

I wanted to thank the George C. Marshall Foundation for inviting me to speak today. It's a great pleasure. I only regret that I am NOT able to speak to you in person, but I hope that this online talk will give you some sense of the work that I have done in my book "Information Hunters."

The Information Hunters were an unlikely band of American librarians, archivists, scholars, spies, and soldiers whose wartime effort was centered on books and documents. They gathered enemy publications in the spy-ridden cities of Lisbon and Stockholm, searched for records in liberated Paris and in the rubble of Berlin. They seized Nazi works from bookstores and schools and unearthed millions of copies of books hidden in German caves and mine shafts. Improvising library techniques in wartime conditions, they contributed to Allied intelligence, safeguarded endangered collections, and restituted looted books. And at the same time, they built up the international holdings of leading American libraries for the post-war period. We're all very familiar with the Monuments Men--the unit of the Army, the Monuments Fine Arts and Archives Unit that was engaged in preserving and restituting artworks and other kinds of cultural monuments. My story is a little bit different here because books range into a number of different areas, but you will find that there are certain parallels with some of the activities of the Monuments Men and some do actually appear in my book and presentation.

I want to begin with these two men: William Donovan and Archibald MacLeish, who are emblematic of the developments that I want to describe today, and in fact gave them a kind of start, a jump start, for a particular kind of intelligence gathering involving open sources, publications, books and the like. Both men were interventionists and they came together in 1940 and '41 to talk about how to best serve the country in terms of information at a time when there was a great deal of concern that the United States would get into the war.

William Donovan convinced Franklin Roosevelt to establish what was initially called the Coordinator of Information--a significant word that, "information." It later was renowned as the Office of Strategic Services, which he headed. This was the first coordinated civilian intelligence agency in the country and was an extremely important effort during World War Two. Archibald MacLeish, of course, was the famed poet, playwright, and at the time, Librarian of Congress. He too was an ardent interventionist and he called upon librarians to understand themselves as defenders of freedom and not only custodians of culture. He believed that knowledge was crucial for a free world and for the success of the United States as it was pursuing its war aims. The two men came together to collaborate on an effort to acquire and analyze open source materials, openly available publications that would reflect information about the enemy.

I should say that during the 1930s there were many ideas about information already swirling in the United States and also in Europe. There were calls for universal information and international cooperation. There was rising nationalism at the same time, with the establishment of the National Archives, an archival awakening that was very important for the United States. Americans turned to microfilm as a possible technology that would increase the ability of people to access materials that were otherwise rare or hard to come by, or that could be used immediately for example for scientific understanding. The Library of Congress itself began to see itself as a national library, and there were other efforts to bring together a kind of feeling of cooperation around the country. By World War Two, this information consciousness had really developed and around the country there were public libraries with War Information centers where ordinary citizens could get the information that they needed.

Meanwhile, as the United States looked on, Europe descended into war. I want to tell you about one librarian who sort of fought her own war of resistance prior to the United States being in the war, declaring war in Europe and against Japan. This was José Meyer, who was a 45 year old American woman who lived in Paris working for the publisher Hachette and part time for the Library of Congress. I have not been able to find a photograph of her, so imagine a fairly petite, blonde, blue-eyed woman in her mid-40s. She was in Paris when the Germans occupied the city in June of 1940. She had no money, her passport had expired, and she did not want to leave her possessions behind. She had a dozen cases of books, five trunks of a collection of war materials for the Library of Congress, and a lot of heavy furniture.

She wrote Archibald MacLeish very moving, powerful letters, saying after the Germans had marched in "the outlook is very dark indeed." And yet, as I said, she fought her own war of resistance. She took photographs of the German occupation. She collected books in out-of-the-way bookstores that had been banned by the occupying government. She even acquired a list of banned books called the Liste Otto, borrowed from a gendarme who told her she could copy it overnight and return it to him. And she investigated the book trade, including the looting of Jewish bookstores and libraries, and sent her report to Washington along with ephemera that she had collected. Finally she decided to leave Paris in December 1940. She got an export permit to take her personal effects, and at the last minute she switched her furniture for her war collection and she accompanied it to the United States. And McLeish saw her as a pretty amazing individual who gave the promise of the potential for information gathering that would be realized after war had been declared.

