**Singapore Won't Allow Publication of Prophet Cartoons (Update1)**

By Linus Chua - February 9, 2006 22:58 EST

Feb. 10 (Bloomberg) -- Singapore won't allow the publication of a controversial sequence of cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammad, Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said late Thursday, condemning the caricatures as insensitive.

Maintaining harmony is a higher priority than freedom of expression, Lee said in broad-ranging comments in a meeting with community leaders. He also warned Singapore remains a ``key target'' for terrorist attacks, according to a transcript of his remarks published in the Straits Times.

Cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, first published in a Danish newspaper in September and subsequently reprinted in newspapers around the world, have sparked protests in which more than 10 people have died. Islam, followed by about 14 percent of Singapore's population, bans the visual depiction of the prophet, and Muslims were especially angered that one of the caricatures showed him wearing a turban shaped like a bomb.

``It's wrong, it's provocative. We would not have allowed it in Singapore,'' Lee said in the two-hour dialogue yesterday with 1,700 community leaders and students. ``It was wrong for the Danish newspapers to publish the pictures, it was wrong for the other European newspapers to say, in solidarity, I will republish.''

Neighboring Malaysia, where three fifths of the population follow Islam, has also condemned the caricatures. Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi suspended the permit of The Sarawak Press Sdn. after its Sarawak Tribune newspaper reprinted the cartoons, Malaysian state-owned Bernama News Agency reported late Thursday.

Furor

French Muslim leaders yesterday condemned the violence that followed the reprinting of the caricatures in France, though they said they plan to sue newspapers that carried the cartoons. The offending images were first carried in September by Jyllands-Posten in Denmark.

The Sarawak Tribune has apologized for republishing the caricatures, claiming a lone editor -- who has since resigned -- was responsible. The editor in question has said a superior cleared the offending page after he prepared it, the New Straits Times reported Wednesday.

Still, at a meeting on Thursday, ``all the Cabinet members, including non-Muslim ministers, described the reproduction as an irresponsible and insensitive act that warranted stern action,'' Bernama reported.

Satanic Verses

Singapore's Lee said that, in some circumstances, the maintenance of religious harmony is more important than freedom of expression. He cited the example of the city's ban on ``The Satanic Verses,'' a novel by Salman Rushdie that incensed many Muslims and led Iran's former spiritual leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini to sentence the author to death.

``In 1989, when Salman Rushdie wrote the book `Satanic Verses,' which many Muslims found very objectionable, we banned it,'' Lee said. ``People say, `Where is the freedom of expression?' We say maintaining harmony, peace, that's the first requirement.''

Singapore's Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act would have explicitly prevented the publication of the cartoon. Lee said two other laws, the Penal Code and Sedition Act, were also added to ensure social harmony in the city-state of 4 million people.

Singapore, which was expelled from a federation with Malaysia in 1965, was subject to communal violence in the 1960s and has since worked to avoid racial tensions. Unlike Southeast Asian neighbors Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand, the city has so far managed to avoid terrorist attacks by Islamist groups, though it has been the subject of several plots.

Indonesia last week deported Mas Selamat bin Kastari, known as Singapore's most-wanted man, to the city-state. The Singapore government said Mas Selamat planned to crash a plane into Singapore's Changi airport. It hasn't said whether he denies the allegations.

`Social Fabric'

Singapore has ``hardened'' potential terrorist targets such as hotels and entertainment areas, Lee said, comparing the threats with those it faced with communism and gang fights after the country became independent four decades ago.

``Today's security problem is by far the most serious since the '50s and '60s,'' Lee said in the speech. In the event of a terrorist attack, ``it's not just the casualties and the physical damage, but the impact on our social fabric which will be severe and long-lasting.''

President George W. Bush yesterday said the U.S. and its allies foiled a plot hatched a month after the Sept. 11 attacks to hijack a commercial jet and fly it into a Los Angeles building that is the tallest on the West Coast.

Bush gave new details about the planned attack, involving al-Qaeda sympathizers in Southeast Asia, saying it was thwarted in early 2002 after the capture of suspected terrorists overseas. The arrests, he said, were an example of international cooperation in battling terrorism. He didn't say which Southeast Asian country made the arrests.

# Canadian group urges U.S. booksellers to ban hate material

By Troy Wolverton
Staff Writer, CNET News

**Leading Internet bookstores are under fire again for selling hate literature abroad, this time from Canada.**

The Green Party of Canada has accused Amazon.com and Barnesandnoble.com of violating Canadian criminal and customs laws by selling racist and anti-Semitic books such as "The Turner Diaries" and "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion" in the country. Party leaders say that although they notified the companies in February, Amazon and Barnesandnoble.com have not yet responded.

