

Reconstructing an unintentional library: Fueling community discussion and education about the Holocaust using Jewish Cultural Reconstruction Books

Towson University's Albert S. Cook Library, in collaboration with Brandeis University Library, are requesting \$249,014 in IMLS support to implement a community program for education on Holocaust disinformation, supported by rare primary source materials, our Jewish Cultural Reconstruction (JCR) books. This project fulfills Goal 5 and Objective 5.2 of the National Leadership Grant Program. The project will result in a shared catalog or database of the JCR books, the story of which will be used to engage our community on Holocaust education. As the last generations of living survivors pass away, the role of physical artifacts in giving witness and fighting disinformation is growing exponentially. Since many U.S. institutions hold JCR books, we will include up to 10 partners in the project, giving them guidance on how to locate their books and provide best practice for working with a community partner to engage wider audiences in Holocaust education in their geographic area.

Project Justification

During World War II, the Nazis planned a cultural holocaust to accompany the physical destruction of European Jews. Millions of pieces of European Jewish Cultural heritage were seized by German soldiers, and as Allied forces moved across Europe at the end of the war, they discovered massive storehouses of books, periodicals, and ritual objects; half a million of these items remained without heirs. The Jewish Cultural Reconstruction (JCR), Inc., an organization founded in 1947 to collect and distribute Jewish Property after the war, used a distribution formula based on the locations of established Jewish communities around the world to find new homes for these items. JCR distributed approximately 160,000 of these books and periodicals to 48 universities, libraries, and synagogues across the United States in the early 1950s. What happened to the JCR books after they arrived in the United States depends very much upon their new homes. Cataloging practices of the time were not as consistent as they now are and many of the items were not properly marked with JCR bookplates, bookplates fell off, or were obscured by later preservation work. These inconsistencies mean that many of these JCR books, books that are the last remains of some individual lives, books that witnessed one of the worst atrocities in history, are hidden away within libraries across the United States at risk of accidental discard.

This project also fights disinformation. In a [recent nationwide poll](#), 63% of Millennials and Gen Z respondents did not know that 6 million Jews were murdered during the Holocaust. One in ten respondents had never heard the term Holocaust. JCR books share the atrocities of the past while discouraging disinformation by presenting tangible evidence of the Holocaust. We are seeking funding for a two-part project: (1) Develop, test, and share best practices and digital tools for book identification and cataloging with other JCR libraries, and (2) Partner with museums, schools, universities, and other cultural institutions to create Holocaust education programming that enables these books to share their stories within our communities and around the world.

Towson University (TU) is well-positioned to complete this project through the recent founding of the Sandra R. Berman Center for Humanity, Tolerance, and Holocaust Education, stewarded by Dr. Hana Bor. Dr. Bor, Cook Library's Special Collections Program and the campus' [Baltimore Hebrew Institute](#) have partnered on Holocaust education in the past including a well-attended international [virtual symposium on teaching the Holocaust amidst much disinformation](#); White Glove sessions highlighting our [JCR book collections](#), and our traveling [Vergissmeinnicht \(Forget-Me-Not\) exhibition](#).

Project Work Plan

Over the last 10 years, staff at TU's Albert S. Cook Library have developed best practices for identifying, cataloging, and sharing their JCR collections in order to make them more accessible. Meanwhile, Brandeis has also [inventoried JCR books](#) in their collections. To date, Towson has received small grants to tie together pieces of the Holocaust collections we hold. The IMLS National Leadership Implementation Grant will allow us to link our Holocaust education programs to tangible evidence of primary source JCR books seized during the Holocaust. This project will be completed in three phases, some of which overlap: (1) Hiring a graduate student assistant from TU's Jewish Studies or History Departments to investigate shared catalog possibilities, such as the [Jewish Digital Cultural Recovery Project](#), or the [Footprints Project at Columbia](#), to determine which avenue will be best for depositing records. Once the proper catalog or database platform is found, this student will work with Mael at Towson and Greenblatt at Brandeis to pilot the deposit of both institutions' records in the catalog. This student will also process stipend paperwork, and track progress of each institution, as well as assist with marketing, communication, and programming (Years 1-3). This student will organize monthly check-ins for the co-PIs and bimonthly meetings for the co-PIs and institutions receiving stipends. (2) Collaboration between Mael at

