

Testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary  
Hearing on  
“Book Bans: Examining How Censorship Limits Liberty and Literature”  
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## **Introduction**

Thank you, Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Graham, and members of the Committee for giving me the opportunity to testify at this hearing.

I am an associate professor in the School of Information Sciences (iSchool) at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign where we use multidisciplinary information sciences to create solutions to real-world problems. I am the chair of the board of the National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC) which promotes freedom of thought and inquiry and opposes censorship. I also serve as the editor of the *Journal of Intellectual Freedom and Privacy*. I am also a former president of the Freedom to Read Foundation (FTRF), the legal arm of the American Library Association (ALA). My research focuses on information access, intellectual freedom and censorship, information ethics and policy, and print culture studies.

I was born in Nashville, Tennessee and grew up in Columbia, Maryland. I attended Smith College in Massachusetts where I spent my Junior Year Abroad at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. I then received my AM from the Divinity School at the University of Chicago. After spending two years as a project assistant at the law firm of Kirkland & Ellis, I attended what was then the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois. After receiving my MSLIS, I worked as Reference Librarian and eventually Associate Director of the library at the General Theological Seminary of the Episcopal Church in New York City. I then attended the doctoral program at the School of Communication & Information at Rutgers University. I joined the faculty of the iSchool at Illinois in 2012.

I appreciate the opportunity to discuss book banning, intellectual freedom, and libraries today. My testimony does not reflect official positions of the University of Illinois, NCAC, ALA or FTRF.

## **Book Banning in the U.S.**

First, while “book banning” is nicely alliterative, I believe the term "book challenges" more precisely describes the various actions that are taking place around the country. A challenge occurs when an individual or group asks to redact, remove, restrict, or relocate materials within libraries and schools. Challenges do not always lead to banning, that is, the removal of materials,

or to a change in the classification of materials. Sometimes books remain accessible to their intended audience following these requests.

Second, materials in public institutions have always been challenged but we have never seen anything like the current number of cases. When the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom released its data for book challenges in 2022 the headlines were glaring. "A record 2,571 unique titles were targeted for censorship, a 38% increase from the 1,858 unique titles targeted for censorship in 2021."<sup>1</sup> Almost all of the books can be categorized as "diverse" or books by and about "LGBTQIA, Native, people of color, gender diversity, people with disabilities and ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities."<sup>2</sup> These attacks on our freedom to read, our libraries, and our schools are unconstitutional and unpopular. 71% of Americans oppose books bans in public libraries and 67% oppose book bans in school libraries.<sup>3</sup>

Why do people attack diverse books? In my research I found that books about LGBTQIA folks are believed to be only about sex (even if they are picture books that do not discuss sex in any way) and are therefore "inappropriate."<sup>4</sup> Books about non-white people must have what Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie called the "Single Story."<sup>5</sup> That is, these books must be a story of triumph over adversity without really discussing the specifics of that adversity.

Both of these attacks flatten the people's humanity. People are always more than their sexual or gender identity. Telling only a triumphant story about our nation's history of genocide, slavery, Jim Crow, and intergenerational trauma means that we do not confront the truth of our origins or how people have fought back against these sins. Knowing these truths is one aspect of our right to intellectual freedom.

### **Intellectual Freedom and Freedom of Expression**

Intellectual freedom is a bit of an insider term. Most people, when they discuss these issues, often talk about free speech or something related. Intellectual freedom is the right of every individual to hold and express opinions, and seek, access, receive, and impart information and ideas without restriction. The First Amendment states that "Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of speech." Our right to speak, write, publish, and read are protected by the Constitution. This right is not based on whether or not people in government agree with the ideas being expressed. One of the core beliefs of the NCAC is that free expression, including the freedom to express oneself through arts and through protest, is fundamental to both individuals

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<sup>1</sup> American Library Association, "Book Challenges Nearly Doubled From 2021," Text, News and Press Center, March 22, 2023, <https://www.ala.org/news/press-releases/2023/03/record-book-bans-2022>.

<sup>2</sup> We Need Diverse Books, "Our Definition of Diversity," About We Need Diverse Books, accessed October 25, 2018, <https://diversebooks.org/about-wndb/>.

<sup>3</sup> American Library Association, "Voters Oppose Book Bans in Libraries," Text, Advocacy, Legislation & Issues, March 21, 2022, <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/voters-oppose-book-bans-libraries>.

<sup>4</sup> Emily J. M. Knox, "Silencing Stories: Challenges to Diverse Books," *The International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion (IJIDI)* 3, no. 2 (2019).

<sup>5</sup> Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story," [https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en).

and society.<sup>6</sup> The right to free expression is a basic human right and essential to human fulfillment and autonomy and it is our right as citizens of the United States.

### **Autonomy**

Autonomy is not “total independence, but rather the ability of an individual to make life choices guided by his or her own values.”<sup>7</sup> Making choices is key to being able to think for oneself. Autonomy and making choices are linked to intellectual freedom because it is through exposure to others’ ideas and opinions that we discover others’ values which, in turn, helps us establish our own values. We then use these values to influence society. Everyone has the right to autonomy and to the vocabulary to describe their own beliefs and values. In fact, people have the right to their own opinions and beliefs even if they are misinformed. However, as Nicole Cooke writes, information professionals including librarians, must “determine their community’s needs, strive for community engagement and community problem solving when working to combat [mis- and disinformation].”<sup>8</sup>

When it comes to parents, they do have the responsibility to talk to their kids about what they are learning and reading and to steer them towards appropriate choices for their children and their family. However, they do not have the right to make those choices for *other* children and families. What schools and libraries try to provide for everyone, including children, are the skills to make good judgements. Discernment is key to encountering ideas and beliefs that you disagree with. You do not have to read books you don’t like, and you can work with teachers to find an alternative for your child, if necessary.

### **Censorship Practices**

What parents are engaging in when they tell library workers and teachers that they disapprove of a title and challenge it is a censorship practice. By “practice” I mean that they are putting a belief into action. These challenges impede access to the materials. I use the “4 Rs” to categorize censorship practices: redaction, restriction, relocation, and removal. Briefly, redaction means marking through text or image so that it cannot be viewed. Restriction and relocation are limits on the availability of a work to its intended audience. Restriction means that the work is, for example, put behind the reference desk so that someone can only access it with permission. Relocation means that the work is moved from its proper classification to another, less accurate, classification. For example, a chapter book in the library is moved from the children’s section to the adult section. Removal is what most people think of as censorship—a work is removed from the collection or curriculum entirely.

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<sup>6</sup> NCAC, “About Us,” *National Coalition Against Censorship* (blog), accessed September 7, 2023, <https://ncac.org/about-us>.

<sup>7</sup> Audrey Barbakoff, “Libraries Build Autonomy: A Philosophical Perspective on the Social Role of Libraries and Librarians,” *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-Journal)*, January 1, 2010, <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/463>.

<sup>8</sup> Nicole A. Cooke, “A Right to Be Misinformed? Considering Fake News as a Form of Information Poverty,” in *Libraries and the Global Retreat of Democracy: Confronting Polarization, Misinformation, and Suppression*, ed. Natalie Greene Taylor et al. (Bingley, United Kingdom: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2021), 56, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uiuc/detail.action?docID=6784254>.

## The Library

The library is the physical embodiment of the right to freedom of expression in a community. Libraries provide materials from a variety of viewpoints and opinions along with the services needed to access those materials. Libraries are not labyrinths that lead to the truth but gardens that contain many truths.<sup>9</sup> Education and discernment allow people to make choices among these truths. As Shannon Oltmann notes, “freedom of speech is impossible or valueless without the right or ability to access that speech.”<sup>10</sup> In many communities, libraries provide that ability.

All libraries, whether they are public, school, academic or special, are mission driven. The services they provide are almost too numerous to count. Along with books, video games, and other physical materials, libraries have makerspaces and computers. They provide electronic and streaming services. The Library of Congress and its Congressional Research Service and Knowledge Services Group provide research and resources for this body!

More than that, libraries provide students of all ages—from kindergarten through grad school—with a quiet place to study and space to do group assignments. They have newspapers for people who still read broadsheets every day and cooling centers during heatwaves. Libraries offer programming for all patrons and lunches for kids during the summer. Libraries provide their communities with the services and resources people need to flourish.

What is most amazing about visiting the library is that the dignity of every human being is respected. From the toddlers at storytime to the older folks in a computer skills class to the adults in a book club to students working on a book report. To paraphrase Ranganathan and his Five Laws of Library Science: Library resources are for use by everyone. You can find your resource—if you don’t like the book you picked up, find another. Because every resource has someone who will use it and libraries are here to save your time and find something that works for you.<sup>11</sup>

Libraries and schools need more funding. More funding for materials and services. More funding to provide resources that cover a variety of ideas and beliefs—more books and more freedom because Free People Read Freely.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Robert V. Labaree and Ross Scimeca, “The Philosophical Problem of Truth in Librarianship,” *The Library Quarterly* 78, no. 1 (January 1, 2008): 43–70, <https://doi.org/10.1086/523909>.

<sup>10</sup> Shannon M. Oltmann, “Intellectual Freedom and Freedom of Speech: Three Theoretical Perspectives,” *The Library Quarterly* 86, no. 2 (March 17, 2016): 153–71, <https://doi.org/10.1086/685402>.

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<sup>11</sup> S.R. Ranganathan's 5 Laws of Library Science are:

1. Books are for use.
2. Every person his or her book.
3. Every book its reader.
4. Save the time of the reader.
5. The library is a growing organism.

<sup>12</sup> This is the motto of the Freedom to Read Foundation

## **Appendices**

- A. Chapter 1 – *Foundations of Intellectual Freedom*
- B. Chapter 2 – *Book Banning in 21<sup>st</sup> Century America*
- C. Knox, Emily J. M. "Silencing Stories: Challenges to Diverse Books." *The International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion* 3, no. 2 (2019): 24–39.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/48645178>.

# Foundations of Intellectual Freedom

**Emily J. M. Knox**

ALA  
Neal-Schuman

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*For Aaron, with all my love.  
We should get that ice cream sometime soon.*

"We uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources."

—*ALA Code of Ethics* (June 29, 2021)

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# PREFACE

**WHEN I FIRST DISCUSSED THIS BOOK** with my editor, support for intellectual freedom among librarians seemed to be on the wane. There were bitter disputes—mostly online—that centered on whether or not intellectual freedom harmed underrepresented populations and was not in keeping with the values of librarianship. The world has changed since I first agreed to write this book in 2019. I could not have imagined that there would be a global pandemic, a political insurrection in the United States, or a doubling of the number of reported book challenge cases. The latter has led to a reconsideration of the position of intellectual freedom in librarianship and, I would argue, reasons for supporting intellectual freedom as a core value of the profession and a basic human right are clearer than ever.

I have taught an elective class called Intellectual Freedom and Censorship at the School of Information Sciences at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign every year except one since I first joined the faculty in 2012. The course was originally sixteen weeks and was shortened to eight weeks in 2014 to encourage more students to take the elective. Since 2015 the Freedom to Read Foundation ([ftrf.org](http://ftrf.org)) has provided support in the form of organizing guest speakers and scholarships for non-Illinois students to take the course. In its eight-week format, the course is intensive and requires students to read a lot of material in a very short time.

The course includes two assessments that were originally designed by the previous instructor, Loretta Gaffney. The first is a presentation on intellectual freedom allies that exposes students to organizations other than the American Library Association that support intellectual freedom. A second assessment asks students to write a short overview of an intellectual freedom issue. Students may choose any topic that interests them as long as it relates to the themes of the course.

The third is a role-playing portfolio on responding to a library challenge, for which students must respond in character to one of several scenarios in a variety of library settings. The portfolio consists of five parts:

1. A 1-2 page letter of response to the complainant
2. A 1-2 page letter to the library board, school board, or decision-making committee detailing the challenge and your recommendation for resolution
3. An annotated support file of 3-4 documents
4. A 3-4 page plan for community public relations and outreach
5. A 1-2 page reflection on your process for addressing this controversy

This assessment is intended to prepare students to apply what they have learned in the course when they are confronted with an intellectual freedom challenge in their working lives. The scenarios are updated regularly and often mirror current challenges that are reported in the media.

The primary purpose of *Foundations of Intellectual Freedom* is to provide a primer on this core value. It is intended to introduce intellectual freedom to librarians and other

information professionals. I use the term “information professionals” throughout to indicate *all* library workers (whether degreed or not) and workers in aligned fields including archives, museums, information sciences, and others. The book is also intended to be accessible to readers outside of information fields. Although the geographic context for the book is the United States, each chapter includes at least a brief overview of global implications of the various subjects that are presented.

The book is a distillation of the eight-week University of Illinois course. Although the emphasis and timing for any particular topic change from year to year, the subjects of the chapters in this volume form the general outline of the syllabus.

Chapter 1 introduces and defines important concepts related to intellectual freedom, including censorship, and discusses intellectual freedom as a value and a right. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the history of intellectual freedom as a modern value based primarily on the work of John Stuart Mill and how it was incorporated in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Chapter 3 provides context for understanding the right to freedom of expression and its intersections with free speech, hate speech, and the embeddedness of communication. Information access and censorship are the focus of chapter 4. Chapter 5 addresses privacy and intellectual freedom with an emphasis on power and context. Chapter 6 is an introduction to copyright and its impact on intellectual freedom. Chapter 7 examines the history of intellectual freedom as a core value in librarianship. Chapter 8 provides short summaries of emerging topics in intellectual freedom.

Each of the first seven chapters includes discussion questions and a list of recommended readings with short annotations. Readers should also consult the reference list at the end of each chapter for additional readings and resources. Newsworthy events, statistics, and citations are accurate as of March 2022. The book can be read as a whole or as individual chapters. The book’s goal is for the reader to develop a better understanding of why intellectual freedom matters and how supporting this right leads to a more just world.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

**THIS BOOK IS TWO YEARS LATE** due to many factors and never would have been finished without the support of my community. After working as an interim associate dean for two years during the pandemic, I was able to relinquish the role with the support of my colleagues and finish this manuscript. My editor, Rachel Chance, was extremely patient over the two years of delays. My friends in Champaign, Illinois, and around the world never lost their faith in me. My parents, Jo Emily and Nathaniel Knox, have always provided love and support. Finally, my fiancé, Aaron Wilson, always had an ear for talking through the manuscript and supported me through the inevitable difficult times of writing a book.



# Intellectual Freedom

## A Core and Contested Value

### INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM: DEFINITIONS

“Intellectual freedom” is a term that most people have heard and yet may have only a vague sense of its definition. In the United States, for example, people often use the term “free speech” as a catchall for concepts relating to how information circulates instead of using intellectual freedom. There are some who might say that intellectual freedom has something to do with reading banned books or writing offensive content on Twitter. Others seem to have a sense that intellectual freedom is both important and contested but difficult to define. In her article on legal foundations for intellectual freedom, Shannon Oltmann (2016) notes that there are generally three different theoretical grounds for understanding intellectual freedom: the marketplace of ideas, democratic ideals, and individual autonomy. Each of these provides differently nuanced definitions and applications of the principle that will be discussed throughout this chapter and the book.

As noted in the introductory chapter of the tenth edition of the *Intellectual Freedom Manual* (IFM), intellectual freedom has never been officially defined by the American Library Association (ALA) even though intellectual freedom is a core value of librarianship (Jones and LaRue 2021, 3). The IFM, which is published by ALA’s Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF), offers a short definition: intellectual freedom is “the right of every individual to both seek and receive information from all points of view without restriction” (Jones and LaRue 2021, 3). Not surprisingly, this definition focuses on works which are fixed—such as books, magazines, movies, CDs, and digital files—that might be included in library collections. The meaning of free speech and freedom of expression are implied but not explicitly stated in this definition.

However, intellectual freedom does not have to be solely focused on fixed works that can be collected in a library or assigned as schoolwork. OIF itself offers a broader definition on its question-and-answer web page. Here OIF defines intellectual freedom as “the right of every individual to both seek and receive information from all points of view without restriction. It provides for free access to all expressions of ideas through which any and all sides of a question, cause or movement may be explored” (ALA n.d.). This definition includes both the circulation of works (broadly defined) and the expression of ideas.

