

## KEY DOCUMENTS FROM THE AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

*Reprinted with the permission of the American Library Association*

### The Library Bill of Rights

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

1. Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.
2. Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.
3. Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.
4. Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas.
5. A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views.
6. Libraries which make exhibit spaces and meeting rooms available to the public they serve should make such facilities available on an equitable basis, regardless of the beliefs or affiliations of individuals or groups requesting their use.

Adopted June 18, 1948. Amended February 2, 1961, and January 23, 1980, inclusion of "age" reaffirmed January 23, 1996, by the ALA

In addition to the Bill of Rights, the American Library Association has issued interpretations of the Library Bill of Rights on various issues such as free access to libraries for minors, labeling of library materials, library meeting rooms and exhibit spaces, and sexism and racism in library materials. These interpretations may be found in the American Library Association's *Intellectual Freedom Manual*, on ALA's website ([www.ala.org](http://www.ala.org)), or they may be obtained from the Office for Intellectual Freedom of the American Library Association (50 East Huron Street, Chicago, IL 60611; 1-800-545-2433 Ext. 4223, or [oif@ala.org](mailto:oif@ala.org)).

## **The Freedom to Read Statement**

The freedom to read is essential to our democracy. It is continuously under attack. Private groups and public authorities in various parts of the country are working to remove or limit access to reading materials, to censor content in schools, to label “controversial” views, to distribute lists of “objectionable” books or authors, and to purge libraries. These actions apparently rise from a view that our national tradition of free expression is no longer valid; that censorship and suppression are needed to avoid the subversion of politics and the corruption of morals. We, as citizens devoted to reading and as librarians and publishers responsible for disseminating ideas, wish to assert the public interest in the preservation of the freedom to read.

Most attempts at suppression rest on a denial of the fundamental premise of democracy: that the ordinary citizen, by exercising critical judgment, will accept the good and reject the bad. The censors, public and private, assume that they should determine what is good and what is bad for their fellow citizens.

We trust Americans to recognize propaganda and misinformation, and to make their own decisions about what they read and believe. We do not believe they need the help of censors to assist them in this task. We do not believe they are prepared to sacrifice their heritage of a free press in order to be “protected” against what others think may be bad for them. We believe they still favor free enterprise in ideas and expression.

These efforts at suppression are related to a larger pattern of pressures being brought against education, the press, art and images, films, broadcast media, and the Internet. The problem is not only one of actual censorship. The shadow of fear cast by these pressures leads, we suspect, to an even larger voluntary curtailment of expression by those who seek to avoid controversy.

Such pressure toward conformity is perhaps natural to a time of accelerated change. And yet suppression is never more dangerous than in such a time of social tension. Freedom has given the United States the elasticity to endure strain. Freedom keeps open the path of novel and creative solutions, and enables change to come by choice. Every silencing of a heresy, every enforcement of an orthodoxy, diminishes the toughness and resilience of our society and leaves it the less able to deal with controversy and difference.

Now as always in our history, reading is among our greatest freedoms. The freedom to read and write is almost the only means for making generally available ideas or manners of expression that can initially command only a small audience. The written word is the natural medium for the new idea and the untried voice from which come the original contributions to social growth. It is essential to the extended discussion that serious thought requires, and to the accumulation of knowledge and ideas into organized collections.

We believe that free communication is essential to the preservation of a free society and a creative culture. We believe that these pressures toward conformity present the danger of limiting the range and variety of inquiry and expression on which our democracy and our culture depend. We believe that every American community must jealously guard the freedom to publish and to

circulate, in order to preserve its own freedom to read. We believe that publishers and librarians have a profound responsibility to give validity to that freedom to read by making it possible for the readers to choose freely from a variety of offerings.

The freedom to read is guaranteed by the Constitution. Those with faith in free people will stand firm on these constitutional guarantees of essential rights and will exercise the responsibilities that accompany these rights. We therefore affirm these propositions:

1. *It is in the public interest for publishers and librarians to make available the widest diversity of views and expressions, including those that are unorthodox or unpopular with the majority.*

Creative thought is by definition new, and what is new is different. The bearer of every new thought is a rebel until that idea is refined and tested. Totalitarian systems attempt to maintain themselves in power by the ruthless suppression of any concept that challenges the established orthodoxy. The power of a democratic system to adapt to change is vastly strengthened by the freedom of its citizens to choose widely from among conflicting opinions offered freely to them. To stifle every nonconformist idea at birth would mark the end of the democratic process. Furthermore, only through the constant activity of weighing and selecting can the democratic mind attain the strength demanded by times like these. We need to know not only what we believe but why we believe it.

