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HOLOCAUST-DENIAL LITERATURE IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES:
AN INVESTIGATION OF PUBLIC LIBRARIANS' ATTITUDES
REGARDING ACQUISITION AND ACCESS

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ABSTRACT: This study was undertaken to learn about public librarians' attitudes and opinions concerning the sometimes conflicting issues of intellectual freedom, collection balance, and controversial materials. The investigation focused on Holocaust-denial literature, a body of work which tries to dispute or deny outright the historical reality of the Holocaust. The results, while ambiguous in some areas, indicate that librarians are more open to Holocaust-revisionist literature than had been predicted and, regardless of outside pressures, would acquire and provide ready access to this material in their libraries.

This study is based on the authors' MLS research project at the Graduate School of Library and Information Studies, Queens College of the City University of New York.

INTRODUCTION

In late 1991 and early 1992, students at several universities in the United States found a controversial advertisement in their campus newspapers: the ad, written by Bradley R. Smith, was placed by the Committee for Open Debate on the Holocaust and asserted that no Jews had been gassed in Nazi concentration camps during World War II. The ensuing media coverage may have been the first occasion on which many people heard the term *Holocaust Revisionism*. Librarians and other scholars, however, have known about Holocaust-revisionist material for years. For example, due to the sale, in 1980, of the Organization of American Historians' mailing list, every member of the OAH received a complimentary copy of the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Historical Review*, which proclaimed the Holocaust to be a hoax.¹

DEFINITION OF TERMS

What Is Holocaust Revisionism?

According to librarian Jeffrey Katz of the New York Public Library, Holocaust revisionists deny flatly that a plan to exterminate the Jews of Europe ever existed and attempt to “prove” that concentration camps, gas chambers, and the entire concept of genocide was just one huge “hoax” concocted by “Zionists” and their cohorts, in order to discredit Germany and advance their own (naturally greedy) causes.²

Rather than interpreting the causes and consequences of events, revisionists, in the words of one historian, “seem to want history published in loose-leaf pages so they can extract what they dislike and substitute their own mythical version of history.”³ The present researchers will use the terms Holocaust revisionism and Holocaust-denial interchangeably.

While different revisionist authors make different claims, they all espouse at least one common belief: there was no attempt to exterminate the Jews of Europe during World War II.

Although some authors who negate the Holocaust (a word they always spell with a lowercase *h* and pejoratively enclose in quotation marks) acknowledge a special German harshness toward Jews during the Second World War, they all claim that Jews who died did so from disease, hunger, or other war-related causes, not, for example, from Zyklon B gas, which they say was used only to delouse clothing. They all claim that the Holocaust is a fraud perpetrated by Jews in their quest not only for a homeland, but also for world power.

Other Key Definitions

By *Holocaust* the researchers mean the deliberate murder of between five and six million European Jews by Nazi Germany and its allies during the Second World War. Since Holocaust revisionists concentrate on trying to disprove the deaths of those Jews, the researchers will use the term *Holocaust* to refer solely to the Jewish tragedy, although it is recognized that other peoples died at the hands of the Nazis as well.

The term *access*, as used in this paper, will mean:

1. The physical placement of library materials.
2. The subject headings assigned to library materials.
3. The classification number assigned to library materials.

Acquisition will mean the purchase of, and/or acceptance as gifts of, library materials.

Controversial will be used to refer to materials that have provoked, or have the potential to provoke, protests from library clients or other members of the public. Referring to them as controversial is in no way an attempt by the researchers to condemn or endorse the contents of these materials.

The Problem of Revisionist Materials and Libraries

The largest distributor of Holocaust-denial literature in the United States is the Institute for Historical Review (IHR) through its subsidiary, Noontide Press, headquartered in Newport Beach, California. Both are under the institutional control of the ultra-right-wing Liberty Lobby, run by Willis A. Carto, “the leading anti-Semitic propagandist in the United States,” according to the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith, and have ties to Neo-Nazi groups in the United States and abroad.⁴

The IHR/Noontide Press publishes the aforementioned *Journal of Historical Review*, as well as many books, pamphlets, and audio- and videocassettes, including what is considered to be the most famous Holocaust-revisionist book, *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century*, by Arthur R. Butz, a Professor of Electrical Engineering at Northwestern University. Although IHR/Noontide Press publishes revisionist works on subjects other than the Holocaust, it is most famous for producing materials on the latter topic.

Librarians’ Professional Guidelines

Many good arguments have been made both for and against the inclusion of Holocaust-revisionist materials in public library collections. It is easy to say that one is in favor of intellectual freedom, but when one is confronted with deliberate fabrications of the historical record, the decision whether or not to acquire them becomes more complex.

Few, if any, librarians would question the right of authors to write and publish Holocaust-denial materials, nor would they question the right of persons to read Holocaust-denial materials or any other items. The more problematic question librarians face, however, is the place, if any, of Holocaust-revisionist materials in public libraries.

It appears that one could argue for inclusion of revisionist materials in libraries based on American Library Association policy statements regarding library collections. The Library Bill of Rights states that “libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues.” Another ALA policy states that “access to all materials legally obtainable should be assured to the user, and policies should not unjustly exclude materials *even if they are offensive* to the librarian or the user.”⁵

The central issues.

Pitted against these professional guidelines is the overwhelming evidence documenting the Holocaust. Serious scholars do not question the actuality of that event, and it has been shown that Holocaust-revisionist materials are based on deliberate fabrications of history.⁶

These, then, are the dilemmas that public librarians face: should they or should they not acquire material that is generally accepted to be “hate literature”? After all, they know that revisionists share the ideas of Neo-Nazi and other hate groups. Yet librarians want to develop comprehensive, balanced collections even as they struggle with dwindling financial resources. Furthermore, should public libraries subsequently make revisionist materials freely accessible to more readers, including young adults and children, who are free to examine, read, and very often borrow adult materials? After all, these books may be the first ones that they have ever read on the Holocaust.

