

Political Ideologies in Public libraries: An Effective Approach to Spread Propaganda?

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Abstract

With multiple outbreaks of wars and revolutions, public libraries endured many political, social and cultural shocks and reforms during the twentieth century. This paper focuses on two historical cases from the twentieth century where public libraries were radically transformed into propaganda sites: Nazi Germany and Communist China.

In 1933, the Nazi propaganda machine whose operations extended to all aspects of German society, aimed to destroy books that challenged the legitimacy of Nazi racial theories. Thirty years later in a different continent, the Communist Party of China forced libraries to burn down millions of books that were viewed as anti-revolutionary and pro-Western.

The purpose of this paper is to compare and understand how both totalitarian regimes despite their ideological differences manipulated public libraries with their extensive use of terror to obliterate books and libraries. Using primary sources such as memoirs and newspaper articles, the paper also examines how the general public and librarians reacted to such drastic changes against their wills.