"It's important that they take responsibility for what they are distributing out into the public," Green Party spokesman Richard Warman said. "They have to respect the laws of other countries."

But Canadian officials expressed doubts about whether the sale of such books over the Internet by foreign companies constitutes a crime.

"This is not straight cut," Royal Canadian Mounted Police spokesman Paul Marsh said. "It's not straight-forward when you look at the sections."

Representatives for Amazon were not available to comment. A Barnesandnoble spokesperson declined to comment.

The controversy is the latest incident in which an e-commerce player has been taken to task for carrying hate-related merchandise. Last month, Amazon and Barnesandnoble.com agreed to[post a statement](http://news.cnet.com/news/0-1007-200-1596208.html) from the Anti-Defamation League calling the "Protocols of Zion" an anti-Semitic forgery.

Earlier this year, online auction giant eBay bowed to pressure from outside groups and [banned the sale](http://news.cnet.com/%20/news/0-1007-200-1542073.html) of items that promote hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and the Aryan Nation.

And last August, Amazon, Barnesandnoble and Borders Online [came under fire](http://news.cnet.com/news/0-1007-200-345897.html) from the Nazi-hunting [Simon Wiesenthal Center](http://www.wiesenthal.com/) for selling Adolf Hitler's "Mein Kampf" in Germany. The companies later banned sales of the publication in the country.

Canada prohibits advocating genocide or publicly inciting hatred via spoken or written words. The country also bans the importation of hate propaganda.

The "Turner Diaries" and the "Protocols of Zion" are on a list of books that the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency consider illegal to import into the country, agency spokesman Michel Cl?roux confirmed. But with $1 billion worth of goods crossing the border from the United States into Canada every day, the agency cannot check every package that comes over the border, Cl?roux said. In any case, if the agency intercepted a shipment of banned books, it would contact the Canadian importer, not the U.S. exporter, he said. He added that the agency did not have authority to regulate the actual online sales of the books.

"Electronic commerce is outside our jurisdiction as customs officers," Cl?roux said.

Complying with scores of complex international laws is a "classic issue" of doing business on the Internet, said Maureen Dorney, an attorney with Palo Alto, Calif.-based Gray, Cary, Ware & Freidenrich. Amazon and Barnesandnoble could have some criminal liability for the sales of banned books even if they don't have a presence in the countries they are shipping to, she said.

"If you are willing to make your products available internationally, you are potentially subject to the laws of all those jurisdictions that you are shipping to," Dorney said.

Regardless of whether the sales are illegal, Green Party officials said the companies had a moral obligation to refrain from profiting from the sale of hate literature.

"We would like to express our general concern about the decision by Amazon.com to carry works that are self-evidently racist," the party said in a letter to the leading e-tailer. "We do not doubt the right of these individuals to hold racist ideas, but we do question the moral and ethical basis of Amazon's decision to profit from their distribution and how this reflects upon Amazon's presumed desire to be a responsible corporate citizen."

# Poland's leftwing voices are being silenced

The sacking of Przekrój's left-leaning editors is the latest in a narrowing of public debate to the neoliberal viewpoint\



Solidarity members dressed as prisoners demonstrate in Wroclaw, Poland, last year. Photograph: Agencja Gazeta/Reuters

After [1989](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/aug/02/protest-berlinwall), eastern Europe was supposed to join the club of so-called "normal countries". From now on, we were told, there would be free speech, a free press and free debate, all prevented during the years of communist oppression. But in practice, this free liberal debate is anything but.

These days, whenever someone in the post-communist countries of eastern Europe tries to criticise the changes that their country have undergone, the tendency is to ridicule, or worse, silence them. We're all middle class now, we are told. Start your own little enterprises, consume and shut up. Those trying to discuss a solution to the current crisis other than the orthodox austerity measures is quickly dismissed.

So when a group of left-leaning editors took over the troubled Polish news weekly [Przekrój](http://www.przekroj.pl/%22%20%5Co%20%22) ("Slant") last winter, it felt like a breath of fresh air in a public sphere usually divided evenly between neoliberalists and nationalists. Yet the change of direction didn't last long. After only a few months, and with the circulation having shrunk by roughly 50%, the editors were sacked and replaced with an editorial team with a track record in entertainment and lifestyle journalism.