Other definitions, like Eliza Dresang's, also explicitly include the right of the individual to have their own expression. Dresang (2006, 169) defines intellectual freedom as the "freedom to think or believe what one will, freedom to express one's thoughts and beliefs in unrestricted manners and means, and freedom to access information and ideas regardless of the content or viewpoints of the author(s), or the age, background, or beliefs of the receiver." In a previous work, *Book Banning in 21st-Century America*, I stated that intellectual freedom is "the right to access the whole of the information universe without fear of reprisal from the powers that be" (Knox 2015, 11). Outside of library and information science, the ethicist Piers Benn (2021, 2), for example, defines intellectual freedom as a state that "fosters the ability to think, speak and act without being stifled by an atmosphere of taboo, whether this is legally, intuitively, or socially enforced." This definition includes the idea that intellectual freedom is related to both explicit and implicit bans on certain ideas or knowledge.

Each of these definitions provides a window into why intellectual freedom can be difficult to define. Intellectual freedom is a condition of being—one in which an individual's mind has ultimate liberty—that is in many ways an impossible state to achieve given that, as Sue Curry Jansen (1988, 4) notes, censorship is "an enduring feature of all human communities." Individuals live in societies that each have their own norms, values, and laws, which means that intellectual freedom is always subject to circumscription. This is why it is imperative to be aware of both context and power when discussing intellectual freedom.

Throughout this book, intellectual freedom is defined as the right of every individual to hold and express opinions, and seek, access, receive, and impart information ideas without restriction. This definition is based on Article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers." The definition used in this book explicitly includes the term "access," as this is in keeping with the core values of librarianship. The definition also refers to all aspects of the communications circuit (Darnton 1991). Article 19 is one of thirty rights and freedoms enumerated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was ratified by the United Nations in 1948. It is no mistake that in the ruins of a horrifying world war that was the deadliest in history, the United Nations included the right to freedom of opinion and expression in this document.

#### **ARTICLE 19 ([article19.org](http://article19.org))**

The international human rights organization ARTICLE 19 takes its name from the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Founded in 1987, the organization bases its work on two interlocking freedoms: the freedom to speak and the freedom to know.

### **FLOURISHING, AUTONOMY, AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

In the early twenty-first century, discussions of intellectual freedom can become heated quickly. There is no longer a general liberal consensus on the issue as there was in the mid- to late-twentieth century. One reason why discussions of intellectual freedom are so contested is that they are entangled with human rights, individual autonomy, and personal

flourishing. Here “flourishing” is used as a less self-oriented term for self-actualization. As John Burgess (2016, 134) notes:

[Flourishing] is the good that results from living in accord with the virtues. In its simplest form, flourishing is the idea that to be good is to fulfill one’s purpose in life. Put another way, to flourish is to pursue the ideal self. Since everyone determines his or her ideal self, flourishing is an internally created good.

Along with classical virtues such as courage or patience, virtues can also include such concepts as caring for others or compassion for those less fortunate than oneself. This means that flourishing does not have to be solely focused on the self but can also point to whether or not others in society are flourishing. The second concept, individual autonomy, is linked to flourishing, and as Audrey Barbakoff (2010) writes, “it is not total independence, but rather the ability of an individual to make life choices guided by his or her own values.” Making choices is key to both autonomy and flourishing. These ideas are linked to intellectual freedom because it is through exposure to others’ ideas and opinions that we discover their values which, in turn, help us establish our own values. We then use these values to influence society.

Along with these ethical concepts, intellectual freedom is a right endowed to every individual. Rights are moral and legal entitlements that are due to human beings. Societies have a moral and legal obligation to uphold these entitlements. One method for analyzing rights is through a typology. Information philosopher Kay Mathiesen (2012) defines several types of rights that are interconnected and demonstrate how intellectual freedom is vital to human autonomy and fulfillment. First, some rights are *primary*. These are basic, fundamental rights like food, shelter, and water. There are also *linchpin* rights, which make other rights possible. The key linchpin right for intellectual freedom is the right to communicate. Mathiesen (2015, 1312) notes that the right to communicate is slightly different from the right to information or the right to expression: “Although these three rights are closely interrelated and interdependent, they differ in whether the focus is on the rights of the speaker (expression), the rights of the receiver (information), or on the rights of both at the same time (communication).” In this book, these three rights are combined into one right called intellectual freedom. Mathiesen goes on to argue that from linchpin rights come derived rights, which often focus on specific circumstances. For example, freedom of the press is a derived right that comes from the right to communicate.

Mathiesen (2012, 14) makes a strong case for communication as a linchpin right. Without it, she argues, it is impossible for humans to even understand that they have other rights: “The ability to exercise the rights of expression and access to information promotes the realization of all other human rights.” Elsewhere she goes into in more detail:

Indeed, one could argue that, without the ability to communicate, we do not have rights at all. A right licenses a person to speak up for herself. . . . One cannot claim a right if one does not know that one has the right and one cannot claim a right if one lacks the means to express oneself. The idea of claiming in relation to rights is so important that some philosophers have argued that only those who can make claims can be rights holders. While we might want to include such beings as animals and small children within the realm of rights holders, there is still something of special dignity to adult human rights holders who can take an active role in exercising their rights. (Mathiesen 2012, 15)

This discussion may seem in the weeds, but it is important to understand why intellectual freedom is so highly contested. When someone argues, for example, that they are being censored by social media companies when their accounts are removed from private platforms, they are often using arguments that are based on a misunderstanding of what rights are and the legal status of private media platforms. Also, as John Budd notes, rights are not simply about what we *should* do but what we *must* do: “When we speak of rights we should do so with care. We are not talking about situations where certain actions should be taken, we mean something more specific and more explicitly binding” (Budd 2017, 136). Intellectual freedom is at the heart of what it means to be human and a part of a community.

Many also argue that intellectual freedom is the heart of democratic society. Free inquiry is necessary to have an informed citizenry that will shape their government. Paul Sturges (2016, 169) notes:

At its simplest, democracy is the idea that power resides in the people whose will is consulted through elections. The basic simplicity becomes more complex the closer one examines the principle and processes, but it is important to hang on to the idea that those who vote are being asked to exercise intellectual freedom. Intellectual freedom begets and supports democracy, and democracy in turn provides appropriate conditions for the further development of intellectual freedom.

The relationship between democracy and intellectual freedom can be fraught as there is always concern that free inquiry will not necessarily lead to votes and subsequent adoption of policies that will benefit all. However, this possibility becomes even more improbable without intellectual freedom.

This argument also helps to explain why intellectual freedom is necessary for social justice. Although we are all entitled to rights, they are often circumscribed by laws. In order to ensure that we are given the rights due to each of us, we must know what they are, and these rights must be claimed. This happens through communication. Having access to information and utilizing the right to intellectual freedom mean that individuals can learn about their own rights without fear of repercussions from those in power who want to deny them those rights. Freedom of expression means that they can express their knowledge of their rights to others. Although these rights are also held by those in power, upholding intellectual freedom means that people who are not part of the dominant culture have the same rights as those who are. Everyone, regardless of their social status, has the right to intellectual freedom.

## **CENSORSHIP**

“Censorship” is the inverse of intellectual freedom. It is also a more common term that people use when they discuss issues of information access and circulation. Although in many respects all language is political, “censorship” has a decidedly more political valence than intellectual freedom. What counts as censorship often depends on both one’s worldview and what one might be trying to accomplish. To employ Sue Curry Jansen’s (1988) term, censorship is the knot that combines power and knowledge. Researching and analyzing censorship also provide a window into how the right to intellectual freedom is exercised in a given society.

In a previous work, I have noted that there are both broad and narrow definitions of censorship (Knox 2014b). Narrow definitions tend to focus on government censorship, while broad definitions focus on individuals or institutions. These definitions are not static and can be held by the same person or group of people at the same time. In addition, the definitions are often focused on who or what is engaging in censorship. For example, the *Intellectual Freedom Manual* defines censorship as “a decision made by a governing authority or its representative(s) to suppress, exclude, expurgate, remove, or restrict public access to a library resource based on a person or group’s disapproval of its content or its author/creator” (Garnar et al. 2021, 295). This definition has a few features that should be noted. First, it focuses on the government. Second, it covers a wide range of censorship practices. Finally, it is focused on library resources. In practice, librarianship often takes a much wider view of who can engage in censorship and its effects.

The American Civil Liberties Union’s (<https://www.aclu.org/other/what-censorship>) definition of censorship states that:

Censorship, the suppression of words, images, or ideas that are “offensive,” happens whenever some people succeed in imposing their personal political or moral values on others. Censorship can be carried out by the government as well as private pressure groups. Censorship by the government is unconstitutional.

This definition, unlike ALA’s definition, includes private pressure groups as actors along with the government. It also focuses on “moral disapproval” rather than just simply “disapproval,” implying that it is focused on values and ethics. Finally, its scope is wide-ranging and broader than libraries.

The dictionary definition of “censorship” refers to the transitive verb “censor” which, according to Merriam-Webster, means to “examine in order to suppress or delete anything considered objectionable” or “to suppress or delete as objectionable” (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/censor>). This definition has a somewhat limited view of censorship practices and leans heavily on the word “objectionable.”

In my own work, I have previously defined censorship as control over the production of texts and other cultural goods (Knox 2015, 4). This may seem overly broad, but it does capture more fully how the term is used by the general public, where it seems to mean that “someone in power has taken away my ability to circulate the knowledge that I want to in the way that I want to.” The latter part is key to understanding this colloquial understanding of censorship—who has control over a particular medium is often what matters more than just what is being communicated. (This topic will be explored more in chapter 3.)

Censorship can be understood as a constellation of practices rather than a dichotomous act. Although the term is often employed this way, the question of whether or not a work or a person has been censored is rarely black and white. One way to think about censorship is to consider how someone or an entity has engaged in censorship. Jansen (1998), for example, discusses constitutive and regulative censorship. Regulative censorship refers to the type of censorship that institutions engage in and generally concerns access to information. Constitutive censorship, on the other hand, is how “the powerful invoke censorship to create, secure, and maintain their control over the power to name” (Jansen 1998, 8).

Another way to think about censorship is to consider that there are both active and passive censorship practices. Passive practices take place before a work is circulated or obtained and include self-censorship and professional bias (e.g., in acquisition practices). Active practices occur when a work is already in circulation; they include the 4 Rs:

redaction, restriction, relocation, and removal. Briefly, redaction means marking through text or images so that it cannot be viewed. Restriction and relocation are both based on whether or not a work is available to its intended audience. Restriction means that the work is, for example, put behind a desk so that someone can only access it with permission. Relocation means that the work is moved from its proper classification to another. For example, a book intended for juveniles in a library is moved to the young adult or adult section. Removal is what most people think of as censorship—a work is removed from circulation by some entity. Being aware of the level of analysis is always important for understanding censorship—engaging in censorship practices in a school district is different from engaging in censorship practices through the use of a national firewall. Both are types of censorship, but their effects are different.

#### **The 4 Rs of Censorship Practices**

- Redaction
- Restriction
- Relocation
- Removal

Note that the word “work” is used above in a general sense to refer to any type of expression—not necessarily only those that are fixed, such as a book. For example, permission for protests is often restricted to certain times of day or limited to certain spaces. This might be the case for many reasons, including the safety of the participants, but these restrictions can also be understood as a censorship practice.

As with many things in life, censorship is often in the eye of the beholder. This is because censorship is inherently political and social. It is through the censorship and circulation of ideas, information, and knowledge that individuals and societies come to agreed values and norms. What is permitted to circulate and what is not defines what matters. Intellectual freedom, on the other hand, is more concretely about individuals and their personal right to information.

## **SOCIAL JUSTICE**

Throughout this book, I argue that intellectual freedom is necessary for a just society. I acknowledge that this is a contested position and, in the early twenty-first century, many believe that social justice is not compatible with intellectual freedom. As Shannon Oltmann, Toni Samek, and Louise Cooke (2022, 8) note in the context of librarianship:

It is fair to say that intellectual freedom is under siege from across the political spectrum, as librarians’ professional and personal ethics diverge. There is a certain proportion of librarians who do not adhere to the promises of the IFLA Statement, thereby creating an ethical void and, arguably, although with positive intentions, committing a disservice to their patrons.

Although this is a longstanding argument, especially in librarianship, this critique is probably most easily viewed through the lens of the critical librarianship movement.

Critical librarianship originally began in 2014 as an extended Twitter conversation on how librarianship can more fully incorporate progressive values into practice. Critlib.org writes on their home page (<http://critlib.org/about/>) that the movement is “dedicated to bringing social justice principles into our work in libraries.” Social justice is not fully

defined by the movement but refers to bringing down the “regimes of white supremacy, capitalism, and a range of structural inequalities.” Over the next few years, this movement grew online and also has sponsored several events. The hashtag #critlib is regularly used in online discussions.

In the introduction to *Knowledge Justice: Disrupting Library and Information Studies through Critical Race Theory*, Sofia Leung and Jorge López-McKnight (2021, 16) argue that critical librarianship alone is not enough and library and information science should fully incorporate critical race theory (CRT) into its theory and praxis. As they note, “CRT rejects liberal frameworks as they do not examine and center critiques of power, race, and racism. We argue that current and past diversity frameworks continue to ignore these critiques.” Although intellectual freedom is not explicitly addressed in their book, the opening chapter critiques the concept of neutrality and how it is commonly used to support content-neutral policies in libraries rather than one that uplifts marginalized voices (Chiu, Ettarh, and Ferretti 2021).

Social justice, when employed as a critique of intellectual freedom, refers to the harm that an individual might endure when exposed to ideas that are hateful, biased, or discriminatory. I have written elsewhere that this perceived incompatibility is due to intellectual freedom and social justice having political foundations that are shared but with different emphases (Knox 2020). This difference can be glossed as “intellectual freedom is a liberal value while social justice is a progressive value” (Shockey 2016). However, both social justice and intellectual freedom are politically liberal orientations toward society as opposed to anarchist or conservative.

An extended Twitter discussion in January 2020 using the hashtag #timetotalk-aboutIF (<https://twitter.com/talkaboutif?lang=en>) provides a useful overview of some of the current discourse regarding intellectual freedom and social justice. One question that was explored was: “The current approach to IF undermines human rights b/c it acts like IF is in a vacuum—like it’s, as a value, no way connected to, or reflective of, actual social and material power relations.” Overall, I would argue that the progressive critique of intellectual freedom is incomplete because it does not account for power imbalances as they currently exist. That is, because we live in a world built on white supremacy, racism, heterosexism, misogyny, transphobia, ableism, and other inequities, laws and practices that are enacted to withhold information from certain groups often end up benefitting the group in power. For example, during the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests in summer 2021, President Trump called the movement a “symbol of hate” (Sprunt and Snell 2020). If he had been empowered to censor “hate speech,” Trump would never have targeted the Proud Boys in Richmond, Virginia. He preferred to (and often did) set his sights on the BLM protests that happened across the United States in the wake of George Floyd’s murder.

Although strides have been made, the upheavals of recent history indicate that there is still a long way to go to a just society. In the United States, in particular, people do not have shared understandings of what constitutes hate across political and social boundaries. As with censorship, bias, prejudice, and discrimination are often, unfortunately, in the eye of the beholder.

## **A SOCIOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE**

Many books on intellectual freedom and, more specifically, freedom of expression, focus on the legal aspects of these concepts. Although it is important to be familiar with the law,

this book is less rooted in legal frameworks for understanding intellectual freedom and is instead focused on a sociology of knowledge. Briefly, academics in this field center their work on investigating how language is “created” to make the world “real” and then to communicate that world to our fellow human beings. Communication is based in language and this area of sociology explores how knowledge is transmitted and maintained across time and space. Although an in-depth review of these theories is not necessary, it is helpful to understand what is happening when, for example, people engage in what seems to be an irrational act, such as trying to remove a database aggregator from libraries across an entire state (Cortez 2018). What are these people trying to accomplish? The theories of sociology of knowledge demonstrate that they are trying to maintain a particular reality or world-view. The resources in those databases contain not simply information but knowledge that threatens who they are as people.

