

Censorship in Libraries

Definition of Censorship

to examine in order to suppress or delete anything considered objectionable

Source: Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary

History of Censorship

The word censor comes from the Office of the Censor created in Rome in 443 BC. The Censor's job was to conduct the statistical census of the citizenry and protect their morals.

What leads to censorship?

- ◆ Fear
- ◆ Conservation of Power
- ◆ Individual Morality
- ◆ Religious Interpretation

Fear

- ◆ Fear of corruption
- ◆ Fear of destruction of culture
- ◆ Fear of offending the sensitive
- ◆ Fear of discussing controversial issues

Conservation of Power

- ◆ Limited distribution of knowledge creates power
- ◆ Hiding of information

Morality

- ◆ A set of standards of right and wrong
- ◆ Some have the inability to accept the standards of others

Religious Interpretation

- ◆ Those who have religious beliefs that do not allow for the beliefs of others.

Who censors?

- ◆ Individuals
- ◆ Organized Groups
- ◆ Government

Censorship in Libraries

- ◆ Usually an attempt to remove material from the collection
- ◆ Some libraries have an official "challenge" policy

Censorship in Libraries

"A challenge is an attempt to remove or restrict materials, based upon the objections of a person or group. A banning is the removal of those materials."

American Library Association

Library Censorship Process

- ◆ Library user discovers material in the library that they find objectionable
- ◆ The user alerts library staff about the materials and often assumes staff are not aware of the material and will agree with them to remove it

Library Censorship Process

- ◆ After discovering the library does not intend to remove it, patron seeks more official routes:
 - Filling out a [Challenge Form](#)
 - Writing a letter of challenge to the library director/administration
 - Speaking at a Library Board Meeting

Library Censorship Process

- ◆ Unofficial Routes
 - Contacting the local media
 - Organizing an ad hoc group
 - Staging a protest
 - Theft or destruction of the material

Library Censorship Process

A member of the Dorchester District 2 school board has borrowed three copies of *Catcher in the Rye* from two Summerville, South Carolina-area high schools and says he intends to pay for the books rather than return them. Anticipating that his fellow board members will oppose his request to have the title banned from school libraries, Howard Bagwell told the September 7 Myrtle Beach Sun News, "I understand they have their own opinions, and that is OK, but I want everyone to know how I feel."

Bagwell's challenge is the second one in a decade that he has brought against the classic coming-of-age novel by J. D. Salinger. A member of the board for 20 years, Bagwell saw his 1993 request defeated on appeal to the board by 6-1.

"It is a filthy, filthy book," Bagwell told the newspaper. "It has 269 some odd pages or so, and if you took out all the [profanity], the sarcasm, the mockery of old people, the mockery of women and decent people, you would get to read about 10 minutes' worth."

American Libraries, Sep. 10, 2001

Library Censorship Process

- ◆ Library will consider complaint and review material in question
- ◆ Materials will be compared to **Materials Selection Policy**
 - Guidelines by which libraries choose materials for their collection
 - <http://www.santaclaracountylib.org/about/matselection.html>

Library Censorship Process

- ◆ Materials are seldom removed through this process because materials has already met selection policy standards
- ◆ Materials are usually removed for political purposes

Internet

- ◆ An uncontrolled resource
- ◆ Internet Filtering Software
 - Also called Blocking Software, Censorware and Internet Content Management Software

Internet Filtering Software

◆ Method of filtering

- restrict access to Internet content, based on an internal database of the product, or;
- restrict access to Internet content through a database maintained external to the product itself, or;
- restrict access to Internet content by certain ratings assigned to those sites by a third party (ICRA), or;
- restrict access to Internet content by scanning text, based on a keyword or phrase or text string, or;
- restrict access to Internet content by scanning pixels, based on color or tone, or;
- restrict access to Internet content based on the source of the information.

American Library Association

Internet Filtering Software

◆ Underblocking

- Failing to block sites because the software cannot analyze it

◆ Overblocking

- Blocking sites that are not pornographic by accident

Underblocking

◆ Consumer Reports Study (March 2001)

- All but one filter tested allowed 20% of objectionable material through in its entirety.

Overblocking

◆ Breast Cancer

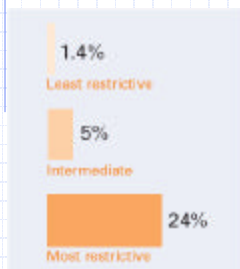
◆ Superbowl XXX

◆ Anne Sexton

◆ www.hatewatch.org

Kaiser Foundation Study

-Dec, 2002



• Pornographic Sites Blocked
 • 87% at Least restrictive
 • 91% at Most restrictive

Internet Filtering Software

◆ Non-local control

- Pre-defined lists are often made by software companies
- Many companies do not release their lists of blocked sites or their criteria for blocking

◆ Subjective & Discriminatory

- Companies use advisory groups to select sites to filter and makeup of the group can affect what's filtered

Internet Filtering Software

- ◆ Legality (ALA)
 - Library use of blocking/filtering software creates an implied contract

Government Action

- ◆ CIPA - Children's Internet Protection Act
 - Requires libraries that receive federal discounts for Internet access to put filtering software on Internet accessible computers or lose that funding
 - Signed into law by President Clinton in December, 2000
 - Challenged in Federal Court by the ACLU, ALA and others
 - Eastern District federal appeals court ruled in favor of plaintiffs (ALA, ACLU)
 - Supreme Court reversed the lower court on June 23, 2003

American Library Association (ALA)

- ◆ Founded in 1876
- ◆ The largest library association in the world

"The American Library Association provides leadership for the development, promotion, and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all."

www.ala.org

ALA Library Bill of Rights

The American Library Association affirms that all libraries are forums for information and ideas, and that the following basic policies should guide their services.

- I. Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.
- II. Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.

ALA Library Bill of Rights

- III. Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.
- IV. Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas.
- V. A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views.
- VI. Libraries which make exhibit spaces and meeting rooms available to the public they serve should make such facilities available on an equitable basis, regardless of the beliefs or affiliations of individuals or groups requesting their use.

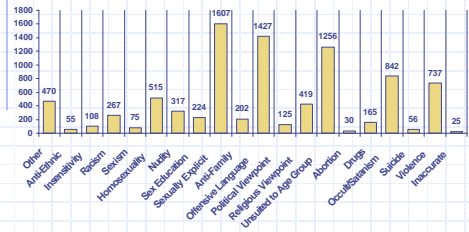
Ten Most Challenged Books of 2005



Challenged Books

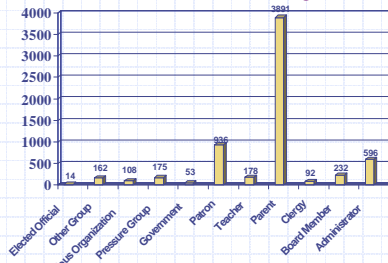
100 Most Frequently Challenged Books (1990-2000)

Challenged Books (1990 – 2000) Challenges by Type



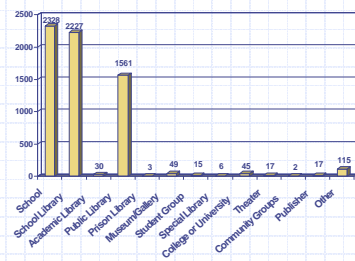
As of December 31, 2000, as compiled by the Office for Intellectual Freedom, American Library Association. The Office for Intellectual Freedom does not claim comprehensiveness in recording challenges. Research suggests that for each challenge reported there are as many as four or five which go unreported.

Challenged Books (1990 – 2000) Initiator of Challenge



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Challenged Books (1990 – 2000) Institution Being Challenged



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