

The Holocaust: memories, research, reference

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The Holocaust: memories, research, reference has been simultaneously co-published as *The Reference librarian*, Numbers 61 and 62, 1998.

This book is a varied collection of essays organised into three sections: memories, research and reference. The editors state in the introduction that a study of the Holocaust requires a 'diversity of articulations' (p. 1-2) and have therefore included a wide breadth of scholarly materials with the primary emphasis on research and the research process. Although this book is primarily aimed at librarians and teachers, because of the breadth and level of research included in this volume it is a book that would be of interest to a researcher and general reader as well.

Authors included in the book constantly state that the Holocaust is incomprehensible in many ways but we need to try and understand the complexity of this event as it is a watershed event in human history. I think to this end that the editors were wise in beginning the book with a short section on memories which bring an immediacy to the topic and helps to make it more personal. It is hard to imagine six million people or to identify with their suffering but one can identify with the suffering of an individual and comprehend to some extent his or her personal tragedy. There are four contributions in this

section. The first one consists of the personal account by Arnold Lustig of his memories of Auschwitz-Birkenau. He emphasises that no matter how many personal memories are written we will never understand what it was like to be there. He states 'Memory that serves the living betrays the dead ... It is not in one's power ... to recall more than a fraction of what was, what happened, how four million innocents died there' (p. 6). In contrast with this personal recollection are five of Lyn Lifshin's poems from *Blue tattoo*. Lynn Lifshin is not a survivor but her poems are based on the 'voices of those who were involved in the Holocaust' (p. 25). She draws on the real words of people who knew the Holocaust firsthand based on personal interviews with survivor's and on survivor's memoirs. Her poems are extremely moving and convey some of the horror experienced by these people through the use of metaphor and allusion. Also included is an essay where she describes the process of how she became involved in writing about the Holocaust and what her relation is to the Holocaust. The fourth essay by Linda Belau describes the problems involved in setting up and designing the Holocaust Museum in Washington.

The second section on research is far longer, consisting of ten contributions. The range of subjects covered is extremely diverse. This makes it a valuable resource for a researcher who wants to get an overview of current research being done in this field. One of the most interesting articles is on the Nazi origins of Eduard Pernkopf's *Topographische Anatomie des menschen* by Howard Israel. The article on Pernkopf's Anatomical atlas deals with issues of biomedical ethics. Should doctors use medical data that was obtained from victims if it will help patients in the long run or will this be used to justify unethical experimentation.

Another interesting contribution by Samuel Totten is a discussion of the use by students of American contemporaneous newspaper articles about the Holocaust. Totten suggests that by looking at newspaper articles students are able to see how the Holocaust was reported in America, what the reaction of people in America was to news of the wholesale murder of the Jews and others. They are able to look at issues like prejudice, stereotyping and selective representation of the news. They can study questions of morality as related to journalism such as responsible reporting, page placements of articles on key topics, censorship and tone of the article. They can also become familiar with some of the problems experienced at that time by reporters who were faced with the possibility that if they reported events negatively the Nazis would evict them from the country.

Two other contributions which were extremely interesting were a study of the Canadian churches' reaction during the Holocaust by Alan Davies and a study of American Congressional source materials by Daniel Rosenberg. There are also a number of contributions dealing with the setting up and running of a Holocaust unit for high school and tertiary level students which gives valuable input for a librarian who is interested in starting such a unit. The articles selected by the editors all try to relate the research to wider issues

indicating why it is so important to study the Holocaust and how it can be related to broader social and ethical problems in society.

The final section deals with reference and is of particular relevance to librarians and teachers. It also tackles the topic from many diverse points of view which makes this a particularly helpful and stimulating source. The contribution by Martin Goldberg, for example, gives some stimulating ideas on how to use autobiographies when studying the Holocaust. Samuel Totten's article gives a detailed outline of how to use the lives and literary works of victims and survivors in English studies. He has also included a detailed bibliography which could be very useful. There is an article on interviewing survivors in order to keep an oral record. This article could be very useful to South African teachers and librarians who may wish to use these techniques to store and build up a collection of African oral history. Of interest to librarians is the article by Sanford Berman on the correct way to catalogue Holocaust material dealing with the Romany (gypsies). The correspondence with cataloguers at the Library of Congress and the final resolution of the matter demonstrates how an issue such as this can be dealt with in a sensitive way. Another article of particular interest to librarians is how to deal with denial material. (The term *denial* is preferred to *revisionist* as history is always being revised, but those people who deny that the Holocaust took place are not revising history in any acceptable use of the word.) Susan Stauffer in her article discusses the ethical issues involved in dealing with denial material and borrowers who are looking for denial material. She feels that, similarly to other controversial material, denial material on the Holocaust should be made available to users. However the librarian should indicate that these sources are of dubious value. She suggests there are subtle ways of doing this. For instance Library of Congress polled Judaica librarians on their feelings about the classification of denial material. The result is that there is now a separate LC classification so that these items are not shelved cover-to-cover with Holocaust studies but grouped in a separate area. The same poll also resulted in a new subject heading, 'Holocaust, Jewish (1939–1945) – Errors, inventions, etc.' which sends quite a different message from 'Controversial literature' (p. 192).

The section on 'Reference' also includes four articles on using the Internet for information on the Holocaust. These articles include useful addresses as well as e-mail and discussion groups. It is felt that the expertise of librarians is needed to use this information effectively. However, it is possible to find material using the Internet which may not have been found using traditional research methods. There are many interesting cites on the web such as <http://www.charm.net/~rbennett/l'chaim.html> which is the site of the Virtual tour of Dachau. This site is also valuable for its links to other Holocaust sites.

This book contains some useful features. An abstract is given for each article as well as a reference to its publication in *The Reference librarian*. Short biographical notes on

authors are also included. All articles include bibliographies and many of these bibliographies are extremely extensive. The book is also comprehensively indexed. It is a pity that the book is marred by some editorial and spelling errors. For example, on page 143, line 11 the word *rector* is spelled incorrectly as 'recktor'. On page 150 there is a quote from Levi which states 'The memories that lie within us art not carved in stone' instead of reading 'are not carved in stone'.

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