

****CONFIDENTIAL****

6 September 2005

Dear Dr. Brown:

This is a very busy time of the year for us all, but for you especially, so I thought I'd use this format to bring to you my concerns about an issue that is troubling me and many of my colleagues. Please excuse the length, but this does bear explanation in some detail.

My concerns involve Dr. Michael Link's HIST 6423 graduate research seminar in Modern European Intellectual History, in which he has chosen to emphasize the Holocaust. I became aware of this emphasis through a former student of mine who was in the class. (It should be noted that nowhere on Dr. Link's course syllabus, which is available to all as a matter of public record, is mention made of either the Holocaust or any of the titles he is asking his students to read, which could be read as an attempt at subterfuge).

This student told me that Dr. Link allowed each student to select a book from a list of eight or nine works on the Holocaust. Evidently, the object of the assignment is to explore the variations in interpretation of the Holocaust in history, which of course can be a quite legitimate exercise, as there is historical debate about various aspects of the Holocaust, though not, of course, over its existence as a real event.

This is where my concerns begin. Being a historian and a Jew myself, I am perhaps more aware than others of the Holocaust literature. I recognized the title of the book this student chose, unwittingly, from the available list. It was Paul Rassinier, *Debunking the Genocide Myth*, published by the neo-Nazi Noontide Press. The book is a collection of three earlier works by this author which assert that the Holocaust was a fiction perpetrated by a Zionist Jewish Communist cabal bent on world domination. No reputable historian on the planet recognizes this as anything but a travesty of historical method in the service of anti-Semitism. It has been thorough vilified by historians as an egregious piece of Holocaust denial.

Rassinier sets out two basic propositions: Holocaust survivors largely exaggerated or fictionalized their experiences since (he asserts) there were no death camps, and the inmates themselves, not the SS, were responsible for what atrocities did occur.

This is not a work of history, but a piece of anti-Semitic propaganda, and has no place in any college classroom, save perhaps as an example of the abuse of historical methodology or an example of hate literature. For Dr. Link to assign it in an ATU graduate class with absolutely no disclaimers attached give it the imprimatur of validity in the eyes of the student, who, as was the case with this particular student, simply assumes the work to be reputable because his professor assigned it.

It is not the only such work Dr. Link has assigned.

Another student, who also felt, in his words, that "something wasn't right" in this course, chose from among the list Dr. Link provided the Carlos Porter book *Made in Russia*,

published by Historical Review Press, the publication arm of the Institute for Historical Review, a pseudo-academic institute devoted to Holocaust denial. It is well-known to the legitimate academic community as an anti-Semitic front. *Made in Russia* states that the Nuremberg Trials and the evidence presented therein were a fabrication of Zionist Jewish Communist conspirators who were trying to cheat the German people out of the reparations they were due after World War II. It is a vile piece of filth laced with hate. You can find information about it on any number of Neo-Nazi websites, as well as Radio Islam's website.

When this particular student told me that this was the book he had selected, I then told him what the book was all about. The student was embarrassed, appalled, and wanted to immediately drop the course. He had put in an interlibrary loan order for the book (there are only 20 or so copies in the US, for obvious reasons), and was greatly concerned that his ordering of this book – again, unwittingly on his part – would mark him in academia. He too has now dropped the course, as has at least one other student.

The book Dr. Link asserts is his “neutral” book on the subject is Norman Finkelstein's *The Holocaust Industry*, which Dr. Omer Bartov, professor of European history at Brown University, characterized (in the *New York Review of Books*) thusly:

What I find so striking about *The Holocaust Industry* is that it is almost an exact copy of the arguments it seeks to expose. It is filled with precisely the kind of shrill hyperbole that Finkelstein rightly deplores in much of the current media hype over the Holocaust; it is brimming with the same indifference to historical facts, inner contradictions, strident politics, and dubious contextualizations; and it oozes with the same smug sense of moral and intellectual superiority.

This book is, in a word, an ideological fanatic's view of other people's opportunism, by a writer so reckless and ruthless in his attacks that he is prepared to defend his own enemies, the bastions of Western Capitalism, and to warn that “The Holocaust” will stir up an anti-Semitism whose significance he otherwise discounts. Like any conspiracy theory, it contains several grains of truth; and like any such theory, it is both irrational and insidious. Finkelstein can now be said to have founded a Holocaust industry of his own.

I am concerned for this department and for this university. I am only partially motivated to this action by virtue of my Jewishness; what scares me is first, that this becomes public knowledge: that an ATU grad course assigns recognized, ahistorical, hate-filled, neo-Nazi propaganda and tries to pass it off as mere variation of interpretation. Again, almost no reputable scholar recognizes these works as legitimate (though Finkelstein has some academic support).

To be fair, Dr. Link has also made available noted and valued academic works on the Holocaust by reputable authors such as Lucy Dawidowicz whose work has been well-received. My fear, though, is that an ambush awaits these students. Under cover of academic freedom and discussions of historical interpretation, Dr. Link will assert that these works by Rassinier, Porter, and to a lesser extent Finkelstein, are valid. They are not.

An analogy would be the geologist who asserts that the earth is flat, and demands to teach such in his courses as an alternative interpretation of geological fact. Holocaust deniers are no more historians than flat-earthers are geologists. Would the university tolerate my African American history course if I chose to use vile, racist Klan literature as texts in order to offer "another view"?

Holocaust deniers play off of our innate sense of fairness. Why shouldn't "both sides" be argued? They play off a basic flaw in reasoning, i.e. that the assertions of the Holocaust as an event in world history have equal weight to assertions that the event never occurred. But given the patina of academia by professors with agendas, this false equality of validity will find acceptance among students who will see it in terms of just another debate among historians when in fact there is no debate.

There are legitimate debates involving the Holocaust. Whether or not it occurred is not one of those debates.

I'm not sure what action should be taken, frankly. I know that I am very concerned. I know that these books have no place in any legitimate history class. Why has Dr. Link assigned these titles in particular? He has asserted that he is not a Holocaust denier. Then why assign known hate literature with no disclaimer attached? To what use does he plan to put these anti-Semitic diatribes in a graduate university classroom? These are legitimate questions that do not, I think, infringe upon academic freedom.

A tenured midwestern university professor teaching a course on the Napoleonic Wars used his class as a platform for holocaust denial, and he was fired. He defended himself by stating that he was presenting "two sides" of the issue because the students were only aware of the "orthodox" view (language, by the way, used by Dr. Link who also speaks of the "orthodox" view.) Some students, not knowing any better, came to his defense out of "fairness," that somehow his firing had violated some precept of fairness. This is the danger here – that students will indeed accept the notion of "two sides" and be taken in by the language of "fairness." One student who is still enrolled in Dr. Link's class has indeed used this very argument already.

I bring these deeply-felt concerns to you, because I fear for our standing in the academic as well as local community, I fear litigation should this become public knowledge, I fear disrepute and castigation of my department in the academic community, I fear challenges to accreditation, and I fear for the students in that class who will have wasted a semester on books that are disreputable.

For a further discussion of this, I refer you to Emory University professor Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (1993), a book to my knowledge not on Dr. Link's list.

Sincerely,

James L. Moses, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of History