Purpose of the Present Study

There are, of course, no easy answers to these questions. There are compelling arguments on both sides of the acquisitions issue as Katz explained when he wrote:

It cannot be denied that Holocaust-denial literature is designed to distort the truth, promote hatred, and advance a racist ideology. It also cannot be denied that free speech is, indeed, a right, and that the most fundamental ethic of the library profession is intellectual freedom. The problem for the librarian, therefore, is to find a way to reconcile both truths.⁷

This research project investigated the extent to which public librarians believe those two truths should be reconciled. It asked librarians whether or not public libraries should acquire Holocaust-denial literature, and, if a library does, how it should be cataloged and classified and where it should be housed.

Assumptions

Central to this research project is the assumption that Holocaust-denial literature is considered to be “controversial material” by most public librarians and in most public libraries. Thus, the authors believe that Holocaust-denial literature represents more of a controversy, both actually and potentially, in public libraries since they serve a diverse clientele and are very often held accountable because they are supported by public funds.

The authors assumed that public libraries as a matter of policy do not, and cannot, acquire every item that is published. It was also recognized by the investigators that serious scholars do not question the actuality of the Jewish Holocaust, which has been documented by testimonies of the perpetrators, their allies, and their victims.

It was also assumed by the researchers that Noontide Press and other revisionist publishers actively send catalogs and other advertisements to public librarians and libraries, as do other publishers.

The present researchers tested the following hypotheses regarding the attitudes of public librarians toward Holocaust revisionism:

1. Public librarians will oppose the inclusion of Holocaust-denial literature in public libraries unless there are some forms of restrictions to its access.
2. The ethnic and religious composition of the community served by the public library will play a role in the librarians' decisions whether or not to acquire Holocaust-revisionist materials.
3. Public librarians will be less receptive to acquiring Holocaust-revisionist literature than other controversial materials.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Some materials are *so* objectionable and elicit such strong condemnation that the librarian might be hard-pressed to justify their inclusion in a public library collection. Pornography is an example, and Holocaust revisionism is another. Adding such material to a public library collection requires a strong commitment to intellectual freedom on the librarian's part, and he/she must be prepared to defend that action against the almost certain criticism that will follow.

Revisionism has maintained a high profile in the news during the past decade in part because of several notorious court cases. For example, in December 1980 Robert M. Faurisson, of the University of Lyon in France, stated on French radio that the Holocaust was a hoax perpetrated by Zionists. He subsequently was tried, fined, and convicted by the French government for racial defamation. Faurisson has continued to write and publish actively, has spoken at annual conferences sponsored by the Institute for Historical Review, and has faced additional criminal charges in France.⁸ Another French case aroused media attention as well. In 1985, the University of Nantes granted a doctoral degree to Henri Roques, whose revisionist dissertation had previously been

rejected by the University of Paris. The furor in the French press led the Minister of Higher Education to revoke the degree.⁹

Two trials in Canada concerned a Social Studies teacher, Jim Keegstra, and a book publisher and distributor, Ernst Zundel. Zundel, author of *The Hitler We Loved and Why*, had been distributing revisionist and Neo-Nazi publications for nearly two decades before being convicted in both 1985 and 1988 of publishing “false news.” Keegstra, who taught Holocaust revisionism in his classes, was convicted in 1985 of violating Canada’s law prohibiting promotion of racial hatred. His conviction was overturned in 1988 when Alberta’s Court of Appeals declared that law unconstitutional.¹⁰

Unlike France and Canada, the United States is much more tolerant in its interpretation of free speech, so there have been no prominent cases similar to Faurisson et al. Arthur R. Butz was not disciplined by Northwestern University for writing *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century*, in part because he teaches electrical engineering rather than history. Indeed, when knowledge of Butz’s book was made public, Northwestern’s provost, Raymond W. Mack, was quoted in the *New York Times* as saying that it was an academic freedom issue.¹¹ Furthermore, at the beginning of Robert Faurisson’s legal troubles, Noam Chomsky, noted Professor of Linguistics and Philosophy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, wrote a brief defense of Faurisson’s right to free speech, which was later used as an introduction to Faurisson’s second book.¹²

The most widely publicized cases in the United States involved David McCalden. In 1979 McCalden, who was director of the Institute for Historical Review, offered a \$50,000 reward to anyone who could prove that Jews had been gassed to death in Nazi concentration camps. Holocaust survivor Mel Mermelstein, whose entire family perished at Auschwitz, came forward with his proof.

When the IHR stalled, Mermelstein filed suit against the organization. The lawsuit was settled in 1985 with the IHR having to pay Mermelstein \$90,000 and having to issue an apology to him and other survivors for claiming that the Holocaust was a hoax. Mermelstein also won a suit in 1986 against revisionist Ditlieb Felderer of Sweden, and in 1988 he filed a lawsuit against Willis A. Carto.¹³

After breaking with Carto and the IHR, McCalden founded an organization called Truth Missions. When his request to display his books during Banned Books Week was denied by the Torrance (California) Public Library, McCalden was invited by the California Library Association in 1984 to operate a booth and participate in a presentation at its annual conference. The uproar by both politicians and the press when this became public led the CLA to cancel McCalden's exhibit and program. McCalden then threatened to sue the association.¹⁴

Controversial Materials in Libraries

The question as to how public libraries should handle Holocaust-denial literature has not been discussed extensively in the literature. Several survey projects have been done regarding controversial materials in school and public libraries, but what are considered "controversial" in these studies are books that contain profanity, explicit sexual passages, or other characteristics, such as graphic violence, considered inappropriate for children or young adults.¹⁵ In short, these surveys deal with J.D. Salinger and Kurt Vonnegut, not, for example, Arthur Butz.