2. *Publishers, librarians, and booksellers do not need to endorse every idea or presentation they make available. It would conflict with the public interest for them to establish their own political, moral, or aesthetic views as a standard for determining what should be published or circulated.*

Publishers and librarians serve the educational process by helping to make available knowledge and ideas required for the growth of the mind and the increase of learning. They do not foster education by imposing as mentors the patterns of their own thought. The people should have the freedom to read and consider a broader range of ideas than those that may be held by any single librarian or publisher or government or church. It is wrong that what one can read should be confined to what another thinks proper.

3. *It is contrary to the public interest for publishers or librarians to bar access to writings on the basis of the personal history or political affiliations of the author.*

No art or literature can flourish if it is to be measured by the political views or private lives of its creators. No society of free people can flourish that draws up lists of writers to whom it will not listen, whatever they may have to say.

4. *There is no place in our society for efforts to coerce the taste of others, to confine adults to the reading matter deemed suitable for adolescents, or to inhibit the efforts of writers to achieve artistic expression.*

To some, much of modern expression is shocking. But is not much of life itself shocking? We cut off literature at the source if we prevent writers from dealing with the stuff of life. Parents and teachers have a responsibility to prepare the young to meet the diversity of experiences in life to which they will be exposed, as they have a responsibility to help them learn to think critically for themselves.

These are affirmative responsibilities, not to be discharged simply by preventing them from reading works for which they are not yet prepared. In these matters values differ, and values cannot be legislated; nor can machinery be devised that will suit the demands of one group without limiting the freedom of others.

*5. It is not in the public interest to force a reader to accept with any expression the prejudgment of a label characterizing it or its author as subversive or dangerous.*

The ideal of labeling presupposes the existence of individuals or groups with wisdom to determine by authority what is good or bad for the citizen. It presupposes that individuals must be directed in making up their minds about the ideas they examine. But Americans do not need others to do their thinking for them.

*6. It is the responsibility of publishers and librarians, as guardians of the people's freedom to read, to contest encroachments upon that freedom by individuals or groups seeking to impose their own standards or tastes upon the community at large.*

It is inevitable in the give and take of the democratic process that the political, the moral, or the aesthetic concepts of an individual or group will occasionally collide with those of another individual or group. In a free society individuals are free to determine for themselves what they wish to read, and each group is free to determine what it will recommend to its freely associated members. But no group has the right to take the law into its own hands, and to impose its own concept of politics or morality upon other members of a democratic society.

Freedom is no freedom if it is accorded only to the accepted and the inoffensive.

*7. It is the responsibility of publishers and librarians to give full meaning to the freedom to read by providing books that enrich the quality and diversity of thought and expression. By the exercise of this affirmative responsibility, they can demonstrate that the answer to a "bad" book is a good one, the answer to a "bad" idea is a good one.*

The freedom to read is of little consequence when the reader cannot obtain matter fit for that reader's purpose. What is needed is not only the absence of restraint, but the positive provision of opportunity for the people to read the best that has been thought and said. Books are the major channel by which the intellectual inheritance is handed down, and the principal means of its testing and growth. The defense of the freedom to read requires of all publishers and librarians the utmost of their faculties, and deserves of all citizens the fullest of their support.

We state these propositions neither lightly nor as easy generalizations. We here stake out a lofty claim for the value of the written word. We do so because we believe that it is possessed of enormous variety and usefulness, worthy of cherishing and keeping free. We realize that the application of these propositions may mean the dissemination of ideas and manners of expression that are repugnant to many persons. We do not state these propositions in the comfortable belief that what people read is unimportant. We believe rather that what people read is deeply important; that ideas can be dangerous; but that the suppression of ideas is fatal to a democratic society. Freedom itself is a dangerous way of life, but it is ours.

This statement was originally issued in May of 1953 by the Westchester Conference of the American Library Association and the American Book Publishers Council, which in 1970 consolidated with the American Educational Publishers Institute to become the Association of American Publishers.

Adopted June 25, 1953; revised January 28, 1972, January 16, 1991, July 12, 2000, by the ALA Council and the AAP Freedom to Read Committee.

A Joint Statement by: American Library Association  
Association of American Publishers

Subsequently Endorsed by:  
American Society of Journalists and Authors  
The Media Institute  
National PTA  
The Thomas Jefferson Center for the Protection of Free Speech

### **Statement on Professional Ethics**

- I. We provide the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources; equitable service policies; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests.
- II. We uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources.
- III. We protect each library user's right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired or transmitted.
- IV. We recognize and respect intellectual property rights.
- V. We treat co-workers and other colleagues with respect, fairness and good faith, and advocate conditions of employment that safeguard the rights and welfare of all employees of our institutions.
- VI. We do not advance private interests at the expense of library users, colleagues, or our employing institutions.

VII. We distinguish between our personal convictions and professional duties and do not allow our personal beliefs to interfere with fair representation of the aims of our institutions or the provision of access to their information resources.

VIII. We strive for excellence in the profession by maintaining and enhancing our own knowledge and skills, by encouraging the professional development of co-workers, and by fostering the aspirations of potential members of the profession.

