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# Denial on the Campuses Demonstrably False Ideas Should Not Necessarily Be Protected by Bill of Rights

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## Holocaust Revisionism

January 04, 1998 | By Kenneth Lasson

We will show you these concentration camps in motion pictures, just as the Allied armies found them when they arrived. Our proof will be disgusting and you will say I have robbed you of your sleep. I am one who received most atrocity tales with suspicion and skepticism. But the proof here will be so overwhelming that I venture to predict not one word I have spoken will be denied.

8, Thomas Dodd, Nuremberg prosecutor (1947) The recent debate at Johns Hopkins University over whether the student newspaper should have published an advertisement denying the existence of Nazi death camps is more than just an academic flap. At stake are profound questions of how a free society learns the lessons of history and, unique to America, the effect of constitutionally protecting the dissemination of demonstrably false ideas.

From the ashes of the Holocaust, we have come once again to learn the terrible truth, that the power of evil cannot be underestimated. Nor can the effect of the spoken and written word.

At Hopkins and elsewhere, the issue of granting historical revisionists equal access to curricula and classrooms is difficult enough, but it is complicated acutely when student editors become entangled in the black and nefarious thickets of Holocaust denial masquerading as "scholarship." The Johns Hopkins News-Letter is only the most recent university paper to succumb to the blandishments of a group calling itself the "Committee for Open Debate on the Holocaust," which promulgates claims that a plan to systematically rid Germany or Europe of Jews never existed, that no gas chambers ever operated and that the number of Jewish victims has always been grossly distorted by Zionist propagandists.

During the past few years, similar [See Holocaust, 6f] such briefs have appeared at universities as notable as Brandeis, Duke, Miami, Michigan and Ohio State, where student editors have defended their decisions to publish on First Amendment grounds. In so doing, they broadly invoke the freedoms of speech and press and are quick to note specifically their aversion to censorship.

But other student newspapers such as those at Dartmouth, Harvard, Pennsylvania and Texas have been able to recognize that Holocaust denial reflects less "scholarship" and "intellectual freedom" than sham and nonsense. Perhaps better than some of their politically correct professors, they understand that such historical revisionism is designed to take advantage of both the dwindling number of survivors and the inevitable ignorance of future generations.

The Nazis understood that the incredibility of what they had done would cast shadows of doubt upon eyewitness reports. Concentration camp inmates have testified they were frequently taunted by their captors that no one would believe what they reported except as wartime exaggeration. That is why the Nuremberg Tribunal was so intent on documenting all of the atrocities found by the Allied liberators in places such as Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen and Buchenwald.

"The things I saw beggar description," said Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower on first viewing the death camps in 1945. "I made the visit deliberately, in order to be in a position to give firsthand evidence of these things if ever, in the future, there develops a tendency to charge these allegations merely to propaganda."

Alas, even Eisenhower understated the possibilities.

Although it has been but a half-century since the liberation of Nazi death camps, a little more than a decade since the First International Conference on the Holocaust and Human Rights, and a few short years since the U.S. Holocaust Museum (upon whose entrance are etched Eisenhower's words) first displayed its documentation of horror, the claim that Hitler's genocide was a Zionist fabrication has gained increasing currency.

This particular form of historical revisionism - disseminated not only in student newspapers but also by books, articles, speeches and the Internet - abounds worldwide, feeding in full, foul flourish on the ignorance of the masses about what actually happened at the hands of the Nazis.

One would hope that Americans were better informed, but a recent survey found that close to 40 percent of high school students did not know anything about the Holocaust. Neither did 30 percent of the adults polled, many of whom thought it possible that the Holocaust never happened. Even supposedly well-educated people have difficulty identifying important historical events such as Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass in November 1938 that marked the beginning of the end for millions of European Jews.

Holocaust denial will likely gain even more strength once no more victims are alive to offer eyewitness testimony. The need to remember is made all the more critical by the existence of well-known political figures who express sympathy for accused Nazi war criminals or doubt the extent of their atrocities. The most notable current examples in the United States are Patrick Buchanan and Louis Farrakhan.

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