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Mary Rasenberger

December 2, 2024

Matt Baldacci, Publisher

John Mutter, Editor-in-Chief

Shelf Awareness

Dear Mr. Baldacci and Mr. Mutter,

As fans of *Shelf Awareness*, the Authors Guild was saddened and distressed to learn of *Shelf Awareness*' recent cancellation of an ad for Bernard-Henri Lévy's new book, [*Israel Alone*](#). Matt Baldacci explained to Melanie Notkin, the consultant seeking to place the ad, that the cancellation was due to the concern that bookstore employees might be upset by the appearance of an ad for a book about Israel, stating:

“We have a responsibility to our 250 independent bookstore partners, and it's our feeling that running that ad in their publications, for some of those partners, is going to cause them trouble that they haven't asked for and don't wish to have. For certain stores, an ad for *Israel Alone* will cause the employees to go to the management and say, ‘We don't support this. Why are you doing this?’ Now we can debate, you know, whether they're right or they're wrong, but the point is, it will happen.”

While we acknowledge that *Shelf Awareness* and bookstores have the right to make their own business decisions, rejecting an advertisement to shield staff from potential discomfort sets a troubling precedent. This decision not only appears patronizing but also constitutes viewpoint discrimination. And by seemingly applying a different standard to this book than applies to books expressing different views, the decision has been perceived as antisemitic.

Equally concerning, it undermines the fundamental principles of open discourse that have long been the cornerstone of American publishing.

We ask you to rescind this decision. If we in the book world cannot tolerate and support the written word from different voices around the country and world, who will? It is only by educating ourselves that we have informed opinions and denying information about resources to help better understand the situation is a dagger to the heart of free speech.

We recognize that store employees and patrons hold deeply felt and equally valid perspectives on this complex issue. Their right to question, debate, and even disagree with the viewpoints expressed in any book is fundamental to meaningful discourse. However, preventing access to a perspective does not advance this discourse – it diminishes it. The presence of a book or advertisement in the marketplace of ideas does not constitute an endorsement of its contents but rather an acknowledgment that understanding often emerges from engaging with multiple

viewpoints, even those we may strongly dispute. If you feel free to censor certain viewpoints today, be assured that your views will be censored tomorrow.

Books are essential tools for broadening our understanding of complex issues, challenging our preconceptions, and fostering meaningful discourse. This is especially true for contentious topics where multiple valid narratives and experiences deserve consideration. By preemptively removing certain perspectives from the conversation, we risk creating an echo chamber that stifles the very democratic values our industry aims to uphold. Protecting the right to publish does not diminish the right to critique – indeed, it strengthens it.

We remind all those who are part of the book ecosystem and help bring authors' works out into the world that censoring and blacklisting books is never justifiable.

As we say in our [Council's recent statement](#):

“We remind all publishers, agents, readers, literary organizations, and writing communities that this type of censorship cannot ever be justified and that we cannot allow the current climate of fear and intolerance to be used to bully or silence writers. It is by writing and publishing, not by censorship, that we can best shine a light on injustice. Free expression is the soil from which democracy sprouts and thrives.”

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. E. Rasenberger', is displayed on a light gray rectangular background.

Mary E. Rasenberger
CEO, The Authors Guild