In a *Social History of Knowledge* (2000), Peter Burke explores epistemic history from 1450 to the end of the eighteenth century. This time period is important because it saw the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg around 1440 (this was some time after the development of movable type in China in the eleventh century), which allowed for faster and often more reliable circulation of texts. For information professionals, one of the most important theories of the sociology of knowledge is the classification of knowledge into different types.

These types are divided into pairs and they can be useful for librarians and information professionals who are attempting to understand the arguments people are using when they attempt to restrict access to information resources. According to Burke (2000, 83), the pairs are:

1. Theoretical versus practical
2. High versus low
3. Liberal versus useful
4. Specialized versus universal
5. Public versus private
6. Legitimate versus forbidden

One approach to thinking about this is to consider the many challenges that are brought against sexual education books for children and young adults. For challengers, these books contain knowledge that should be forbidden to children even when the books are written at an appropriate age and reading level. Some people believe that sexual knowledge is only legitimate knowledge for adults. When an Arizona senator called for Robie Harris’s book *It’s Perfectly Normal* to be removed in December 2019, a commenter on the senator’s Facebook post stated:

Thanks for taking up the cause, but give me one good reason why “sex” needs to be added to reading, writing, and arithmetic curriculum. Schools have no legitimate cause for indoctrinating our children on matters of sex or morality; which belongs squarely on the shoulders of their parents. (<https://www.facebook.com/TownsendForHouse/photos/a.10152486902763914/10157926730488914/?type=3&theater>)

This comment demonstrates that intellectual freedom is truly a social and not merely political or legal phenomenon. According to the poster, schools, which are institutions that help mold future generations, should focus only on what the poster considers to be legitimate

### **Constructing Reality through Language**

Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966) is a seminal work in understanding how knowledge is transmitted and maintained across generations. The authors argue that the foundations of knowledge in everyday life are based in language. Although their argument is somewhat esoteric, they are basically saying that language makes objects real. What is most important for understanding why this matters for intellectual freedom is that eventually language leads to an understanding of what is "legitimate" in a particular setting—including what knowledge is legitimate. In this typology classifying a particular knowledge as forbidden or private helps keep chaos at bay in one's life.

Language is very important for understanding censorship practices. The words that book challengers use (e.g., inappropriate, innocence, indoctrinate) are important for understanding what they are attempting to accomplish.

knowledge: reading writing, and arithmetic. "Sex," on the other hand, is in the realm of private and forbidden knowledge.

In her work on children and knowledge, Kerry H. Robinson (2013) argues that many censorship efforts are in relation to what she calls "difficult knowledge." This is knowledge that is linked to powerful emotional responses in adults and therefore there are often attempts to shelter children from such knowledge. This is similar to private or forbidden knowledge. Robinson argues that these attempts are often harmful because they deny children both agency and the vocabulary to describe their own bodies and lives.

This is important because it demonstrates why legal arguments are often unpersuasive in censorship cases. As will be seen throughout this book, intellectual freedom is not simply a legal construct but a social one, and the arguments that people use against the right to intellectual freedom are often social and political.

## **AREAS OF INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM**

Intellectual freedom encompasses several interrelated areas which will be discussed throughout the chapters that follow. Although all of the areas do not map directly onto the chapters, each of the areas provides a lens through which the reader may analyze the subjects discussed in the chapters. Note that there is no hierarchical relationship between these issues—in fact, all of them are interrelated. One of the reasons why it can be difficult to research or analyze intellectual freedom is that arguments for or against intellectual freedom tend to highlight one particular theoretical or philosophical lens. For example, the idea that "information wants to be free" can be understood through the lenses of access, philosophy, policy development, and privacy.

In general, there are five areas that most scholars and practitioners focus on: access, philosophy, policy development, legal issues, and privacy. As with all typologies, these areas have a great deal of overlap (e.g., is copyright a legal issue or policy?), but it is helpful to use these areas to think through what the underlying assumptions of an argument might be. For example, when a person argues that someone should be blocked on social media or that

a book should be removed from a classroom, they are making a moral and therefore philosophical argument. The response will often be a legal argument: “that’s against the First Amendment” or “the Supreme Court ruled that you can’t do that.” These arguments are not employing the same lens for analysis and that is why people are often talking past each other when discussing intellectual freedom.

The first area, access, refers to whether or not people are able to obtain information. It can be argued that the most salient area of research for intellectual freedom is access and the defense of free inquiry. This incorporates more than just the concept of “what is on the shelf.” Access includes questions of selection (what was not chosen for the shelf) and classification (how the bookshelf is arranged). Challenges to materials in libraries also fall under this umbrella because such actions threaten access. Peter Lor and Johannes Britz (2007) argue that access is a social justice issue and state that knowledge societies cannot exist without freedom of access to information. The authors use their own country, South Africa, as an example in order to demonstrate how lack of access to information can have deleterious effects on a society. “Our experience in South Africa during the apartheid years,” the authors write, “taught us that restrictions on access can cause a regime to lose touch with reality. Curtailment of freedom of information is invariably associated with the dissemination of disinformation” (Lor and Britz 2007, 394). Lor and Britz describe four pillars of information societies—information and communication technology infrastructure, usable content, human intellectual capacity, and physical delivery infrastructure—which cannot be brought to fruition without access to information.

As mentioned above, Lor and Britz’s thesis is heavily dependent on the concept of social justice. This links access to the next area of research issue—philosophy. One’s beliefs and actions regarding intellectual freedom and censorship often rely on philosophical ideas relating to ethics, values, and morality. As an example, Lor and Britz (2007) use philosopher John Rawls’s theory of justice and their own experiences in apartheid South Africa to support their view that knowledge societies must have freedom of access to information.

In *Fundamentals of Information Studies*, June Lester and Wallace C. Koehler (2007) define morals as a “set of mores, customs, and traditions that may be derived from social practice or from religious guidance.” Values, in turn, are “enduring beliefs that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable. Value systems are an enduring organization of beliefs” (Lester and Koehler 2007, 253). Ethics, on the other hand, are the application of values along with an area of study in philosophy.

Eliza Dresang (2006) uses “professional philosophy” as an umbrella term for the many policies and codes that librarians have developed in the area of intellectual freedom. Elsewhere, I have used the term “practical philosophy” (Knox 2014a). These terms are meant to undergird the idea that these policies are not necessarily subject to formal philosophical analysis but are often general guidelines for practice in information institutions.

These policies are part of the third interlocking issue within intellectual freedom, policy. Susan K. Burke (2008) divides these into two types: first, foundational documents, which include the IFLA Statement on Libraries and Intellectual Freedom and the ALA Library Bill of Rights, the Freedom to Read Statement, and the Freedom to View Statement that ALA developed in concert with the American Book Publishers Council. The second type of policy includes newer statements such as ALA’s Code of Ethics and Core Values Statement. Policy development is an important interlocking issue within intellectual freedom and librarianship because it affects each librarian individually. Even if a particular librarian or other information professional does not hold to the Code of Ethics, this becomes an active choice

because she or he is introduced to these statements through the professionalization process of library education.

Although in the United States these policies borrow language from the United States Constitution, First Amendment issues constitute a separate, supplementary issue within intellectual freedom. The library and legal professions in the United States hold that the right of freedom of access is guaranteed in the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights. To ensure this right is unabridged, the Freedom to Read Foundation is the legal arm of ALA that supports intellectual freedom in the courts. On a global level, Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights focuses on freedom of expression (UN 1948). This indicates that members of the global community have recognized freedom of access to be a legal and moral right of humanity. The IFLA Statement on Libraries and Intellectual Freedom mirrors much of the language found in Article 19.

The final interlocking issue within intellectual freedom and censorship is closely related to the legal realm and involves issues of privacy. Within librarianship, the most common privacy issues are internet filtering and records management. There are many research articles that discuss the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) and the effect of the PATRIOT Act on libraries in the United States. However, government censorship of the internet is a global issue. In their article on censorship and internet search engines, Mark Meiss and Filippo Menczer (2008) compare search results in different countries. Because "search engines are essential in discovering new sources of information . . . a censored search engine can hide that a blocked site even exists. How can you know what you're not being shown?" As with issues of selection, "what is not on the shelf" is just as important as "what is on the shelf." Although Meiss and Menczer's article primarily describes the search comparison tool, using the interface allows users to viscerally experience how censorship impedes access to information.

## **BOOK OVERVIEW**

Some might argue that the social ills of the early twenty-first century have shown us the negative consequences of what unfettered access to information can do. Writing this in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic means that we are inundated with false information concerning the spread of SARS-CoV-2 and the efficacy of the vaccinations that will save lives. Challenging political situations around the world are exacerbated by the ubiquity of misinformation and disinformation on the web, in addition to the inciting language that is used to encourage people to attack political and society enemies.

This book is not intended to answer all of the questions raised by these issues but to provide a framework for understanding what intellectual freedom is and why it is an important value for not only librarians and other information professionals, but also to ensure that the entire world is able to meet the challenges of the information age. As noted above, although this book will discuss the legal aspects of intellectual freedom and censorship, that is not its focus. Instead, the book will discuss these ideas as social phenomena based in frameworks of the circulation of knowledge, print and digital cultures, and reading practices. That is, the book argues that how a society views intellectual freedom and censorship is based on how knowledge is understood to be absorbed and acted upon by individuals. Legal frameworks such as the First Amendment law in the United States and hate speech laws in the European Union are just one aspect of the overall foundation for discussions in the book.

Note that in the preceding paragraph, the subject of the book was listed as “intellectual freedom and censorship.” This is because it is difficult to discuss one without the other. In many ways, intellectual freedom is the opposite of censorship. However, I hope to demonstrate in the following chapters that intellectual freedom is much broader and richer than simply allowing or denying access to information. Intellectual freedom is vital to thriving both as an individual and as a society. Censorship, on the other hand, is a group of negative practices that are often based on fear of the unknown.

Intellectual freedom is also intimately tied to ideas of social justice. Social justice has many meanings but, when it comes to knowledge, social justice centers on basic questions of what, who, and how. What types of knowledge should be out of bounds? Who makes those decisions? How is that knowledge circulated in society? The answers to these questions are disputed in the early twenty-first century. Western societies are grappling with their white supremacist, colonialist, heteronormative, ableist, and classist histories sometimes in ways that seem at odds with the value of intellectual freedom.

I, and therefore this book, take the position that social justice is impossible without intellectual freedom. It is only through the free circulation of ideas that citizens can understand what the terms “white supremacist,” “colonialist,” “heteronormative,” “ableist,” and “classist” even mean. It is in the interest of those in power to not allow these ideas to become part of everyday parlance. Throughout this book, I hope to show that censorship only helps those in power. I fully recognize that some readers will not be convinced; however, I hope that the book at the very least explains why arguments advocating censorship of hateful and hurtful ideas are not always the best course of action when attempting to protect the voices of people who are marginalized.

Some caveats are in order. This book is not meant to be a comprehensive overview of all intellectual freedom issues, and there will inevitably be some information that is left out or glossed over. Readers are encouraged to explore the supplementary readings listed at the end of each chapter. In addition, this book is primarily focused on intellectual freedom in the United States, although there is some discussion of intellectual freedom issues around the globe. Finally, although the primary audience for the book is all library workers and other information professionals, it is intended to be accessible and of interest to all who want to know more about intellectual freedom. Readers may consider reading this primer in tandem with the latest edition (at the time of this writing, the tenth edition) of the *Intellectual Freedom Manual* (2021) in order to have practical guidelines and parameters for better understanding intellectual freedom as a fundamental value of librarianship and related fields.

This introductory chapter sets the stage for exploring several aspects of intellectual freedom. The rest of the book is divided into seven areas that provide breadth in understanding the issues that constitute intellectual freedom. None is meant to be exhaustive, and the reader is again encouraged to explore the supplementary bibliographies at the end of each chapter.

Chapter 2 focuses on the historical foundations of intellectual freedom. It includes discussion of John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty*, US court cases, and some information about IFLA and the Committee on Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE) and provides historical, philosophical, and legal overviews of the topic. Chapter 3 discusses the value of freedom of expression and includes an overview of current issues such as protection for hate speech in the United States as well as misinformation and disinformation. Chapter 4 centers on information access and provides an overview of what access means as well as other issues such as internet filtering, pro- and anti-censorship arguments, and a short discussion of book banning. Privacy is the focus of chapter 5. It

is primarily concerned with definitions of privacy and its relationship to information services. Chapter 6 is on copyright and provides a brief overview of US copyright law with a focus on fair use as well as some discussion of international copyright law. Chapter 7 discusses how intellectual freedom is supported within the information professions. Finally, the book concludes with a chapter that explores current and future issues in intellectual freedom.

It should be clear that intellectual freedom has two dominant concepts: information access and freedom of expression. These work in tandem with each other because one leads to the other: there is no information to access without the freedom of expression, which leads to there being information for people to access. This is clearly part of the communications circuit (Darnton 1991). It is hoped that this book will provide a foundation for understanding why supporting intellectual freedom is an important professional and personal value to hold in the information age.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How do you define intellectual freedom? Censorship? Social justice?
- Have you encountered censorship practices in your own life? Personal or professional?
- Do you agree that intellectual freedom is necessary for social justice? Why or why not?
- What does it mean to flourish as a human being? As a society?

## FURTHER READING

Alfino, Mark, and Laura Koltutsky, eds. 2014. *The Library Juice Press Handbook of Intellectual Freedom: Concepts, Cases, and Theories*. Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press.

This volume of essays covers the gamut of intellectual freedom issues from theoretical foundations to specific areas, including journalism, defamation, and government secrecy. It is an excellent resource for understanding a wide variety of debates within intellectual freedom.

Atkins, Robert, Svetlana Mintcheva, and National Coalition against Censorship (U.S.), eds. 2006. *Censoring Culture: Contemporary Threats to Free Expression*. New York: New Press.

The authors of the essays in this collection provide a wide array of perspectives on censorship. Although it was published some time ago, the essays remain relevant to intellectual freedom debates today.

Benn, Piers. 2021. *Intellectual Freedom and the Culture Wars*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

There are very few books outside of library and information sciences that focus on intellectual freedom, and Benn's monograph is one of the few examples. This ethical treatise provides a well-reasoned, philosophical justification for intellectual freedom.

Garnar, Martin, Trina Magi, and Office for Intellectual Freedom, eds. 2021. *Intellectual Freedom Manual*. 10th ed. Chicago: American Library Association.

The most recent edition of the *Intellectual Freedom Manual* is a crucial resource for anyone interested in intellectual freedom and related issues. It provides clear overviews, definitions, checklists, and recommendations for implementing policies that support intellectual freedom in an information institution. Although primarily intended for library workers, it is useful for anyone interested in intellectual freedom.

**Leung, Sofia Y., and Jorge R. López-McKnight, eds. 2021. *Knowledge Justice: Disrupting Library and Information Studies through Critical Race Theory*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.**

This important book, which is available fully open access, pushes both academics and practitioners to reconsider firmly held theories and practices in the information professions. There are critiques of conventional ideas of intellectual freedom, information access, and freedom of expression that should be carefully considered by every librarian and information professional.

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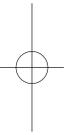
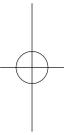
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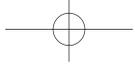
# Book Banning in 21st-Century America



Emily J. M. Knox

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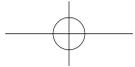
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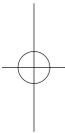
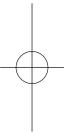
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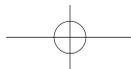
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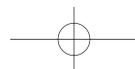




## Preface

At the beginning of the 21st century, an incredible assortment of media including books are readily available to anyone with a computer, tablet, smartphone, and an Internet connection, so what is the point of trying to ban a book from the public library or remove it from the school curriculum? This book attempts to provide some answers to this question. I have long been interested in exploring the reasons why people challenge books. My mother was a high school media specialist for over 30 years and she would bring home Banned Books Week literature every year and encouraged me to write my book reports on frequently challenged books. Books that I loved, like Judy Blume's *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*, appeared on the list every year. What were people trying to accomplish trying to remove or restrict these books? What did they think would happen if I read them?