In 1941, the OSS oversaw an interdepartmental agency. It was called the Interdepartmental Committee for the Acquisition of Foreign Publications or IDC. And this group was set up with the cooperation of the Library of Congress to send agents to neutral cities around the world to acquire newspapers, periodicals, scientific reports, technical manuals and the like, with the idea that they would be brought to the United States and analyzed for the war effort. They could be used to assess enemy troop strength, for example—industrial capacity, transportation networks, morale and similar subjects. So agents were sent to several cities around the world to gather these materials.

Only one of them was a woman. This woman here: Adele Kibre, who headed the operation in Stockholm. Adele Kibre was an unusual woman. She grew up in Hollywood in a Hollywood film family but she herself was a scholar and went to the University of Chicago to get a PhD in medieval linguistics in 1930. She couldn't get a job, given discrimination against women and academia at that time, and instead she went to Europe to do her own research and to work for professors back at home, researching and copying materials for them from rare books collections and archives. She saw people in Europe taking photographs in archives with small cameras, with Leicas, and she learned how to do this kind of photography. And she was in Europe in a library in Germany when war broke out. She finally found her way to Lisbon and returned home to the US, and then 18 months later was sent by the OSS to Stockholm to set up a microfilm operation known as the Anglo-American Microfilm Unit. She worked with the British to acquire publications to microfilm. She also had contacts in the clandestine press and in the Danish resistance. And she was enormously successful at this effort. She did—these microfilm units abroad had to take their the film reels without developing them. They sent them back to the United States or to London for development, and so technical skill was very important. She was quite successful at this and in fact produced over 3,000 reels of microfilm during her time in Stockholm.

Another center of OSS activity was Lisbon. This of course was a hotbed of intelligence, of espionage, of refugees and the like, well-known as a kind of center of spies. To Lisbon were sent several librarians, two for the OSS: one of them Ralph Carruthers, a microphotography expert at the New York Public Library. Another, Rubin Peiss, who was a relative of mine, my father's oldest brother, and the means by which I got into this project. He was a librarian at Harvard, multilingual, and was sent to assess and collect materials that could be used for intelligence analysis. A third individual was Manuel Sanchez, who came from the Library of Congress to collect for their purposes. They developed networks of contacts in bookstores and news dealers, including this bookstore, Livraria of Portugal. The bookstore was owned by Allied sympathizers who went to Spain to collect books for the US and other materials, journals, periodicals and the like, which were sent back to the United States.

The use of microfilm was incredibly important. There was only limited space allotted on the Clippers, the aircraft that that still went between the U.S. and Portugal, and so this effort was a kind of vast undertaking. By the end of the first year of operation, 1942, over a million pages had been microfilmed and then duplicated for many different wartime agencies. It was very hard for them to use these materials because the microfilm was done in a kind of haphazard way, and so librarians back in the United States developed mechanisms, sort of early information science, to shift from a library point of view to the point of view of the information in the publications. They would disaggregate the publications creating nuggets of information. They would classify these, index them, organize them, create abstracts of articles, even do full-text translations in 42 languages. This, before there were computers to help with this work. And so several hundred people, mainly women and immigrants, did this job. These outposts in neutral cities became less important as the war wore on. There's simply less information there, reliable information, to be found.

Instead, the operation turned to what were known as T-Forces, or Target Forces, and documents teams after D-Day. These teams followed troops into newly liberated or occupied areas in Belgium, France, and then ultimately in Germany. And these collecting teams essentially scooped up whatever seemed to possibly contain information that might be helpful for the war effort, for the post-war occupation, for the prosecution of war crimes, or for the war in Japan, and relations with Russia, So there's a whole range of topics that were of interest to these documents gathering teams.

