BOOK BURNING
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Book burning" refers to the ritual destruction by fire of books or other written materials. Usually carried out in a public context, the burning of books represents an element of censorship and usually proceeds from a cultural, religious, or political opposition to the materials in question.

Book burning has a long and dark history; and perhaps the most famous of these events, the burning of books under the Nazi regime on May 10, 1933, had a precedent in nineteenth century Germany. In 1817, German student associations (Burschenschaften) chose the 300th anniversary of Luther’s 95 Theses to hold a festival at the Wartburg, a castle in Thuringia where Luther had sought sanctuary after his excommunication. The students, demonstrating for a unified country—Germany was then a patchwork of states—burned anti-national and reactionary texts and literature which the students viewed as “Un-German.”

In 1933, Nazi German authorities strove to synchronize professional and cultural organizations with Nazi ideology and policy (Gleichschaltung). In keeping with this endeavor, Joseph Goebbels, Nazi Minister for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda, began an effort to bring German arts and culture in line with Nazi goals. The government purged cultural organizations of Jewish and other officials alleged to be politically suspect or who performed or created art works which Nazi ideologues labeled “degenerate.”

In an effort to synchronize the literary community, Goebbels had a strong ally in the National Socialist German Students’ Association (Nationalsozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund, or NSDStB). German university students were among the vanguard of the early Nazi movement, and in the late 1920s, many filled the ranks of various Nazi formations. The ultra-nationalism and antisemitism of middle-class, secular student organizations had been intense and vocal for decades. After World War I, many students opposed the Weimar Republic (1919–1933) and found in National Socialism a suitable vehicle for their political discontent and hostility.

On April 6, 1933, the Nazi German Student Association’s Main Office for Press and Propaganda proclaimed a nationwide “Action against the Un-German Spirit,” to climax in a literary purge or “cleansing” (Säuberung) by fire. Local chapters were to supply the press with releases and commissioned articles, offer blacklists of “un-German” authors, sponsor well-known Nazi figures to speak at public gatherings, and negotiate for radio broadcast time. On April 8 the students’ association also drafted its twelve "theses”—a deliberate evocation of Martin Luther’s 95 Theses: declarations which described the fundamentals of a "pure" national language and culture. Placards publicized the theses, which attacked “Jewish intellectualism,” asserted the need to “purify” the German language and literature, and demanded that universities be centers of German nationalism. The students described the “action” as a response to a worldwide Jewish “smear campaign” against Germany and an affirmation of traditional German values.

In a symbolic act of ominous significance, on May 10, 1933, university students burned upwards of 25,000 volumes of “un-German” books, presaging an era of state censorship and control of culture. On the evening of May 10, in most university towns, right-wing students marched in torchlight parades “against the un-German spirit.” The scripted rituals called for high Nazi officials, professors, university rectors, and university student leaders to address the participants and spectators. At the meeting places,
students threw the pillaged and “unwanted” books onto bonfires with great ceremony, band-playing, and so-called “fire oaths.” In Berlin, some 40,000 persons gathered in the Opernplatz to hear Joseph Goebbels deliver a fiery address: “No to decadence and moral corruption!” Goebbels enjoined the crowd. “Yes to decency and morality in family and state! I consign to the flames the writings of Heinrich Mann, Ernst Gläser, Erich Kästner.”

Among the authors whose books student leaders burned that night numbered well-known socialists such as Bertolt Brecht and August Bebel; the founder of the concept of communism, Karl Marx; critical “bourgeois” writers like the Austrian playwright Arthur Schnitzler, and “corrupting foreign influences,” among them American author Ernest Hemingway. The fires also consumed several writings of the 1929 Nobel Prize-winning German author Thomas Mann, whose support of the Weimar Republic and critique of fascism raised Nazi ire, and the works of international best-selling author Erich Maria Remarque, whose unflinching description of war, All Quiet on the Western Front, Nazi ideologues vilified as “a literary betrayal of the soldiers of the World War.” Erich Kästner, Heinrich Mann, and Ernst Gläser, denigrated in Goebbels’ blistering rhetoric, represented early German literary critics of the Nazi regime, although Heinrich Mann had gained fame as the author of Professor Unrat, which appeared in German cinemas in 1930 as “The Blue Angel”; and Kästner was primarily known for his literature for children and young adults. Other writers included on the blacklists were American authors Jack London, Theodore Dreiser, and Helen Keller, whose belief in social justice encouraged her to champion the disabled, pacifism, improved conditions for industrial workers, and women's voting rights.