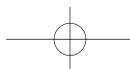
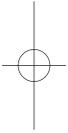
Unlike a lot of research on intellectual freedom and censorship, which tends to focus on bibliography, ethics, and policy, *Book Banning in 21st-Century America* explores the arguments of the challengers themselves. These arguments are often dismissed in both the general and professional media, but I believe that by taking challengers' justifications for their actions seriously, information professionals can be better prepared for challenges to materials in their collections. *Book Banning* is based on research that I initially completed for my dissertation. Over the four years since the initial study I have added three cases to the analysis, and there are additional interviews, public hearings, and documentary data. One of the most difficult aspects of the study was finding challengers who were willing to be interviewed, and I am grateful to all who agreed to speak to someone on the "other side." This study would not have the same resonance without their thoughtful answers to my questions.





As stated throughout the book, the practices of censorship demonstrate the relationship between knowledge and power. The study presented here focuses on the discourse of challengers particularly with regard to their understanding of the effects of knowledge and how they use their symbolic power to control access to certain cultural materials within public institutions. Through analysis of challengers' discourse, we can more clearly understand the connection between knowledge and power and also provide better responses to those who attempt to remove, restrict, and relocate materials.

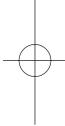
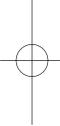
As a former professional librarian, I should note that I am not neutral on the issue of censorship, although I have attempted to adopt a neutral tone. I strongly support the ALA's policies on intellectual freedom and work to uphold them in my academic and professional life. In some respects, this makes me a direct antagonist to people who bring challenges against books. However, what unites me and the challengers is our belief that reading is powerful. Books change lives. With this in mind, I endeavored throughout this study to be open to challengers' arguments and not impose my own biases on their own worldviews concerning books and reading.





## *Chapter Two*

# **Power and Knowledge**



Most of my interviews take place over the phone. This is not ideal, as quite a bit of the interaction is lost when you can't see someone's nonverbal communication. Despite these drawbacks, my recorder is on and I'm concentrating on being an active listener. The interview begins with questions about the participant's life and how reading fits into it and only later on do we discuss the book challenge. The reasons for the book challenge in this particular case are notable. In the United States many books are challenged for their sexual or political content, but this parent was concerned about the violence in the text. I ask her about her reasons for challenging the book:

I think it's damaging for children to read literature, damages them psychologically . . . that literature, not dark as in Harry Potter dark. But dark as in holding a gun to the head and describing holding a knife to a two-year-old's throat. That's just too graphic. Too much. Crossing a line. If they weren't doing a story about a kidnapping they wouldn't have . . . you know they get kidnapped and trapped in a closet. But it [should] never [cross] that line where somebody is holding a knife to her throat. To me the line has been crossed and I felt like I had to stand up and say my piece about it. (Interview with challenger, Central York, PA, December 7, 2011)

Although the stated reasons for targeting this particular book are not typical, the parent's justifications for wanting the book removed can be found in many challenge cases: "A line has been crossed." "I needed to say something." "The books will damage children." These themes occur with regularity in challengers' arguments for removing a particular title from a public library or school. As noted in chapter 1, censorship demonstrates an intimate relationship between power and knowledge. When a group or individual endeavors to remove, restrict, or relocate an item within a public

institution they are both demonstrating their concern over the knowledge contained within the book and also exercising their symbolic power over the institution. This chapter explores these concepts more fully, first by introducing a theory of power—specifically, symbolic power—and second by exploring the construction of knowledge and the practice of reading.

By way of introduction to these theoretical frameworks, note that this study is a work of discourse analysis. There are many different types of discourse analysis (see the Methodological Note in appendix A for more on this method of analysis). According to Nelson Phillips and Cynthia Hardy, discourse is “an interrelated set of texts and practices of their production, dissemination, and reception that brings an object into being.”<sup>1</sup> More specifically, discourse is constructed from language. However, it is not simply “words” that exist outside of a particular individual but also what individuals “do” with the language. The theories given below describe how language is “constitutive of reality.”<sup>2</sup> Language does not simply describe the world—it also constructs the objects that exist within it. The challengers’ arguments analyzed in the following chapters use language that both describes and constructs their worldviews concerning society, the materiality of books, the act of reading, and institutions within their communities.

The chapter begins with a discussion of social constructionism, the meta-theoretical framework for the study that clarifies the emphasis on language in the analysis. It then discusses symbolic capital and power in the theory of Pierre Bourdieu as these two ideas help to explain the intersection of language and power that are employed in challenge cases. These two theories clarify the emphasis on language in the analysis. Next, the chapter explores how past and present reading practices can be used to understand the current reading practices of challengers. Although these frameworks for analysis come from different paradigms, they provide robust concepts and vocabulary for understanding the discourse of challengers and also position their discourse within a broader social-theoretical framework.

### SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM AND SYMBOLIC POWER

The analysis in this study is based in the work of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann’s *The Social Construction of Reality*.<sup>3</sup> In this classic treatise in the sociology of knowledge, Berger and Luckmann explore how reality is constructed through everyday knowledge that is transmitted and maintained through society and its institutions. The book describes how “language marks the co-ordinates of [one’s] life in society and fills that life with meaningful objects.”<sup>4</sup> Based on the work of Max Scheler, Robert Merton, Karl Mannheim, and others, Berger and Luckmann posit two concepts from their work

that are particularly important for the analysis used in this study: stocks of knowledge and the symbolic universe.

### Stocks of Knowledge

In order to understand what Berger and Luckmann mean by “stocks of knowledge” it is necessary to understand their theory of how language and the social world operate as the foundation of reality in everyday life. Language, including written language, is used for the *objectivation* of things as well as a bridge to experience and organize everyday life. Note that the term “objects” is used broadly in this context and includes both everyday objects such as books as well as institutions such as the school or library. Through the process of objectivation we develop a system of signs through which we build up a socially distributed stock of knowledge. Stocks of knowledge are based in language and include both everyday and specialized knowledge. Everyday knowledge includes, for example, the ability to read and write. Specialized knowledge, on the other hand, is the domain of experts within a particular field. This would include, for example, the knowledge that subject librarians have for sources in a particular area of study or the knowledge of programmers of coding languages.

Prior to publishing *The Social Construction of Reality*, Luckmann coauthored *The Structure of the Life-World* with Alfred Schutz, in which the concept of stocks of knowledge is described in more detail.<sup>5</sup> Here Luckmann and Schutz demonstrate how stocks of knowledge are constituted by both *types* and *typical actions*. Types are individuals’ construction of objects in their everyday life—including their fellow human beings—that are developed through a process of socialization. Schutz and Luckmann note that these types are abstract, incomplete, relative, and relevant to the situation at hand. That is, they do not provide a “complete picture” but are used as a heuristic device to interpret situations and objects in one’s life. Types also are mutable depending on the intimacy and relevance of the involved object. For example, a book is a type of object for which I might have a general perception in my head, but this perception will change when I encounter a book in my everyday life. I will also employ my construction of “book” to perceive and identify that the object in front of me is, in fact, a book. However, depending on the nature of the interaction, this encounter might also change my typification of books in general. It is salient for this study to note that types can also apply to institutions such as the library or schools. An individual’s particular understanding of “what a library should do” or “what a school should be” within a community is based on a typification of “library” and “school.” As will be demonstrated in the following chapters, challengers argue that such institutions should be “safe”—not just physically but also in terms of having “appropriate” types of knowledge on shelves or in

curricula. A typical action describes how one responds to others' actions and provides information on how to get things accomplished. One example of typical actions that is salient to this study is the interpretive strategies that one uses when reading a text. For example, when the interviewee quoted above states that reading "dark" literature damages children psychologically, she is describing a particular interpretation that she brings to the text. According to Berger and Luckmann, stocks of knowledge are learned through socialization. Types and typical actions are passed down from one generation to the next through social institutions such as the family and schools. Stocks of knowledge operate within what Berger and Luckmann call the symbolic universe, which both produces new interpretations of objects and makes these interpretations credible.

### **The Symbolic Universe**

The symbolic universe, as described by Berger and Luckmann, is particularly important to understanding the worldviews and arguments of challengers, as it is a concept that helps to illuminate the origin of the common themes found in their discourse. Objective reality, that is, the reality of everyday life, is constructed through processes of institutionalization and legitimation. Types and typical actions that make up stocks of knowledge are passed down through these two processes. Institutionalization describes the process of socialization that takes place through childhood. Individuals become "selves" through a process of social integration with both their environment and other humans. One's "self" is the outcome of all of these interactions. Legitimation, on the other hand, is the process by which institutionalization is made plausible and passed from one generation to the next. The symbolic universe, through which meaning is created, emerges from this process of legitimation as it makes stocks of knowledge credible to succeeding generations. The symbolic universe encompasses all levels of legitimation in everyday life including the incipient or "things are just like that" level, theoretical propositions, and explicit theories. These legitimating functions allow the symbolic universe to play an important part in constructing an individual's worldview because it supplies meaning to unexplained and random events and helps to explain divergent worldviews among individuals.

Symbolic universes perform important functions within objective reality. First, they have a "law-giving" quality and allow for everyday life to have complete integration. They also order one's individual biography and provide legitimacy for death. In short, symbolic universes provide a basis for rationalizing the events in one's life and are an integral part of one's worldview. For example, religion operates as a symbolic universe sine qua non since it completely orders reality. As noted above, symbolic universes provide a foundation for an institutional order for the entire universe and help

individuals fill in gaps for aspects of life that are not readily explained. As will be demonstrated in chapter 6, some challengers sometimes use religious language to argue for removing or relocating a particular text. It is clear from this use of language that, for these challengers, their religious beliefs provide a particular order for understanding their lives.

Social constructionism, as briefly outlined above, provides the metatheoretical foundation for this study because it offers a framework for understanding how language shapes an individual's worldview on the deepest levels of legitimation and rationalization. For Berger, Luckmann, and Schutz, the constitutive view of language is axiomatic. Since this is a study of the discourse employed by individuals in challenge cases, it is important to understand how analysis of language provides a window into the wider worldviews of challengers. That is, it is possible to understand why challengers target particular books in an age of ubiquitous access to texts by exploring the language they employ to justify their actions. As noted previously, this study can be classified as culturalist discourse research that explores the arguments challengers use to justify their arguments for removing, relocating, or restricting books in public school libraries. Research of this type focuses on how both language and symbolic capital affect the distribution of knowledge. While the previous section of this chapter discussed language, the following section explores Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice and symbolic power.

### Symbolic Capital and Power

As will be demonstrated in the analysis chapters, challengers use their symbolic power as citizens, parents, and taxpayers in challenge cases in order to shape public institutions in their communities. The symbolic is an important aspect of Bourdieu's philosophical project, the development of a theory of practice. Bourdieu's project is called theory of *practice* because it focuses on how individuals conduct themselves within both institutional and personal constraints.<sup>6</sup> According to Bourdieu, constructions within the social world have three attributes: First, they are always subject to structure. Second, cognition is socially structured. Finally, practices are both individual and social. Bourdieu's well-known concept of *habitus* comes out of these three points—it is what produces structure for classification within the world. The concept of habitus is crucial to understanding Bourdieu's theory.<sup>7</sup> It describes how individuals operate within the “space” between objective structures and subjective structures. As Bourdieu notes, practice is never automatic and people do not always know that they are operating within socially constructed boundaries. By turning “history into nature” and “nature into common sense,” an individual's habitus offers a collection of repertoires on which an individual can draw throughout a particular event.<sup>8</sup> In this study,

one set of repertoires on which challengers rely are particular reading strategies that are based on a strong correlation between the written word and the idea of truth. In Bourdieu's terms, challengers' habitus provides the structures for interpreting text in this manner. It is important to note that the world is not seen by people as being completely structured—individuals have “space” in which to operate and interact within the symbolic system.

Another important aspect of Bourdieu's theory is the concept of capital. Capital refers to an individual's “accumulated labor which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor.”<sup>9</sup> In other words, capital is a form of currency broadly construed. According to Bourdieu, there are four different types of capital that an individual possesses: economic, cultural, social, and symbolic. First, economic capital is simply one's monetary worth. Next, Bourdieu describes three different states of cultural capital. Art, music, and literature are examples of cultural capital in its objectified state. Second, table manners and other such habits of the body exemplify an embodied state of cultural capital. Finally, academic credentials are an institutionalized form of cultural capital. The third type of capital, social capital, is particularly important for this study because it primarily consists of one's social networks which can be leveraged for political influence in the local community. Social capital also includes one's inherited capital such as is found in the nobility.

Symbolic capital is a “transformed and thereby disguised form of physical ‘economic’ capital that produces its proper effect inasmuch and only inasmuch, as it conceals the fact that it originates in ‘material’ forms of capital which are also, in the last analysis, the source of its effects.”<sup>10</sup> That is, symbolic capital is economic capital in a different form. For example, when challengers describe themselves as “taxpayers” they are conveying the idea that they have a certain kind of fiscal authority over public institutions. This is a method of converting one's economic capital into power. Symbolic power is important because it is often misrecognized as something else such as common sense or justified actions. Bourdieu defines symbolic power as those symbolic instruments (including discourse) that are used by one social group to dominate another social group.<sup>11</sup> Both the division of labor and ideology are included as types of symbolic power, and it is understood to be one of the primary building blocks for a social group.

It is the combination of symbolic capital and symbolic power that delineates the knowledge classification struggles found in challenge cases. These cases are a struggle for domination over who has the authority to determine the boundaries of legitimate and illegitimate knowledge in the public sphere. Challengers use their own symbolic power against the symbolic power of librarians, teachers, and administrators. Bourdieu describes this struggle as a form of symbolic violence in which hegemonic norms and procedures are

used by one group to dominate over another.<sup>12</sup> As will be demonstrated in the following chapters, challenge cases are essentially symbolic struggles between individuals and groups who have different values and operate within differing symbolic universes. The following section discusses the foundations of one aspect of the symbolic universe in which challengers operate—their conceptualization of the book and the interpretive strategies that they impose on texts.

## WRITTEN KNOWLEDGE

In his book on understanding and managing challenges titled *The New Inquisition*, James LaRue, a former public library director, argues that book challenges are essentially about respect for writing:

Behind the challenges of many patrons is awe of the written word. This may well be rooted in the profound respect granted to the Bible, based on several factors but not least upon its endurance. This belief, incidentally, is also shared by the secular left, which believes education—mainly exposure to the written word—is also very powerful.<sup>13</sup>

That is, understanding an individual's reverence for the written word is foundational for understanding why he or she challenges a book. This argument can be found throughout challengers' discourse. Within this particular worldview, it is easy to see why challengers are arguing that children should not read a particular book because reading is a powerful act—one that has effects on individual character and behavior. While the sections above focused on theories of discourse and power, the following sections elucidate the other half of the censorship equation—a particular understanding of knowledge and how it operates in everyday life.

Grounded in the idea of the power of writing, the following explores how past and present reading practices can be used to understand challengers' construction of current interpretive strategies. Since the practices of writing and reading have changed over time, it is necessary to define what these practices are and how they may influence contemporary challengers. This section begins with a discussion of writing practices and the materiality of books. It then offers a brief overview of historical reading practices in the West, starting in the Middle Ages through to the contemporary era. Finally, this overview offers a framework for understanding how the “undisciplined imagination” is conceptualized in challengers' discourse.

### Writing Practices

Writing, in contrast to oration, is a form of symbolic authority that acquires its power through material form. Writing is a performative action and its real-world effects outstrip the physical action of putting words to page.<sup>14</sup> There are many examples of this performative power of writing. Some legal contracts, for example, are not considered binding unless they are written down. This can be most clearly seen in the common legal agreement of marriage. Even if there is a ceremony, there is no marriage without a written and signed marriage license. Another example concerns the institution of slavery. Before manumission, the act of writing someone's name under the heading "slave" made them a slave.<sup>15</sup> When the slave's owner struck through his or her name on this list, the slave was free. However, freedmen and freedwomen were required to carry papers that proved their status in society. These acts of writing had and have actual ramifications in the "real world."

