

## FORUM

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*With the exception of editing for conformity of capitalization, punctuation, and citation style, letters to the Forum are published verbatim.*

### **American Archivist Cover Illustration**

#### **To the editor:**

We are very disturbed by the illustration chosen for the Fall/Winter [2003] cover of the *American Archivist*. The negative depiction of a corporation on the front cover of our professional journal seems inappropriate for an association whose membership includes both archivists working in corporations or at universities and historical societies whose holdings include business records.

While we certainly understand that the cover illustration was chosen to represent a political poster collection described in the journal, the selection of that image was unfortunate and inflammatory. Any of the other posters used to illustrate the article itself would have made the same point as a graphic on the cover.

In addition, the choice of this cover represents an unnecessary legal risk for the Society. Although the cover is clearly a parody and defensible against a charge of trademark infringement, there are corporate law departments that would have no reluctance to file a charge simply to make a point. Once a nonprofit like SAA is involved in unnecessary legal action, we've already lost. If the *American Archivist* must print parodies of trademarks on its cover, the SAA would be well advised to parody only those trademarks that have been abandoned or those of inactive companies with inactive legal departments.

Most importantly, the published cover sends all of the wrong messages to managers who already view the preservation of the historical record as tangential to contemporary business practice. Though we are sure that it was unintended, this issue of the *American Archivist* communicates a strong

antibusiness message with its provocative cover and holds the potential to undermine the professional credibility of SAA members who work in business settings. This is one journal issue that we will not be sharing with our business associates.

PHIL MOONEY  
*The Coca-Cola Company*

BECKY TOUSEY  
*Kraft Foods Inc.*

ELIZABETH ADKINS  
*Ford Motor Company*

JANE NOKES  
*Scotiabank Group*

BRUCE BRUEMMER  
*Cargill*

PAUL LASEWICZ  
*IBM*

LESLIE SIMON  
*CIGNA*

ED RIDER  
*Procter and Gamble Company*

**To the editor:**

I write as an archivist who has never been employed by a commercial enterprise; one who in his personal life is a longstanding critic of much corporate behavior; and one who had no sympathy for corporate archival criticism of Bill Maher's presidential address some years back; but who is nonetheless disturbed by the editorial decision to run an attack ad against corporations on the cover of the fall/winter 2003 issue. SAA only damages itself by unnecessarily embarrassing and provoking a section of its membership.

Just as I believe that Maher, even as president, has a right to express his opinions without fear of being censored for representing an "official" SAA view, so the issue here is not whether SAA should censor its authors. No one is suggesting that use of the ad as an illustration for the article would be inappropriate. But the *cover* of the SAA journal does represent the entire organization, and not just to its members but to everyone who might reasonably view the image.

Some of my corporate archives colleagues have shared with me their letter to you and your response. In your response you write that "We ensure that each cover illustration is accompanied by an 'About the Cover' note on the inside front cover in order that its context is properly established." Notwithstanding the "about the cover" text (which, by virtue of not being *on* the cover does little to provide effective context to the image), I still feel that the cover was gratuitous.

The use of an offensive poster on the cover was—as you yourself imply ("I viewed using it on the cover as a good way to attract the attention of readers. . .")—primarily an attention-getting device. As such, it is doubly offensive because it places sensationalism and circulation above all other priorities.

The journal should show equal sensitivity to the reasonable feelings of its corporate members just as it should show sensitivity to other members. For example, I would hope that concern for the opinions of its women members would prevent AA from putting an uncensored still from a *Playboy* photo shoot on its cover even though it would be eye-catching and even though an article on the *Playboy* archives might be running within; similarly, I would hope that interest in its GLBT members would stop any thought of running a “Matt Shepherd is Burning in Hell” placard on the cover even though it would draw attention and was in relation to an article on collections of right-wing religious organizations.

Comparing the ad to a photo of nuns misses the point entirely, it seems to me—“Certainly there was no thought of conveying an antibusiness message (as you acknowledge), just as there is no thought of sending a pro-Catholic Church message by having a photograph of nuns on the cover of the next issue.” The useful analogy would be to running a virulently anti-Catholic cartoon on the cover. I would submit that such a decision would naturally lead priests and nuns who are members of SAA to question whether the organization was sensitive to their needs, and their resource allocators to question whether it made sense to support their archivists’ membership in the association.

In the end, I just don’t see the sense in placing sensationalism ahead of common courtesy when choosing a cover illustration.

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University of Wyoming*

#### **The Hoover Institution and Russian Archives**

##### **To the editor:**

There are several factual errors in the recent *American Archivist* article on the Russian archives [George Bolotenko, “Frost on the Walls in Winter: Russian and Ukrainian Archives since the Great Dislocation (1991–1999),” Fall/Winter 2003 issue], particularly with regard to the Hoover Institution. Please note that the correct formal name is the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace. Other points that require correction are as follows:

1. Hoover was not a part of the agreement for the Leaders of the Russian Revolution project. It was a joint pilot project launched by the Rosarkhiv and Chadwyck-Healey.
2. Comintern finding aids were not microfilmed by Hoover. Hoover microfilmed 2,190 finding aids from GARF and 331 finding aids from RGASPI, and 15 from RGANI. Total number of reels with finding aids is 455.

## AMERICAN ARCHIVIST COVER ILLUSTRATION

3. Hoover microfilmed actual documents from two RGANI fonds on 1,011 reels; from thirty-eight RGASPI fonds on 2,772 reels; and from fourteen GARF fonds on 7,823 reels. The total number of reels from all three repositories is 11,676.

We would be happy to respond to fact-checking questions any time. It is also possible to learn more about our projects by consulting our Web site at <http://www.hoover.org/hila>.

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*Hoover Institution*  
*Stanford University*