

POLISH AMERICAN LEADERS PROTEST VILE DEPICTION

More than 200 leaders of Polish American organizations signed a letter to members of Congress asking that a book which offers a vile depiction of Poles during the Holocaust be discontinued in the schools.

The letter was distributed to members of the House Committee on Education and Labor, Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education. It follows a decision by a Tennessee school district to drop the book from its curriculum.

The best-selling graphic novel, *MAUS*, by Art Spiegelman, which is targeted at children, features illustrations that are outrageous and needlessly offensive. But it is the lies, and the vicious insults hurled at Poles, that merit the most serious condemnation.

The letter by the Polish American coalition, led by Edward Wojciech Jeśman, president of the Polish American Strategic Initiative, lists several reasons why *Maus* does not belong as an assigned or recommended book in the schools.

- The book offers a flagrantly inaccurate account of the Polish experience during the Holocaust. Poles are portrayed as Nazi sympathizers, which is a lie—they were the victims of Hitler's genocidal agenda. Polish deaths were proportionately the greatest of any nation in World War II, which is why the deaths of Poles and Polish Jews constitutes a double Holocaust. Moreover, many Poles, drawing on their Catholic upbringing, risked their lives to save Jews.
- Poles are depicted as pigs. "Pigs in popular culture are viewed as disgusting, filthy animals," the letter notes,

“while in Jewish culture, pigs and pork are unclean in a way other animals are not. *MAUS* employs the same imagery of Poles found in Nazi propaganda, where they are routinely referred to as ‘Polish pigs.’”

- The takeaway for Polish schoolchildren who are required to read this book is that their people are morally debased and that their heritage is evil. No child deserves to be psychologically raped by educators.

Removing books from a school’s curriculum should never be taken lightly, but when the book in question (a) maligns an entire ethnic group (b) is historically indefensible and (c) is aimed at innocent, unsuspecting children, then to make it available in the schools is nothing short of educational malpractice.

Those who defend assigning *MAUS* would not assign a book which characterized blacks as pit bulls or American Indians as piranhas, never mind distort their historical heritage by depicting them as savages.

Many thanks to Ronald Rychlak, Distinguished Professor of Law at the University of Mississippi, for bringing this issue to our attention. He is a member of the Catholic League’s board of advisors. Bill Donohue would also like to note that one of the signatories, Richard Walawender, serves on our board of directors.