The most common complaint voiced against Holocaust-denial material is that it is hate literature. Revisionist authors have been shown to have Neo-Nazi sympathies, are apologists for Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany, and attack and seek to undermine Israel. Morton Weinfeld has also used the analogy that libraries do not collect hardcore pornography because the decision has been

made that it has no literary value. Similarly, libraries cannot be blamed for making that decision regarding revisionist literature.¹⁶ Add to this the factor of diminishing financial resources for public libraries, and for libraries in general, and the point raised about spending money on historical fabrications when other materials can be purchased with that money seems appealing.¹⁷

Arguments made in favor of revisionist materials in libraries.

Vincent Richards, former president of the Library Association of Alberta, Canada, is one of the few librarians to have defended in print the presence of Holocaust-denial materials in libraries. He has made the point that other books in the library, especially in large collections, will combat the ideas of the revisionists without having to censor them.¹⁸ An even more passionate defender of free speech, John C. Swan, has argued that librarians have a “basic professional commitment to the flow of all kinds of information without regard to its truth or falsehood,” and that the librarian’s primary responsibility is *access*, and “access means a professional responsibility to, among other things, as much untruth as we can politically and practically manage” on the shelves.¹⁹

The arguments of Richards and Swan were also expressed several years earlier at the University of Toronto. When pressured by some students to reclassify several revisionist books in the library to separate them from the standard works, the Acting Chief Librarian responded:

We do not make judgments about books: we simply put books of the same subject together.... If we gave in to that sort of pressure because one side didn't like something life would be impossible. The books are on the shelves so that people can read them and make up their own minds. That's the reason we're here.²⁰

Solutions offered in the literature.

Several authors have expressed their distaste for revisionist material but have suggested that libraries should collect them if certain conditions can be met, ranging from labeling to assigning special class numbers. For example, neither the Dewey Decimal Classification nor the Library of

Congress Classification systems provide class numbers specifically for Holocaust-denial literature. Therefore, they are classed in the same location as the widely accepted histories of the Holocaust (940.53 in DDC, and D810.J4 in LCC).

Several cataloging and classification solutions have been offered by those who object to the placement of revisionist material in the Holocaust-history section. One would be for DDC and LCC to establish a separate class for Holocaust denial. It has also been suggested, since it is an example of anti-Semitic literature, that it be classified as such.

Keeping revisionism in special, restricted collections has not only been suggested, but it has actually been implemented at the Simon Wiesenthal Center Library in Los Angeles. At that private library, the material is listed in the public catalog, although it is not on the open shelf and must be specifically requested by clients.²¹

Although there is no separate classification, LC *has* provided a subject heading for Holocaust-denial literature. Earlier materials were cataloged under “Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945)--Historiography,” but *Library of Congress Subject Headings* now provides “Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945)--Errors, inventions, etc.” as an alternative.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers conducted a mail survey to determine librarians’ attitudes regarding acquisition of and access to Holocaust-denial literature. To the knowledge of the present researchers, no surveys have been conducted on this topic. The subjects were public adult-services librarians varying in age, race, and gender. The sample population was 200 public adult-services librarians, including directors and assistant directors, in Nassau County, New York, a county chosen as a sample because of the various sizes of its libraries and the diverse communities they serve. The names of the

adult-services librarians were taken from the *Directory of Long Island Libraries & Media Centers 1991*. The researchers pretested the questionnaire in the Queens Borough Public Library system before testing the sample population.

The subjects were asked to respond based on their knowledge and opinions. To ensure confidentiality, the subjects were requested not to provide their names or affiliations on the returned questionnaire or stamped, self-addressed envelopes that were provided.

Limitations of the Present Study

In examining Holocaust-denial materials first-hand, it was determined by the researchers that the literature was overwhelmingly directed toward adults, including college students. It was therefore decided to exclude children's, young adult, and school media librarians from the population to be studied.

Because of the assumption that academic and research libraries will collect more controversial materials than public libraries, it was further decided to exclude academic and special librarians as well.

FINDINGS

At the outset, the researchers selected certain key questions on the survey that were deemed most crucial not only to determining the respondents' attitudes toward the acquisition and placement of Holocaust-revisionist items, but also, obviously, to ascertaining which hypotheses could be proved or disproved. The following questions were chosen (see survey at end of article for exact wording of questions): 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, and 22.

In addition, the researchers categorized the respondents into the following population groups: administrators; librarians with fewer than five years experience; librarians with more than fifteen

years experience; librarians reporting their clientele was over 51% European-American; librarians with more than 51% Jewish clientele; librarians whose institutions have no collection-development policy; and those who had experienced challenges to library materials in their careers. There was, of course, some overlapping among groups, but the population breakdowns allowed the authors to compare and extrapolate from responses and also to note which circumstances inherent in the groups might have influenced answers.

The authors received a total of seventy-two responses, representing a return rate of 36%. The percentages for each question do not necessarily total 100, however, because some respondents did not answer every question.

A discussion of the key questions follows.

Question 10: Selection criteria

As Table 1 illustrates, when asked to rate a list of selection criteria--accuracy, price, reviews, author's reputation, publisher's reputation, client requests, weakness of the collection in the subject area, and scholarly value of the material--accuracy was first choice. In addition, these criteria were valued: reviews, client requests, and weakness of the collection.

Question 11: Should library collections present all sides of every issue?

As Table 2 shows, an overwhelming majority of respondents answered in the affirmative to the question "Should library collections present all sides of every issue?" Tables 2 and 3 show a very high percentage answering *yes* across each population category.

