2001

Facing Cyberhistory and Ourselves

Rob Franciosi

Grand Valley State University

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/gvr

Recommended Citation

Available at: http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/gvr/vol23/iss1/25

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Grand Valley Review by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.
Facing Cyberhistory and Ourselves

Encountering the Holocaust on the World Wide Web

Prologue
I delivered the following talk in February 1998 as part of a symposium hosted by the Grand Rapids Public Museum, “Social Injustice—Berlin 1936 to Grand Rapids 1998.” Held in conjunction with the first traveling exhibition sponsored by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “The Nazi Olympics, Berlin 1936,” the meeting brought together a range of educators and community activists to discuss the lessons which Nazi Germany and the Holocaust still hold for us.

At the time, just three years ago, the wonders of the World Wide Web were first being loudly proclaimed across the media, particularly for students and teachers. Because my writing on the Holocaust considers its “Americanization,” the way our culture has engaged this history, almost as soon as Mosaic (the first real browser) was available, I explored what the Web had to offer. I still recall one of my first searches using “Alta Vista”: after typing “Nazi,” I was sent to a site which not only celebrated Hitler’s “achievements,” but also argued that, lamentably, killing six million Jews had not been one of them. Using “Holocaust,” then, as my key term, I soon came upon a host of pages devoted to elaborate denials of the event’s very truth; indeed, I was just as likely to get hits from neo-Nazi and Holocaust “revisionist” sites as from legitimate historical ones. And many of the former seemed quite visually sophisticated.

Fortunately, better search engines today make it far less likely to be unexpectedly plunged into the world of Holocaust denial, at least when using the most popular tools. Yet all of us who regularly travel the Web know that even the most simple of searches can lead us away from odd, or at least unhelpful, Internet continuations of the research sources. With the Holocaust “revisionist” issue for teachers well

Imagine you are on your way to the Grand Rapids Public Museum, just studied Elie Wiesel’s Night, and are about to see its exhibition on the same building. And because you also assign your students to research topics of the World Wide Web, opportunities for teachers and citizens. In cyberspace -the Guttenberg in the

Students are assigned to research various websites in the Museum’s resources devoted to Anne Frank. A student even found testimonies by Hélène Ceccaldi that you read the following:

“The Holocaust: A Glance through the Following:

Revisionist scholars point to considerable evidence that numerous German programs that numerous concentration “chambers” are false; six million Jews is an impossible exaggeration.

Your school’s presentation to family sites, in which she...
Imagine you are a teacher of ninth-graders in the Grand Rapids public schools. Your class has just studied *The Diary of Anne Frank*, or perhaps Elie Wiesel’s *Night*; they have been through the exhibition on the Nazi Olympics in this very building. And because your school strives to integrate on-line resources into its curriculum, you also assign your class to use the World Wide Web to research topics on the Holocaust. The growth of the World Wide Web presents new learning opportunities for scholars, teachers, students, and citizens. Indeed, some have declared cyberspace—the most important change since Guttenberg in the way we acquire and process knowledge.

Students are asked to use search engines, to sample various web sites, to evaluate those sites, and then to print an interesting article or two from one of them. The results are impressive: many have found their way to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum’s resources, others have located sites devoted to Anne Frank herself, one enterprising student even found an on-line archive of video testimonies by Holocaust survivors. And then you read the following title: “The Holocaust: Let’s Hear Both Sides,” a glance through the first two paragraphs yielding the following statement:

Revisionist scholars have ... presented considerable evidence to show that there was no German program to exterminate Europe’s Jews, that numerous claims of mass killings in “gas chambers” are false, and that the estimate of six million Jewish wartime dead is an irresponsible exaggeration.

Your school’s librarian had already done a presentation to faculty on how to evaluate web sites, in which she particularly emphasized sponsorship as an indication of reliability—.edu for educational or research material,.gov for government resources,.com for a commercial site. You quickly look at the name of this one: “Student Revisionists’ Resource Site,” and then the web address, “www.wsu.edu,” or Washington State University.

The opportunities the Web poses for those who wish to learn about the Holocaust are indeed impressive, as I shall indicate, but just as my hypothetical teacher must face cyberspace’s black holes, so too must even the most casual of surfers. Search the word “Holocaust” or “Nazism” and you will no doubt find much valuable information. Unfortunately, you are just as likely to encounter a shadow world of Holocaust denial, appropriation, and misinformation, of anti-Semitism, racism, of apocalyptic fantasy. To boldly go into cyberspace is not without its dangers, especially for the young or the uninformed. And that more and more students from elementary school to college are relying on it as their primary research source should give us all pause.