One member of a T-Force was Ross Lee Finney, who was a modernist composer and a professor at Smith College, and he operated largely in France and Paris and wrote voluminous letters to his wife, so we have a good idea of what it was he was doing. He said at one point that he "had to adopt slightly different methods of acquiring foreign publications than I or anyone in Northampton, Massachusetts, would use." He was able to find--his best day was on a Thanksgiving Day, when he found thousands of patent abstracts that could then be shipped to the United States.

These documents teams and T-Forces, as well as Allied troops, uncovered vast quantities of books and other publications that had been stashed away in surprising places. In the wake of bombing raids, German authorities had decided to relocate their State Archives, their rare book collections, and many of their full library collections from the state libraries in caves, mines and castles for safety, this along with art treasures and other valuable materials that had been looted by the Nazis. This mine, the Ransbach mine, was a salt potash mine where gold, art treasures, and the costumes of the Berlin State Opera had been stored, along with millions of volumes of the Prussian State Library, as you can see

here. And there was no card catalog to help people figure out what was stashed. So these posed a problem for America, the American occupation. What would be done with all these books?

Meantime, back in the United States, the librarians were itching to get back into Europe once victory in Europe had been declared. There was fierce competition among libraries. This was not a genteel world as we might think and many of them tried to send their agents into war zones and occupied zones to try to get a jump on other libraries. The most successful of these was the Hoover Institution, whose library had been founded by former President Herbert Hoover. He actually had begun his collection back in the aftermath of World War One and he had many contacts in relief agencies and other supporters around the world who collected materials for him. Likely because of his influence as an ex-president, he was also able to get some of his friends and representatives into Europe to begin to collect documents, archival records and rare materials for the Hoover Institution Library.

And these are two men who did this work, Louis Lochner and Frank Mason, who were journalists, and their major role of course in August of 1945 was to write news stories, but they also engaged in a collecting mission for the Hoover Library. One of the means they used that was most successful, in fact, was to acquire care packages, and of course care packages had a connection to Hoover as well with his relief efforts after World War One. And because of the great hunger and limited calories that the Germans were on after World War Two, the care package was an incredibly powerful gift, and in fact it became one means of sort of transacting exchange with people: giving a valued diary or archival material to the Hoover Library in exchange for food relief.

So this kind of competition in the libraries and a desire of many American researchers to get back into Europe to find the materials of Europe helped to push the Library of Congress to make a proposal to the War Department and State Department, which was to set up a mission of the Library of Congress that would be a kind of single mission under the rubric of the military that would go in and serve the purpose of acquiring books that had been published in the war years and had been unavailable to American libraries through normal commercial channels which had been stopped. Now one might think that this would be a very limited mission. After all there's only a certain number of books that had been published that research libraries might want, and in fact the mass collecting mission sponsored by the government might have simply ceased or narrowed in scope when the war in Europe was over.

But the opposite actually occurred because the military had needs too, not only the libraries. For the military, having people who could help assess and screen the vast quantity of materials that had been collected and continuing to be collected was extremely important. There was a kind of mission creep that went on here and a reluctance to just say "no, we don't want to collect this, we need to look at it assess it and then decide what to do with it." And so the military and the State Department gave approval to the Library of Congress for this mission.

The head of the mission was Reuben Peiss. He is the figure in the middle of this photograph with the pipe. He was already in Germany and was simply reassigned from the OSS to the Library of Congress. In a few months this group of individuals in the trench coats arrived from the United States, including one of the one of the deans of American librarianship on the right of your screen, second from the right: Harry Lydenberg, who was 70 years old at the time that he went on this mission. The initial aim was simply to engage in buying books, to purchase books. And it was to rescue books that had already been ordered by such libraries as Harvard and Yale. They had been ordered before the war and had been set

aside by the publishers in Leipzig, which was the center of German book publishing for whenever the piece would come.