Table 1

Rating of Selection Criteria--All Respondents

	Extremely Important (%)	Somewhat Important (%)	Somewhat Unimportant (%)	Not Important (%)
Accuracy	76.4	22.2	0.0	0.0
Price	12.5	69.4	11.1	4.2
Reviews	65.3	31.9	1.4	0.0
Author's Reputation	20.8	66.7	8.3	2.8
Publisher's Reputation	5.6	44.4	34.7	6.9
Client Requests	47.2	45.8	2.8	0.0
Weakness of Collection in Subject Area	59.7	37.5	5.6	0.0
Scholarly Value of Material	23.6	52.8	18.1	2.8

Note. $N=72$.

Question 12: Is it acceptable for a library to acquire materials whose factual accuracy might be in question?

As Table 2 also illustrates, when asked about the acceptability of acquiring factually questionable materials, *yes* and *no* responses were virtually equally matched, with 47% of all respondents answering *yes* and 44% answering *no*. The biggest difference in responses concerned librarians who had, and who never had, materials challenged. Librarians who had materials challenged in the past had the highest percentage of *yes* responses (74%) and the lowest percentage of

Table 2

Responses to Questions 11, 12, & 16 by Selected Population Groups

	All Respondents (%) <i>N</i> =72	Admins. (%) <i>N</i> =24	Non- Admins. (%) <i>N</i> =48	< 5 Years Exper. (%) <i>N</i> =13	> 15 Years Exper. (%) <i>N</i> =39
Should library collections present all sides of every issue?					
YES	88.9	87.5	89.6	100.0	89.7
NO	9.7	8.3	10.4	0.0	7.7
Is it acceptable for a library to acquire materials whose factual accuracy might be in question?					
YES	47.2	54.2	43.8	38.5	53.8
NO	44.4	37.5	47.9	38.5	46.2
Would you acquire Holocaust-revisionist materials for your library's collection?					
YES	45.8	50.0	43.8	38.5	51.3
NO	44.4	37.5	47.9	53.8	43.6

Table 3

Responses to Questions 11, 12, & 16 by Selected Population Groups

	> 51% European- American (%) N=50	> 51% Jewish (%) N=8	Had Materials Challenged (%) N=23	Never Had Materials Challenged (%) N=39	Coll. Dev. Policy (%) N=53	No Coll. Dev. Policy (%) N=19
Should library collections present all sides of every issue?						
YES	86.0	100.0	87.0	89.8	90.1	84.2
NO	14.0	0.0	13.0	8.2	7.5	15.8
Is it acceptable for a library to acquire materials whose factual accuracy might be in question?						
YES	50.0	50.0	73.9	34.7	45.3	52.6
NO	46.0	50.0	21.7	55.1	49.1	31.6
Would you acquire Holocaust-revisionist materials for your library's collection?						
YES	48.0	50.0	52.2	42.9	52.8	26.3
NO	44.0	50.0	39.1	46.9	35.8	68.4

no responses (22%), while librarians who had never had materials challenged had the lowest percentage of *yes* responses (35%) and the highest percentage of *no* responses (55%). The other population subgroups were more evenly divided on the question.

Table 4

Rating of Controversial Materials--All Respondents

	Extremely Controversial (%)	Somewhat Controversial (%)	Not at All Controversial (%)
Abortion	47.2	40.3	12.5
AIDS	5.6	63.9	30.6
Capital Punishment	18.1	58.3	23.6
Child Abuse	8.3	37.5	54.2
Euthanasia	34.7	51.4	15.3
Evolution	9.7	29.2	59.7
Holocaust Revisionism	44.4	30.6	19.4
Homosexuality	29.2	55.6	22.2
Sexual Abuse	8.3	36.1	55.6
Suicide	15.3	47.2	36.1

Note. *N*=72.

Question 13: Rating of controversial topics.

As Table 4 shows, on a rating of controversial topics, abortion received the largest percentage of responses in the “extremely controversial” category overall, while Holocaust-revisionism ranked a close second in that category. Interestingly, for abortion, librarians in the “over 51% Jewish” group ranked lowest among respondents on the “extremely controversial” rating (25%); for Holocaust revisionism, however, they ranked second highest (50%) among the population groups in rating it as “extremely controversial.” Those librarians who had faced prior challenges to materials had the

highest percentage (57%) in categorizing Holocaust-revisionist materials as “extremely controversial.” In the “somewhat controversial” category for Holocaust revisionism, the highest figure (35%) came from librarians who had faced prior challenges to materials, while the lowest figure (23%) came from librarians with under five years experience. Those librarians whose communities are over 51% Jewish ranked second lowest (25%) in rating Holocaust revisionism as “somewhat controversial” and also ranked lowest (13%) in rating it as “not controversial.” The highest percentage in categorizing Holocaust revisionism as “not controversial” came from librarians with under five years experience (31%), while the lowest figure (9%) came from librarians who had faced prior challenges to materials.

Question 16: Would you acquire Holocaust-revisionist materials for your library’s collection?

When asked whether or not they would acquire Holocaust-revisionist materials, librarians were almost evenly divided (see Table 2 above). Librarians working with collection-development policies had the highest percentage of *yes* responses (53%) and the lowest percentage of *no* responses (36%), while librarians ungoverned by collection-development policies had the lowest percentage of *yes* responses (26%) and the highest percentage of *no* responses (68%).

Although the other population subgroups did not differ this dramatically, there *were* some significant differences: 1) more non-administrators responded *no* than administrators; 2) more librarians with less than five years experience answered *no* than those with more than fifteen years experience; 3) librarians who had never faced challenges responded *no* more often than professionals who had encountered challenges.

Question 17: Rating of factors influencing decision to acquire Holocaust-revisionist materials.