It is a complex task to conceptualize how writing produces these effects. In the Western world the writing practices described above seem to operate as indexical signs. A concept first developed by Charles S. Peirce, an indexical sign has a tangible link between the signifier and the signified where there is a *correlation* between the meaning of the sign and reality.<sup>16</sup> In this case, there is a correlation between writing and reality. Indexical signs indicate a concrete reality: It is a sign wherein "smoke means fire, pawprints mean the presence of a cat."<sup>17</sup> In the example given above, the words on the page (e.g., a person's name under the heading "slave") have a direct correlation with his or her status in the reality. Further, the writing imbues the individual with that status. Another example of the indexical status of writing might be the words on a legal contract, or the act of signing a marriage license signifying an ontological change among the signatories. At the same time, it also produces this change. That is, by signing the marriage license the two individuals are now "married" and they are now bound to fulfill the duties that go along with that status. Note that these writing practices take place within wider institutional and social contexts that continually construct the written word as a powerful act. As demonstrated in this study, challengers are very concerned with truth in the written word and it is possible that this is due to understanding of text in this sense where the text operates as an indexical sign. That is, the fact that something is written text means that is (or should be) true. This concept of correlation between the sign of the text and signified reality is particularly helpful in understanding challengers' discourse regarding the nature of truth and fictional texts as described in chapter 5.

Writing, which in its performative capacity can give shape and framework to the social world, also has a direct influence on the authority given to books in modern society. Because they "contain" writing and are a fixed

medium, books also have a particular kind of “power.” They operate as symbolic, stabilizing objects within the social world that can legitimate the ideas that are contained within them. That is, the book *as a book* legitimizes and gives credibility to ideas in texts. This connection between writing and books is a major theme in the discourse of censorship. One model for understanding this relationship between texts and books can be found in the work of Lisa Jardine, who titles one chapter in her monograph “The Triumph of the Book.” Jardine notes that books “revolutionized the transmission of knowledge and permanently changed the attitudes of thinking Europe.”<sup>18</sup> It is the book as a medium for the dissemination of knowledge that is crucial here, as its material form allowed for the spread of a limitless number of ideas across the West and throughout the world. As demonstrated in the analysis chapters that follow, challengers are finely attuned to the legitimating power of writing and its influence over people in the sense that this power can validate the assumption presented in a particular text.

### Materiality of Books

If one allows that, for challengers, the book is a symbolic object of authority, it must be noted that this authority is complicated by the fact that books may contain limitless content and ideas. As a consequence of this, books are simultaneously a stabilizing and a destabilizing force in society. A common theme in challengers’ discourse centers on whether or not the presence of a controversial idea in a book gives legitimacy to the idea as such. Their arguments reveal the tension between the book as a stabilizing and destabilizing object. Book history scholarship demonstrates that the book operates not only as a legitimizing agent but also as a symbolic object that can be used to verify one’s particular cultural sensibility. For example, during the early modern period, simply having a copy of the *Encyclopédie* on one’s library shelf demonstrated a particular sensibility and showed that the owner shared the progressive opinions of the *philosophes* who wrote the articles in the encyclopedia.<sup>19</sup> Another historical example that demonstrates the importance of the book’s symbolic authority is the reverence that the 19th-century New England families described by William J. Gilmore held for their single-volume Bibles. Even if the household had no other books, there was always a Bible, which served as a family archive and a manual for living.<sup>20</sup> This concept of the book as signifier of one’s sensibilities is linked to challengers’ concern over having objectionable material in public institutions such as libraries and schools. If such books are present it means that, for the challengers, the institutions approve of all aspects of the texts within. In her monograph on a censorship controversy in Oklahoma, Louise Robbins argues that libraries are particularly susceptible to challenges and that this “vulnerability comes both from the importance and authority Americans ac-

cord the books . . . the library collects, organizes and circulates . . . from its position as a public institution charged with the preservation and transmission of culture.”<sup>21</sup> For challengers, having a book in a public or school library collection, and especially if the book is approved for use in a school curriculum, means that the institution believes in the ideas that are presented in the text. In this context, ownership of books becomes a sign of a particular worldview.

It should be noted that perhaps the most well-known debate in the area of the authority of the book relates to the relationship between the presentation of the text and how it is interpreted by readers. In her treatise on the impact of printing on Western society, Elizabeth Eisenstein argues that printing changed culture not simply because ideas shifted but because the printing press allowed many more people to have access to these new ideas.<sup>22</sup> Eisenstein contends that printing allowed for the standardization of texts (i.e., fixity) and permitted people to discuss the same work across space and time. There are some historians who consider Eisenstein’s argument to be overly deterministic. Adrian Johns, in particular, believes the idea of fixity in early printing to be overstated.<sup>23</sup> He argues that early modern printings of books were not uniform editions of texts and therefore could not be considered to be a source of stable knowledge. Nevertheless, the idea of the fixed work underpins and enables the practice of indexing the book and allows for ideas to be maintained over temporal and spatial distances. Challengers, like almost all contemporary readers, take this idea of fixity of the text as a given and assume that the text they are challenging is the same for all.

The juxtaposition of the book as a revered material object and the importance of the text contained therein is also emphasized by Daniel Selcer in his monograph on early modern philosophy titled *Philosophy and the Book*. Of particular interest is Selcer’s discussion of Baruch Spinoza and how the mechanized printed word changed people’s interpretation of text especially in relation to the Bible. Selcer notes that Spinoza posits two somewhat contradictory positions. First, that scripture itself is a fixed entity but its new status as simply “a book” means that it has lost some of its sacred character. Second and concurrently, that sacred meaning is inextricable from the materiality of the text.<sup>24</sup> The words on the page are capable of creating real effects on the reader:

A concatenation of letters on the page is capable of generating in me devotion to God (or its opposite . . .) means the disposition of these letters produces effects in my mind and in my body, and that those effects are transitions in my power to produce effects (i.e., to act and to exist). This is what constitutes the meaning of the words in question: the meaning of words is nothing but the effects they produce.<sup>25</sup>

This idea of meaning and interpretation, even in the secular realm, leading to real effects is integral to understanding the discourse of censorship as a whole and discourse of challengers in particular. As demonstrated in the analysis chapters, challengers often fear that reading the targeted texts will not only lead to short-term harmful effects but also puts the reader's soul in jeopardy. The book, as a material object that both stabilizes and transmits knowledge, is of primary importance to understanding how these effects become manifest in a reader. The circular interaction between books and texts means that these material objects have the power to affect an individual's character and soul. The next section of this chapter describes in more detail some models for understanding how this takes place by exploring the historical models that inform challengers' construction of the practice of reading, in particular with regard to the effects of texts on certain readers.

### HISTORICAL READING PRACTICES

Reading, like writing, is somewhat difficult to theorize. In this study, reading is constructed as a social practice that has changed over time and encompasses different physical modalities and interpretive strategies. In order to understand why people challenge books, it is necessary to delve into their understanding of how reading works, what it means to read a text, and how they construct the idea of "appropriate" reading materials. In her article on textual interpretation, Elizabeth Long demonstrates the social and collective nature of the practice of reading.<sup>26</sup> Even though reading is often seen as a solitary activity (a concept that Long vividly illustrates through a series of images that show lone readers), Long establishes the collective nature of reading by demonstrating its reliance on both social infrastructure and social framing. By social infrastructure, Long means that reading is an activity that is learned through social relationships and relies on the social base of literary culture. Social framing constructs certain materials as being "worth reading" and is a socially defined concept. As shown in the following chapters, this concept of "worthy" reading becomes visible in challengers' discourse when they refer to the challenged material as "garbage" or "junk" in opposition to books that they consider to be worth reading.

The following sections of the chapter briefly describe reading practices from the Middle Ages to the present with particular emphasis on the interpretive strategies employed when encountering written texts.<sup>27</sup> Here one can see the development of "typical actions" with regard to reading. Stanley Fish notes that "interpretive strategies are not put into execution after reading . . . they are the shape of reading and because they are the shape of reading they give texts their shape, making them rather than, as it is usually assumed, arising from them."<sup>28</sup> As Fish explains, the meaning of a text is never fixed

and is open to polysemy (i.e., multiple meanings) across time, groups of people, or even within a single individual. Interpretive strategies are defined here as a set of implicit decisions regarding analysis that one makes both before and while one is reading. These decisions have many different influences including how written texts are socially constructed and, as noted previously, the perceived authority of the book. As will be shown in the analysis chapters, challengers, in fact, disagree with this view of texts being open to many different meanings and often argue that there is only one possible interpretation of the texts that they target.

### The Middle Ages

Historians have shown that in the Middle Ages, writing was understood to be a medium of authority that held the record of obligations of the poor and had both magic and evil powers.<sup>29</sup> This conceptualization can be connected to the performative aspects of writing described above. It was, according to historical accounts, an era of “restricted literacy” in which few people could read or write. Restricted literacy is defined as a society in which only the gentry, clerics, and other elites are able to read—everyone else lives on the margins of these literate classes.<sup>30</sup> This meant, ipso facto, that problematic texts were not accessible to most of the population. Many people could not read and those who could did so primarily for religious purposes. Christianity is a religion whose doctrines are based almost exclusively on texts. The Christian canon consists of the written texts of the Hebrew Bible (or Old Testament—one section of which is called “The Writings”) and the New Testament that includes the four canonical written Gospels and letters to Christian communities from wandering apostles. For the Christian, almost everything that one needed to know for salvation was contained in these texts and he or she considered reading to be the path to redemption. As will be demonstrated in the analysis chapters, the negative of this idea (that reading can be a pathway to sin) is a common theme in challengers’ discourse.

#### *Levels of Interpretation*

In the Middle Ages, those who could read would often engage with scripture—and possibly other texts—on a dialogical level. They would employ interpretive strategies that did not encourage a single fixed meaning but, as described below, methods that allowed for simultaneous polysemy of a given text. These codified interpretive strategies were intended to guide the reader away from a negative interpretive pathway of sin. According to M. B. Parkes, there were four levels of interpretation that readers used when studying texts. The first was *lectio*, in which the student had to identify the elements of the text. *Emendatio* referred to the corrections made by the student to the manuscript text. The third, *enarratio*, described the process of inter-

preting the text's subject matter. Finally, *iudicium* referred to judgment of the aesthetic qualities of the text. Discrepancies in texts, especially sacred texts, could be attributed to the multiple senses of scripture.<sup>31</sup> Scholars engaged with and produced their own personal readings or exegesis of texts through a process that was fully systematized. Although, as time went on, students used a variety of glosses and abridgments to help them better understand difficult texts, all were encouraged to be readers and not simply reciters. For example, Jacqueline Hamesse offers an anecdote of Robert of Melun who, next to a passage on *lectors* and *recitators* writes: "Concerning those who apply themselves to the exercises of reading and citations of authorities and do not understand them."<sup>32</sup> In this time period, there were professional recitators who simply read aloud while lectors were those who attempted to read and understand the text.

#### *Silent Reading and Private Interpretation*

According to accounts of the history of reading, physical reading practices shifted during the Middle Ages. Hamesse discusses modes of reading that existed at the time. First, people read by murmuring in low voices to themselves. People also continued to read aloud publicly—a practice that dated from antiquity.<sup>33</sup> Third, although it took some time for this practice to take hold, Hamesse notes that people also read silently. When reading silently—in contrast to reading aloud—one's thoughts and therefore one's interaction with the text is private. This historical shift to silent reading is important for understanding the discourse of challengers. When someone reads silently, an observer has no knowledge of how the reader is interpreting the text. Paul Saenger notes that the connection between silent reading and accusations of heresy began in the 11th century. Reading aloud in community (public *lectio*) meant that others would be able to provide corrections to heretical statements. Saenger explicitly links the spread heresy to the silent, private reading of tracts:

Alone in his study, the author, whether a well-known professor or an obscure student, could compose or read heterodox ideas without being overheard. In the classroom, the student, reading silently to himself, could listen to the orthodox opinions of his professor and visually compare them with the views of those who rejected established ecclesiastical authority. . . . Private visual reading and composition thus encouraged individual critical thinking and contributed ultimately to the development of skepticism and intellectual heresy.<sup>34</sup>

When one reads silently, one could be thinking heretical thoughts and there is no method for correcting them. This point of distinction between reading silently and reading aloud is vitally important for understanding the discourse of contemporary challengers. Silent reading places interpretation

primarily in the hands of the individual. As demonstrated in the following chapters, the issue of unmediated text is a salient one for understanding the actions of challengers. While other mediums, such as broadcast television, can be censored by standards and practices boards, reading silently means that outsiders do not know where one is located or how one might be interpreting the text. This adds to the fear challengers have that people will have access to the ideas presented in objectionable texts.

### Early Modern Period (1500–1800)

Along with changes to reading practices in the Middle Ages described above, new reading practices in the early modern period also provide models for understanding some distinctive aspects of challengers' construction of reading in the early 21st century. Several shifts in reading practices described by historians in this period appear in the discourse of contemporary challengers. Some notable differences in the practice of reading include an emphasis on unmediated texts and the fear of the effects of unmediated interpretation; along with these practices there was also increased distributions of printed materials and a continuing growth of literacy throughout the time period. Each of these changes is briefly described below.

#### *Unmediated Texts*

As noted above, silent reading became a more widespread practice during the Middle Ages. Without the intervention of fellow “readers” who were listening to a text as it was read out loud, reading became a personal, individualized experience between the reader and the text. The text itself, however, often had its own mediatory attributes. As Brian Stock notes, there were “textual communities” or “microsocieties” that shared a common understanding of scripture.<sup>35</sup> Sacred and classical works usually included annotations, glosses, and commentaries that would guide the reader toward a “correct” interpretation of the original text. According to Stock, individuals who shared a particular understanding of the text became a community even if they were dissimilar in other ways.

During the early modern period, sacred and classical works that were published in their original languages circulated without commentaries and annotations.<sup>36</sup> This particular model of reading did not focus on the interpretations of others; instead, historians argue that individuals could form interpretations of classics unmediated by the annotations of other readings. Similar to the Middle Ages, when a “typical” reader who read silently no longer had to contend with the influence of others who were *hearing* the same text, during the early modern age, the “typical” reader did not always have to contend with the work of others in the text itself. As a consequence of this, interpretive strategies that one brought to the text exerted considerable influ-

ence when reading a text. It should be noted that humanist scholars in the early modern age eventually produced their own commentaries and these were often published alongside the original text. As Anthony Grafton writes, “The glosses of humanist teacher, usually offered first as lessons in classrooms, then rewritten for print, twined themselves like the illuminators’ vines around the texts.”<sup>37</sup> However, the early modern age also placed considerable emphasis on the individual and his own interpretation of the texts. As described by Grafton, often readers would write their own annotations to supplement the printed ones, thus revealing their individual interpretation of the texts.

The early modern age was also a time of religious upheaval in Europe. Although there were many doctrinal variations in what eventually became Protestant Christianity, one—*sola scriptura* or salvation through knowledge of the Bible alone—is particularly important for understanding the contemporary discourse of challengers as it points to why reading is such a powerful activity. Inherent in this idea is the belief that each person can read and understand for himself or herself the truth of the good news of Jesus Christ.<sup>38</sup> Along with the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers (a belief that there is no mediator between the believer and God), the doctrine of *sola scriptura* indicates a belief that each person can bring about his or her own salvation through reading. These shifts, along with the loss of the fourfold sense of scripture described above, are crucial for understanding how contemporary challengers construct the practice of reading.

