

Holocaust museum shows tyranny of book burnings

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By CARA NISSMAN

WASHINGTON — German Jewish poet Heinrich Heine (1797-1856) said, "Where books are burned in the end people will be burned."

Seventy years ago this month, Heine's prediction became a reality when German university students burned more than 25,000 books in Berlin, igniting a holocaust against words, ideals and humanity.

"They burned books not just by Jewish authors like Albert Einstein or Sigmund Freud, but by any writer who wrote differently from the idea of what a German state should be,"

said Sara Bloomfield, director of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum here. "They burned books by Helen Keller, Ernest Hemingway and Jack London — authors that had ideas about democracy."

The Holocaust museum's "Fighting the Fires of Hate: America and the Nazi Book Burnings," which opened late last month, examines Americans' reactions to the book burnings. It is one of several exhibits commemorating the museum's 10th anniversary.

Bloomfield said American reaction came from religious leaders, artists, writers and journalists, among others. Along with articles denouncing the

"holocaust of books," the exhibit displays examples of how, during World War II, the U.S. government used the 1933 book bonfires to convey the depravity of the Nazis. The Office of War Information even had posters that read, "Democracies read books, tyrannical states burn books."

Yet the exhibit also underscores Americans' short attention span. About a decade after the book burning, when the Nazis started killing Jews, Americans did not instantly view the action as a sufficient reason to get embroiled in war, Bloomfield said.

As visitors approach the end of the

books exhibit, which runs through Oct. 13, they'll read about how the Harry Potter series ignited ire and fire in New Mexico.

Another new exhibit, "Anne Frank the Writer: An Unfinished Story," opens June 12 and will surprise readers of "The Diary of Anne Frank."

"A lot of people don't know that while Anne Frank was in hiding, she discovered that her great ambition was to be a writer," said Bloomfield.

"She wrote essays, stories and started a novel," Bloomfield said. Frank's famous diary came about when she heard about a radio broadcast by the Dutch government requesting people

to save their memoirs and letters for publication after the war.

The exhibit contains several examples of Frank's writing and editing. It is the first time her writings will be available outside of the Netherlands, where Frank hid with her family.

On Sept. 18, visitors can learn about the brave people who saved children from annihilation and how the children struggled with their new identities in an exhibit called "Life in Shadows: Hidden Children and the Holocaust."

For more information, go to www.ushmm.org, or call 202-488-0400.