

# Burning and Banning: *Fahrenheit 451* and Intellectual Freedom

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First...

CONGRATULATIONS to  
Fond du Lac for taking on  
censorship and talking  
about intellectual  
freedom.



# Agenda

- Brief historical overview of Censorship and Intellectual Freedom
- Foundational Principles
- Where We are Today



# The "Censor"

1533: The title of two magistrates in ancient Rome, who drew up the register or census of the citizens, etc., and had the supervision of public morals. In this year began the office of censoris )

1592: One who exercises official or officious supervision over morals and conduct

1644: An official in some countries whose duty it is to inspect all books, journals, dramatic pieces, etc., before publication, to secure that they shall contain nothing immoral, heretical, or offensive to the government.



Source: Oxford English Dictionary

[http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50035531?single=1&query\\_type=word&queryword=censorship&first=1&max\\_to\\_show=10](http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50035531?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=censorship&first=1&max_to_show=10)

# The "Censor"

1914: An official whose duty it is to censor private correspondence (as in time of war)



# Censorship

- Act of changing or suppressing speech or writing that is considered subversive of the common good.
- In a democracy, diversity feeds the common good.
- In F451 ... Firemen burn books because society stresses a structured, homogeneous conformity... routine [over] original thought
- Today, we have multiple channels of speech and writing—and therefore, multiple ways to receive—and repress— information.



# Legal and Philosophical Foundations for IF/Free Speech



# Intellectual Freedom: The Basics

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 19:  
“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media, regardless of frontiers



# Intellectual Freedom

- Intellectual freedom can exist only where two essential conditions are met: first, that all individuals have the right to hold any belief on any subject and to convey their ideas in any form they deem appropriate; and second, that society makes an equal commitment to the right of unrestricted access to information and ideas regardless of the communication medium used, the content of the work/and the viewpoints of both the author and receiver of information.
- Freedom to express oneself through a chosen mode of communication, including the Internet, becomes virtually meaningless if access to that information is not protected. Intellectual freedom implies a circle, and that circle is broken if either freedom of expression or access to ideas is stifled.



# First Amendment to the Constitution

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.



# Supreme Court Decisions

- **Schenck v. United States, 249 U.S. 47, 39 S.Ct. 247, 63 L.Ed.2d. (1919)**
  - “Clear and present danger” test
- **Near v. Minnesota, 283 U.S. 697, 51 S.Ct. 625, 75 L.Ed. 1357 (1931)**
  - “Prior restraint” test
- **Rosenberg v. Board of Education of City of New York, 92 N.Y.S.2d 344 (Sup. Ct. Kings County 1949)**
  - Suppression based on offensive content (prejudice)
- **Todd v. Rochester Community Schools, 200 N.W.2d 90 (Mich. Ct. App. 1972)**
  - Suppression based on offensive content (language)
- **Right to Read Defense Committee v. School Committee of the City of Chelsea, 454 F. Supp. 703 (D. Mass. 1978)**
  - Suppression to protect minors
- **Bong hits for Jesus...?**



# Libraries and IF

- American Library Association: 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. Intellectual freedom encompasses the freedom to hold, receive and disseminate ideas”
- IF is a prerequisite to effective and responsible citizenship in a democracy



# ALA Challenges Reports, 1990-2000: 6,364 challenges

- 1,607 were challenges to “sexually explicit” material (up 161 since 1999);
- 1,427 to material considered to use “offensive language”; (up 165 since 1999)
- 1,256 to material considered “unsuited to age group”; (up 89 since 1999)
- 842 to material with an “occult theme or promoting the occult or Satanism,”; (up 69 since 1999)
- 737 to material considered to be “violent”; (up 107 since 1999)
- 515 to material with a homosexual theme or “promoting homosexuality,” (up 18 since 1999) and
- 419 to material “promoting a religious viewpoint.” (up 22 since 1999)
- Other reasons for challenges included “nudity” (317 challenges, up 20 since 1999), “racism” (267 challenges, up 22 since 1999), “sex education” (224 challenges, up 7 since 1999), and “anti-family” (202 challenges, up 9 since 1999).



## Of those...

- 71 % schools/school libraries
- 24% public libraries
- Most initiated by parents
- Note: The importance of a full time school media/librarian and funded libraries is growing vis-à-vis IF.



# Challenges in Wisconsin

- From 1966 through 1975, 49 cases of censorship were reported in Wisconsin;
- From 1975 through 1980, 14 cases were reported.



# Book Burning in the Real World



It can't happen here?



# Harry Potter burned



# Church Group activities

- Christ Community Church in Alamogordo, NM held a bonfire for Potter books among others- BBC 31Dec01
- Harvest Assembly of God Church near Pittsburgh, held "spring cleaning" to burn "ungodly and demonic books, tapes, videos, statues and any other thing that gives demons the opportunity to traffic into your life" -Pitts. Post-Gazette 24Mar01



# Present day repression



# Poor Harry

“ Books in the Harry Potter series also were the most frequently challenged of the 21st century. The ALA reports there were more than 3,000 attempts to remove books from schools and public libraries between 2000 and 2005.”



<http://www.ala.org/ala/pressreleases2006/september2006/HarryPottermostchallenge.htm>

# Current Challenges: Above and Beyond....

- **DOPA**-Deleting Online Predators Act
- **USA Patriot Act**
  - Section 215: “the FBI can obtain library records of anyone when they present facts showing “reasonable grounds” to believe that the records are “relevant” to an “authorized investigation....”
  - “requiring records or other things to be described with “sufficient particularity” to allow them to be identified –reducing the danger that the FBI will engage in fishing expeditions in library or bookstore records.



# Current Challenges: Above and Beyond....

- Mass registration and surveillance
- ABORs
- Chilling effects on university/college campuses—our own UW (Kevin Barrett)



# What Can We Do?

- This! Talk.
- Support school and public libraries.
- Oppose ABOR, DOPA
- Voice concern over Patriot Act and Surveillance Programs
- Vote! Read! Stay informed!



# The One Un-American Act

- “The task of keeping our civil liberties alive is not an easy one in troubled times like these. But I believe our civilization will supply the necessary men. The people need leadership that makes a virtue of courage, of conviction and freedom of expression.”
- “The pre-eminent problem of this age is the invention of new institutions, new political methods for aligning the people of the world in a true crusade for freedom. The ingenuity will be lacking if fear of Communism shrinks the world of ideas to one school of thought, to one point of view. *Restriction of free thought and free speech is the most dangerous of all subversions. It is the one un-American act that could most easily defeat us.*” -Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas



Source: Authors Guild Council, New York. Dec. 3, 1951

# Ray Bradbury

“There is more than one way to burn a book. And the world is full of people running about with lit matches.”

