

Knuth, Rebecca. *Burning Books and Leveling Libraries: Extremist Violence and Cultural Destruction*. Praeger: Westport, CT. 2006. 248 pages. \$39.95 (ISBN: 0-275-99007-9)

Books are the portals to the world. They allow us to travel to far off worlds, to meet people of other countries, to experience our past. Libraries hold these portals in a common place for everyone to have access to at no cost and regardless of station in life. To think of someone deliberately destroying such a place to make a point strikes a chord in those who hold libraries and books as an essential part of life.

Professor Knuth explores this issue in depth. She begins by laying a sociological basis for vandalism, moves into the various reasons that people attack libraries and shares vivid examples of such attacks. She explores extremism by going back to the French Revolution and following the ideas, as they apply to extremism, of the Enlightenment through to the twenty-first century. The book is broken into three sections that look at alienated groups within society, ethnicity, ideology, war and anarchy and how biblioclasm was used in each situation. She explains in detail how groups such as the National Socialists destroyed books and select libraries in order to push their agenda. Included is a discussion of the Taliban and the Pol-Pot regimes and how they attempted to totally destroy the literary heritage of their respective countries of Afghanistan and Cambodia. She also looks at the policies of militaristic governments and their seemingly blind eye to biblioclasm in the countries they invade. Notable here is her explanation of the looting in Iraq during this country's current conflict and the current administrations' lack of protection of the cultural heritage of Iraq. It is frightening to think that even modern American policies include such a tool.

Written in academic style, the book is a thorough look at the topic of library destruction. This book would be an excellent discussion tool for those who are concerned about intellectual freedom. This is not a read for the faint of heart. This book sounds the clarion call to protect our libraries and our books in any way we possibly can. This is a must read for all professional librarians, museum curators and cultural center directors.

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