What Przekrój had dared to try and do was initiate a debate about capitalism, in a country where the language of class struggle had supposedly been discredited. It interviewed trade unionists and spoke about strikes and opposition against austerity. They profiled prominent critics of the US and Israel, wrote features on [David Harvey's Rebel Cities](http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2012/apr/12/owen-hatherley-rebel-cities-harvey)book, the Occupy movement, Spain's Indignados and last year's English riots. In sharp contrast, the rest of Poland's "liberal" establishment has largely turned a blind eye not just to developments abroad, but also those on its own doorstep.

For example, when [Solidarity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solidarity_%28Polish_trade_union%29) – one of the unions who played a key role in the 1989 uprisings – recently protested against the government's raising of the pension threshold from 65 to 67 years, its co-founder Lech Walesa said [in an interview](http://wpolityce.pl/wydarzenia/28645-lech-walesa-palowac-zwiazkowcow-kaczynski-wysylajacy-brata-na-smierc-koncesja-dla-tv-trwam-jako-brzytwa-dla-malpy) that he'd have liked to have seen the police face down the demonstrators. Such robust protests were legitimate if directed against a dictatorship, he said, but couldn't be tolerated in a modern democracy.

Did the protesters get a fair hearing in the media? One of the protesters complained about the government's lack of empathy with their cause: "What does he [prime minister Donald Tusk] know about being old and having to work in a coal mine?" Tellingly, his complaint wasn't found in any of the mainstream liberal outlets, but on [an English-language blog](http://beyondthetransition.blogspot.co.uk/). Class is an issue in modern Poland, but the media refuses to talk about it.

This protest, as well as recent strikes of nurses, was a rarity, because in the whole ex-bloc the culture of protest has largely died out with the end of communism. A look at a map of Indignados and Occupy solidarity marches on 15 October 2011 tells you all you need to know: there was almost nothing to the east of the former iron curtain, with only tiny groups in Warsaw, Bucharest and Prague.

This is even more surprising since eastern Europe – the Balkans and Baltic states especially – has been hit very hard by the crisis. [Latvia has experienced economic collapse on the scale of Greece](http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/world/2011/1107/1224307165331.html). But there is no Latvian [Syntagma Square](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jun/19/athens-protests-syntagma-austerity-protests%22%20%5Co%20%22) or Syriza party. In Poland, there are currently two kinds of protest: the old Solidarity generation still marches for workers' rights; while post-89 youngsters demonstrate on issues such as freedom of speech – [in January thousands protested against the international counterfeiting and piracy agreement Acta](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-16735219). Yet how political that younger generation is remains unclear: what motivated them to take to the street wasn't unemployment or the scaling back of the welfare state, but the fear of free culture being taken from them.

All this is taking place in a situation where the state is focused on liberalising employment legislation, tax cuts and privatisation. Leszek Balcerowicz, the economist who adopted the "[shock therapy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balcerowicz_Plan)" doctrine in the early 90s, today bemoans the "swollen public sector". Nobody investigates the dealings of Atos, who are not only active in Britain but will soon also be taking care of "benefit reform" in eastern European countries.

One of the reasons Poland has been able to avoid having a wider debate about the flaws of capitalism is that mass emigration, EU subsidies and exports to Germany have been covering up the tolls of the crisis.

Under the new editorial management, Przekrój's reaction to the jobs crisis has been much like that of the rightwing press in Britain: "Stop being so lazy and get on your bike!" Needless to say, the change in editorial direction has been cheered on by the economic liberals that dominate the debate in Poland. Unless the tone of the debate fundamentally changes soon, Poland will be taken completely by surprise when the crisis eventually starts to hit home

# Mis-Education Nation: Why Were Student Voices Silenced at NBC's Town Hall?


When an event is advertised as a student town hall you expect that the people driving the conversation will be, well, students. Last week I had the privilege of speaking at NBC’s Education Nation Student Town Hall hosted by Melissa Harris-Perry. While I was initially thrilled that NBC wanted to involve students in the discussion, my optimism quickly soured.

Half of the "student" town hall was dedicated not to hearing what students had to say, but to venting by various adult journalists and politicians on the challenges affecting education. During the panel discussion portion, students in the audience who wanted to ask questions weren't allowed. Only pre-screened questions were permitted.

The minimal exposure students were given was an insult to our generation. What this boils down to is one simple axiom: NBC does not trust students. They put on a sham "student" town hall and—aside from two panels—students were left out.

