



THE
PUBLIC
LIBRARY
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Hamilton County

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For Immediate Release

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Press
Release

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Fighting the Fires of Hate: America and the Nazi Book Burnings

On Exhibit at the Main Library, 800 Vine Street (February 13 – April 9)

Main Library Exhibit - Many acts of censorship that quickly took control of the German book market during World War II are presented in an exhibit on loan from the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. As part of Holocaust Awareness Weeks, *Fighting the Fires of Hate: America and the Nazi Book Burnings* will be displayed in the Main Library Atrium (south building, first floor) from February 13 through April 9. Through vivid photographs, political cartoons, and other forms of propaganda the mass hysteria that led to thousands of books being destroyed is remembered, along with the impact the book burnings had on America.

It all began in 1933. Shortly after the Nazi party took power, university students from all over Germany built bonfires of books and eagerly destroyed scientific, political and literary manuscripts that threatened Hitler's view of the world. On the night of May 10, in most university towns, students marched in torchlight parades "against the un-German spirit." Guided by blacklists and scripted rituals calling for high Nazi officials, professors and university leaders to address participants and spectators, students threw the unwanted books they purged from their own private libraries and the shelves of public and university libraries into the bonfires amid joyous ceremony, band playing and incantations. Books thrown to the flames included not only many by German authors—a great number of whom were Jewish, such as Sigmund Freud and Albert Einstein—but also the works of non-Germans, such as H.G. Wells, Upton Sinclair, and Jack London.

During World War II, three organizations—the Writers' War Board, the Council on Books in Wartime, and the Office of War Information—came together to rally Americans around the war effort. Inspired by President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Four Freedoms" —freedom of

speech and religion, and freedom from want and fear—these agencies emphasized freedom of speech by contrasting it with the Nazi book burnings, censorship, and other acts of suppression. The importance of books was given wartime currency in the slogan “Books Are Weapons in the War of Ideas,” which appeared in posters, radio and other media.

To this day Americans who depend upon free access to information have focused on the Nazi book burnings as a historical analogue to past and present events. The 1950s witnessed widespread book banning in school and public libraries, occasioning the *New York Times* to observe that the suppression of books was a “species of book burning” conflicting with basic American ideas of free thought. In 1953, while speaking against censorship, U.S. Senator Thomas C. Hennings, Jr. used the term “book burnings” as “symbolic of any effort to remove books from libraries. It matters little,” Hennings continued, “whether the removal literally takes the form of burning or consists of storing the books in basements and warehouses.” The symbolism of “book burnings” has since entered into the American culture of politics, film and even television as a powerful metaphor of censorships and suppression.

Exhibit Hours:

Monday-Wednesday: 9:00 a.m.-9:00 p.m.

Thursday-Saturday: 9:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m.

Sunday: 1:00-5:00 p.m.

Information: (513) 369-6900

✓ **Information about events at the Main Library and 41 branch libraries is available on the Internet site: www.CincinnatiLibrary.org.**

✓ **Our goal is to make our programs accessible to everyone. Please request ADA services one week in advance at 513-369-4406 (TTY 369-4409).**