Now these books had actually--most of them had been put away for safekeeping out into the hinterlands, even though Leipzig itself was heavily bombed by the allies during the war. The problem, however, was that Leipzig was in the Soviet zone of occupation. And so a delicate negotiation had to take place between the Library of Congress mission and their Soviet counterparts in order to permit them to bring trucks into Leipzig, pack up their police books and bring them back, first to Berlin, then Frankfurt, and then ship to the United States. This was a successful effort and everyone was amazed at this, even as the Cold War was already beginning to be felt.

At the same time, the Library of Congress found itself expanding its mission. There were many tempting targets as one member of a T-Force said and it was hard for these bibliophiles and people very committed to the historical record of--to preserving the historical record of Nazism and the war, to let go of materials that weren't necessarily books or the kinds of materials they were supposed to be collecting. There was an enormous collection, for example, called the Rehse collection, which was split among many different places and efforts to salvage it were ongoing. You can see here in these photographs two agents, an agent and a German librarian, trying to figure out what should be salvaged from this sub-basement in a Nazi Beer Hall as late as August 1946. And this process had been going on really since the end of the war. There was a huge photographic collection that was found in a restroom in a restaurant, and it was confiscated and a decision had to be made: is this something that reflected Nazism and could be taken by the U.S. or it was the cultural patrimony of Germany and should remain in the U.S.

So these kinds of ethical questions were raised continuously as the Library of Congress mission was doing its work. Even more powerful in terms of expanding the mission was the question of what to do with Nazi and militaristic book collections. And the principle of denazification, which was one that had been established by the four powers, came to the fore here. Initially, books with Nazi or militaristic content was sequestered in, you know, was removed from bookstores, from publishing houses, even from libraries, and put under lock and key. Over time there was an effort to expand what was defined by--what the definition of Nazi content was, and not only to sequester this material, but to destroy it. And in May of 1946 there was an order issued by the four powers to not only sequester books, but to destroy them and these included books in public libraries. Not research libraries, but public libraries. So when this news hit the American press there was an outraged response. Americans had already condemned Nazi book burning, and there was a certain amount of propaganda about the destruction of books by Germans and how that was, you know, antithetical to American war aims and American ideals. And now here the Americans seemed to be burning books. The occupation governor Lucius Clay, in a somewhat awkward statement, said "well, we're not burning books, we're pulping books for paper pulp which we desperately need in Germany." But this distinction did not quite carry the effect that he wanted.

And so the Library of Congress mission was given the task of screening these books and preserving a certain number, up to 150 copies, for research libraries, initially in the United States and then worldwide (it was going to be a worldwide effort) as well as government agencies. And these books were brought to the United States, nearly 600,000 of them. They were allocated to over 100 research libraries across the country. All sorts of institutions: Harvard, New York Public Library, University of Illinois, Iowa, along

with the Library of Congress in this cooperative acquisitions arrangement. The idea here was a goal that had been established in 1942, by Archibald MacLeish and library leaders around the country, that the goal would be to ensure that a copy of every book published in the world would be somewhere in the United States. So here you see this idea of international holdings as being really crucial for, not only for knowledge but for national security.

Finally, there's the question of looted books. The fate of the looted books. These books were overwhelmingly looted from Jewish institutions and individuals, although not exclusively. There were many from Masonic lodges, Catholic organizations, socialist and labor organizations, but overwhelmingly, these were looted Jewish books. Alfred Rosenberg, the Nazi ideologist, had decided to create an Institute for the Study of the Jewish Question in Frankfurt. This would essentially be a kind of study for advanced learning related to Jewish history, culture, and peoples, and it seems a terrible irony that the books were being collected at the same time that six million Jews were being murdered. But this was in fact what Rosenberg and his looting teams were doing.