Librarians who claimed that they *would* acquire Holocaust-revisionist writings were asked to rate five factors that would influence their decision. As Table 5 illustrates, intellectual freedom and

balance of viewpoint on the Holocaust were the “winners.” The “over 51% Jewish” group ranked balance of viewpoint on the Holocaust as “very important” to a greater degree (75%) than the other populations, while both librarians with under five years experience and those with no collection-development policy had the highest figure (80%) in citing intellectual freedom as being “very important.” Weakness of the collection accounted for a total of 88% of the responses in the “very” and “somewhat important” categories, while the religious/ethno-cultural composition of the community accounted for a total of 70% of the responses in those categories. Personal feelings about the topic ranked low.

Table 5

Factors Influencing Decision to Acquire Holocaust-Revisionist Materials--All Respondents

	Very Important (%)	Somewhat Important (%)	Not Important (%)
Balance of viewpoint on the Holocaust	57.6	33.3	9.1
Intellectual Freedom	69.7	30.3	0.0
Personal feelings about the topic	9.1	12.1	78.8
Religious/ethnic makeup of the community	12.1	57.6	30.3
Weakness of the collection in this area	15.2	72.7	12.1

Note. N=33.

Question 18: Rating of factors influencing decision not to acquire Holocaust-revisionist materials.

Librarians who would *not* acquire Holocaust-revisionist materials were requested to rate four factors that would influence their decision. As Table 6 shows, lack of scholarly merit was

overwhelmingly selected by the respondents. Interestingly, those librarians who serve a *Jewish* majority gave the second highest rating (75%) for the composition of the community as being “very important”. The highest rating was given by administrators (78%). Because one person from the Jewish majority group skipped that part of the question, that group had the lowest percentage for ranking lack of scholarly merit as “very important” (75%). Overall, the composition of the community was judged “very important” as a *no* factor by 59% of respondents, followed closely by impact on children and young adults.

Table 6

Factors Influencing Decision *Not* to Acquire Holocaust-Revisionist Materials--All Respondents

	Very Important (%)	Somewhat Important (%)	Not Important (%)
Perceived lack of scholarly merit	90.6	6.3	3.1
Impact on children and/or young adults	56.3	21.9	18.8
Personal feelings about the topic	37.5	21.9	40.6
Religious/ethnic makeup of the community	59.4	15.6	25.0

Note. N=32.

Question 19: Possible subject headings.

When asked to choose possible headings for Holocaust-revisionist materials, “Antisemitism” (the *Library of Congress Subject Headings* spelling) was checked by 57% of all respondents. The heading “Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945)--Errors, inventions, etc.” was the second most popular choice (50%), followed by “Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945)--History” (32%), “Holocaust, Jewish

(1939-1945)--Historiography” (26%), and “Other” (18%). Very surprisingly, 50% of those librarians who serve communities over 51% Jewish favored “Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945)--History,” the largest percentage among those who selected that heading.

Question 20: Where should Holocaust-revisionist materials be classified?

When asked for their opinions on where Holocaust-revisionist materials should be classified, the majority of respondents chose classification within the Holocaust-history section (64%). Only 21% of all respondents said that Holocaust-revisionist materials should have a separate number outside the Holocaust-history section, and 8% selected “Other.” There were no significant differences in the responses to this question when broken down by population subgroups.

Question 21: Where should Holocaust-revisionist materials be shelved?

The overwhelming majority of respondents (89%) agreed that Holocaust-revisionist writings should be kept on open shelves and free of any restriction. No respondents said that it should be kept in closed stacks and be available only to adults, and the other possible choices each received 1% of the responses. There were no significant differences in the responses to this question when broken down by population subgroups.

Question 22: Evaluation of the potential offensiveness of Holocaust-revisionist materials.

Finally, when asked to express their opinions about the offensiveness of these materials, 39% of the respondents indicated that such writings are more offensive than other controversial materials, but 40% responded that they are neither more nor less offensive. No group believed that Holocaust-revisionist items are *less* offensive, and 15% had no opinion.

The other questions posed in the survey were used to break the respondents down into the various subgroups and are not in themselves significant in terms of the hypotheses.

What follows is a brief report on how the data affected the three hypotheses the researchers set forth.

Hypothesis 1.

The researchers hypothesized that public librarians would oppose the inclusion of Holocaust-revisionist literature in public libraries unless there were some restrictions to its access. As can be seen from Table 2, the majority of respondents indicated that they *would* purchase Holocaust-revisionist literature. Further, the majority of respondents favored placing this material on open shelves, and a smaller but still significant majority would want it classified in the Holocaust-history section of the collection. Thus, the data do not support this hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2.

The researchers hypothesized that the ethnic and religious composition of the community served would play a role in librarians' decisions about whether or not to acquire Holocaust-revisionist items. Table 3 contains the responses of those librarians whose communities are over 51% European-American and those whose communities are over 51% Jewish. These responses do not differ significantly from the overall total, and the very small number of librarians (eight) who reported that their communities are over 51% Jewish makes it difficult to draw any inferences, even from the large (60%) affirmative response. Because the data do not differ markedly overall, hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Hypothesis 3.

The researchers hypothesized that public librarians would be less receptive to acquiring Holocaust-revisionist literature than other controversial items. First, 46% of all respondents answered that they would purchase it, and 44% said they would not (see Table 2). When asked to compare how controversial Holocaust-revisionist items are as opposed to other controversial

materials, 39% responded that the former were more offensive, but 40% thought Holocaust revisionism was neither more nor less offensive, and 15% had no opinion. Furthermore, as Table 4 shows, when ranking various topics as to their controversial nature, abortion (47%) and Holocaust revisionism (44%) were considered the most controversial out of the 10 topics. Since the responses to these key questions were so evenly divided and ambiguous, the evidence regarding hypothesis 3 is not conclusive.

INTERPRETATION OF DATA

Selection criteria.

When asked to rate the importance of various selection criteria (Question 10), the librarians indicated that accuracy and scholarly value were very important. This emphasis on accuracy and scholarliness is surprising when one considers that nearly half of all respondents claimed that they would acquire this literature, which is not generally considered to be either accurate or scholarly.