#### *The Consequences of Unmediated Interpretation*

When one considers the doctrine of *sola scriptura*, it is not surprising, then, that Protestant reformers viewed the practice of reading with some trepidation. This doctrine as well as the practice of reading unmediated texts silently led to two contradictory notions regarding reading the Bible. First, since the reformers assumed that God wants to save his people, the Bible was considered to be a simple text for anyone to understand. However, reformers simultaneously feared that this might not be the case and were concerned that individual interpretations might lead to heresy—the negative interpretation described above.<sup>39</sup> This fear was, in some respects, exacerbated by the events of the Peasants’ War (1524–1525) in which tenant farmers animated by the antiauthoritarian doctrines of the revolution rose up against feudal lords. Martin Luther, in particular, was highly influenced by the war and published commentaries and catechisms on the scriptures in order to guide his followers toward “correct” interpretation.<sup>40</sup>

As noted earlier, fear of unmediated interpretation is critical for understanding the discourse of contemporary challengers. As Martyn Lyons notes:

Neither Protestant writers nor the Catholic hierarchy could predict readers' responses. Lutherans, Calvinists and Inquisitors alike confronted the independence of individual readers who could not easily be influenced or guided in the desired direction. . . . The interpretation of scripture could not be controlled.<sup>41</sup>

In the early modern age, reformers encouraged their followers to read on their own but with a reference text to guide them. These readers were not "trusted" to arrive at this correct interpretation on their own. This is an argument similar to those made by challengers. Although the segments of society who are not trusted to have adequate interpretive skills have changed over time, this study demonstrates that the fear of unmediated interpretation is paramount to understanding why people challenge materials in public institutions.

#### *Increased Distribution and Literacy*

Along with an increase in unmediated texts and the fear of how individuals would interpret such texts, the early modern period also saw the advent of the printing press and greater distribution of texts as well as increased literacy. As noted earlier, Jardine argues that the book altered the nature of knowledge in Western society.<sup>42</sup> How this happened and the nuances of this change remain highly contested among scholars. One of Jardine's explanations for this change, that books were less expensive than manuscripts, seems the most salient for understanding of the discourse of censorship. Since books were less expensive they were (eventually) more widely disseminated in society. This meant that more people might have access to knowledge that was not previously readily available to them. And yet by implication, people were in danger of becoming poor interpreters of texts.

According to some accounts of history, not only were there more texts available for reading in the early modern period, there were also more people to read them. The spread of literacy during this time period is well documented.<sup>43</sup> For the purposes of this study, it is important to note that this increase in the literate populace meant that more people would be susceptible to the dangers of the unmediated text. One might surmise that as more people were able to engage in the practice of reading, anxieties that they would do so "incorrectly" would also be intensified. This fear of unmediated interpretation relates to the concept of "undisciplined imagination" described in more detail below and helps inform some of the unease found in challengers' discourse on reading.

#### **Modern Period (1800–Present)**

During the 19th century, some sources note that there was a "print explosion" in the modern world.<sup>44</sup> Technological changes eventually gave rise to the

mass production of books, which meant that many different types of texts were available to many different members of society. Books were no longer the province of the wealthy. A few notable changes in reading took place during this time period. Both Europe and the United States experienced a reading fever, characterized by marked rises in literacy and the “secularization” of literature. Particularly important to understanding the discourse of censorship are the concepts of critical distance to the text and commonsense interpretive strategies. These latter changes are described in some depth below.

### *Secularization and Extensive Reading*

According to William J. Gilmore, the secularization of reading material occurred more slowly in the United States than in Europe. Even if the household had no other books, there was always a Bible present in the homes of the New England families. For 19th-century American families, the family Bible served as both a family archive and a manual for living.<sup>45</sup> However, reading fever for texts other than the Bible grew in the antebellum period, and the reading public in the United States became especially enamored of novels, which “threatened not just to coexist with elite literature but to replace it.”<sup>46</sup> There was a fear of a reading public who subsisted on popular literature that is familiar to many observers in contemporary America.

Individuals also began to read texts less intensively. Rolf Engelsing’s well-known theory regarding intensive versus extensive reading primarily refers to practices of the bourgeois in 18th-century Germany; however, because of the slower pace of change in reading practices in the United States, his thesis regarding changes in reading practices provides a useful starting point for understanding the practice of reading in the modern age in America.<sup>47</sup> Intensive reading, a style that characterized many readers up to this point, involved reading a few items closely, while extensive reading describes reading many items with less care. Leah Price argues that Engelsing established a contrast between “reverent readers and passive consumers . . . [that] fuels a conservative distaste for modern mass culture and mass markets.”<sup>48</sup> This distaste for mass culture and mass reading was marked in this time of reading fever and is well documented in Stephen Colclough’s *Consuming Texts*, which uses newspaper illustrations from the industrial age to demonstrate this leeriness toward the reading public. One such illustration shows a father ignoring his daughters who are looking at suspicious books while he is distracted by advertisements.<sup>49</sup> As will be demonstrated in chapter 4, this scene illustrates a particular fear that is common in the discourse of challengers wherein they are afraid that other parents are not “living up to their jobs” by setting proper boundaries for their children. The image de-

scribed above situates this fear within a long tradition of discourse about reading practices.

### *Critical Distance and Common Sense*

Another concept of primary importance to understanding reading practices in the modern era is the idea of *critical distance* to a text, which is linked to the modern idea that humans are capable of rational thought and are able to apply their own ideas to a particular text. That is, they have “the capacity for resistance and disbelief” and do not simply accept whatever is written in the text.<sup>50</sup> This is a conceptualization of readers that defines many interpretive communities throughout the West today and it is an interpretive strategy that many librarians, administrators, and other staff of public libraries and schools share. When students are required to read a particular book in school, one surmises that the staff members who assigned it believe that the students employ both the interpretive strategies to understand the text and also maintain a critical distance from the text. In public libraries and schools, librarians and other staff members often hold parents responsible for ensuring that their children are reading materials at the appropriate level. That is, that the children are sufficiently mature to have critical distance from and maintain a rational relationship to text in the book.

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, a particular conception of the idea of “rational thought” took hold in the United States in which rational thought is limited to “commonsense” ideas. Although it does not necessarily have resonance for many modern Americans, it is this philosophical framework that informs the discourse of challengers in this study as it helps to explain some of the intensity of challengers’ actions and their position regarding the targeted books. Their discourse concerning interpretive strategies of text is grounded in a particular understanding of how one views text, wherein “rational thought” is coupled with a view of “common sense” that elevates a monosemic rather than a polysemic interpretation of text. As noted above, the fourfold sense of scripture shifted during the Reformation and interpretation became a matter of direct experience. In his monograph examining the American commonsense tradition and its major advocates including John Witherspoon and William James, Scott Philip Segrest notes that the tradition reigned in American philosophy until the post–Civil War era.<sup>51</sup> The American idea of common sense, which is based in a Scottish philosophical tradition, is an attitude

grounded in experience in the sense of staying in touch with the world . . . and it is grounded by experience, in that it is the fruit of innumerable encounters with the world’s basic features and innumerable judgments both of fact and logic. The common sense attitude, once highly developed, enables the clarifi-

cation, collection, and synthesis of common sense truths into a body of knowledge accessible to a broader community.<sup>52</sup>

Although Scottish Common Sense philosophy never became very popular on the European continent, it exerted a strong influence over the American imagination. Common sense permeates many founding documents of the United States. As Segrest persuasively argues, when the founding fathers wrote that “we hold these truths to be self-evident,” they were referring to a self-evident truth that is grounded in the Scottish Common Sense tradition wherein truths must be experienced.<sup>53</sup>

In his monograph on the philosophical foundations and development of theology in the United States, Mark Noll argues that Common Sense philosophy provided a necessary epistemological framework for the Revolution era.<sup>54</sup> Previous eras including the Reformation, Puritanism of the 17th century, and the First Great Awakening of the 18th century “stressed human disability as much as human capability, noetic deficiency as much as epistemic capacity, and historical realism as much as social optimism.”<sup>55</sup> Common Sense, on the other hand, emphasizes the self-sufficiency of individuals and their ability to observe and understand the world around them. Noll’s work traces the spread of Common Sense philosophy from Scotland through the work of Scottish immigrants including John Witherspoon to institutions of higher learning in the United States, especially the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University). Of particular importance for these philosophers was an epistemology based on scientific rationality. This orientation toward the scientific, especially in the realm of the interpretation of texts, is explained in more detail by George Marsden in his writings on fundamentalism and evangelicalism in the United States.<sup>56</sup> According to Marsden, rational ideas based in a commonsense understanding of the world are of great importance in fundamentalist and evangelical culture. This is particularly prevalent in the idea of scientific Christianity wherein the Bible is seen as a book of scientific facts that can be understood by any reader and simply need to be rationally classified. A commonsense orientation toward reading the Bible means that

mystical, metaphorical and symbolic perceptions of reality have largely disappeared. Instead most Americans share what sociologist Michael Cavanaugh designates an “empiricist folk epistemology.” Things are thought best described exactly the way they appear, accurately with no hidden meanings.<sup>57</sup>

That is, when one reads the Bible—and possibly other texts—the meaning of the text is plain. In marked contrast to the fourfold sense of the scripture from the Middle Ages described above, polysemy is impossible. One example of this reading practice can be found in so-called Young Earth Creationists who do not allow for any allegorical interpretation of the Gene-

sis 1 creation story. For them, a day *means* a 24-hour period. This viewpoint is clearly demonstrated on the website for the Young Earth Creationist group Answers in Genesis (answersingenesis.org), which states that “the Bible clearly teaches that God created in six literal, 24-hour days a few thousand years ago.”

This foundation in Common Sense philosophy means that the idea of critical distance has a slightly different implication in this context. It does not necessarily refer to the idea that a *rational* interpretation of text is based in a given individual but that the *text itself* is only open to a particular interpretation—one that is self-evident to any rational reader. This study demonstrates that, for many challengers, the idea of reading a text with critical distance as an interpretive strategy is suffused with the concept of reading with common sense. The concept of reading with common sense is exceedingly important for understanding the discourse of censorship and the literalism with which challengers approach texts. Challengers often state that anyone who reads a particular text can see why they are requesting that it be removed or relocated. The problems with a particular text are self-evident and a rational person need only read it to understand this. For them, polysemy is impossible and there is only one probable interpretation for a given text. However, the manner in which this interpretation will have an effect on the reader may vary wildly depending on the mental abilities of the individual. For challengers, *it is the effects of this commonsense reading that take precedence*. Rational people (usually defined by challengers as adults) have the capacity and skill to maintain critical distance from the effects of commonsense reading while other members of society—especially children—are unable to maintain this distance. This is particularly clear when challengers discuss how the imagination operates, another idea that can be understood through past practices.

#### UNDISCIPLINED IMAGINATION AND MIMESIS

In his chapter on texts and images in the Renaissance, Peter Stallybrass observes that illustrations in scripture were crucial to interpreting the text. He focuses on the story of Genesis 2–3 where Adam and Eve are expelled from the garden and notes that images of the text portray them as naked while that text states that they were clothed. However, for Stallybrass, “the visual images have effectively rewritten the biblical text. These visual exegeses are more fascinating and important precisely because they produce meanings for which there is no textual support.”<sup>58</sup> The connection between text and image is of primary importance to challengers. However, as many of the books that are the targets of challengers do not contain illustration, challengers are more often concerned with mental images that are conjured by the text on the page. That is, challengers conceptualize imagining as a mimetic experience where,

through reading a text, the reader experiences the actions in the text. Since reading conjures images in one's mind, reading about a particular event is akin to living through it.

Cathy Davidson, in her monograph on the increase in novel reading in antebellum United States, describes the phenomenon as “undisciplined imagination” wherein the reader is unable to maintain distance between the events in a text and his or her own response. Davidson links fear of the undisciplined imagination to the influence of Common Sense philosophy described above. Teachers at the Ivy League colleges in the 18th century passed on to their students “an implicit suspicion of the undisciplined imagination, a conviction that literature must serve clear social needs, and a pervasive assumption that social need and social order were one and the same. Through these students—many of whom served as ministers—these ideas were readily disseminated throughout the populace.”<sup>59</sup> This suspicion of the imagination continues to inform the discourse of challengers. They fear, as the critics in the time period that Davidson studies, that there is no space between the events in the text and the reader's response to the text. She writes that “the very act of reading fiction asserted the primacy of the reader and the legitimacy of that reader's perceptions and responses.”<sup>60</sup> Like the critics in the 18th and 19th centuries, challengers are concerned with the effect of reading objectionable material on the maintenance of social order.

To summarize, in the modern era an orientation toward written texts developed wherein the reader maintained a critical distance toward texts. In the United States, this idea of critical distance is linked to the concept of common sense. Some people—such as in historical examples of women in the 18th and 19th centuries or children and youth in our time—are believed to be constitutionally unable to maintain critical distance toward a text. That is, the text will affect them adversely. Although challengers may disagree, it is important to note that reading practices and interpretive strategies are never isolated from one another and it is possible to read some texts with critical distance and other texts using more modular interpretive strategies. In some respects, the arguments of challengers harken back to some of the responses of the Reformation when leaders wanted their followers to read scripture on their own but were also frightened of what the consequences of this practice might be. These concepts of commonsense interpretive strategies and fear of the undisciplined imagination are an important aspect of the worldview of challengers and are key to understanding the knowledge side of the censorship equation.

## WORLDVIEWS AND CHALLENGES

The metatheory of social construction, Bourdieu's theory of practice, and the historical practices of reading detailed above provide a framework for understanding the worldviews of challengers as revealed through their discourse. As noted in the introductory chapter, worldviews provide both a lens for understanding everyday life and a road map for action. Challengers' arguments and justifications for requesting the relocation, restriction, and removal of books in public institutions provide insight into their worldviews especially with regard to the state of society, the role of public school libraries in local communities, and the power of reading. Although there are other theoretical frameworks, such as childhood development and studies in children's literature, that can be employed to understand the actions of challengers, it is my contention that these frameworks do not fully explain the targeting of books in public institutions in an age of ubiquitous access to books.<sup>61</sup> These actions can only be understood through an analysis that explores the link between symbolic power and written knowledge. In fact, as will be demonstrated in the analysis chapters, child development and education discourse operate as what Bourdieu terms structuring structure for challengers. That is, these are the discourses on which they draw to justify their targeting of particular books. Although the cases in this study focus on literature for children, similar arguments to those found in the following analysis were made when libraries refused to buy *Fifty Shades of Grey*, an erotic book intended for adults. In keeping with their professional ethics, information professionals should always be wary when individuals argue that certain materials should be removed from the public sphere, especially when such requests are made on behalf of people who have little political agency of their own.<sup>62</sup>

The following chapters of the book offer an analysis of challengers' discourse using the theoretical frameworks above. Throughout these chapters the words of the challengers are shown in block quotations. Analyzed quotations are followed by a parenthetical citation indicating the quotation's source, the location of the challenge case, and date. Hearings include the gender and number of the speaker. Documents include document type and date. These quotations are exemplars of particular themes and one quotation might be used to illuminate several different concepts throughout the chapters. Except when interviewees specifically stated that I did not need to maintain confidentiality in their informed consent forms, great care is taken not to give any identifying information other than gender in the analysis. Gender is included solely for clarity and concision. All quotations are from transcripts produced by me and any errors are my own.

## NOTES

1. Nelson Phillips and Cynthia Hardy, *Discourse Analysis: Investigating Processes of Social Construction* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002), 3.
2. Phillips and Hardy, *Discourse Analysis*, 12.
3. Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York: Anchor, 1966).
4. Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction of Reality*, 22.
5. Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckmann, *The Structures of the Life-World* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973).
6. It is called a theory of *practice* because it is midway between structuralism and subjectivism and focuses on how individuals conduct themselves within both institutional and personal constraints. In other words, the theory focuses on the practices of individuals who themselves operate in dialectical relationship between the objective and the subjective. It endeavors to explain why and how people act as if social classes actually exist even though they do not. For Bourdieu, people are neither wholly controlled by the structures of the social world nor are they only subject to their inner lives.
7. Karl Maton, "Habitus," in *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*, ed. Michael Grenfell (Durham, UK: Acumen, 2008). The concept of habitus is similar to the idea of worldview. As noted previously, a worldview is a road map for action and is the preferred term in this study. One's habitus operates in a similar fashion to a worldview as it is the embodiment of the structures that one uses for cognition and meaning in practice.
8. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).
9. Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1986), 241.
10. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 183.
11. Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).
12. Pierre Bourdieu, "The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups," *Theory and Society* 14, no. 6 (1985): 734. The term "violence" refers to the domination of one social group with greater symbolic capital and power over another group that has less symbolic capital and power. Although this violence takes place in the realm of the symbolic, it is still a real form of suffering, as it affects how a particular group is able to live out their lives.
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## Silencing Stories: Challenges to Diverse Books

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### Abstract

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This research expands on a previous discourse analysis of censorship on challenges to diverse books through more robust analysis of the challenge cases. The article specifically focuses on two common themes found in the arguments that book challengers give for the redaction, restriction, relocation, and removal of diverse titles in and from school curricula, school libraries, and public library collections in the U.S. The article begins with a working definition of diverse books and a brief overview of the campaign to increase their publication and circulation in the U.S. An overview of previous research on general book challenges and challenges to diverse literature is provided, as well as the methodology for analysis. The article concludes with a discussion of recommendations for protecting access to diverse books in public libraries and schools.