Adopted by the ALA Council, June 28, 1995

Located at <http://www.ala.org/alaorg/oif/ethics.html>, last visited September 4, 2000

## **RESOLUTION ON THE USE OF FILTERING SOFTWARE IN LIBRARIES**

**WHEREAS**, On June 26, 1997, the United States Supreme Court issued a sweeping re-affirmation of core First Amendment principles and held that communications over the Internet deserve the highest level of Constitutional protection; and

**WHEREAS**, The Court's most fundamental holding is that communications on the Internet deserve the same level of Constitutional protection as books, magazines, newspapers, and speakers on a street corner soapbox. The Court found that the Internet "constitutes a vast platform from which to address and hear from a world-wide audience of millions of readers, viewers, researchers, and buyers," and that "any person with a phone line can become a town crier with a voice that resonates farther than it could from any soapbox"; and

**WHEREAS**, For libraries, the most critical holding of the Supreme Court is that libraries that make content available on the Internet can continue to do so with the same Constitutional protections that apply to the books on libraries' shelves; and

**WHEREAS**, The Court's conclusion that "the vast democratic fora of the Internet" merit full constitutional protection will also serve to protect libraries that provide their patrons with access to the Internet; and

**WHEREAS**, The Court recognized the importance of enabling individuals to receive speech from the entire world and to speak to the entire world. Libraries provide those opportunities to many who would not otherwise have them; and

**WHEREAS**, The Supreme Court's decision will protect that access; and

**WHEREAS**, The use in libraries of software filters which block Constitutionally protected speech is inconsistent with the United States Constitution and federal law and may lead to legal exposure for the library and its governing authorities; now, therefore, be it

**RESOLVED**, That the American Library Association affirms that the use of filtering software by libraries to block access to constitutionally protected speech violates the *Library Bill of Rights*.

**Adopted by the ALA Council, July 2 1997**

Located at [http://www.ala.org/alaorg/oif/filt\\_res.html](http://www.ala.org/alaorg/oif/filt_res.html), last visited September 1, 2000

## **BANNED BOOKS WEEK**

Banned Books Week (BBW) celebrates the freedom to choose or the freedom to express one's opinion even if that opinion might be considered unorthodox or unpopular. The celebration also stresses the importance of ensuring the availability of those unorthodox or unpopular viewpoints to all who wish to read them. The celebration is cosponsored by ALA and a number of other professional associations. The week is called "Banned Books Week" instead of "Challenged Books Week," in spite of the fact that the majority of the books featured during the week are not banned, but "merely" challenged primarily because a challenge *is* an attempt to ban or restrict materials, based upon the objections of a person or group. A successful challenge would result in materials being banned or restricted.

Although they were the targets of attempted bannings, most of the books featured during BBW were not banned, thanks to the efforts of librarians to maintain them in their collections.

To assist in planning the week long celebration, each year a BBW kit is developed. This kit includes three posters, 100 bookmarks, a button and a *Resource Guide*, which contains suggested activities and ideas for a celebration. The *Resource Guide* contains an excellent annotated list of challenged or banned books and landmark court cases which dealt with censorship issues.

For more information on the annual celebration of Banned Books Week contact the American Library Association/Office for Intellectual Freedom at 1-800-545-2433, ext. 4220, or [oif@ala.org](mailto:oif@ala.org).

*Adapted from the ALA Banned Books Week Notice for 2000 at <http://www.ala.org/bbooks/index.html>. Last visited August 30, 2000.*

## **ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGE AND RESEARCH LIBRARIES, INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM PRINCIPLES FOR ACADEMIC LIBRARIES: AN INTERPRETATION OF THE LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS**

A strong intellectual freedom perspective is critical to the development of academic library collections and services that dispassionately meet the education and research needs of a college or university community. The purpose of this statement is to provide an interpretation of general intellectual freedom principles in an academic library setting and, in the process, raise consciousness

of the intellectual freedom context within which academic librarians work. These principles should be reflected in all relevant library policy documents.

