supporters. In another publication, Sagan calculated that it would take 30 million years for a comet in the vicinity of Jupiter to impact Earth.¹⁶²

If the Internet provides access to strange and startling ideas it also offers reasonably easy access to valuable contradictory evidence which would be difficult to find elsewhere. Among the many websites with information refuting the theories of Velikovsky are:

- "Top Ten Reasons Why Velikovsky is Wrong," by Leroy Ellenberger

<<http://abob.libs.uga.edu/bobk/vdtopen.html>> [Accessed 15 Nov. 2000]. Along with his "An

Antidote to Velikovskian Delusions” <<http://abob.libs.uga.edu/bobk/velidelu.html>>¹⁶³ [Accessed 15 Nov. 2000], Ellenberger, an astronomer, cites numerous negative quotes from scientists regarding Velikovsky’s low comprehension of physics and astronomy. To cite but one example: Where is the physical evidence of debris either on the ocean floor or in the polar ice caps deposited from Venus’ near collision with Earth? In fact, the lack of physical evidence in the geological, archaeological, and paleontological record for Velikovsky and his supporters can be counted as one of their more egregious errors. As another author has pointed out, if the world was covered in darkness for decades as a result of this near collision between Venus and the Earth, how did bristlecone pines, more than four thousand years old, survive?¹⁶⁴

- “Immanuel Velikovsky’s Worlds in Collision” <<http://skepdic.com/velikov.html>>, from Robert Todd Carroll’s online *Skeptic’s Dictionary*, also provides a useful summary of the arguments [Accessed 15 Nov. 2000].

Today, Velikovsky’s theories are no more tenable to the scientific establishment than they were 50 years ago. While his suggestions for interdisciplinary connections in future studies is considered positive by some critics, Velikovsky’s refusal to adhere to the scientific method reduces his argument to no more than interesting science fiction. When the evidence did not fit into Velikovsky’s hypothesis, he ignored it. His complete lack of understanding of cuneiform writing became apparent during a confrontation with Egyptologist Abraham Sachs during a conference in 1965.¹⁶⁵ There is no question of the sincerity of Velikovsky’s supporters, but until that day arrives when reasonable sounding assumptions replace the objective tests laid out by the scientific community, the preponderance of credulity must remain with the scientific method.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC INSTRUCTION ASPECTS

As the World Wide Web continues to expand, and as more and more students begin to rely on it for research for homework and term papers, B.I. librarians have incorporated lessons on “using the Internet” into their Information Literacy classes. The present authors have stressed throughout this paper that misinformation, disinformation, hoaxes, and fabrications freely intermingle on the Web with reliable information, and that students (as well as *all* users of the Internet) must learn how to recognize them. Teaching students how to critically evaluate *all* information should be a paramount objective in any B.I. class, and it is hoped that the websites discussed in this article will be of use to librarians and educators as they demonstrate how misinformation and fabrications can come in various packages, both print and electronic. Just as a library patron might not realize that a book is unreliable or out-of-date¹⁶⁶, so too might they not realize that the professional and authoritative looking website accessed via the library’s Web terminal is unreliable or out-of-date.¹⁶⁷ After all, not every hate site has a swastika on it.

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Notes

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166. Marvin Scilken, publisher of *The U*N*A*B*A*S*H*E*D Librarian*, used to distribute stickers which he advocated placing on old reference books that stated (in capital letters), "Caution: Information in this book may be out of date. Ask a Librarian." Copy of sticker in possession of John A. Drobnicki.
167. A recent random telephone survey of 3,097 adults conducted by the Urban Libraries Council found that 75.2% of Internet users also used the library, and that 60.3% of library users also used the Internet. For those respondents who reported using both the library and the Internet, libraries received higher ratings for (among other characteristics) *accuracy of information*: in response to the statement "I trust information to be accurate" – on a scale of 1 (very strongly disagree) to 10 (very strongly agree) – library use received a mean score of 8.5, while Internet use received a mean score of 7.3. The entire report (*The Impacts of the Internet on*

Public Library Use) is available online at <http://www.urbanlibraries.org/pdfs/finalulc.pdf>, and a brief summary fact sheet is at <http://www.urbanlibraries.org/Internet%20Study%20Fact%20Sheet.html> [Accessed 14 Dec. 2000].