**Keywords:** book banning; censorship; diverse books; intellectual freedom; reading practices

**Publication Type:** research article

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### Introduction

Since the young adult novel *The Hate U Give* was published in February 2017, author Angie Thomas has received much praise. The book stayed at the top of the *New York Times* young adult bestseller list for almost a year and received glowing accolades from many review outlets. Sometimes dubbed a Black Lives Matter book (Canfield, 2018), *The Hate U Give* is a gripping tale that centers on an African American female protagonist, Starr, whose best friend Khalil is killed by a white police officer when Khalil drives them home from a party. Starr is deeply affected by Khalil's death and eventually becomes part of the movement to fight against injustice in the U.S.

Along with effusive reviews, *The Hate U Give* has also been the subject of controversy since its publication for various reasons such as "being 'pervasively vulgar' and for the depiction of drug use, profanity, and offensive language" (Gomez, 2018). For example, in 2017, the Katy (Texas) Independent School District removed the book from its school libraries after a parent complained about the language used in the book (Aragon, 2017).<sup>1</sup> In the summer of 2018, the Fraternal Order of Police Tri-County Lodge #3 in the state of South Carolina objected to the book's inclusion in a local high school summer reading list because they felt the novel promotes "negativity towards the police" (Leah, 2018). For the year 2017, *The Hate U Give* was one of the 10 most challenged books according to the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom (ALA OIF, 2017).

One of the things that *The Hate U Give* has in common with all but one other book on the ALA OIF's 2017 most challenged books list is that it is a story about a non-majority protagonist and

focuses on what might be called “diversity.” While the number one book on the OIF list, Jay Asher’s *Thirteen Reasons Why* (2007), focuses on the suicide of a white teenage girl, the other books on the list center on members of diverse populations. Such titles include *I Am Jazz* by Jessica Herthel and Jazz Jennings (2014), which discusses gender identity. *And Tango Makes Three*, (a perennial entry on the OIF list) written by Peter Parnell and Justin Richardson (2005), features penguins in a same-sex relationship. Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) discusses race in the segregated U.S. South. *George* by Alex Gino (2015) centers on a transgender child. *Drama* by Rina Telgemeier (2012) includes lesbian-, gay-, bisexual-, transgender-, and queer- (LGBTQ) identified characters. *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini (2003) is set in Afghanistan, a majority-Muslim country invaded by the U.S., and focuses on an oppressed minority. The summary for *Sex is a Funny Word* by Cory Silverberg (2015) is also on the 2017 OIF list. On the author’s website, the book is declared to be “an essential resource about bodies, gender, and sexuality for children ages 8 to 10 as well as their parents and caregivers” (“Sex is a funny word,” n.d.) and includes descriptions of different gender and sexual identities. Finally, the protagonist in the perennially challenged text *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie is a Native American boy who decides to leave his reservation to attend the local predominately white high school. Of these 10 titles listed on the OIF’s “Top 10 Most Challenged Books of 2017,” nine out of the 10 titles listed include characters with diverse identities.

Malinda Lo, an author and co-creator of the We Need Diverse Books (WNDB) campaign, completed a study (2014) that found that book challengers often target publications that feature diverse protagonists. Lo’s research focused on recent ALA banned/challenged book lists: the Top 100 Banned/Challenged Books, 2000-2009 and the OIF Top Ten Challenged Books lists for 2010-2013. In 2016, I offered a brief expansion of Lo’s research, which further confirmed and substantiated Lo’s original findings (Knox, 2016).

This article offers more robust analysis of the challenge cases. I specifically focus on two common themes found in the arguments that book challengers give for the redaction, restriction, relocation, and removal of diverse titles in and from school curricula, school libraries, and public library collections in the U.S. Discussion begins with a working definition of the concept of “diverse books” and a brief overview of the campaign to increase publication and circulation of diverse books in the U.S. An overview of previous research on book challenges in general and challenges to diverse literature more specifically is offered, as well as the methodology for analysis of the challenge cases. Next, the article presents two common themes in the discourse of challengers of diverse books. Finally, recommendations are offered for protecting access to diverse books in public libraries and schools.

### Diverse Books and Book Challenges

The current American usage of the term “diverse” is a bit of a catchall, but the definition used by We Need Diverse Books (WNDB) provides an excellent working definition. WNDB ([diversebooks.org](http://diversebooks.org)) is a grassroots, nonprofit advocacy organization based in the United States that primarily focuses on encouraging the publishing industry to solicit and distribute books for young people that reflect all human lives. Their programs include awards, grants, and research. WNDB defines diversity as “LGBTQIA, Native, people of color, gender diversity, people with disabilities\*, and ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities” (<https://diversebooks.org/about-wndb/>). The asterisk in the definition is further defined to include a broadened view of the term “disability.” WNDB (n.d.) states that disability “includes but is not limited to physical, sensory,



cognitive, intellectual, or developmental disabilities, chronic conditions, and mental illnesses (this may also include addiction).” This full definition for “diversity” is the definition ascribed for the research presented here.

Although it is taken as a given by some, it is still important to discuss why the accessibility of diverse books is important. At the most fundamental level, diverse books accomplish what all books do—allow people to be introduced to various ideas, theories, people, and cultures. However, books about diverse characters have two special roles to play. First, they allow all human beings to see themselves reflected in books, and second, they allow everyone to learn about people who are not like themselves. This argument is rooted in the “mirrors and windows” theory of reading that was first introduced by Rudine Sims Bishop. Bishop (1990) noted that a book “could help us understand each other better by helping to change our attitudes towards difference” (p. xi). The importance of diverse books for all was also powerfully described by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s TED talk (2009) on the “Danger of a Single Story”:

So that is how to create a single story, show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become. It is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power. There is a word, an Igbo word, that I think about whenever I think about the power structures of the world, and it is “nkali.” It’s a noun that loosely translates to “to be greater than another.” Like our economic and political worlds, stories too are defined by the principle of nkali: How they are told, who tells them, when they’re told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power. (09:26)

Adichie demonstrates why it is imperative that diverse books remain accessible to all. Without them, human beings are bound by single stories that can constrain lives.

It should be noted that not very many diverse books are published in the U.S. in the first place, but this disparity is especially true of books published for children and youth. The Cooperative Children’s Book Center (CCBC) found that out of 3,700 books for children published in the U.S., about 25% had main characters or subjects who were people of color or where people of color were prominently featured (n.d.). Using the CCBC’s terminology, 340 books were about Africans/African Americans, 72 were about American Indians/First Nations, 310 texts were about Asian Pacific/Asian Pacific Americans, and 216 titles were about Latinxs (CCBC, n.d.). Given that 75% of children’s books published in 2017 were focused on non-diverse stories or topics, it is a significant concern that diverse books featuring various cultural groups are so prevalent on banned and challenged booklists, especially when one considers that these book challenges do not include other types of diversity such as gender diversity or people with disabilities.

For the purposes of this research, the term “challenge” refers to the process of formally requesting that a book be in some way removed from a school curriculum, school library collection, or public school collection. “Challenge” is used because the books are not always censored or formally removed from the curriculum or collection. In the U.S., although there are local and institutional differences, written policy usually provides procedural guidelines for challenge cases. Formal complaints are typically made by filling out a “Request for Reconsideration” form, which is then submitted to the institution. These requests may be escalated up the administrative ladder to a governing board. Sometimes the requests culminate in a hearing in which the merits of the book are debated publicly. Generally, the board makes a final decision regarding the status of the book in the institution.

Book challenges can be included under what might broadly be called censorship practices, which include the redaction of text, the restriction of books to only certain age groups, the relocation of a book to another section of the library collection, or the removal of a book from the collection, entirely. Redaction, restriction, relocation and removal of books from circulation in publicly accessible libraries are all censorship practices. It is also important to note that, for this study, “challenge” also refers to requests that books no longer be accessible to their intended age groups. As will be noted in the analysis section, the question of “intended age group” can be highly contested.

### Previous Research

Previous research on diverse books has primarily focused on questions regarding creation and publication. For example, a recent article by Shea et al. (2018) discusses whether or not more diverse books are published by the “Big Five” U.S. corporate publishers (Hachette, HarperCollins, Macmillan, Penguin Random House, and Simon & Schuster) or by independent publishing companies. They found that the Big Five are no less likely than independent publishers to publish diverse books (p. 217). Other research focuses on library collection development policies, like Warsinske’s (2016) overview of the availability and accessibility of multicultural picture books in library catalogs and databases such as *NoveList*. Mabbott (2017) discusses the history and development of the WNDB campaign.

To date, there is very little research on challenges to, or censorship of, diverse books in the U.S. As noted, Lo’s (2014) study found that diverse books are often the targets of challenges in public libraries and schools in disproportionate numbers. She states: “It’s clear to me that books that fall outside the white, straight, abled mainstream are challenged more often than books that do not destabilize the status quo.” PEN America (2016) published a wide-ranging report on diverse books. The “Challenged Books” section focuses on the 2012 challenge to *Beloved* in Fairfax County, Virginia, which eventually led to a 2016 bill in the Virginia legislature regarding “sexually explicit content” in the classroom (p. 9). In previous research (Knox, 2015), I found that challenges reduce children’s access to books that feature protagonists who do not fit within various cultural norms in American society. The analysis in this article further states the case of the previous research cited by focusing not just on how many and which diverse books are challenged, but why people brought challenges in the first place.

### Methodology

This article centers on why and how people construct arguments against reading certain materials. This “discourse of censorship” is distinctive for its opposition to arguments for “freedom” that permeate American culture and society. By analyzing challengers’ arguments, it is possible to see how access to information is impeded through the use of language and symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991).

Book challenges can be understood as a type of reading practice. With this understanding in mind, this analysis is grounded in the social construction theory of Berger and Luckmann (1966) and Schutz and Luckmann (1973). According to Berger, Schutz and Luckmann, language is the most important element for the construction, transmission, and maintenance of knowledge in society. One of the methods for this process is the development of “stocks of knowledge” which are used to frame interactions in the everyday world. “Typical actions” and “types” compose

these stocks of knowledge. Typical actions can be characterized as maps for “getting things done” in everyday life while types are constructions of objects that are incomplete, abstractive, relative yet still relevant. The analysis discussed below focuses on the typical action of interpreting text and “the book” as a type of object.

Since this research discusses how diversity is challenged and constructed in the U.S., it is important to discuss critical race theory (CRT). CRT originated in the legal field and centers on the relationship between power, race, and racism. Delgado and Stefanic (2012) write that CRT “questions the very foundations of the liberal order including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law” (p. 3). Mabbott (2017) also makes the relationship between diverse books and CRT with the argument that WNDB fulfills essential tenets of CRT through acknowledgment of “experiential knowledge” and having an “interdisciplinary” perspective” (p. 510-11). Orozco (2011) discusses the “literal and (assumed) rational translations” employed by the dismantled Tucson (Arizona) Unified School District’s Mexican American Studies program, where some of the program’s opponents did not give credit to “emotive interpretations” and argued that only literal translations are “sensible and reasonable” (p. 827). Orozco’s work shows how the interpretive strategies of text that are used against diverse books can also be linked to issues of race and power. As will be discussed in the analysis below, this “common sense” interpretation is used throughout the discourse of people who challenge books that center on diverse identities as a whole.

## Procedures

Arguments against diverse books in the study came from documents including forms, emails, and letters from the challengers that were produced through the course of challenge cases. These were obtained through state public records act requests. Twenty-seven requests were sent to administrative boards across the U.S. and 11 usable responses that included the challengers’ own voices were received (see Appendix). The books were all from the 2016 and 2017 ALA Banned Books Field Reports by Robert Doyle (2016, 2017). One case, the Virginia *Beloved* case, is included because, even though it started in 2012, it continued into 2016 and was included in the field report for that year. Meeting minutes were excluded since they contain only paraphrases of arguments.

Although all 11 responses were analyzed, most of the arguments below come from four cases which had a wide range of people involved in the challenges. The first is the Virginia *Beloved* case described above. The second is the 2017 challenge against Alexie Sherman’s *The Absolutely True Diary of Part-Time Indian* in the New London-Spice School District in Minnesota. Third is a 2016 challenge to *The Bluest Eye* in Northville Public Schools in Michigan. The fourth case, also from 2017, focuses on *This Day in June* by Gayle Pitman at the West Chicago Public Library in West Chicago, Illinois.

In order to find common themes in these arguments, I employ discourse analysis to focus on how challengers’ arguments communicate “the constitution and construction of the world in the concrete use of signs and the underlying structural patterns or rules for the production of meaning” (Keller, 2012, p. 2). All of the challengers’ arguments were analyzed for common themes using Atlas.ti software for qualitative research. The analysis is an example of what Keller (2012) calls culturalist discourse which focuses on how people combine symbolic power and language to effect change. Codes were applied at a paragraph level for context and paragraphs often received more than one code. Coding was an iterative process and both previous research

and the discourse itself provided codes for analysis. In particular, I analyze how people name themselves (e.g., as taxpayers, parents) and thereby invoke their own symbolic power and how they discuss the practice of reading.

### Themes in the Discourse of Challengers to Diverse Books

The discourse of censorship, as noted, combines symbolic power and language to effect change in the world. When people bring challenges against diverse books, the arguments are similar to those against non-diverse books, but they have a different valence. This is because the arguments made against the books often target elements that are constitutive to life as a member of a non-majority group.

Some of the more common themes in all challenges include the moral decline of society, the importance of institutional support for parenting, and indoctrination (Knox, 2015, 2017). Two themes are presented below that characterize the arguments made against diverse books. The first focuses on the theme of “unsuitable for age group.” This reason is often given in many challenge cases but, as will be demonstrated below, has special resonance when applied to diverse books. The second theme is “provide an alternative.” This argument is difficult to respond to when used against diverse books for two reasons. First, as noted above, there are not many diverse books published. Second, the requests for alternatives often focus on essential aspects of diversity that challengers prefer not to be included in replacement texts.

Note that only representative quotations are given for each theme. Identifying information only refers to the administrative body for the case and, when more than one person is challenging the book, the date of the letter, form, or email are given (see Appendix). A time stamp was also noted for multiple emails.

#### Theme 1: Unsuitable for Age Group

One of the primary arguments that diverse book challengers make is that the book is not age appropriate. I have noted before (Knox, 2015) that age suitability is strongly tied to constructions of innocence in children. As stated above, this particular argument has a different resonance when discussing diverse books. What does it mean to have a book that discusses slavery in the U.S. but not its more horrific aspects? For example, here is an argument against *Beloved* by Toni Morrison:

Throughout *Beloved*, there is a pervasive, repetitious pattern of gratuitous “mature” content or themes that are not age appropriate for high school students. “Age appropriateness” should not be construed as an attempt to unnecessarily shelter or protect students from human depravity or disturbing events that have occurred throughout history. Rather, “age appropriateness” in this context, refers to the extraordinary graphic examples of mature and sexual themes, infanticide and profanity the author has chosen to include in her novel. (Fairfax Request Exhibit A, Attachment B, 2012)

Slavery was a moral horror and it is difficult to discuss “human depravity or disturbing events” without employing some of the literary devices that the challenger lists. The sentence below in some respects argues against the entire essential theme of *Beloved*:

This book is not age appropriate for high school students and is patently offensive and obscene throughout the book. Unconscionable acts of bestiality and graphic rape scenes pervade the entirety of the book in addition to a brutal murder of an infant child. (Fairfax Appeal Letter, 2012)

The author's summary includes the description, "the hideous logic of slavery." While the horrors of slavery are revealed, two additional themes that are referenced throughout the book are omitted. The reoccurring themes of deviant sexual behavior and a graphic, gruesome murder of an infant baby are as much a part of the story as the horrific effects of slavery. In fact, there are approximately eight references to bestiality (sex with cows and goats), 29 references to a violent graphic rape, 38 references to breasts, and 12 references to reproductive organs. (Fairfax Request Exhibit A, Attachment B, 2012)

Note that enumeration of portions of the text that are considered problematic are common in the discourse of censorship.

