CHAPTER 13

Holocaust Denial in North America

Kenneth Lasson

The devastating truth about the Holocaust is that it was a fact, not a dream. And the devastating truth about the Holocaust deniers is that they will go on using whatever falsehoods they can muster, and taking advantage of whatever vulnerabilities in an audience they can find, to argue, with skill and evil intent, that the Holocaust never happened. By being vigilant to these arguments we can all fight this second murder of the Jews—fight it, and weep not only for the victims’ mortality but also for the fragility, and mortality, of memory.

SEN. ORRIN HATCH

Without the past, without memory, without history, we are nothing, adrift. We place our destiny and dignity in the hands of the misfits and their projected psychoses. This movement is not an attack on the Holocaust, but on the very notion of historical meaning. It is a revolt against reality, a threat not only to the past but to the future.

JAMES S. ROBBINS

From the still-burning embers of the Holocaust we have come once again to learn the terrible truth, that the power of evil still lurks among the nations of the world, and cannot be underestimated. Nor can the effect of the spoken and written word, which in modern times must be taken in tandem with the violence of terrorism.

It has been but a half-century since the liberation of Nazi death camps, a little more than a quarter-century since the First International Conference on the Holocaust and Human Rights, and two decades since the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum first put on display its documentation of horror.

3 Sponsored by the Boston College Law School Holocaust/Human Rights Research Project and the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai Brith, the conference took place on April 17, 1986. See Debate, Freedom of Speech and Holocaust Denial, 8 Cardozo L. Rev. 559 (1987).
Yet today that form of historical revisionism popularly called “Holocaust denial” abounds worldwide in all its full foul flourish—disseminated not only on Arab streets but in American university newspapers, not only in books, articles, and speeches but in mosques and over the Internet and by heads of state.

“Israel must be wiped off the face of the map,” declared Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the elected president of Iran, in December of 2006. His primary justification—that the Jewish State’s existence is predicated upon events that never happened—is echoed throughout the Muslim world. Ahmadinejad’s true colors came through in a much ballyhooed international conference in Tehran, officially sponsored by the Iranian Foreign Ministry and billed as a “Review of the Holocaust: Global Vision.”

In a global environment increasingly dominated by mass media of manifold form and format, we have also begun to understand that what is printed on paper or broadcast on television or bytten into cyberspace affects everyone, actually or subliminally. Conversely, what is rejected or otherwise left out is doomed to a world of communication failure, ignorance, and misunderstanding. Although Holocaust denial is flourishing in the Arab world—one of the Twenty-first century’s fastest-growing forms of counter-knowledge—many Western nations are wary of drawing attention to it for fear of upsetting Muslims.

How many of them are sensitive to the fact that the Holocaust was the murder of six million Jews, including two million children, or to the idea that Holocaust denial is a second murder of those same six million. As the generation of survivors dwindles, whose words will win? Who decides what is to appear in the vast and burgeoning marketplace of ideas?

Many of those important choices are vested in editors and publishers, upon whom the United States Constitution confers almost unfettered discretionary authority. (Lesser but similar discretion is allowed in other Western democracies.) For the most part journalists can write, say, depict, or ignore anything

5 *International Conference on Holocaust Opens in Tehran*, BBC Worldwide Monitoring, December 11, 2006. Some insisted that Ahmadinejad’s statement was a mistranslation of what he said—but the same quote was on the home page of the Iranian president. See also “Ahmadinejad Defends Holocaust Denial at UN,” available at http://www.breitbart.com/BigPeace/2012/09/24/IsraelsUNEnvoyWalksOutDuringAhmadinejadSpeechUSEnvoySticksAroundtoListen; and “Iran’s President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in his Own Words,” available at http://www.adl.org/main_International_Affairs/ahmadinejad_words.htm.