



Figure 21-1.



Figure 21-2.

Tip 21 – Are Exhibits Political?

One of the issues I struggle with is the extent to which politics and exhibiting mix. We say, and we believe, that politics and philatelic exhibiting are independent of each other and one should not affect the other. Philately is a pursuit that is largely removed from the world of politics. Yet, our exhibiting subjects may include items that are political.

But that is not the real thing that bothers me. The real issue is this: Can I exhibit material that might offend a fellow philatelist? One of my secondary collecting interests is the illustrated covers to commemorate the opening of Israeli post offices in 1957 of the then-occupied Gaza Strip. As you can see in Figures 21-1 through 21-3, some of them are quite attractive and can make an attention-grabbing illustrated mail exhibit.

Other commemorative covers from Gaza, such as those shown in Figures 21-4 and 21-5, convey a political message that is as likely to evoke political feelings now as well. While some philatelists may support the political content of the messages on the covers, other philatelists may be equally opposed. Or, from the opposite perspective, Figs 21-6 and 21-7, showing stamps depicting Palestinian ‘Resistance against [Israeli] Aggression on Gaza’ or ‘Revolutionary Martyrs’, may find support among some philatelists while others are opposed to the message on the stamps.

There are differences between the world of exhibitors and the world of collectors. Not all attendees at stamp shows approach exhibits from a perspective of seeing how well a story is told and how well the title page conveys the content of the exhibit; many of them want to see the stamps and do not attend to the finer points

of philatelic exhibiting. Does it matter if they see political stamps? From the perspective of preparing an exhibit, do I have any obligation to refrain from possibly antagonizing fellow philatelists?

Other exhibitors have faced this issue and have successfully addressed it. Ed Andrews, in his gold medal exhibit *Hitler Youth— The Generations of Lost Innocence* faced one of the greatest exhibiting challenges possible: addressing Nazism and a set of Nazi practices within the confines of a philatelic exhibit.

Who among us does not find Nazism abhorrent? Ed treated his subject masterfully. On his title page (shown in Figure 21-8), in bold print, he stated,

“This exhibit, and the artifacts and images, does not intend to offend the viewer, nor glorify or validate the actions of the Nazis. Rather, the exhibit is a historical accounting of the manipulation and exploitation of German youth, before and during WWII.”

That’s clear. Unambiguous. Well done. The disclaimer makes it obvious the exhibit is a “historical accounting” and cannot be confused with a contemporary political philosophy or position. The exhibit is not reflecting a contemporary political position. The exhibit, like my cachets from Gaza, is neither for or against: it describes.

For my Gaza exhibit, therefore, as is the case with so much in exhibiting, context matters. If I spell out the context (the situation in the Middle East in 1957 and how cachets expressed the sentiments of segments of the Israeli population) there is no political message contained within the exhibit. Philatelic elements may display political context – think of U.S. or Confederate Patriotic covers– but that does not mean they are political.



Figure 21-3.

Figure 21-4.



Figure 21-5.

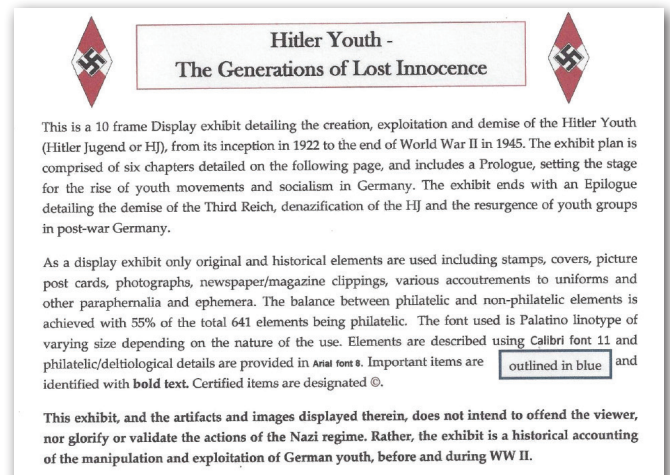


Figure 21-8.



Figure 21-6.

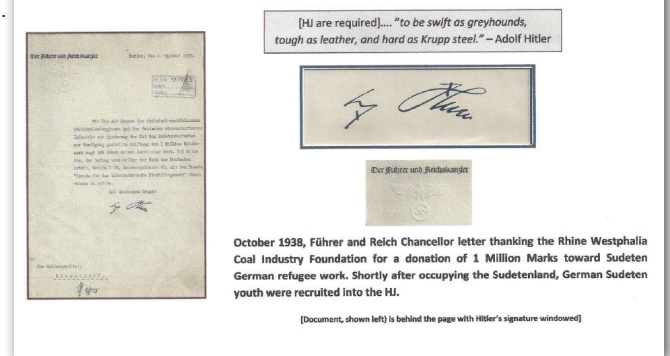


Figure 21-7.

