

Platform Accountability Through Digital “Poison Cabinets” | Knight First Amendment Institute

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April 15, 2021

As denazification and reconstruction efforts ramped up across Germany in the wake of World War II, Germans and occupying Allied forces found themselves struggling with difficult questions around censorship and preservation, among them what to do with decades worth of Nazi writings. While books including *Mein Kampf* were banned for a period of years after the war as part of an effort to redesign Germany’s political system, reformulate its national identity, and reverse years of indoctrination, the prospect of purging them completely—leaving no copy unpulped—carried unwelcome echoes of Nazi campaigns of book burning and repression. With collective memory and public remembrance as key pillars of the country’s transitional process, the total erasure of past horrors would have been sorely out of step.

To balance these two competing needs—on one hand, to limit the circulation of ugly, potentially corruptive materials; on the other, to preserve them as objects of study and reflection—Germany’s reformers drew inspiration from an archival institution dating back centuries: the Giftschränk.

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