When the American troops came into the area around in Frankfurt and around Frankfurt, they discovered these vast collections of looted materials. You see here this famous photograph of Army Chaplain and Rabbi Samuel Blinder, who examined Torah scrolls in the cellar of Rosenberg's Institute. There were over a hundred fifty thousand volumes as well, found in this cellar of the building which had on the top of the building been bombed. Nearby, in a small village called Hungen, looted books—about two million looted books were discovered in a tax office, in a church, in a brick yard, all over the place, often in incredible disarray.

And the question of what to do with these books was an enormous one, and it was an unexpected one. Nobody really anticipated what, you know, that this would be a problem for the military, and especially the Monuments Men to solve. At first, the effort was to collect these books and place them in an extant library, the Rothschild Library in Frankfurt. You can see some bomb damage there, but it was basically workable and a number of books were placed there with the idea that they would be identified and then restituted. A civilian named Glenn Goodman was placed in charge of these books. He was somebody who had been in an internment camp in Germany for the duration of the war. He was released when the Allies came in and he was officially a displaced person. He went to a Monuments Men's office in Frankfurt and basically was given the job of organizing these materials. And it was an overwhelming job. This was not something that he was prepared to do. As more and more books were found, the question of what to do with them became increasingly acute and from July of 1945 until January of 1946, not a single book had been restituted, and really the operation just kind of ground to a halt.

Finally, in early 1946 a decision was made to get this operation underway, and the books were all relocated to the Offenbach Archival Depot, as it was called. This was a big warehouse in Offenbach and it was organized by different floors. You can see here the intake floor with the crated boxes of books. The initial man in charge was Seymour Pomrenze, who was a military officer and a commanding presence, very good organizer and just insisted that this was going to be a success. And he was rapidly followed by Isaac Bencowitz, also a military officer veteran of two World Wars. The two of them were Jewish American and cared very deeply about the fate of these books. It mattered deeply to them.

But the problem of identifying and restituting them was enormous. It would have taken many years for a team of people to open every book and try to figure out whose it was if there hadn't been some streamlined way to do it. And Bencowitz came up with this idea, which was to photograph the book

stamps and ex-libris plates that were in the books, put them onto pages with numbers, and to have the German workforce who couldn't read Hebrew or Polish or many of the other languages that these book stamps came in--they would memorize the image, and if they found a book with that image--so they would memorize a small number, and then if they found that image they would place that book in the numbered bin. And so this rapid sorting took place of an initial group of books. And it was really a remarkable effort, you know, that over a few months most of these books had been sorted through and many of them identified.

At the same time, there were hundreds of thousands of books that were still unidentifiable or orphaned. Many did not have book stamps. Many didn't have signatures. They were defaced, they were damaged by mold, by dampness. There are many reasons why a book couldn't be identified, and of course even if it was identified, finding the owner or the owner's heirs was extremely difficult given how many Jews had died in this time. So another solution had to be found to these identifiable books, what to do with them and that is a very long story. It would take me an entire lecture to tell you that story.

But what occurred was that a Jewish organization was created. It was based in the United States but with an international membership. It was known as Jewish Cultural Reconstruction and over a few years' time, Jewish Cultural Reconstruction gained the right to essentially be the successor agency of these books and to distribute them as it saw fit, with the idea of restoring the Jewish community and Jewish cultural heritage to those who survived. And this was not a program that focused on the remainder of Jews in Germany or in Eastern Europe. It rather distributed books to Israel, about 43 percent went to Israel, and about 38 percent came to the United States. In the United States they went to different theological seminaries, to yeshivas, to other religious and cultural Jewish institutions, as well as to some secular universities and the Library of Congress. Another group of books were distributed around the world to Latin America in particular as well as England, and a fairly small number to Germany. These decisions essentially reinforced an idea of restitution as a collective, as having a collective meaning not an individual meaning.