First the good news. With a little guidance, one can easily access materials that would have been unimaginable even five years ago. Take the exhibition which is located on this floor. I visited it long before it got to Grand Rapids, not by traveling to Washington’s Holocaust Museum (though I’ve done that),
but via the Internet connection in my office. Much of the printed text and many of the photographs were available to me. I could even print them.

The Holocaust Memorial Museum’s site is perhaps the standard by which such web pages should be measured, not only for the range of materials it contains—everything from teacher’s guides to transcripts of recent public lectures held at the museum—but for its authoritativeness.

There are others, however, without the funding or imprimatur of the museum which provide information far beyond anything you will find at USHMM.org. The Cybrary of the Holocaust, for example, presents an impressive array of subjects and links, as does a site maintained by Professor Alan Filreis, of the University of Pennsylvania, who created it as a resource for a courses he teaches on “Literature of the Holocaust.”

Advances in video technology have naturally found a place in sites devoted to the Holocaust. The Anne Frank Center site, for example, which is aimed at that public school audience, provides a photo scrapbook of the Frank family and promises soon a virtual tour of the Secret Annex. Perhaps one of the most impressive Holocaust sites on the Web is that of the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies. A Yale University collection of over 3,700 videotaped interviews with witnesses and survivors of the Holocaust, the archive offers audio-visual selections on-line. In some respects, this is only the beginning for the availability of such testimony on the Web, as Steven Spielberg’s massive and well-funded “Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation” which aspires to digitally encode “more than 100,000 hours of tape” for multimedia use.

In a medium which tends to overemphasize the visual, though, and is becoming more and more like television, one site deserves particular notice. Yale University’s “Avalon Project,” produced by the law school, assembles “digital documents relevant to the fields of Law, History, Economics, Politics, Diplomacy and Govern-

...
A click on the mouse and we enter a path far more sinister than the glowing Information Superhighway our president talks so much about.

We learn that "around 1,000,000 Iraquis have been killed as a result of the Zionist-orchestrated "Gulf War"... "because the Jewish ideology, i.e. the Old Testament, the Torah, demands a terrible revenge—the total annihilation—of those who dare to oppose the plans of the Jews." A section entitled "Quotes" offers a selection of "What famous men have said about the Jews." The "Revisionism" subsection contains links spread over nearly three pages. And for those interested...
long will it be before white men
wake up and understand that
they are the targets of genocide
and the all-too-true reality of the
real 20th century Holocaust?"

Or you may land on the "Al­
pha" site which claims the
fourteen most important words
today are "We Must Secure The
Existence Of Our Race And A
Future For White Children."

Traveling through the luna­
tic fringe of cyberspace is, in
some ways, a tainting experi­
ence. Yet whenever I think to
dismiss such hatred and insan­
ity, a voice within says, "This is
the way the Jews of Germany
viewed the Nazis in 1933." How­
ever much I want to ignore the
"Waco Holocaust Memorial
Museum Site," I can’t forget the
images of the federal building in
Oklahoma City, or that Timothy
McVeigh often read The Spotlight,
a newspaper published by Insti­
tute for Historical Review
founder, Willis Carto. And
when I realize that the web of
Holocaust denial is so tightly
interwoven among American
hate groups, I remind myself of
the words from the Book of
Isaiah which are chiseled into
the stone at the U.S. Holocaust
Museum, "You are my wit­
tnesses."

This symposium, this travel­
ing exhibition, and I hope this
paper will remind us that as the
new millennium dawns we must
be ever vigilant against the
"night" which not only con­
sumed Anne Frank and
destroyed Elie Wiesel’s family,
but which waits out there for unsuspecting trav­
elers through cyberspace.

**Epilogue**

Recently the sponsors of www.hatwatch.org
decided to go off-line. David Goldman, creator
of the site, writes that hate groups have done
"an extremely poor job of using the Internet to
increase their membership," that they "have ut­
terly failed to gain widespread acceptance" for
their beliefs among American users. For most
Internet travelers, the dark, hate-filled corners
of cyberspace remain on the far periphery. While
the service that hatewatch.org and other sites
have performed has been admirable, their ex­
posure of ties between hate groups and Holocaust
denial has done little to stem the electronic flow
of such material. "Holocaust deniers’ thousands
of pages of propaganda on the Web," writes one
monitoring group, "presented as academic fact
or in the guise of free and open ‘debate,’ take
particular advantage of many Web users’ diffi­
culty distinguishing between reputable and
disreputable Web sites." A press release by the
Anti-Defamation League pointed to the grow­
ing tendency of German neo-Nazi groups to use
American sites to host Holocaust denial infor­
mation (publishing such information is illegal in
Germany), noting as well the trend of extremist
groups in the United States to use Holocaust de­
nial as a wedge issue for their larger agendas.