Moreover, recall that respondents rated these selection criteria as extremely important as well: reviews, client requests, and weakness of the collection. These are also interesting statistics, given that Holocaust-revisionist items almost never appear in the legitimate professional review media and that they are either never asked for or are requested rarely (81% of the respondents claimed they were never asked for this literature by patrons; 10% responded that these materials are requested “very rarely”).

Thus it appears that for the librarians who *would* acquire these materials, weakness of the collection might be an even stronger motivating acquisition force than accuracy. This is borne out in the responses to Question 12. While accuracy is clearly an important selection criterion, it appears to be so in ideal, general terms and for all subject areas. Where the issue of collection balance is concerned, however, the data suggest that librarians are not averse to acquiring factually questionable

items, since nearly half responded affirmatively to the question (see Table 2). Furthermore, in order to achieve balance and correct collection weakness, the majority of professionals surveyed would acquire inaccurate and/or factually questionable items.

Thus the decision whether or not to acquire Holocaust-revisionist literature is not an easy one, for this material contradicts the very criteria most librarians use in selection decisions.

Factors influencing librarians to acquire.

Those librarians who answered that they would acquire Holocaust-revisionist literature were requested to rank several possible factors that would influence this decision. For 70% of the respondents, intellectual freedom was cited as being “very important.” This is in keeping with the finding that librarians’ personal feelings were declared “not important” by 79% of the respondents, suggesting that the professionals surveyed can and do set aside their own judgments about library materials in the interest of fostering free and open discussion and access. Allied with these factors is the finding that balance of the Holocaust collection would be “very important” in influencing the decision to acquire Holocaust-revisionist items. The researchers find these results to be consistent with the data mentioned heretofore that library collections should present all sides of issues; that many professionals would not be opposed to acquiring factually inaccurate or factually questionable works; that Holocaust revisionism did not rank first as the most controversial topic; and that less than 40% of respondents claimed that Holocaust revisionism was more controversial than other topics. The personal comments expressed by many respondents bear out these results: one director voiced his thought that he “wrestles” with this issue “from time to time,” while another comment told, poignantly, of the soul-searching involved in being the child of Holocaust survivors; at the same time, this librarian expressed her complete and utter commitment to intellectual freedom and her strong

belief that Holocaust-denial items should be acquired, no matter how repugnant, in order to serve a community's needs and intellectual interests.

There were large disparities between *yes* and *no* responses to question 16 by the following groups, who answered affirmatively in a significant way: librarians *with* a collection-development policy and librarians who had had library materials challenged. From these data the researchers infer that those librarians who are governed by collection-development guidelines are freer to make choices of materials involving intellectual freedom and controversy. Second, librarians who have met with client challenges may be better equipped than others to meet the backlash that could arise from a library's decision to acquire or not to acquire controversial, offensive materials. Having stood up to challenges in the past, these librarians may realize that challenges are occasionally "part of the job," so to speak, and their experiences have demonstrated that library personnel can survive community opposition.

Factors influencing librarians *not* to acquire.

It has been demonstrated that the lack of scholarly merit inherent in Holocaust-denial writings emerged as the foremost reason why librarians said they would not acquire these works. As one respondent remarked, "[They] belong with 'the world was flat material.'" This finding is opposed to the data that show that most of the professionals surveyed *would* acquire factually questionable works. Moreover, not every librarian who would resist acquiring Holocaust-revisionist materials on unscholarly grounds was opposed to acquiring factually questionable or inaccurate items either. The disparities here reveal once again how complex and confusing the issue is. On the one hand, as has been seen, the librarians seem very sure about their general positions *vis-a-vis* intellectual freedom, collection balance, and the presentation of all sides of issues. On the other hand, on occasion some of the librarians surveyed betrayed a certain ambiguity about these issues, suggesting to the

investigators that the librarians wage a private war between their personal feelings and their strong sense of responsibility and ethics as professionals. A representative comment from a respondent testifies to the conflict between personal and professional convictions:

As a librarian I feel it is wrong to censor the material we make available to our patrons--that includes Holocaust-revisionist materials. However, as a child of a Holocaust survivor . . . I am repulsed by this material. . . . Given my background I would find it difficult to select such material, but I am torn between that and my responsibility as a librarian to provide uncensored material to my patrons.

It has been seen that the religious/ethno-cultural composition of a community would be a significant factor in librarians' decisions both to acquire and not to acquire Holocaust-denial literature. But even though librarians cited the composition of the community as being important, the data show that as many librarians serving communities that would presumably be most offended by this material *would* acquire it as those who would not. Because the data have shown that librarians serving European-American communities (under which the Jewish community must be subsumed) are not generally opposed to Holocaust-revisionist writings, and that this group does not consider the items to be overwhelmingly controversial, the researchers further conclude that these particular demographic factors would not in themselves prevent most librarians from acquiring Holocaust-denial items.

The only population who expressed themselves very significantly in the *no* response to the question "Would you acquire Holocaust-revisionist materials for your library's collection?" were the following: librarians with less than five years experience and librarians working in institutions with no collection-development policies (see Tables 2 and 3). The investigators draw the following conclusions from these findings: younger, less experienced professionals might be more fearful than their more seasoned counterparts of incurring the wrath of their respective communities and/or administrators by actively acquiring these writings; librarians working with no

collection-development policies might, ironically, be laboring under less free acquisition standards than professionals working with a policy that likely sets out clearly what can and should be acquired for a library in a specific community. Here the investigators also assume that collection-development policies would express their strong adherence to American Library Association guidelines about free and open access to all points of view on all subjects.

Overall, the data supported the importance, for the purposes of tabulation and comparison, of the investigators' decision to categorize the respondents into the various population subgroups. For example, from the data the investigators infer the following:

- * On the whole, collection-development policies seem to make librarians more liberal-minded and amenable to acquiring all kinds of materials.

