

At a dinner with students and professors in December 2019 I learned that a scholarship at Arkansas Tech University, where I am an Assistant Professor of English had been named in honor of Dr. Michael Link, a former Associate Professor of History. <https://www.arkansastechnews.com/university/new-atu-scholarship-made-possible-by-link/> My colleague told me that he had taught Holocaust denial while a professor at Arkansas Tech and she couldn't believe they named a scholarship after him. I was shocked by this and decided to look into the matter. The following is what I learned and the treatment I received from my colleagues and the administration at my university as I sought to uncover the truth and then to have the name of the scholarship changed or the money returned to the estate of Michael Link. (Personal conversations referenced have been documented in my journal.)

The case against Dr. Michael Link:

I have been able to substantiate through documentation and personal interviews that Dr. Link taught Holocaust denial at Arkansas Tech both in the undergraduate and graduate classroom. The most egregious example of this came in 2005 when Dr. Link taught the graduate seminar Modern European Intellectual History and provided an assignment that purported to teach "both sides" of whether or not the Holocaust happened. Students were presented with Paul Rassinier's *Debunking the Genocide Myth*, published by the neo-Nazi Noontide Press as well as *Made in Russia*, published by Historical Review Press as historical texts. Both publications claim that the Holocaust is a fabrication and are in no way accepted as legitimate by historians. (Attached is a letter from a colleague documenting what occurred in that course from his point of view, Document A). I was able to speak to a student who withdrew from the class upon going to purchase one of these books and finding herself on a neo-Nazi website. She told me that she could not in good conscience give her money to neo-Nazis, and that she found the class disturbing and lodged a complaint about the course. The History Department has kept no records of the syllabus, Dr. Link's CV, or of any official hearing or actions taken to reprimand Dr. Link, having recently shredded all such documents as part of "routine housekeeping", but a professor in the department told me that "we had a discussion and we took care of it." Dr. Link was taken out of the classroom for one semester and was then allowed to teach only undergraduate classes after that until 2015 when he co-taught a graduate course. (Attached is the document asking for Dr. Link to be reinstated as graduate faculty and his CV, which I found on the server of the graduate college, Document B). They are now saying both that he did nothing wrong and that they punished him sufficiently.

Numerous members of the campus community can confirm that Dr. Link questioned the validity of Holocaust history in his undergraduate classroom, encouraging his students to question the number of 6,000,000 Jews, for example. I spoke to a librarian at our university library who said that Dr. Link was her favorite professor, and in an attempt to defend him she told me the following on December 13, 2018: "I know he was not a Holocaust denier. I had heard the rumors that he was, so I went and privately asked him about it. He said, 'I believe the Holocaust happened, but not on the scale they say.'" When I informed her that this was classic rhetoric for Holocaust deniers and that she had just confirmed for me that he was a denier, she seemed shocked. The number of people in our community who came in contact with these ideas in the classroom must be quite large and certainly includes the large majority of high school history teachers in the area who often have obtained their history degrees from Arkansas Tech and thus likely studied under Michael Link.

Dr. Link self-published a book with Adams Press, *The Social Philosophy of Reinhold Niebuhr: An Historical Introduction*, in 1975. Although Niebuhr was not anti-Semitic, Link uses the book as a platform to

express anti-Semitism and minimize Nazi atrocities. (The entirety of the book is attached as two PDF files, Document C & D). I direct you especially to pages 25-26 where Dr. Link draws on many anti-Semitic tropes, writing: "In Germany the Jews were prominent in banking, the press, the Socialist party and the Communist party." He then again states within the same paragraph that "there were many Jewish bankers" and "Many Jews were bankers." Stating this three times within one paragraph, he implies that since Jews were bankers they were a legitimate political enemy of the Nazis. He also states: "Niebuhr thought that the Jews justly resented the Nazi terror, but one should remember that they were not the only victims of the National Socialists." This sentence twists Niebuhr's thought in order to minimize Jewish suffering in the Holocaust. Perhaps most damning, Link gives the entire history of the Nazis throughout his "Fascism" sections and never once mentions the Holocaust, completely eliding it from his book.