"When Timothy McVeigh bombed the Federal
Office building in Oklahoma City in 1995," Rabbi
Abraham Cooper of the Simon Wiesenthal Cen­
ter noted in 1999, "there was exactly one hate
site on the Web. Today there are over 2000." And
of course the World Wide Web itself continues
to grow at an exponential rate, all during a pe­
riod in the United States of unprecedented
economic expansion. How might this new com­
unications tool be used during a period of
persistent economic stagnation or even crisis? As
our lives become more and more enmeshed in
the Web, it is a question we should all ponder.
Goldman, creator groups have done using the Internet to what they "have utter­ acceptance" for in users. For most hate-filled corners their exposure and Holocaust the electronic flow and other sites their efforts which are so important. This cyte links to over 100 other Web Sites about the Holocaust, providing guidance through the chaos of Holocaust related information. Or as CNET noted when picking this site one of the Best on the Web: "As time passes, memory can fade. The Cybrary of the Holocaust uses art, discussion groups, photos, poems, and a wealth of facts to preserve powerful memo­ and to educate scholars and newcomers alike about the Holocaust.... The Cybrary is stunningly effective in its service to memory." (2/26/97)
http://remember.org/index.html

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: Education Resources
The Holocaust has challenged us to confront some of the darkest aspects of human nature and contemplate the capacity and willingness of a society's institutions or governments to protect the innocent and vulnerable. The Division of Education at the United States Holocaust Memorial
Museum has a twofold mission: to teach the history of the Holocaust and, in doing so, pose some of the most difficult questions that can be raised about ourselves as human beings. This website contains a variety of resources designed for use by teachers, students and all who want to learn about this history.
http://www.ushmm.org/education/

Simon Wiesenthal Center: Museum of Tolerance Multi-Media Learning Center
A comprehensive resource on the Holocaust and World War II, with over 3,000 text files, and tens of thousands of photos.
http://motlc.wiesenthal.org/index.html

Yad Vashem
Yad Vashem's task is to perpetuate the legacy of the Holocaust to future genera­tions so that the world never forgets the horrors and cruelty of the Holocaust. Its principal missions are commemoration and documentation of the events of the Holocaust, collection, examination, and publication of testimonies to the Holocaust, the collection and memorialization of the names of Holocaust victims, and research and education.
http://www.yadvashem.org.il
Anti-Defamation League

Holocaust Denial: An On-Line Guide

Holocaust denial, which its propagandists misrepresent as "historical revisionism," has become one of the most important vehicles for contemporary anti-Semitism. It is the invention of a collection of long-time anti-Semites and apologists for Hitler.

http://www.adl.org/poisoning_web/holocaust_denial.html

Nizkor Project

In contrast to our ideological opponents, the Nizkor Project has a completely open and visible agenda. To monitor the falsehoods, half-truths, and misinformation distributed via the Internet and other media by individuals and organizations that are fascist (including Nazi or neo-Nazi), racist, antisemitic, and/or that dishonestly and/or flagrantly reject established historical fact about the Nazi Holocaust; to refute or otherwise reply to those falsehoods, half-truths, and misinformation, with the aim of ensuring that they and their proponents remain firmly in the margin; to encourage, assist, and engage in such refutation by sponsoring and organizing collaborative research and writing efforts of both amateurs and experts around the world, including but not limited to historians, war-crimes prosecutors, lawyers, and witnesses, and/or to distribute such refutation;

http://www.nizkor.org

Holocaust Denial Web Sites

Note: All Web descriptions are quoted from the sites themselves.

Arthur R. Butz: Associate Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering
Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois. USA

I am the author of the book The Hoax of the Twentieth Century (1976), a work of "Holocaust revisionism". This Web site exists for the purpose of expressing views that are outside the purview of my role as an Electrical Engineering faculty member. The material will be continually updated and revised, but will always have an emphasis on Holocaust revisionism. A second aim is to present, from time to time, material likely to be appreciated only by advanced students of Holocaust revisionism. Such is the case with my Vergasungskeller note. A third aim is to present news items of particular interest to Holocaust revisionists.

http://pubweb.acns.nwu.edu/~abutz/

Committee for Open Inquiry

The aim of this Committee for Open Inquiry (COI) is to historically investigate historical events, with special emphasis on the world's most revered historical events (thus also on religious events, political events, and war crimes). It is the goal of the Committee for Open Inquiry (COI) to investigate the monstrosity of the Holocaust and the horrific violence committed by the perpetrators, to critically evaluate the evidence of the Holocaust, and to scrutinize the motives of those who misrepresent its story.

http://www.coi.org

European Foundation for Antifascism

It is the goal of the European Foundation for Antifascism (EFSA) to provide a scholarly forum for the discussion of the broader context of fascism, and to promote the elimination of fascist movements in all forms.

