

# This Issue

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Of late, librarians appear to have become more distrusted than understood. This gathering distrust stems from both our commitment to inclusion and our arcane (at least to the uninitiated public) process of selecting materials. We assume the solemn mandate to make practical and theoretical knowledge freely accessible to *everyone* in order to promote the common good for a healthy democracy. This duty is entrusted to a professionally trained corps of information specialists representing a vast array of independent thought and rationalities as well as philosophical, religious, and political perspectives. To do so means selecting a diverse collection of content. When these strengths within our professional ranks are governed by the principle of value neutrality, the ideal result is a collection based on a wide distribution of knowledge, not on the imposition of ideological sensibility.

Recent cultural shifts have made collection development more tenuous and have exposed a segment within our society that is inimical to free and inquiring minds. Consequently, the process of collection development has been questioned and under attack for some time now. Some in our communities have called to add 'overscers' of collection development to library boards, to cut library budgets, to instigate book challenges, to ban books, and to take the decision-making away from professional librarians and hand it over to politicians. Ultimately, this has led to fractured communities and an erosion of confidence in the library profession and its independent, decision-making policies.

Each of the contributions to this Spring Issue investigate and explore the hobbling effects of the current socio-political climate upon libraries and librarians, caused by wielding political threats of censorship, investigations, book banning, and library budget cuts.

Our first article, "I Don't Fit Into Your Neat Little Plan': Defending Queer Youth From the Censorship Crusade" by Ronald Padrón, discusses the importance of addressing the political right's derision of LGBTQ+ people under the aegis of "parental rights" and "protecting the children." To navigate political and social blowback, some librarians and libraries have been forced to benignly neglect or discretely provide materials about LGBTQ+ history, identity development and sexual health. Padrón argues that librarians can and should facilitate community connection, empathy, and understanding concerning the lived realities of LGBTQ+ people within their local community. He offers a concrete framework for achieving this goal.

Our second piece is a report prepared by The EveryLibrary Institute's research team: "The Demographics of Book Bans". This paper delivers a novel analysis of the demographics and political attitudes of the communities experiencing book bans and challenges. It investigates common demographic characteristics between communities that are experiencing book bans and challenges to intellectual freedom and access to information. Among its numerous arguments, is that Parent's Rights groups and political entities claiming to protect all children from what they see as threats from groups supporting diversity and sex education can be motivated by conditions such as white fragility, white demographic decline (and its associated fear), as well as by intolerance of the LGBTQ lifestyle--both religious and otherwise.

The third piece is an anonymous submission, titled, “Reflections and Advice on Running an Informational Millage Campaign.” The paper documents the excruciating but necessary process of executing, within a hostile environment, a campaign to persuade voters to vote “no” on a county-wide ballot to eliminate or decrease the millage rate that financially supports the library. Our author offers concrete, sage advice on how to navigate this process, stage by stage, and in the end, even adds a dose of hope to those who must pass this way.

The final opinion paper, “Book Banning and Censorship are Only Symptoms: Lessons Learned from Personal History,” penned by Ewa Dziedzic-Elliott, is a cautionary tale, which begins in Poland and comes full circle to the threatening realities we are facing in our libraries in the United States today. The author presents both a personal and historical perspective on banning and censorship, sounding an alarm to the potential greater damage that these movements pose to our society.

Together, these articles serve as a clarion call for librarians to design collections that support the confident pursuit of free inquiry: whatever its source, wherever it leads, whatever the consequences. It is incumbent upon us to resist book bans, external infringements on collection development policies, and ward off frivolous book challenges so that, in the paraphrased words of Dwight D. Eisenhower, ‘citizens--of all ages and races, of all creeds and persuasions--are able to confidently turn to libraries as a space where they can freely seek the whole truth, unvarnished by fashion and uncompromised by expediency’.

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