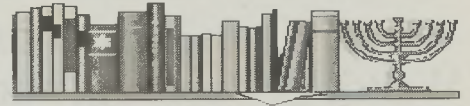


What's New in the Library?



Should I Order Madeleine Albright's Biography for the Library?

By Amalia Warshenbrot,
Librarian, Speizman Jewish Library

"I think we ought to read only the kind of books that wound and stab us. If the book we are reading doesn't wake us up with a blow on the head, what are we reading it for? So that it will make us happy? Goof Lord, we would be happy precisely if we had no books, and the kind of books that make us happy are the kind we could write ourselves, if we had to. But we need the books that affect us like a disaster, that grieve us deeply, like the death of someone we loved more than ourselves, like being banished into forests far from everyone, like a suicide. A book must be the ax for the frozen sea inside us. That is my belief." — Franz Kafka, 1883-1924.

Should I order Madeleine Albright's biography for the library? It is number three on the New York Times best sellers non-fiction list (October 12, 2003). The main criterion for book selection for the Speizman Jewish Library is that the book has Jewish content or that the author is Jewish. Based on the criterion, *Madam Secretary* by Madeleine Albright and Bill Woodard may belong in our collection as the former Secretary of State has a Jewish background. Bill Woodard has a reputation as an excellent biographer and the book may generate some interest. I personally am curious to know more about her Jewish background than about her career. Yet, is this

enough?

Questions like this are on my mind every time I read book reviews to help me select books for the library. I love adding books to the collection. Parents' donations in honor of their children's Bar/Bat Mitzvah bring funds to the library for many of our new books. Finding the right books is not an easy task. In the October issue of the *Charlotte Observer* there was an article about Steve Oney's book *And the Dead Shall Rise: the Murder of Mary Phagan and the Lynching of Leo Frank*. In our small collection there are already three books on the subject. One of these is Harry Golden's book *A Little Girl is Dead*, which was written in 1965. The review of Oney's book indicates that the author is not as certain of Leo Frank's innocence. The book is also expensive. Do I have the right to censor it? All of this is part of my decision whether to buy the book or not. In addition many books are not available for me to read before I make my wish list, so I rely on book reviews.

Book selection is a subject that is of great concern to all librarians. As I was debating this, a member of our listserv for Judaica Librarians happened to enter this topic for debate. However, the debate included academic and day school libraries, which may have different criteria. So, how do I make these decisions? I base my decision on another criterion: who will benefit from these books? Our main users are the religious school users and adults who research our religion and history. Not all of them are Jews. (A detailed list will be the subject of another article).

It is easier, but a greater responsibility to select books for children. As I am writing this article a school director, a rabbi and a teacher are reading a small book, which describes a correspondence between Israeli and Palestinian girls. My volunteer, who is a Judaica librarian, found the book disturbing. Another book by an award-winning author raises serious concerns because it is about a rabbi who had sexually abused young girls. Should this book be in our collection?

When deciding which books to teach comparative religion should I purchase books about other religions by authors who are not Jewish? Should we include *Mein Kampf* in our collection?

I feel some censorship is unavoidable. The Speizman Jewish Library is primarily a Judaica library. Anyone looking for books here should not expect to find much materials on other religions. We serve primarily both the Reform and Conservative synagogues. We have material for Orthodox users as well.

After the great demand for the book *The Red Tent*, I looked for other works of biblical fiction. There are more books than you can imagine. One of my colleagues has

just alerted us about a mystery series about Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah that are based on the Mormon interpretation of the bible. I am especially careful with children's bible stories as some of the beautifully illustrated "Old Testament" stories have Christian interpretation.

Every book about Israel is carefully inspected by a committee of volunteer librarians from the Association of Jewish Libraries. Old books may refer to old borders, out of date statistics or have outdated pictures. The Association of Jewish Libraries is the first place I look for recommendations and advice. Their suggestions may not preclude every publication that includes examples of anti-Semitism, but they would recommend the appropriate age for readers. I rely on the wisdom of the reader and want you to be aware that I appreciate readers' input and welcome recommendations.

I took the quote at the top of this essay from the book *Kafka's Last Love* by Kathi Diamant (Basic Books, NY 2003). This book was given to me by the author's aunt. Since I have great respect for this person I chose to read it. This is a perfect example of a book that may have been overlooked. It is a must read. It fits Kafka's definition which appears at the beginning of this article. The quote from this book, which might not have gotten my attention from a list, was given to me by Glorie Levinson and I thank her for thinking of us.

I encourage you to let us know your library needs. We will be happy to help you find a book that will affect you like "the ax for the frozen sea inside us."

We acknowledge with gratitude the following donations. These generous gifts make it possible to expand our collection and continue to serve the needs of the community.

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The Speizman Jewish library staff, volunteers and users mourn the loss of our dedicated volunteer Abe Banner.
We extend our condolences to his wife Selina and the entire family.
Our library will not be the same without him
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