Under his former name, Michael Dohse, Dr. Link wrote the PhD Dissertation "American Periodicals and the Palestine Triangle, April, 1936 to February, 1947" in 1966. Although he does list persecution of Jews in Germany as a cause of Jewish settlement in Palestine, the dissertation specifically questions the anti-Semitism of Nazi elites, leaves out any explanation of the Holocaust except to mention that the British dismissed reports of it as "hysteria," and refers to American Zionists as merely propagandists (95, 132). (The dissertation is attached in full as the document Link Dissertation, Document E) I would especially give attention to the pages 27-28 where he writes: "A large percentage of immigrants during the period came from Germany where, in 1933, Adolf Hitler and his National Socialists had come into power. Although it might be foolish to believe that the party's 'elite' believed much of the anti-Semitic material they propagated, they acted as if they did." In one of his only other references to the Holocaust, he mentions "the British Foreign Office's dismissal of reports of Jewish massacres in Eastern Europe as hysteria" (105). He is not calling it hysteria himself, but he does nothing to refute that claim or put it in context. Throughout, he often refers to Jews as "Hebrews."

Finally, on the Arkansas Tech obituary for Michael Link, Billy Roper has written the following: "I had the good fortune to receive Dr. Link's instruction and advice in a couple of graduate level History courses while I was finishing up my M.L.A. at A.T.U. in 1998-99. He was unaffected by the opinions of others, when he considered them plastic and shallow. Nor was he a slave to fashion or dogma of any kind. Along with his uniqueness and admitted eccentricities, most memorable was his brilliant rapier wit while skewering some of the liberal faculty and students verbally. Once, I wrote a controversial paper for him about the origins of Marxism for which he gave me an 'A', but as an aside counseled me to be cautious because no other faculty member would have accepted it due its political perspective and conclusions. The world has lost a great mind and a brave heart. Requiescat in pace." Billy Roper is considered a "voice of violent neo-Nazism" by the Southern Poverty Law Center. <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/billy-roper> He attended Arkansas Tech University. He lives in Russellville. Although the language here is coded, I think it is easy to guess that the "controversial paper....about the origins of Marxism" was about a Jewish conspiracy theory.

It has recently come to my attention, that Henderson State University, where Link received his Bachelors and Masters degrees, has also received money from his estate and named the Michael Link History Scholarship in his honor. <https://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2019/feb/28/2-gifts-to-aid-hsu-s-scholars-of-histor/> They probably do not know about his Holocaust denial in the classroom or anti-Semitic writings.

Reaction to these Revelations at Arkansas Tech University, 2018-2019 (documented in my personal journal, unless otherwise noted):

I, Dr. Stein first brought the scholarship and Dr. Link's known history of Holocaust denial to the attention of the administration in a meeting with the Dean of the College of Arts and Humanities on December 12, 2018. I was told that dredging this up would only bring negative attention to Tech and that he wanted Link forgotten. He thought the best way for this to happen, was to leave the scholarship in place. He told me the money for students outweighed the harm of naming the scholarship after Link in his opinion. He would not agree that what had happened in Link's classroom was Holocaust denial, saying it was "a complicated issue" even when I explained that asking students to study both sides of whether or not the Holocaust occurred is a form of Holocaust denial.

After this, I became determined to document everything I could about Dr. Link's anti-Semitism, and to build a coalition of professors to help me fight this scholarship. I encountered massive resistance in the History Department and throughout my College. When I spoke the Head of the Department of History to request a copy of the syllabus and documents on the hearing for Dr. Link in 2005, he first told me that they had been digitized and the department would look for them, and later informed me in email that those documents had recently (in Fall 2018) been shredded as part of "routine housekeeping." I was surprised that the Department of History had maintained these documents for 13 years and then shredded them only months before receiving this money. However, I have no proof that this was done deliberately.