Not all book burnings took place on May 10, as the German Student Association had planned. Some were postponed a few days because of rain. Others, based on local chapter preference, took place on June 21, the summer solstice, a traditional date for bonfire celebrations in Germany. Nonetheless, in 34 university towns across Germany the May 10th “Action against the Un-German Spirit” was a success, eliciting widespread newspaper coverage. In some cities, notably Berlin, radio broadcasts brought the speeches, songs, and ceremonial chants “live” to countless German listeners. The promotion of "Aryan" culture and the suppression of other forms of artistic production was yet another Nazi effort to "purify" Germany. Naturally Jewish authors numbered among the writers whose works were burned, among them some of the most famous contemporary writers of the day, such as Franz Werfel, Max Brod, and Stefan Zweig.

Also among those works burned were the writings of beloved nineteenth-century German Jewish poet Heinrich Heine, who wrote in his 1820-1821 play Almansor the famous admonition, “Dort, wo man Bücher verbrennt, verbrennt man am Ende auch Menschen”: "Where they burn books, they will also ultimately burn people."

The Burning of Books
By The History Place
(http://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/triumph/tr-bookburn.htm)

A hundred years before the advent of Hitler, the German-Jewish poet, Heinrich Heine, had declared: "Wherever books are burned, human beings are destined to be burned too."

On the night of May 10, 1933, an event unseen in Europe since the Middle Ages occurred as German students from universities once regarded as among the finest in the world, gathered in Berlin to burn books with "unGerman" ideas.
The students, along with brownshirted storm troopers, tossed heaps of books into a bonfire while giving the Hitler arm-salute and singing Nazi anthems. Among the 20,000 volumes hurled into the flames were the writings of Henri Barbusse, Franz Boas, John Dos Passos, Albert Einstein, Lion Feuchtwanger, Friedrich Förster, Sigmund Freud, John Galsworthy, André Gide, Ernst Glaeser, Maxim Gorki, Werner Hegemann, Ernest Hemingway, Erich Kästner, Helen Keller, Alfred Kerr, Jack London, Emil Ludwig, Heinrich Mann, Thomas Mann, Karl Marx, Hugo Preuss, Marcel Proust, Erich Maria Remarque, Walther Rathenau, Margaret Sanger, Arthur Schnitzler, Upton Sinclair, Kurt Tucholsky, Jakob Wassermann, H.G. Wells, Theodor Wolff, Emilé Zola, Arnold Zweig, and Stefan Zweig.

Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels joined the students at the bonfire and declared: "The era of extreme Jewish intellectualism is now at an end... The future German man will not just be a man of books, but a man of character. It is to this end that we want to educate you. As a young person, to already have the courage to face the pitiless glare, to overcome the fear of death, and to regain respect for death – this is the task of this young generation. And thus you do well in this midnight hour to commit to the flames the evil spirit of the past. This is a strong, great and symbolic deed – a deed which should document the following for the world to know – Here the intellectual foundation of the November [Democratic] Republic is sinking to the ground, but from this wreckage the phoenix of a new spirit will triumphantly rise..."

Germany was now led by a self-educated, high school drop-out named Adolf Hitler, who was by nature strongly anti-intellectual. For Hitler, the reawakening of the long-dormant Germanic spirit, with its racial and militaristic qualities, was far more important than any traditional notions of learning.

Before Hitler, German university towns had been counted among the world's great centers of scientific innovation and literary scholarship. Under Hitler, Germany's intellectual vitality quickly began to diminish. Truth, rational thinking and objective knowledge, the foundation stones of Western Civilization, were denounced by Nazified students and professors in favor of mysticism, speculation and collective thinking toward a common goal – the pursuit of a glorious future for Germany.