So I want to highlight two women here, who were involved in this final phase of the book effort, the book missions of the war years. One of them was Lucy Schildkret Dawidowicz, who became a renowned Jewish- American historian of the Holocaust. She herself had been a historian and researcher doing work in Vilna at the Yiddish Scientific Institute known as a YIVO before the war, before the Germans took over that part of Poland and looted YIVO's books. From the United States, after the war, Dawidowicz went to Germany to work as part of the Jewish relief efforts and she found herself at the Offenbach Archival Depot looking for--pleading for books to share with displaced persons, but then beginning to look at the books to try to identify them. And she didn't expect to spend very much time at Offenbach, but instead she spent four months. She reviewed a hundred sixty volumes of books and periodicals there at Offenbach and managed to identify 33,000 of them, many of them the recovered YIVO collections which then were sent to New York City.

Also involved in this effort is someone who's a familiar name to all: Hannah Arendt, the political philosopher who, during the war years, was a researcher and executive director of the organization Jewish Cultural Reconstruction. She was involved in compiling lists of Jewish cultural treasures that were in occupied—Axis occupied countries and distributing these lists so that people who were searching might have some idea of where materials might be located. And when she became head of Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, she was involved in looking for more books that had been looted and in the

distribution process of those books. So she played a very important role during and immediately after the war in the fate of Jewish books.

So in terms of the post-war legacies of these collecting missions during World War Two and the role of librarians and scholars, archivists and the like, I would point in two directions. One is the books themselves and their role in American libraries. The Library of Congress mission, the denazification of books and the Jewish Cultural Reconstruction books all embodied American initiatives and collecting during the war.

You can see a few examples here from the library, my own library at the University of Pennsylvania. The two books on the top are books with Nazi content that were removed in the denazification effort and sent to the Penn Library. As you can see, they are basically pulp fiction. They were--one is a detective story, the other is a historical romance, and they were both cheaply printed books made to entertain and distract the troops on the front. They were known as field post books. The book on the bottom is from the Katz Center for Advanced Studies at Penn and it was a looted, unidentified book. You can see on the left there's a book stamp that shows it had been at Offenbach Archival Depot, that little round stamp in purple. On the right-hand side of the page is the bookplate of Jewish Cultural Reconstruction which had been put in the books as a record and memorial to the fate of Jews and the fate of their books during the war, and of this remarkable effort to preserve cultural heritage in the wake of all the destruction.

These book acquisitions efforts helped define the post-war intellectual order as an internationalist one, with the US in a dominant position. National security and intellectual leadership went hand in hand, and it required an expansive development of research libraries and international holdings. Another legacy, and maybe the most important legacy, is that these wartime missions shaped the information science field after the war. Of course, after the war, computer technology was hugely important, the growth of science and technical fields as well.

But what is interesting is how many figures who were involved in the war time collecting found themselves at the leading edge of information management in the post-war period. Eugene Power, who founded University Microfilms international, was a microfilm expert called upon to advise on how to reproduce rapidly all of these enemy publications. His company now is ProQuest, the big information giant. Jesse Shera was an OSS organizational wizard who figured out how to manage a card catalog that included materials, not only the of text but of visual materials as well. He went on to a distinguished career in the areas of technical automation and information science in library schools after the war. And Frederick Kilgour, who called me one night after I wrote him an email asking about my uncle Reuben Peiss and told me he was the man who recruited Reuben Peiss into the OSS. Frederick Kilgour was the executive director of the OSS agency that was acquiring enemy publications. After the war, he used his expertise to found the OCLC, which was a very early venture in technical cooperation via computers and modems, and OCLC of course has produced WorldCat, which is the largest international bibliographic database and which has a direct lineage to the war years.

Little did I know when my book came out in January that research librarians and faculty would again be called upon to mobilize in an emergency threatening our nation and the world. I hope the story I've told today has been an interesting one to you that tells you something about a little-known episode of World War Two and how it was waged. But I also hope it's a little timely for you as we think about how to

respond to the coronavirus pandemic and how that's going to reshape our world of knowledge and our repositories of learning. Thank you.