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John A. Drobnicki
CUNY York College

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Librarians Seek Answers For Literature of Denial

BY JOHN A. DROBNICKI

Martyrdom and Resistance (March-April) discussed the recent controversy surrounding Professor David Gershom Myers' attempts to remove Holocaust-denial materials from his school's library.

There are three aspects to the topic of Holocaust-denial materials in libraries: Should libraries acquire it? If they do, how should it be classified? Where should it be shelved?

Libraries and librarians have a long history of fighting censorship and attempts to remove materials from their collections, from *Huckleberry Finn* to Judy Blume's *Forever*. With regard to the first question, many librarians feel that it would be censorship not to buy at least some of that material, since the Library Bill of Rights states that "libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues." Another American Library Association 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."

CREATING A CLASSIFICATION

Others would argue that Holocaust-denial material is hate literature and has no place in a library. In a 1992 survey of public librarians in Nassau County, Long Island, conducted by myself and three fellow library school colleagues, the majority of responders said they they would acquire Holocaust "revisionist" materials for their library's collection, most of them citing intellectual freedom as the main reason.

At the present time, there is no special classification (i.e., call number) for denial literature — it is classified in the Holocaust history section, right next to Bauer, Dawidowicz, and Hilberg. Some suggestions have been offered in the literature, though. The Library of Congress and the Dewey Decimal Classification could create special classification numbers for it in their respective systems. Or, since it is an example of anti-Semitic literature, "revisionist" materials could be classified as such, which would move it out of the History section. Another author has suggested that it be classified with the other hoax materials, which would move it near the "Bigfoot" books.

If a library does acquire this material, it must then

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JOHN A. DROBNICKI is assistant professor/reference librarian at York College/CUNY, and co-author of "Holocaust-Denial Literature in Public Libraries: An Investigation of Public Librarian's Attitudes Regarding Acquisition and Access," *Public & Access Services Quarterly*, 1 (1996): 5-40.

Libraries and Denial

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decide whether or not to limit access to it. Generally, librarians do not believe in restricting access, due to their long tradition of fighting for intellectual freedom. Some librarians, however, have suggested that Holocaust-denial materials should be kept in closed stacks or a special collection, where someone would have to specifically request those books in order to examine them. This would prevent the situation where an innocent child would unknowingly pick up a "revisionist" book by mistake; but it might also discourage others from looking at the material at all.

After all, is everyone who looks at a Holocaust-denial book necessarily a "revisionist" or anti-Semite? For

my own research, I have examined and/or read virtually all the English-language denial material available. In the aforementioned survey of public librarians, 89% of respondents said that denial materials should be kept on open shelves and free of any restrictions.

Admittedly, this is a very sensitive issue, but it is one that is not going to go away. The Institute for Historical Review continues to publish this material and sponsor conferences on the subject, and Bradley Smith's Committee for Open Debate on the Holocaust continues to send ads to college newspapers. The best solution is for libraries to have written collection development policies, which specifically state what they do and do not collect. This would give librarians something to back them up when a member of the public asks why they own, or don't own, something in their library.