- * Administrators have a high regard for intellectual freedom and the presentation of all sides of issues; furthermore, in keeping with these findings, administrators would not oppose the acquisition of factually questionable items. This is borne out by the statement of a librarian who said that her institution (with a Jewish-majority clientele) had purchased some Holocaust-revisionist works at the behest of the Director, who desires "to include all opinions in the name of freedom."

- * Librarians with less than five years experience are less tolerant than their colleagues with more than fifteen years of service on the key questions of presentation of all sides of issues; acceptability of acquiring factually questionable items; and specifically the acquisition of Holocaust-revisionist materials.

- * On the key questions itemized earlier, librarians who had experienced challenges and those who had not differ in their perspective. The *yes* and *no* responses from both groups were roughly the same to the question of presenting all sides of issues. However, on the question of acquiring factually questionable items, librarians with challenge experience answered *yes* overwhelmingly,

whereas the librarians who had never encountered challenges were more emphatic in their *no* response. Finally, when asked if they would acquire Holocaust-revisionist materials, the majority of the “challenge group” favored acquisition, but the “no-challenge” librarians were almost evenly divided among themselves in their responses. Clearly, for those who have never faced challenges to acquired materials, the lack of specific guidelines makes for confusion and indecision.

While numerous respondents expressed their personal repugnance at the content and lack of validity of Holocaust-revisionist materials, fewer librarians than expected proclaimed shock or outrage that such items could be even considered for library purchase or be at the heart of a research study. Indeed, it was reported to the researchers that some respondents and others familiar with the project thought the investigation was interesting and “about time.”

CONCLUSION

The public library’s goal is to make available to its clients materials on all topics and expressing all points of view. Librarians have historically opposed censorship in all its forms, including labeling. Holocaust revisionism strongly tests public librarians’ commitments to intellectual freedom, open access, and accuracy because it contradicts and distorts the historical record.

Two of the three hypotheses proposed by the authors have been disproved, and the data are not statistically significant enough to either prove or disprove the third. Public librarians in general do not oppose the acquisition of Holocaust-revisionist materials and would not restrict access to it. Although the overwhelming majority of public librarians believe that accuracy and scholarly value are important criteria when selecting materials, nearly half said that they would acquire Holocaust-revisionist works for their libraries. The ethnic and religious composition of the communities served did not influence the decision whether or not to acquire revisionist writings.

However, for those who opposed acquiring it, approximately 75% said that the religious/ethno-cultural composition of the community was either very or somewhat important. Although many public librarians believe that Holocaust-revisionist literature is “extremely controversial,” many also said that it is neither more nor less offensive than other controversial materials. Thus the investigators cannot say with certainty whether public librarians are or are not less receptive to acquiring Holocaust-revisionist materials than other controversial items. Nevertheless, the researchers believe that the findings of the present project are valid and that the sample surveyed is representative of suburban public librarians in the Northeastern United States.

Appendix

**HOLOCAUST-REVISIONIST LITERATURE IN PUBLIC
LIBRARIES: AN INVESTIGATION OF LIBRARIANS'
ATTITUDES REGARDING ACQUISITION AND ACCESS**

1. Do you have an M.L.S.? Yes_____ No_____

2. Other Master's? _____ specify_____

3. Indicate your current position:

Director_____

Assistant Director_____

Adult reference_____

other (specify)_____

4. How long have you been a librarian? _____years

5. Identify the cultural and ethnic makeup of the community served by your library (check one column for each line):

	< 10% of population	11-25% of population	26-50% of population	> 51% of population
African-American	_____	_____	_____	_____
Asian-American	_____	_____	_____	_____
European-American	_____	_____	_____	_____
Hispanic-American	_____	_____	_____	_____
Native-American	_____	_____	_____	_____
Other (specify)	_____	_____	_____	_____

6. Identify the religious makeup of the community served by your library (check one column for each line):

	< 10% of population	11-25% of population	26-50% of population	> 51% of population
Jewish	_____	_____	_____	_____
Protestant	_____	_____	_____	_____
Roman Catholic	_____	_____	_____	_____
Other (specify)	_____	_____	_____	_____

7. Does your library have a written collection-development policy?

Yes_____

No_____

8. During your career, has there ever been a challenge to materials in a library at which you were working?

Yes _____

No _____

specify _____

9. Who has final responsibility for selecting materials in your library? (Check one)

Director _____

Assistant Director _____

Committee _____

other (specify) _____

10. Please rate the following selection criteria (check one column for each line):

	extremely important	somewhat important	somewhat unimportant	not important
accuracy	_____	_____	_____	_____
price	_____	_____	_____	_____
review(s)	_____	_____	_____	_____
author's reputation	_____	_____	_____	_____
publisher's reputation	_____	_____	_____	_____
client requests	_____	_____	_____	_____
weakness of collection in subject area	_____	_____	_____	_____
scholarly value of the material	_____	_____	_____	_____

11. Should library collections present all sides of every issue?

Yes _____

No _____

12. Is it acceptable for a library to acquire materials whose factual accuracy might be in question?

Yes _____

No _____

13. Please rate the following topics as to their controversial nature:

	extremely controversial	somewhat controversial	not at all controversial
abortion	_____	_____	_____
AIDS	_____	_____	_____
capital punishment	_____	_____	_____
child abuse	_____	_____	_____
euthanasia	_____	_____	_____
evolution	_____	_____	_____
Holocaust revisionism	_____	_____	_____
homosexuality	_____	_____	_____
sexual abuse	_____	_____	_____
suicide	_____	_____	_____

14. To what extent are selection criteria applied when acquiring controversial materials for your library?
 completely _____ somewhat _____ not at all _____

15. Clients of my library have asked for Holocaust-revisionist materials:
 very often _____ often _____ occasionally _____
 rarely _____ very rarely _____ never _____

