

The Political Librarian: A Harbinger of Library Advocacy

ANDREW T. SULAVIK

As I assume the role of editor in chief of *The Political Librarian*, my goal is to help make this journal the harbinger of library advocacy. We are dedicated to publishing material that contains certain tenets of thought, diverse perspectives, strategies, recommendations, and pertinent knowledge, all aimed at inspiring readers to keenly engage in advocacy for libraries and the library profession. This comes at a propitious moment. Free speech and intellectual freedom in an open society such as ours are under assault. Within the body politic others are attempting to restrict access to books, censor language, and shout down any ability to criticize and contest the views of others – all in the name of shielding individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or offensive. It is a time when we need to put out a clarion call for library advocacy and rise above today's rhetorical disruptions to examine recent events in a clear-eyed and impartial manner, which is necessary to make us better library advocates. *The Political Librarian* is poised to do just this.

Emerging threats to library professionals also make it an opportune moment to reflect on our core values, and to redouble our dedication to the five laws of Library Science, first proposed by S.R. Ranganathan in 1924:

1. Books Are for Use
2. Every Reader His/Her Book
3. Every Book Its Reader
4. Save the Time of the Reader
5. The Library Is a Growing Organism

These tenets have been the pillars of Library Science for the past century. The arduous task of consistently applying and defending these tenets in practice have lent credibility to the notion that libraries are the institutional foundation of a true democracy. If these pillars crumble, the edifice will fall.

Moreover, these tenets preserve libraries as great social equalizers. There are many inequalities in our society, but perhaps the most unnecessary inequality surrounds education for all. Libraries and their staff offer the widest possible array of indispensable, informational resources needed to nourish the mind and help all to express themselves with intelligence, confidence, compassion and, perhaps most important, with dignity. Libraries provide every

person, no matter their educational level, socio-economic status, or religious creed, a place to improve their capacity to think -- to ask *unrestricted* questions and get *unrestricted* answers -- thus enabling a broadening of views and a deeper substantiation of opinions and convictions. As public educational assets, libraries are in the business of expanding mutual respect, democracy and liberty, not fencing them in. Inviolable, they offer an ideal setting where the commerce of ideas can flow in a deep and uninterrupted current. In a pluralistic society of haves and have-nots, unmitigated access to that free flow of information and ideas leads to a level playing ground, where all are better prepared and welcome to participate in, and contribute to, this fragile and thus far brief experiment we call Democracy.

At this moment, it appears that *The Political Librarian*—in its unique mission to expand the discussion of, promote research on, and help to re-envision locally focused advocacy, policy, and funding issues for libraries—remains a solitary, singular and undeterred voice. Our goals are an admittedly large order for a small publication. However, this journal remains a critical and growing voice within the much larger arena of the public square. It is not merely a critical voice, but one that leads to deeds of advocacy. Teddy Roosevelt reminds of us our mandate in his “Man in the Arena” speech:

“It is not the critic who counts . . . but the man who is actually in the arena . . . who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again . . . but who does actually strive to do the deeds . . . who spends himself in a worthy cause.”

To all who contribute to this journal’s mission – our staff, our authors, our readers, our financial supporters, to all librarians, library staff and trustees, researchers, policy experts, and friends of the library -- know that we are all in this arena together, in the same struggle. All that needs to be done is to spend yourself in this worthy cause.

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This Issue

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We are pleased to publish this Spring issue after a one-year hiatus, during which time the journal has moved to a new digital publishing platform (Janeway), its layout and typeset have been reformatted, and its publication team reconstituted. I would like to thank Christopher Stewart for his two years of service as series editor, and John Chrastka for his unremitting support during this transitional period. Special thanks are also in order to Martha McGehee and Sanobar Chagani for their requisite contributions proofreading and typesetting this issue on a very aggressive time table.

This issue assesses and responds to the the gathering, external political pressures and legislative actions to censor, review, or ban books at local and state levels, not only at school libraries, but also at public libraries. The content of this issue is of two kinds. The first three pieces are original publications, the final four are republications.

Our lead article, "The Urge to Censor," by Paul T. Jaeger et al., offers eight historical tenets of censorship that shed light on the current censorship movement by placing it within a much broader historical context. It also offers practical means by which library advocates can and should face the latest round of threats to ban books. The second article by Allison Jennings-Roche, "Delegitimizing Censorship," discusses the charged rhetorics employed by those who attack library collections and librarians. She argues that by giving credence to the rhetoric of censorship, it normalizes what should be considered unacceptable rhetoric. Instead, she suggests that there is a need among librarians to build a base of rhetorical power by implementing alternative communication strategies that will protect librarians, the integrity of library collections, and effectively mute and disarm the rhetoric of censors. Our third piece by Sonya M. Durney, "The Library Advocacy Gap," is a mixed methods research study that measures the library advocacy gap, the gap between library advocacy activities undertaken by professional librarians and those activities that are believed to be the responsibility of LIS professionals. Based on the results of her study, she recommends that librarians need to close that gap. To achieve this, LIS programs need to provide better library advocacy training, and library associations, state libraries and other nonprofits need to continue to increase professional development that prepare librarians to advocate effectively.

The final four pieces, although formerly published by EveryLibrary Institute, remain relevant and timely pieces. "Voter Perceptions of Book Bans," first published September 2022, reports the results of a public opinion poll of American voters, taken from August 31 to September 2, 2022, that shows most voters oppose banning books based on race, sexuality and other concerns. "Factors of Success for Libraries on the Ballot" by Valarie McNutt et al., first published January 2021, studies 700 library elections between 2014 and 2018. Her findings are especially advantageous now, when a movement to defund libraries could be on the horizon. Nijma Esad's report, "Could School Librarians Be the Secret to Increasing Literacy Scores," first published in January 2022, provides invaluable data that indicates the

important contributions school librarians make with respect to improving student literacy scores. Again, this report merits republication given the recent censorship movement against school libraries. Finally, Megan Blair's and John Chrastka's whitepaper, "Cannabis Tax Policy and Libraries," first published in July 2022, explores the revenue sharing policies from cannabis taxes, which often leave libraries out of this new revenue stream. As libraries continue to struggle to increase funding, librarians ought to build coalitions with groups and lobby local governments to advocate for increased funding from this revenue source.

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