TU and Kleinman and Hartman at Brandeis to refine our existing best practices for cataloging and locating JCR books, with work completed by student assistants or other part-time temporary workers. As these practices and guidelines are refined, Mael and the co-PIs at Brandeis will reach out to partners who have expressed interest in the project (Columbia University, Yeshiva University, and others in the Association of Jewish Libraries) to share these practices and invite them to request stipends from the grant to hire student assistants to locate their books. Co-PIs will provide support on hiring students including sharing position descriptions, tasks and duties, interview questions, etc. (Years 1-2). The graduate student mentioned in phase 1 will provide administrative support for these tasks. (3) Launching our educational initiatives, including (a) drafting a marketing and communication plan for outreach to our campus, to the Jewish Museum of Baltimore and other museum partners, to the Baltimore Jewish Council's Holocaust Education Teachers' Institute, and local K-12 schools. We will host hands-on workshops on teaching about Holocaust denial and disinformation, using the JCR books as primary source materials for discussion. By approaching the JCR books as objects bearing permanent scars of the events they witnessed during the Holocaust, we can evaluate them as evidence of these events and their owners who became victims of the Nazis. These workshops encourage participants to look past language barriers and observe markings, annotations, and ephemera to hear the voices and experiences of those no longer with us (Year 1). (b) Enacting our plan at TU and in Baltimore/D.C. with the scheduling of various sessions with museums, institutes and schools. We will also share our plan with Brandeis so they can review feasibility within their organization and make recommendations for sharing with other institutions (Year 2). (c) As our events continue, TU will share template outreach plans with the institutions receiving stipends, and coach them on how they might organize similar events via email and during bimonthly check-ins for all involved institutions. Concurrently, TU and Brandeis will co-author a whitepaper detailing the successes and challenges of the project. We will disseminate our project broadly by sharing best practice at regional and national conferences hosted by associations such as the Association of Jewish Libraries, Society of American Archivists, American Library Association, and Association of College & Research Libraries, hosting webinars, and promoting the whitepaper and project generally on multiple listservs including the Association of College & Research Libraries, the Society of American Archivists, and Hasafran--the Association of Jewish Libraries' electronic discussion forum.

The project team will include Co-PIs at TU Suzanna Yaukey, Dean of University Libraries; Dr. Hana Bor, Director of the Sandra R. Berman Center for Humanity, Tolerance, and Holocaust Education; Elaine Mael, Jewish Studies Librarian; Dr. Ashley Todd-Diaz, Assistant University Librarian for Special Collections & University Archives; and Joyce Garczynski, Assistant University Librarian of Communication & Digital Scholarship, and co-PIs from Brandeis University Mark Paris, Associate University Librarian for Scholarly Resources & Discovery; Lou Hartman, Metadata Coordinator; Ari Kleinman, Metadata Librarian, Hebrew Specialty; Dr. Rachel Greenblatt, Judaica Librarian.

Project Results

The outcome of this project will be multifold: (1) cemented best practice for locating JCR books; (2) a shared catalog or database of JCR materials; (3) guides and best practice for reaching out to community museums, institutions and partners to elicit participation in programming including sample marketing materials; and (4) a whitepaper summarizing the results of the implementation grant. All guides and materials will be shared via institutional repositories from TU and Brandeis University. This project is not just about making these specific books available more broadly; it fulfills broader library missions to engage our communities to fight disinformation. Organizing community workshops to debunk Holocaust denials may help many of our community members think more critically about the information they receive and absorb.

Diversity Plan

TU is a majority minority campus with 59% of our students identifying as a racial or ethnic minority, a statistic that coincides with the diversity rates of the state of Maryland. Every effort will be made to ensure that students or staff hired in roles at TU, Brandeis University, and other participant institutions come from underrepresented groups. Community events will be marketed to attract a broad audience including the racial, religious, gender, and socio-economic diversity represented in our communities.

Budget

We request \$249,014 from IMLS to fund our project. This includes the following items: Salaries and wages, including fringe benefits: \$15,480. Travel: \$5,000. Materials and supplies for events: \$7,000. Subawards and Contracts: \$79,000 to Brandeis University. Student support: \$38,880. Other costs: \$35,000 stipends for staffing at participating institutions beyond co-PI teams. Indirect costs (49.62%): \$68,654.