The lack of students is emblematic of a larger problem of NBC not including experts with diverse viewpoints on what's happening in education. With sponsors like the University of Phoenix, ExxonMobil, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, it seems that NBC kowtowed to their corporate backers in their speaker choices. The lineup of speakers tilted heavily toward folks who espouse the corporate education reform dogma of bashing teachers, squeezing profits out of schools, and turning a blind eye toward students. If you disagree, where were progressive, social justice-oriented experts like Diane Ravitch, Howard Gardner, and Linda Darling-Hammond?

For instance, take the parent engagement panel. Though the event was held at the New York City Public Library, there wasn't a single local New York City public school parent included. "The parents in the audience were treated as potted plants, as accessories," says Leonie Haimson, a parent advocate and Executive Director of Class Size Matters.

The audience was instead forced to listen to Michelle Rhee and Joel Klein, two educrats who are only looking out for their own corporate interests. Not only do neither of them "care a fig about parent empowerment," adds Haimson, but "Klein did more than anyone in history to kill it when he was chancellor, by eliminating the power of school leadership teams—made up half of parents and school staff—to make decisions about school-based budgets."

The combination of the lack of genuine interest in the viewpoints of students and the corporate reform-friendly atmosphere meant that when I asked questions about the damaging effects of high-stakes testing, I was ignored and treated like a whiny kid. When I wanted to publicly grill Secretary of Education Arne Duncan about the rise of cheating scandals, teacher turnover, and testing under his reign, I wasn't allowed to speak. And, time and time again, the moderators failed to ask the tough questions. I could very easily infer that few of these moderators were versed in the field.

It's frustrating to imagine how groundbreaking this event could have been. Most of the big-ticket policymakers and education reform celebrities were in town. Provocative pundits were storming the sessions. A presidential candidate decided to show up. And the general American public was glued to their televisions, watching NBC's programming at home. But, because of the narrow viewpoints represented, NBC missed an unprecedented opportunity to move the needle on the education conversation.

Next year, instead of grouping everyone into siloed town halls, the summit should feature all the stakeholders—students, parents, educators, policymakers, and administrators—all at the same table. It should address ["student-led ideas, disruptive solutions, and true innovation."](http://www.fastcoexist.com/1680636/why-education-needs-a-new-brand) Sessions on project-based learning and student-centered learning, changing assessment, and student ethics and cheating should be added. Along with Ravitch, Gardner, and Darling-Hammond, it should include experts doing important thinking and innovative work to ensure schools and students thrive in the 21st century—people like Alfie Kohn, Deborah Meier, Monty Neill, Jerry Mintz, Vicki Abeles, and Larry Rosenstock. Perhaps then we won’t have another year of folks ridiculing the event as "Mis-Education Nation."

Don't get me wrong—I commend NBC's efforts to hoist education onto a national pedestal, but the network deserves the lion's share of the blame for the disaster that unfolded in the halls of the New York City Public Library. Let's hope NBC takes some of these suggestions to heart, so that next year, attendees won't be forced to witness a corporate education circus.

June 22, 2011

# HEATED DEBATES, BURNING BOOKS

Posted by [*Ian Crouch*](http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/bios/ian_crouch/search?contributorName=Ian%20Crouch)

The Canadian writer Lawrence Hill recently received the unsettling news that a Dutch political group would be assembling on Wednesday in Amsterdam to burn copies of his novel, “The Book of Negroes” (published in the Netherlands under the title “Het Negerboek,” and in the U.S. as “[Someone Knows My Name](http://www.amazon.com/Someone-Knows-My-Name-Novel/dp/0393333094/ref%3Dsr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1308674835&sr=8-1)”). The book—which chronicles the ways in which a West African woman asserts and preserves her humanity as a slave in North America in the eighteenth century—takes its name from a historical ledger of black men and women who had been loyal to the British during the Revolutionary War and were evacuated to Nova Scotia following their side’s defeat. So what exactly does this historical novel have to do with the Dutch? Hill [explains in an op-ed](http://www.thestar.com/entertainment/article/1012068--what-lawrence-hill-tells-dutch-group-planning-to-burn-his-book?bn=1) published in the Toronto Star that he was contacted by [Roy Groenberg](http://www.stichtingeerenherstel.com/), who identified himself as the “Chairman, Foundation to Honour and Restore payments to Victims of Slavery in Suriname,” who wrote in a letter:

We, descendants of enslaved in the former Dutch colony Suriname, want to let you know that we do not accept a book with the title “The Book of Negroes.” We struggle for a long time to let the word “nigger” disappear from the Dutch language and now you set up your “Book of Negroes”! A real shame! That’s why we make the decision to burn this book on the 22nd of June 2011. Maybe you do not know, but June is the month before the 1st of July, the day that we remember the abolition from the Dutch, who put our ancestors in slavery.