http://www.efsa.org

Institute for Historical Review

The IHR offers research and documentation on Birkenau, Treblinka, Auschwitz, as well as information on Churchill, WWII, FDR, and the subject generally.

http://www.ihr.org

Jew Watch

Keeping a close watch on the anti-Semitic Jew Watch is a Not-For-Profit Organization.

http://www.jewwatch.com

Greg Raven's Revisionist History Project

This collection is dedicated to Greg Raven. Please keep the "time" project, and the Historical Review among others.

http://wwwRevisionistHistory.org
historical revisionist, and/or those that dissemble and manufacture misinformation, and organizations who falsify and distort and misinform, and/or who dissemble the Nazi Holocaust; or who peddle misinformation, and/or those attempting to tightly, and firmly in the margins, and organizing and recruiting and organizing and creating and cultivating and creating and presenting new executors, lawyers, experts around the world...

Committee for Open Debate on the Holocaust (Bradley Smith)

The aim of this site is to promote intellectual freedom with regard to this one historical event, which in turn will promote intellectual freedom toward all historical events (thus all other issues). We have chosen to concentrate on the gas chamber stories and war crimes trials because they are emblematic of the allegedly unique monstrosity of the Germans before and during World War II. We believe it profoundly vulgar, and emasculating, to spend half a century condemning others for their violence and brutality when we have not yet learned to condemn our own, or even recognize it. We want to help civilize Americans. We’re not Germans and we’re not Jews (well, some of us are) and we are not focused on how naughty they were or were not. We’re focused on American culture, on the American ideal that liberty has the power to wash a people clean and that there is no liberty without intellectual freedom.

http://www.codoh.com/

European Foundation for Free Historical Research

It is the goal of the Foundation Vrij Historisch Onderzoek, V.H.O., to scientifically investigate historical events, particularly those of the 20th century, without limitations imposed by dogmas or axioms.

It is also the Foundation’s goal to defend human rights and to combat racial discrimination, especially when it is directed against the German people. This shall be done within the widest possible framework and particularly by means of proper historical research into the events of the 20th century in Europe.

It is also the Foundation’s goal to correct unjust reporting or accounts of events of the 20th century. It is also the Foundation’s goal to further public debate about the subject generally described as ‘Holocaust’.

http://www.vho.org/index.html

Institute for Historical Review

The IHR offers revisionist perspectives about the Holocaust (including Auschwitz, Birkenau, Treblinka, Dachau, Majdanek, Sobibor, Chelmno, and Nazi gas chambers), as well as information about Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Pearl Harbor, Winston Churchill, WWII, Fred A Leuchter Jr., Stalinism and other topics.

http://www.ihr.org

Jew Watch

Keeping a Close Watch on Jewish Communities & Organizations Worldwide Jew Watch is a Not-For-Profit Library for private study, scholarship, or research.

http://www.jewwatch.com/

Greg Raven's Revisionist Site

This collection of files is provided for the enjoyment and edification of all by Greg Raven. Please read the copyright notice. This Web site is my personal "spare time" project, and is not supported, sponsored, or financed by the Institute for Historical Review or any other group or individual.
If you are interested in the revisionist viewpoint on history, you've come to the right place. (If not, see the caveat below.) There's lots of information here about Auschwitz, Birkenau, Treblinka, Dachau, Nazi gas chambers, the Holocaust in general, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Pearl Harbor, and WWII.

Revisionism.com

Revisionists object to the terminology, "The Holocaust," which by implication suggests it was unique, monumental, over-arching, perhaps even the central historical event of our century if not epoch. In fact there have been many holocausts over the centuries, a good portion of them in our own Twentieth century. The Jewish Holocaust is merely one of them, and not even one of the more vicious ones.

From the point of view of the world as a whole it is far from the greatest or most terrible, Hollywood to the contrary notwithstanding. A marked improvement in both accuracy and objectivity can be achieved if the term "Jewish Holocaust" is substituted for the term "The Holocaust."

Revisionism.com

Riding with the Coen Brothers

One of the darkest, loopiest, heart-breaking films from director Ethan Coen is a paean to "hommage" (perhaps as in "h": what the Coens are adducing), and behooves writers in the set of other masterpieces--indeed, it is one of such a masterpieces--from Dashiell Hammett (The Big Sleep) except as a hand-wavering and genre dependent enterprise, is the real name.

Their favorite among the oldest—the quintessentially familiar Hollywood, and the episodic setting so special is the ordinariness—bankrolled sentiment and the banal domestic details added to the utterly forgettable point here: the passion driving nostalgia. Some of the moments come so especially desirable moments din of the most Arizona, for example, Nicolas Cage says, "the baby they have..."