Movie ratings are used as proxies for age appropriateness in challengers' discourse. For example, a challenger states that *The Hate U Give* should only be for teenagers older than 17 since the movie based on the book will be rated R. The following answer responds to the question: For what age group would you recommend this resource?:

>17 years of age. This book is currently being made into a movie and the movie guild is projecting an R rating for the film due to language and violence. (Katy ISD Request, 2017)

Below, Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* is equated to a pornographic movie as an argument for removing it from the school curriculum.

I compare *The Bluest Eye* book to an XXX rated movie - not R. Children should not be reading the book as it is developmentally inappropriate. An R rating would require a parental warning. Since parents trust the schools to take care of their most prized little ones, they do not expect this kind of book. A warning has to be extremely obvious upon sign up of the class, AND when the book comes up for reading. A few words in the course guide will not be adequate, nor will a note going home. (Northville Public Schools, Proposed Resolution from Challenger, 2016)

As I have argued elsewhere (Knox, 2015): "The MPAA's system offers parents a marker regarding the content of a particular movie and many parents use the ratings as a benchmark for determining whether or not their children may watch a movie. The presence of the ratings system creates a sense of order and safety with regard to movies" (p. 129). This is because reading is often seen as being the same as viewing. Here the argument is about Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*:

Finally, if the scenes of graphic pedophilic and extramarital sex described in this book would not be appropriate to view on the screen in the classroom, then they shouldn't be read in a novel. Reading these accounts on the page create the same mental images that occur when viewing movies. The book is actually more offensive because it describes both the mental and emotional state of the character along with the visual cues of the act itself. (Northville Public Schools, April 7, 2016 9:25 pm)

Pornography arguments are somewhat similar to movie rating arguments as they use an already

established structure for restricting information:

You have to be 18 to buy porn. In the book it makes everything serious a joke. It's not fact or sex ed. (New London Spicer Request, May 12, 2017)

Regardless of how highly acclaimed Ms. Morrison is as an author, this work of literature is pornographic and completely inappropriate for a classroom setting. If these exact same words were written in a playboy magazine or on a porn website, they would never be allowed into the classroom. Being written in a novel does not change the content or make it any more appropriate for our children. (New London Spicer Request, April 12, 2016)

It should be noted that there is special emphasis on age-appropriateness for books that center on LGBTQ people and issues. This is not surprising as some argue that any discussion of such topics is *necessarily* about sexual matters. Here are three arguments, made by different challengers, against *This Day in June* by Gayle Pitman:

Please remove "this day in June" from our children's book section. It is very disturbing and not suitable for young children as early as 3 finding this on our shelves. (West Chicago Public Library Form, August 7, 2017)

The book, out this month, aims to teach children respect and understanding of LGBT people and families by showcasing a pride parade of facts on its pages. The book also includes age-specific advice to parents and caregivers on how to talk to children and even teenagers about sexual orientation and gender identity.

I demand that this book be moved to the education section of the library, not showcased in the children's fiction section. (West Chicago Public Library Form, August 21, 2017)

This book is not age appropriate. My reasons are two-fold: For some time I've been discouraged by the content of the children's section of West Chicago Public Library, noticing a trend away from the classics and tried-and-true literature I've come to know and love which I desire to pass onto my homeschooled children, and towards a preponderance of occult fantasy literature which I don't want my children to read. When I heard that this book was being added to the collection, my discouragement became more frustrated.

Second, I feel strongly that adult human sexuality is not an appropriate topic for children's books, no matter what the "orientation" of the adults in question may be.

Heterosexual, homosexual, lesbian, gay, straight, transgender, these are not appropriate topics for the developing young minds of children. (West Chicago Public Library Statement, August 28, 2017)

It is, of course, impossible for a book on LGBTQ topics not to discuss human sexuality in some respects because, by definition, this is an integral part of the LGBTQ—if not the T—experience. Also note that these arguments take the viewpoint that books about heterosexual and gender-conforming children do not discuss human sexuality. The argument below has an interesting twist that demonstrates this conundrum. The challenger argues that the book is age appropriate and therefore not okay:

I was surprised to find that the book is dedicated to explaining to very young children what a Gay Pride parade is about. It features men holding hands, women wearing bras with no shirt, men wearing leather, as well as men in drag. Despite believing the topics covered in this book are inappropriate for my daughters at their young age, this book was right on their level. (West Chicago Public Library Form, July 19, 2017)

For this challenger, children simply should not be introduced to non-dominant sexual and gender identities.

## Theme 2: Something (Anything) Else Would Be Better

Related to the idea that books are inappropriate even when they discuss topics that are essential to diverse identities is the argument that another book would be able to convey the same story. This, of course, relates to Adichie's idea of the single story—that any story about someone who has a non-dominant identity will suffice. This argument can be seen in the quotation below:

In terms of materials that ghetto-ize blacks, we have that more than covered in Northville, and we need to treat African Americans equally and have books that detail good things they have done. Martin Luther King is not the only African American person that has even[sic] done anything great. How about *Gifted Hands* by Dr. Ben Carson - a Detroit Native that became a world-renowned pediatric neurosurgeon and recently ran for President of the United States? An excellent book about overcoming poverty and the importance of learning. Developing minds are heavily impacted by the books they read. Let's give them some great messages to learn from.

A true literary analysis of *The Bluest Eye*, which is not Pulitzer Prize winning as was said last week, by the way, could be made when a brain is fully developed, and the reader has had more life experiences. Reading the book as a teen, especially all the graphic descriptions of child rape, can be many things other than educationally helpful to a child. (Northville Public Schools Proposed Resolution, April 12, 2016)

Here the challenger argues that the African American experience is a single story. Ben Carson's memoir is similar and would convey the same message as Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* even though one is non-fiction, the other fiction, one discusses a year in a young girl's life, the other a man's journey to adulthood.

In the following quotation, the challenger states that since other works are suitable for children to read for the assignment, then the *Bluest Eye* should simply be removed from the curriculum:

First of all, there are many valuable works of literature that could be substituted for this book. Mr. Cronin said that students who choose to opt-out of reading "The Bluest Eye" will have two or more choices of texts to substitute from.

So, there are obviously many options that will offer students a comparable learning experience without exposing them to the graphic, explicit, sexually dysfunctional acts this book portrays as enjoyable and pleasurable. It isn't about legally banning *The Bluest Eye*, but about changing the curriculum in order to protect our children. (Northville Public Schools Email, April 7, 2016)

This argument presents a problem for teachers and librarians. *The Bluest Eye* is the preferred text but due to the coercive nature of curricula and parental involvement, other books can be used. However, the presence of this alternative provides a structure for arguing for the removal of the targeted book altogether.

In general challengers tend to recommend books that are banal. Although these books have their place, they rarely grapple with the human condition:

    Toot and Puddle, the Cat in the Hat, Curious George, Goodnight Moon, Amelia Bedelia, these books and other like them deal with themes of friendship of children, what happens when children make a mess and parents aren't there to see how horrible it is right away, curiosity which sometimes leads to trouble but is resolved in the end, comical exploits of someone who doesn't understand language and colloquial expression quite yet...these are appropriate topics for children's literature. (West Chicago Public Library Statement, August 28, 2017)

Overall the themes in this discourse of censorship against diverse books center on the idea that an entirely different story should be told, one that does not necessarily tell the truth of what it means to be a person with minority identity. For example, the following quotations discuss Alexie's book:

    We have no problem with students reading a novel about how a young person overcame the challenges of physical disabilities, bullying, a dysfunctional family, and difficult situations on his Indian reservation and how he ultimately achieved a successful career. We object to this book, however, because it contains gratuitous and unnecessary passages describing masturbation, profanity, and taking God's name in vain. Parents have the right to teach their own values to their children regarding these topics and have no assurance that a classroom teacher would teach those same values (New London-Spicer Letter, May 8, 2017).

    Please instruct the eighth-grade teacher to replace "The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian" with a similar book that does not contain passages that conflict with the traditional family values held by many in this community (New London-Spicer Letter 2, May 8, 2017).

    I do not believe we send our young minds to be victimized to read such immoral drivel. Problems on the rez. [sic] can be brought forth in many other ways. It is totally abhorrent that I must come forward on this. It should never have been a part of the curriculum (New London Spicer Form, May 15, 2017)

    I am not looking to discredit life on the reservation. I am against the language used (New London-Spicer Request, May 15, 2017).

These arguments all demonstrate the contradictory notion that, yes, there is hardship when one lives on a reservation, but it should not be portrayed in a realistic manner. As with Morrison's books, it is difficult to think of how "physical disabilities, bullying, a dysfunctional family, and difficult situations" would be portrayed without aspects of the story that are objectionable to challengers.

The question of the nature of truth is often part of challengers' discourse. Elsewhere (Knox, 2015), I have demonstrated that challengers tend to make a strong correlation between the written word and truth. In essence, challengers of all types tend to argue that the books must contain moral truths. In addition, fiction is seen as "untrue" and therefore not as valuable as nonfiction. This argument is found in the quotation below:

Furthermore, the fact that *Beloved* is fictional and that there is little to no documentary evidence to suggest that sexual perversity and infanticide existed on such a grand scale during the time of slavery than at other times in history, FCPS should find this novel inappropriate for high school students. If FCPS believes that it is important for students to understand slavery and appreciate the role of infanticide throughout history from Roman times, Biblical times and even today in modern day China, then these topics should be addressed without the fictional references to gratuitous sex. (Fairfax Request Exhibit A, Attachment B, 2012)

This challenger also states the following "Although the likely intended messages of the dehumanization of slavery are likely to come across clearly, the book also brings up many issues of sexuality, including rape and bestiality" (Fairfax Request Exhibit A, Attachment B, 2012). For many, these concepts are inherently combined. It is not surprising that, as the above challenger notes "sexuality is used as a form of power and control by many characters in the book, and sexuality is a major subject matter in the book." This power and control were, of course, integral to the institution of slavery. Without books that grapple with these subjects, the voices of members of diverse populations are removed from society.

### Silenced Stories

During Banned Books Week 2018, *Entertainment Weekly* (EW) published a short interview of *The Hate U Give's* author, Angie Thomas. EW's David Canfield (2018) stated there was "hardly a better novel to discuss" than *The Hate U Give*. After reviewing the Katy, Texas, challenge case and offering some background on what people find objectionable about the book. Canfield noted:

Thomas believes it's too important to ignore and reminds that the book is written for and targeted to an adolescent audience. 'We have to have discussions about police brutality. . . . Honestly, there is a fear among some parents— I'll just say it: white parents— who say, 'I'm not sure my child is ready for this,' Thomas explains. 'The fact is, black parents are [needing] to have these conversations with their 9-and 10-year-olds about the subject matter in this book. I need white children to be aware of that.' (2018)

One of the most striking aspects of challengers' arguments against diverse books is that, generally speaking, the topic of the book is fine, but—according to the challenger—the story should be presented in some other way that does not really engage the topic. This stipulation is less true of books that center on LGBTQ protagonists where challengers argue that the topic should simply not be addressed at all. As demonstrated throughout the themes discussed above, what the challengers want is a sanitized view of diverse peoples' stories—one that does not take into account what it means to have a non-dominant identity in American society. Although challengers are clearly driven by their concern for children, if their requests are granted, the challenge results in the silencing of diverse voices.

It is incumbent upon librarians and teachers to protect diverse voices in their libraries and

schools. As Shannon Oltmann (2017) notes “having diverse perspectives represented in one’s library can help fulfill the ideal of intellectual freedom” (p. 415). This can be accomplished in two different ways. First, it is important to recommit to the principle of supporting intellectual freedom. Support for intellectual freedom is codified in the ALA Code of Ethics and Library Bill of Rights. Second, be sure to have robust policies that reflect this principle. The Intellectual Freedom Manual (Magi et al., 2015) recommends five policies that every library should have: one for collection development and resource reconsideration, another policy for use of meeting rooms and exhibit spaces, an internet use policy, a policy concerning user privacy and confidentiality, and finally, a user behavior and library use policy. Most important for protecting diverse voices are the collection development and resource reconsideration policies. These actions are imperative for ensuring that people are exposed to more than just a “single story” (Adichie, 2009). The lives of “LGBTQIA, Native, people of color, gender diversity, people with disabilities\*, and ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities” (WNDB, n.d.) must be told. All people deserve both windows and mirrors that describe the human condition and that cannot be accomplished when diverse voices are silenced.

### Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> The book was returned to Katy Independent School District shelves in January 2018.

### Appendix

#### FOIA Requests

| Book  | Date of Challenge | State | Administrative Body                          | Documents Received              |
|---|-------------------|-------|--|---------------------------------|
| Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian | 2017              | IL    | Alton High School                            | Policy, Meeting Minutes, Emails |
| Iqbal                                       | 2016              | TX    | Argyle Independent School District           | No response                     |
| My World History                            | 2017              | FL    | Brevard County                               | No responsive documents         |
| The Hate U Give                             | 2018              | SC    | Charleston County Schools                    | No responsive documents         |
| Jacob's New Dress                           | 2017              | NC    | Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools                | Emails, meeting notes           |
| Tyrell                                      | 2016              | VA    | Chesterfield County Public Schools           | No response                     |
| Push  | 2016              | VA    | Chesterfield County Public Schools           | No response                     |
| Dope Sick                                   | 2016              | VA    | Chesterfield County Public Schools           | No response                     |
| Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian | 2017              | CA    | Cornejo Valley Unified School District Board | Video                           |
| Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian | 2017              | NV    | Democracy Prep                               | No responsive documents         |



|   |      |    |  |  |
|---|------|----|--|--|
| Buck  | 2107 | MD | Digital Harbor High School               | No responsive documents (only response)    |
| A Lesson Before Dying                       | 2017 | FL | Dixie County                             | Challenge Form                             |
| Bad boy                                     | 2017 | FL | Duval County                             | Challenge Form                             |
| Beloved                                     | 2016 | VA | Fairfax County Public Schools            | Challenge, Emails, response                |
| Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress  | 2016 | MI | Forest Hills Public School District      | No response                                |
| You're in the Wrong Bathroom                | 2017 | IL | Geneva Public Library                    | Challenge, Board docs                      |
| The Hate U Give                             | 2017 | TX | Katy Independent School District         | Challenge form                             |
| I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings             | 2016 | IL | Lemont Illinois High School District 210 | Emails                                     |
| Go Tell it on the Mountain                  | 2016 | IL | Lemont Illinois High School District 210 | Emails                                     |
| The God of Small Things                     | 2016 | IL | Lemont Illinois High School District 210 | Emails                                     |
| The Land                                    | 2016 | FL | Marion County Public Schools             | No response                                |
| Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian | 2017 | MN | New London-Spicer School District        | Forms, emails                              |
| The Bluest Eye                              | 2017 | NC | North Buncome High School                | Meeting Notes, Request for Reconsideration |
| The Bluest Eye                              | 2016 | MI | Northville Public Schools                | Forms, emails, resolution                  |
| The Perks of Being a Wallflower             | 2016 | FL | Pasco Middle School                      | Emails                                     |
| Liberation of Gabriel King                  | 2017 | FL | Pinellas country                         | Emails                                     |
| I am Jazz                                   | 2017 | CA | Rocklin Academy                          | No responsive documents                    |
| Red: A Crayon Story                         | 2017 | CA | Rocklin Academy                          | No responsive documents                    |
| Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian | 2017 | WI | Sauk Prairie Schools                     | Emails                                     |
| Is He a Girl?                               | 2017 | NC | Union County Public School District      | No response                                |
| George                                      | 2017 | KS | Wichita School District                  | No responsive documents                    |
| This Day in June                            | 2017 | IL | West Chicago Public Library              | Emails                                     |
| 28 Requests                                 |      |    |  | 11 responses                               |

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