

This Issue

The national elections have brought political change (some might add turmoil) and very likely increased challenges to the library community. We are fortunate to have garnered articles that provide perspective and delineation to those challenges, and in some instances offer practical applications to overcome them. The array of challenges issuing forth from our internecine, politicized culture wars center on the censorship of books. Organized efforts to ban and challenge books based on resistance to allegedly obscene or offensive materials concerning racism, LGBTQIA+ issues, and content thought to be harmful to children, has been trending upward for the past five years, or more.

Our opening piece, “A Confluence of Trends in Library Censorship,” by Michael Nyby and Richard Ellis follows Canadian library censorship trends by conservative reactionary groups pushing an exclusionary anti-LGBTQIA+ and anti-racial justice agenda. Their analysis of their study shows that the Canadian reactionary right has followed in the steps of the success of American anti-library movements. The information provided in this study will benefit those wishing to build public support against these movements by using compelling, fact-based arguments. The piece references EveryLibrary Institute's Demographics of Book Bans white paper, which appeared in the Spring Issue of *The Political Librarian*, and Dr. Tasslyn Magnusson's Database of Book Bans and Challenges in the United States.

The second article by Kathleen McEvoy, “Divisive Politics and Threats to Academic Libraries,” is a clarion call to the academic community to respond to core threats against academic freedom at colleges and university libraries. She argues that recent changes to state legislation and policies affect collection development, tenure, library programming, funding, dual enrollment, and the accreditation process, etc. McEvoy points out that the politicization of educational content has placed the future of academic inquiry and scholarship in jeopardy. Campaigns determined to undermine DEI and CRT principles, and to limit the teaching on humanities, social sciences, sociology and gender studies call for a robust response from the academic community. She believes that academic librarians are in a good position to leverage their technical acumen and knowledge of analytics to influence administrative priorities and help drive decision making and policies at college and university campuses.

The third piece is a white paper “Access to Online Subscription Content in K12 Schools through the School Library,” co-authored by Connie Williams, Jo Melinson and Mary Ann Harlan. This whitepaper raises awareness about how special interest organizations are advocating for tighter controls on school library databases, which they claim contain inappropriate, pornographic materials. They warn that this push for restrictions can result in the removal of specific publications or indexes or the implementation of stop words and excessive filtering within database search functionalities. They argue convincingly that over-filtering, using stop words, and content censorship in school databases ultimately reduces students' access to resources aligned with educational and curriculum standards. Such measures limit the scope of available information and impede the development of critical thinking and informed citizenship

among students. The inclusion in their white paper of a list of defined terms, existing federal laws that apply to school libraries, and relevant court decisions merit our attention. The piece ends with helpful policy suggestions in response to current policies, and a list of proactive policies that should be established.

The final four articles are reflections and a guide based on hardscrabble experience.

The first of these pieces is Shari Henry's "Tip O'Neill was Right: The power of local politics." Recognizing that we are facing a war against censorship and criminalizing librarians for selecting certain titles and content, Henry advises librarians "to use our positions to model democracy in action" in order to promote free expression at a local and personal level. Henry urges librarians to build deeper relationships with other free speech advocates, diversity organizations, community groups, churches and with elected officials, at both local and state levels. Never has there been a more urgent time for librarians to participate in the political process locally.

The second piece by Michelle R. Mears, "Missouri Public Library Levy Campaigns: My Experience and Advice for Directors," is a guide for any librarian intent on conducting an advocacy campaign to turn out voters in support of increased tax funding for their library. This piece was written as a journal of the experience and advice for library directors who must travel through the thicket of written and unwritten rules designed to restrict what a library director can say and do during a levy campaign.

Anne Ake's, "A Warning from East Berlin on Book Censorship," recounts her experience as a military wife living in West Berlin between 1979 and 1983, and crossing over into East Berlin, where she witnessed the disturbing realities of book censorship. She uses that experience as a stepping stone into a wider historical overview of censorship from Roman times to more recent examples of book bannings in the United States. The question she has us ponder is whether our children are best educated through the suppression of materials or by un-suppressed access to knowledge.

In recent years librarians have been harassed, bullied, and threatened into silence by groups that have inspired a slew of censorious legislation and policies against them. Our final piece, "A Conflict between Religious Extremism and Intellectual Freedom at Ground Zero" by Lacie Sutherland is a courageous yet harrowing narrative. It documents the political animus and vitriol that infiltrated one Alabama public library. Sutherland recounts the escalating events that resulted in her final dismissal, and that of her fellow librarians who stood against the policy changes. Groups such as Clean Up Alabama, which push a Christian Nationalist agenda, were able to exert enough pressure on a public library to force resignations from its directors, force firings of library staff, and change policies at the state legislative level.

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