1. The general principles set forth in the Library Bill of Rights form an indispensable framework for building collections, services, and policies that serve the entire academic community.
2. The privacy of library users is and must be inviolable. Policies should be in place that maintain confidentiality of library borrowing records and of other information relating to personal use of library information and services.
3. The development of library collections in support of an institution's instruction and research programs should transcend the personal values of the selector. In the interests of research and learning, it is essential that collections contain materials representing a variety of perspectives on subjects that may be considered controversial.
4. Preservation and replacement efforts should ensure that balance in library materials is maintained and that controversial materials are not removed from the collections through theft, loss, mutilation, or normal wear and tear. There should be alertness to efforts by special interest groups to bias a collection through systematic theft or mutilation.
5. Licensing agreements should be consistent with the Library Bill of Rights, and should maximize access.
6. Open and unfiltered access to the Internet should be conveniently available to the academic community in a college or university library. Content filtering devices and content-based restrictions are a contradiction of the academic library mission to further research and learning through exposure to the broadest possible range of ideas and information. Such restrictions are a fundamental violation of intellectual freedom in academic libraries.
7. Freedom of information and of creative expression should be reflected in library exhibits and in all relevant library policy documents.
8. Library meeting rooms, research carrels, exhibit spaces, and other facilities should be available to the academic community regardless of research being pursued or subject being discussed. Any restrictions made necessary because of limited availability of space should be based on need, as reflected in library policy, rather than on content of research or discussion.
9. Whenever possible, library services should be available without charge in order to encourage inquiry. Where charges are necessary, a free or low-cost alternative (e.g., downloading to disc rather than printing) should be available when possible.
10. A service philosophy should be promoted that affords equal access to information for all in the academic community with no discrimination on the basis of race, values, gender, sexual orientation, cultural or ethnic background, physical or learning disability, economic status, religious beliefs, or views.
11. A procedure ensuring due process should be in place to deal with requests by those within and outside the academic community for removal or addition of library resources, exhibits, or services.

12. It is recommended that this statement of principle be endorsed by appropriate institutional governing bodies, including the faculty senate or similar instrument of faculty governance.

Adopted by ACRL Intellectual Freedom Committee: June 28, 1999. Approved by ACRL Board of Directors: June 29, 1999. Adopted by ALA Council July 12, 2000

Located at <http://www.ala.org/acrl/principles.html>, last visited September 1, 2000

## **AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION AWARDS RELATED TO INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM**

### **Eli M. Oboler Memorial Award**

The Eli M. Oboler Memorial Award, which consists of \$500 and a certificate, is presented for the best published work in the area of intellectual freedom.

The award was named for the extensively published Idaho University librarian known as a “champion of intellectual freedom who demanded the dismantling of all barriers to freedom of expression.”

Works to be considered for the award may be single articles (including review pieces), a series of thematically connected articles, books, or manuals published on the local, state or national level in English or English translation.

Criteria for the award include: focus on one or more issues, events, questions or controversies in the area of intellectual freedom; demonstrable relevance to the concerns and needs of members of the library community; and, for the 2000 award year, publication in 1998 or 1999, with allowance made for books published in December 1999.

The Eli M. Oboler Memorial Award is sponsored by the Intellectual Freedom Round Table (IFRT) of the American Library Association (ALA). The deadline for the biennial award is December 1 of odd-numbered years (e.g., the deadline for the 2000 award will be December 1, 1999).

Full criteria and nomination forms are available from the Office for Intellectual Freedom, American Library Association, 50 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611.

Nominations and supporting evidence should be sent to IFRT Staff Liaison, ALA, 50 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611. Telephone: 312-280-4225 or 800-545-2433, ext. 4225. Fax: 312-280-4227.

### **John Phillip Immroth Memorial Award**

The John Phillip Immroth Memorial Award honors intellectual freedom fighters in and outside the library profession who have demonstrated remarkable personal courage in resisting censorship. The award consists of \$500 and a citation. Individuals, a group of individuals or an organization are eligible for the award.

The John Phillip Immroth Memorial Award is sponsored by the Intellectual Freedom Round Table (IFRT) of the American Library Association (ALA). The deadline for nominations is December 1 of each year.

Nominations and supporting evidence should be sent to IFRT Staff Liaison, ALA, 50 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611. Telephone: 312-280-4225 or 800-545-2433, ext. 4225. Fax: 312-280-4227.

**The SIRS State and Regional Intellectual Freedom Achievement Award** is given to the most innovative and effective intellectual freedom project covering a state or region. Programs may be one-time, one-year or ongoing/multi-year efforts. The award consists of a citation and \$1,000 donated by Social Issues Resources Series (SIRS).

Examples might include a statewide public relations initiative to promote awareness of intellectual freedom, programmatic assistance to meet a broad-based censorship challenge, coalition building or education outreach efforts, or effective reorganization or management of an intellectual freedom committee.

State libraries or library associations, educational media associations or programs, legal defense funds, intellectual freedom committees or coalitions and related parties are eligible for nomination by themselves or others.

The SIRS State and Regional Intellectual Freedom Achievement Award is sponsored by the Intellectual Freedom Round Table (IFRT) of the American Library Association (ALA) and the Social Issues Resources Series (SIRS). The deadline for nominations is December 1 of each year.

Nominations and supporting evidence should be sent to IFRT Staff Liaison, ALA, 50 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611. Telephone: 312-280-4225 or 800-545-2433, ext. 4225. Fax: 312-280-4227.

Information on the above awards located at <http://www.ala.org/alaorg/oif/ifawards.html>, last visited August 31, 2000