**Article of the Week**

 1. Show evidence of a close reading on the page.

 2. Write a one-page reflection in your WN

**The books have been burning**

**By Daniel Schwartz,** CBC News

There is something about burning books.

Shredding, soaking, pulping or any other other method of destroying books just does not compare. Neither does banning or censoring books. Many of us can even identify the temperature at which paper combusts. But can we answer the same question for other materials? *Fahrenheit 451* was the title of Ray Bradbury's famous 1953 novel about book burning and thought control.

Book burning has a long history, too. The first recorded state-sponsored book burning was in China in 213 BC, according to Matthew Fishburn, the author of *Burning Books*. The burnings were ordered by Qin Shi Huang, the Chinese emperor who also started The Great Wall and the Terracotta Army.

Books burnings especially call to mind images of the Nazi bonfires in Germany in May, 1933. There is a long list of burnings after the war so Rev. Terry Jones of Florida would stand atop both an ancient and modern tradition if his Qur'an burning goes ahead.

"The horrific history of exterminating books, sometimes exterminating the authors at the same time, is as much a part of current history as it was of earlier times," Haig Bosmajian writes in his book, also entitled *Burning Books*. "Century after century, the book burners have lit the fearful, powerful, magical fire to reduce to ashes the fearful, powerful, magical books."

**Reasons for book burnings**

For Rebecca Knuth, the author of two books on book burnings and the destruction of libraries, books are the target because they "are the embodiment of ideas and if you hold extreme beliefs you cannot tolerate anything that contradicts those beliefs or is in competition with them."

Book burnings "are highly symbolic. When you destroy a book you are destroying your enemy and your enemy's beliefs," she said in an interview with CBC News. Knuth's latest book is *Burning Books and Leveling Libraries: Extremist Violence and Cultural Destruction*. In her research Knuth found that book burnings are seldom isolated barbaric acts. She explains that there are patterns and the book burners "are following out some kind of logical game plan."

Here now is a list of some of the book burnings that have happened since the end of the Second World War.

**United States, 1948:** That year residents in Binghampton, N.Y. went house to house gathering comic books they feared would spread moral depravity among American youth and burned them.

"Groups of students continued to burn comic books in school yards around the country, some under the sway of their parents and teachers, some in concord with them," writes David Hadju in his 2008 book *The Ten-Cent Plague: The Great Comic-Book Scare and How It Changed America*. Another wave of comic book burnings followed the publication of *Seduction of the Innocent*, by American psychiatrist and comic book foe Fredric Wertham in 1954.

**United States, 1956:** In 1956 psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich was convicted of contempt of court in connection with his research on orgasm and his orgone energy accumulators. On two occasions Reich's books were burned, overseen by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. In New York six tonnes of his books and papers were burned, including *The Sexual Revolution, Character Analysis*, and *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*.

**China, 1966-1976:** Books were burned in China as part of Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution, while about seven million people died during those years.

**Sri Lanka, 1981:** In 1981 the Jaffna Public Library in northern Sri Lanka was considered one of the best libraries in Asia. Following the shooting deaths of three Sinhalese policemen in the majority Tamil city, Sinhalese security forces went on a brutal rampage and burned down the library. More than 95,000 books were destroyed.

**United Kingdom, 1988:** As soon as it was published Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses* was under attack by people who considered it anti-Islamic. The first British burning was at a protest in Bolton. More burnings would follow in the U.K. and elsewhere. In 1989 CBC reported that copies were burned at two Toronto bookstores.

**Bosnia, 1992:** Serbian nationalist forces started a fire in the national library of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo by bombing the building. When it started burning they shot anybody who tried to save the books. About 1.5 million books were destroyed. Author and University of Hawaii professor Rebecca Knuth said it was part of a deliberate policy. By destroying the books, the Serbian nationalists' goal was to "wipe the Muslim presence out of the whole country and deny a long history of the Muslims in Bosnia," she told CBC News.

"You can deny a lot of that history if you go after the primary source material." They had been purging every library, every Muslim institution, she added.

**United States, 2000:** A public lecture by author Dan Flynn about his book on Mumia-Abu Jamal was disrupted by Jamal supporters. (Jamal had been convicted of killing a police officer in 1981.) The protesters seized copies of the book that were for sale and burned them outside the store.

**United States, 2001:** *Harry Potter* books were a "flashpoint" for book burners in the U.S. in 2001. One of those burnings was in the Harvest Assembly of God Church in Pennsylvania. "We got some people mad at us, but it's good to have publicity," said Rev. George Bender. Besides the *Potter* series by J.K. Rowling, books by actress Shirley MacLaine and psychic Edgar Cayce were also torched.There have been at least six book burnings involving Potter books in the U.S.

**Iraq, 2003:** Following the allied takeover of Baghdad during the 2003 invasion of Iraq, almost all the books in both the national library and a nearby Islamic library were destroyed by fire. Looting was widespread in the city at the time but it was not clear who set the fires.

**Canada, 2004:** The United Talmud Torah school library in the St. Laurent neighbourhood of Montreal was set on fire, destroying about 15,000 books. [The burning](http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2005/01/18/firebombsentence-jewishschool0118.html) was carried out by Sleiman El Merhebi. The 18-year-old said he was motivated by events in the Middle East.

**Israel, 2008:** Orthodox Jewish students burned hundreds of copies of the New Testament in Or Yehuda, a suburb of Tel Aviv. The texts had been distributed by the group Jews for Jesus. The campaign was organized by the town's deputy mayor, Uzi Aharon. "All the books went up in fire … in Or Yehuda, where the residents observed the commandment to 'purge the evil from your midst,'" he said. There had been earlier burnings of New Testaments in Israel.

Possible WN topics:

* Why would people burn books? What does this say about the power of the written word?
* How do you feel about censorship?
* What book means a lot to you? What book would you save from being burned?