16. Would you acquire Holocaust-revisionist materials for your library's collection?
 Yes _____ No _____

17. If Yes, please rate the following factors as to how they would influence your decision:

	very important	somewhat important	not important
-balance of viewpoint on the Holocaust	_____	_____	_____
-intellectual freedom	_____	_____	_____
-personal feelings about the topic	_____	_____	_____
-religious/ethnic makeup of the community	_____	_____	_____
-weakness of collection in this area	_____	_____	_____

18. If No, please rate the following factors as to how they would influence your decision:

	very important	somewhat important	not important
-perceived lack of scholarly merit	_____	_____	_____
-impact on children and/or young adults	_____	_____	_____
-personal feelings about the topic	_____	_____	_____
-religious/ethnic makeup of the community	_____	_____	_____

19. The following are possible subject headings for Holocaust-revisionist materials. Check the ones that you agree with:

- Antisemitism_____
- Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945)--Errors, inventions, etc._____
- Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945)--Historiography_____
- Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945)--History_____
- other (specify)_____

20. Where should Holocaust-revisionist materials be classified? (Check one.)

-A separate classification number should be developed in LC and Dewey for Holocaust revisionism within the Holocaust history section._____

-A separate classification number should be developed in LC and Dewey for Holocaust revisionism outside the Holocaust history section._____

-other (specify)_____

21. Holocaust-revisionist materials should be kept: (Check one.)

-on open shelves and not restricted in any way_____

-in closed stacks and available to anyone on request_____

-in closed stacks and available only to adults_____

-in a special collection or room for controversial items_____

-other (specify)_____

22. Please complete the following sentence by checking the phrase that best expresses your opinion:

I believe that Holocaust-revisionist materials are:

- more offensive than other controversial materials_____
- less offensive than other controversial materials_____
- neither more nor less offensive than other controversial materials_____
- I have no opinion on this matter_____

COMMENTS:

Please mail this survey in the attached envelope to:

Johanna Thomas

NOTES

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3. Richard C. Lukas, "The Polish Experience During the Holocaust," in Michael Berenbaum (ed.), *A Mosaic of Victims: Non-Jews Persecuted and Murdered by the Nazis* (New York: New York University Press, 1990), p. 88.

4. Irwin Suall and David Lowe, *The 1989 IHR Conference: White-Washing Genocide "Scientifically"* (New York: Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, n.d.), p. 1; Alison B. Carb and Alan M. Schwartz, *Holocaust "Revisionism": A Denial of History. An Update* (New York: ADL, 1986), pp. 13-14.

5. American Library Association, *Intellectual Freedom Manual*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: ALA, 1989), p. 3; "Diversity in Collection Development: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights," *Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom* 31 (September, 1982), 189, emphasis added.

6. See the article by Dawidowicz cited above, as well as Aime Bonifas, "The French Revisionists and the Myth of Holocauste [sic]" in Yehuda Bauer et al. (eds.), *Remembering for the Future: Working Papers and Addenda* (New York: Pergamon Press), 2:2187-2198; Wallace Greene, "The Holocaust Hoax: A Rejoinder," *Jewish Social Studies* 46 (1984), 263-276; and Bradley F. Smith, "Two Alibies [sic] for the Inhumanities: A. R. Butz," *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century* and David Irving, *Hitler's War*," *German Studies Review* 1 (1978), 327-335.

7. Katz, 324.

8. Judith Bolton, *Holocaust "Revisionism": Reinventing the Big Lie* (New York: ADL, 1989), p. 26; Nadine Fresco, "The Denial of the Dead: On the Faurisson Affair," *Dissent* 28 (1981), 467-483.

9. "Holocaust 'Revisionism' in France: The Roques Affair," *Patterns of Prejudice* 20 (1986), 34-36.

10. Bolton, 24-25; Randolph L. Braham, "Historical Revisionism and the New Right," in Yehuda Bauer et al. (eds.), *Remembering for the Future: Working Papers and Addenda* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1989), 2:2097-2098.

11. Seth S. King, "Professor Causes Furor by Saying Nazi Slaying of Jews is a Myth," *New York Times*, 28 January 1977, p. A10.

- 12.Noam Chomsky, "His Right to Say It," *The Nation* 232 (28 February 1981), 231-234.
- 13.Bolton, 21.
- 14."CLA Cancels 'Holocaust Hoax' Publisher," *Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom* 34, 1 (1985), 30-31; Susan Kamm, "'Holocaust Hoax' Publisher Barred from Annual Convention of California LA After Controversy Spreads Through State," *American Libraries* 16 (1985), 5-7.
- 15.Dianne McAfee Hopkins, "Factors Influencing the Outcome of Library Media Center Challenges at the Secondary Level," *School Library Media Quarterly* 18 (1990), 229-244; Judith Serebnick, "Book Reviews and the Selection of Potentially Controversial Materials in Public Libraries," *Library Quarterly* 51 (1981), 390-409; and Beth M. Whigham, "An Inquiry Into Making Controversial Materials Available in the Media Center to Secondary Students," *Journal of Educational Media and Library Sciences* 28 (1990), 26-42.
- 16.Morton Weinfeld, "The Classification of Holocaust Denial Literature by the Library of Congress," *Judaica Librarianship* 3 (1986-87), 53.
- 17.Michael Grunberger, "Controversial Materials in the Jewish Library: Introduction to a Panel Discussion," *Judaica Librarianship* 3 (1986-87), 49.
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- 20.Quoted in William Gleberzon, "Academic Freedom and Holocaust Denial Literature: Dealing With Infamy," *Interchange on Education* 14/15 (1983-84), 63.
- 21.Adaire Klein, "The Handling of Holocaust Denial Literature in a Special Library," *Judaica Librarianship* 3 (1986-87), 56.