Hill’s response, which [should be read in full](http://www.thestar.com/entertainment/article/1012068--what-lawrence-hill-tells-dutch-group-planning-to-burn-his-book?bn=1), is forceful and eloquent. He condemns the threat:

Burning books is designed to intimidate people. It underestimates the intelligence of readers, stifles dialogue and insults those who cherish the freedom to read and write. The leaders of the Spanish Inquisition burned books. Nazis burned books.

When we think of book-burners, we mostly think of backward, reactionaries blocking against dissent, free thought, radical art, or progressive political reform. We think of official religions censoring the unorthodox, and of totalitarian states issuing edicts against anything threatens centralized control. Or we think of the powerful inciting the masses into fits of destruction. In history, we indeed think of the Inquisition and of the Third Reich. And in novels, the image of top-down state-sponsored madness comes most notably from Ray Bradbury’s “Fahrenheit 451.”

Yet, recently, small groups who reflect extreme minority opinions across the political spectrum have turned to burning books. It has become as much an act of provocation and one of censorship. This spring, Terry Jones, the radical pastor of the Christian Dove World Outreach Center in Florida, put the Koran “on trial,” and then after condemning it, a copy of the document was burned, which [caused violent reprisals in Afghanistan and elsewhere](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/02/world/asia/02afghanistan.html?_r=2&hp). (Months earlier, Jones had backed away from plans to burn the Koran after he was roundly condemned by American officials and by people throughout the world. By March, perhaps tired of being out of the headlines, he changed his mind.) And now, in Amsterdam, another small, passionate political group is using book-burning as a way of getting attention. The political motivations and desired ends are much different, but the means are precisely the same: spectacle, provocation, brutish and simple acts in response to complex issues.

Despite these similarities, though, the protest in Amsterdam does stand out as a rare example of a group with progressive political demands—in this case, the recognition of the ways in which the Netherlands benefited from the slave trade and a call to end contemporary discrimination—resorting to such an odiously reactionary practice. It’s a kind of parallel dystopia, one that Glenn Beck might conjure for his rapt audience, in which every word in a book must be vetted by hundreds of competing “interests groups.” Hill’s story, looked at more evenly, reminds us that attempts to control language by those who are eager to move society forward can be just as insidious as similar attempts by those who want to hold it back.

And what of the word in question? In his op-ed, Hill notes that terms used to describe ethnicity and race change with the times. He writes that his father “was born in 1923 and proudly called himself a Negro for most of his life, but you can be sure that he would not be using the term today, if he were alive,” and then adds:

I tell my own children that no single word is entirely out of bounds. One must simply know the heft of each word, and use it appropriately. If that means employing discretion around archaic or racist terms, so be it. I don’t use “Negro” in day-to-day language. To this day, I still cringe at the sound of “Nigger” or “Nigga” in hip hop lyrics. But there is sometimes room to use painful language to reclaim our own history.

What Hill refers to as “discretion” is the kind of mild censorship that happens all the time in regards to spoken and written language. Sometimes it becomes the [center of debate](http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/backissues/2011/03/the-power-of-the-n-word.html), as happened recently when NewSouth Books published a new version of “Huckleberry Finn” that replaced the word “nigger” with “slave.” Other times, it happens quietly; it’s worth noting that Hill’s book was printed under a different, perhaps intentionally less provocative, title here in the United States. The word “negro” may be an offensive, derogatory term that has no place in modern prose. Or it might be a term ripe for [reclamation and irony](http://www.amazon.com/Negropedia-Assimilated-Negros-Course-Experience/dp/030746380X/ref%3Dsr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1308669553&sr=8-1). Like most of the intersections of language, history, politics, and power, it produces complicated thoughts and feelings, and its resonance depends on experience and context. Reasonable people can disagree. Reasonable people, however, do not burn books.

**Reflections on Nazi Book Burning 75 Years Later**
By Abraham H. Foxman
National Director of the Anti-Defamation League
This article originally appeared in The Jerusalem Post's Blog Central Web site onMay 7, 2008

Seventy-five years ago  -- a mere 100 days after Hitler rose to power -- a series of organized book burnings took place throughout Germany. The Nazi assault on reason, and the Jews, had begun.