The youth-oriented Nazi movement had always attracted a sizable following among right-leaning university students. Even back in the 1920s they sensed Nazism might be the wave of the future. They joined the National Socialist German Students' League, put on swastika armbands and harassed any anti-Nazi teachers.

Now, many formerly reluctant professors were swept along by the outpouring of student enthusiasm that followed Hitler's seizure of power. Most of the professors eagerly surrendered their intellectual honesty and took the required Nazi oath of allegiance. They also wanted to curry favor with Nazi Party officials in order to grab one of the academic vacancies resulting from the mass expulsion of Jewish professors and deans.

The entire teaching profession throughout Germany, from elementary schools to university level, had been purged of Jewish instructors and anyone deemed politically suspect, regardless of their proven teaching abilities or achievements, including 20 past (and future) Nobel Prize winners. About ten percent of Germany's university teaching force was sacked in 1933-34, with devastating results for disciplines such as quantum physics and mathematics where Jews had been prominent. The world's premier physicist, Albert Einstein, settled in the United States along with many other intellectual refugees from Hitler's Germany.
Lovers of truth and freedom who remained behind in Germany only managed to escape through the phenomenon of inner-emigration. The Nazis could never actually know one's inner-most thoughts as long as one maintained a kind of poker face and didn't reveal those private thoughts. However, this could also be a dreadfully lonely existence.

Eventually, small groups of like-minded students and professors still opposed to Nazism found each other. They sometimes held clandestine off-campus discussions featuring a free exchange of ideas. One such group based at the University of Munich became known as the White Rose and boldly distributed leaflets demanding that Hitler "return to us the personal freedom which is the most valuable possession of each German, and of which he has cheated us in the lowest possible manner." Two members of the group, Hans and Sophie Scholl, were arrested by the Gestapo for this and executed.

In the college classroom, professors gave lectures amid the nagging fear they might be denounced by one of their students for any reason and possibly wind up in a concentration camp. Politically ambitious teachers sometimes kept secret dossiers on the utterances and activities of their fellow educators which could be turned over to the Gestapo to further their own careers. The widespread insecurity that resulted caused academic timidity which further lowered educational standards.

Grammar schools and high schools throughout Germany now had National Socialist teachers of questionable ability forming young minds in strict adherence to the Party motto: "The supreme task of the schools is the education of youth for the service of Volk and State in the National Socialist spirit." They taught Nazi propaganda as truth and had their young students recite it back from memory.

During the war years, the Hitler Youth organization gradually supplanted the traditional elementary and secondary school system and became the main force educating German children. And the quality of that education continually worsened. Students emerging from the elite Adolf Hitler Schools were in superb physical condition and thoroughly drilled in Nazi ideology, but lacked basic skills in math and science.

Nazi scientists, educated before Hitler, complained they were hindered in developing new super-weapons by the recruitment of graduates from the Nazified school system. German Army leaders also complained that young officer candidates displayed "a simply inconceivable lack of elementary knowledge."

They didn't even know enough to capitalize the first letter of a proper name. But for Hitler, these shortcomings really didn't matter. The school system now produced what he needed – unquestioning young men ready to obediently serve the Fatherland unto death amid Nazi slogans such as: Believe, Obey, Fight!

“My program for educating youth is hard,” Hitler had once boasted. “Weakness must be hammered away. In my Ordensburgen [special Nazi colleges] a youth will grow up before which the world will tremble. I want a brutal, domineering, fearless, cruel youth. Youth must be all that. It must bear pain. There must be nothing weak and gentle about it. The free, splendid beast of prey must once again flash from its eyes...That is how I will eradicate thousands of years of human domestication...That is how I will create the New Order.”

And in this New Order, anyone refusing to conform was simply removed from society and sent away for a special kind of re-education within the confines of a concentration camp. There they would be broken physically, mentally and spiritually until they either submitted completely or died. The first such camp was Dachau located near Munich. It was so successful that it became the model for all subsequent concentration camps, and there would be hundreds of them.