

Anti-book-burning exhibit to show in Prescott

By Lorin McLain, The Daily Courier

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A new exhibit at Yavapai College's art gallery on the Prescott campus offers an in-depth look at a dark time in world history.

Saturday marks the 75th anniversary of the torching of about 25,000 "un-German" titles throughout Nazi Germany on May 10, 1933, foreshadowing a era of state censorship and oppression under the Nazi regime, sharply illustrated in "Fighting the Fires of Hate - America and the Nazi Book Burnings" a national touring exhibit from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The focus is two-fold in putting equal focus on the American reaction to the event and its lasting symbolism in American politics and culture.

"It was generally a cultural war, not just something that the Nazis were doing," explained Scott Davis, exhibit docent, explaining that German students and professors initiated the movement and brought in government involvement.

Echoing national sentiment of resentment to policies of the Weimar Republic that went into effect after World War I and unleashing political hostility, the German Student Association declared a nationwide "Action against the Un-German Spirit" on April 6, a reaction to a "Jewish worldwide smear campaign against Germany."

After a blacklist of authors went out on April 26, students purged libraries all over the country for titles used as kindling in public torchlight ceremonies and parades where they would declare the "dawn of a new era."

Students hoarded works by authors like Ernest Hemmingway and Erich Maria Remarque, who the list labeled as pacifists for their work in "Farewell to Arms" and "All Quiet on the Western Front."

Others included Jack London, viewed as a communist, Freud for his discussion on human sexuality, works by virtually all other Jewish intellectuals, and Planned Parenthood forerunner Margaret Sanger.

Family planning was ill advised when the Reich needed soldiers for a war.

The exhibit includes a few video kiosks corresponding with the themes of the exhibit, like archived Nazi film footage of the gathering of books, the burning ceremonies, and an inflammatory speech by Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels, whom Hitler had just appointed at the time to run the new department of Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda.

"Nazis put torch to thousands of 'impure books,'" "Nazis acclaim book pyres as 'rebirth'" and other newspaper headlines of the day top the graphic reproductions and translations of posters that the government distributed throughout Germany, like the

12 "theses" "against the Un-German Spirit" by the German Student Association.

By 1939, the Nazis put 579 authors and 5,500 titles and another 4,000 children books on a banned book index, according to the exhibit material.

The exhibit puts equal attention to the American response to the events; particularly the 100,000 strong march in New York on the same day.

"Pittsburghers protest Hitler Book Bonfire," "New York Jews to March Against Fascism, May 10," declare a few headlines.

One Associated Press story reports a letter Helen Keller sent to the German Student Association, where Keller warns them "History has taught you nothing if you think you can kill ideas."

The Nazis burned her books for conveying "socialist" ideas, despite the fact that she donated royalties to German soldiers blinded in World War I.

The exhibit also shows how German intellectual exiles and American writers groups like the Writers War Board, Council of Books on Wartime, and FDR's Office of War Information established in 1942, contributed to the war effort.

Nazi book burning en masse left an indelible mark on American culture as displayed in the remaining portion of the exhibit.

While science fiction author Ray Bradbury told of a futuristic society where firemen find and burn books in "Fahrenheit 451," President Eisenhower told students at Dartmouth College at the height of the Senator Joseph McCarthy's anti-communist campaign, "Don't join the book burners."

Recent events come to light such as the 2001 "holy bonfire" of Harry Potter books by a church group in Alamogordo, N.M.

"Exhibits like this are necessary to remind people that this can happen - and still does," Davis said.

"Fighting the Fires of Hate" shows through June 24.

Admission is free.