As I write this from Israel, ten days after commemorating Yam Hashoah, I don't want to let this day pass without thinking about what this fateful event meant to European Jewry and what it means for us today.

I'm sure you have seen the pictures. On May 10, 1933, perhaps the most notable bonfire was the one that took place on Berlin's Opernplatz - Opera House Square -- opposite Humboldt University. This was the fruit of a month-long campaign by the German Student Association to "cleanse" German language and literature. The mission of these right-wing rabble rousers was in line with Joseph Goebbels's propaganda machinery on behalf of the Reich.

More than 20,000 books and journals, and about 5,000 images, all representing "insidious" Jewish influence, were torched by students and Nazi storm troopers. Enthusiastic crowds witnessed this feverish destruction of "un-German" writings which had been systematically pilfered from libraries, public buildings, private offices, and citizen's homes.

We know that similar "ceremonies" took place in some 30 German university towns. We know that torchlight parades were punctuated with speeches railing against "Jewish intellectualism" and calling for the purification of German culture. We know that writings by such Jewish intellectuals as Einstein and Freud fueled the flames, alongside German texts by Bertolt Brecht and Thomas Mann, and volumes by international writers including Dos Passos, Hemingway, Zola, Proust, and even Helen Keller.

The Nazis made no distinction between hating Jews for religious or "racial" reasons and for so-called "impure" cultural ones. If Jews were historically the "People of the Book," German fascists were as zealous in their hatred of the Torah as they were toward Jewish intellectual thought that grew in the fertile soil of the late Renaissance and the European Enlightenment.

From the Talmud and other books of Jewish learning, to Spinoza, Moses Mendelssohn, and Vienna's own Sigmund Freud, Jewish powers of reasoning were spread by the printed word. For a vast number of anti-Semitic Germans, however, Jewish thought was poisonous simply because it was produced by Jews and because it was considered "cosmopolitan," ushering in a dangerous modern world that challenged a mystical and medieval German romanticism in favor of new ideas.

The book burnings were a totalitarian attack on all of dynamic modern culture and on democratic ideals of pluralism, and was an early warning of what lay ahead for European Jewry that went largely unheeded by the civilized world.

I'm sorry to say that this is not such ancient history. On the American scene, we continue to see books attacked by self-appointed censors and removed from library shelves, while internationally, fatwas are issued against authors and cartoonists.

As Jews, we know only too well the importance and power of words. The gas chambers did not begin with bricks - they began with words. Ugly, hateful words that demonized, degraded, and debased Jews. And those words became ugly, hateful deeds.

But the notion that we must throw books on a bonfire or remove them from shelves, and in that way eliminate ideas and, symbolically, authors, is to break faith with reason.

Of course, the Nazis believed fanatically in the danger of reason or unfamiliar ideas - and the Jew was the eternal conveyor of "foreign" ideas which had to be rooted out of German culture. Let's remember the period:  there was no Internet then. Communication was all about books, newspapers, periodicals, radio, and the moving pictures. First the Nazis tried to limit acceptable communication to what they deemed appropriately "German." Then they judged most of modern art "degenerate," including a modern master like Marc Chagall, and damned Mondrian in favor of the merely kitsch Arno Brecker. After all, to the Nazis modern art was "Jewish Bolshevist." And as for the movies, they could find no better idolater than Leni Riefenstahl, an evil genius if ever there was one.

That fateful night of May 10, 1933 ushered in one of the darkest chapters in Jewish history. It was, of course, just a portent of things to come. We've all seen the pictures and the newsreels. The sparks and flames that reached into the night sky lit the faces of gleeful looters and arsonists, incipient sadists, and ideological true believers. With smug satisfaction, Goebbels said, "The flames not only illuminate the end of the old era, they also light up the new."

Let's also remember that fueling the fire that night were works by Heinrich Heine, the 19th Century German lyric poet born of an assimilated Jewish family. With chilling prescience, Heine had a century before written, "Where they burn books, they will ultimately also burn people."

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Abraham H. Foxman, a Holocaust survivor, is National Director of the Anti-Defamation League and the author of "[*The Deadliest Lies: The Israel Lobby and the Myth of Jewish Control*](http://www.adl.org/Anti_semitism/deadliest_lies/)."  This article originally appeared as a blog entry on the Web site of The Jerusalem Post.