As it became known in the College that I was seeking evidence and as I spoke to colleagues looking for support, in January 2019, faculty who worked closely with my Dean began threatening my tenure and becoming physically aggressive towards me. One member who serves on Faculty Senate with me and works in the Dean's Office, when I approached him for support and presented my evidence, refused to support me, and said: "You should be worried about your job and your family more than what's right or wrong. When are you up for tenure?" in a threatening tone. He told me I was making a mistake. Another faculty member who works in the Dean's office told me that the Dean could not support me, saying: "What do you expect Sarah? If he does what you ask, he could lose his job." I said, "Sometimes you have to be willing to lose your job to do what's right." She looked shocked. I took her underlying message of both conversations to be that if I continued doing what I was doing, I would lose my job.

Two times, I went to the History Department to ask for evidence and speak to faculty there and one faculty member came out from his office specifically to burst into conversations with other colleagues, get very close to my face, and speak with a raised voice. When I started tearing up from fear the second time, the another faculty member told me I wasn't acting very professionally.

I went to the Dean and told him that I was now working in a hostile working environment. He kept asking, "But you know I care, right?" and needing me to reassure him even though I was crying throughout the meeting from the distress. He said that people would see the issue of the scholarship and of teaching both sides of whether the Holocaust happened differently and I needed to get used to that. He claimed that the University had not named a scholarship after Link, but that it "had been named after him automatically" and that it was not in any way an honor. He suggested I stop complaining and

try to productive things again. He said that I was in a community that might not care about anti-Semitism and I might have to learn to live with that.

I met twice with the President of the University, once on January 29, 2019 and once on February 15, 2019. In the first meeting she appeared supportive, saying she was sorry I was experiencing anti-Semitism and acting morally outraged by Link's actions and speech. But she did say: "We don't usually look into people who give money. There could be worse people." She also said this could be "a freedom of speech issue." She did not promise any actions. In the second meeting, she called me in to tell me that she had decided to keep the scholarship and keep it in Link's name. She justified it by saying it was his "free speech right." I asked her to explain what that had to do with keeping his money or keeping his name on the scholarship (even if we were to agree that it was his right to deny the Holocaust in a History classroom, which I do not believe is true since it is a matter of fact). She could not explain it, but said, "I just believe that it is integral to his free speech rights." She also made the argument that the University is not actually receiving the money, but simply holding it for students, who can spend it on "pizza or xbox." She then made the argument that the scholarship is not an honor. I pointed out that the press release (<https://www.arkansastechnews.com/university/new-atu-scholarship-made-possible-by-link/>) specifically says that the scholarship will ensure that "his influence at ATU will continue well into the future" and she said that all the press releases say that. I said, yes, because they are all honors. She said that if she left money it would be to help students and not to honor herself. I asked her why she wouldn't do it anonymously then. She said we couldn't know why he did it because he is dead, and therefore it may not be an honor. (I found this string of arguments nonsensical and essentially absurd, although I did not say this.) The most offensive moment came when I told her that I thought the geography of where we were (in a county where 54 white supremacists had just been arrested two days before) was leading people to not take Holocaust denial as seriously as they should. She pounded the table with her fist and said: "That's offensive! I find that offensive!" At this point, I teared up and told her that I was speaking from my personal experience living in Russellville, Arkansas. The meeting ended with us agreeing to bring speakers about the Holocaust, but I also made it clear that I did not agree with her decision about the scholarship.

Many faculty members have told me that they agree with my position, but are afraid to speak out and therefore it has been difficult to build any support among the faculty. However, students have more readily been interested to become involved in fighting the scholarship. Also, the two of us have been accused of creating a problem that only exists if we are here to perceive it. Dr. Vork was told "you are shining a spotlight on nothing." And I have been told by a colleague that if I was not here to experience this as anti-Semitism it would not be anti-Semitism.