

2021-2022 ALA CD#19
2022 ALA Virtual January Meeting

ALA INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM COMMITTEE
REPORT TO COUNCIL
2022 ALA VIRTUAL JANUARY MEE

CHALLENGES TO CRT AND DIVERSITY TRAINING TOOLKIT T

Three LibLearnX proposals were accepted: 50+ Years in the Making: Claiming Social Justice as a Core Value, Problematic Authors and Problematic Works, and Intellectual Freedom Q&A. And Advancing Social Justice Through the 9th Principle of the Code of Ethics

from OIF and the Freedom to Read Foundation, Kouvenda Media produced and released [Restricted Reading](#), a new original series of short personal audio narratives that examined access to information in prison and the right to intellectual freedom for the more than 2.2 million people incarcerated in America today.

ALA also co-sponsored ["Ideas & Actions," hosted by One World, an imprint of Random House](#) on September 29. The free virtual event asked advocates, leaders, and banned and challenged authors "What do you wish you had learned in school but didn't?" The event featured authors Ta-Nehisi Coates (*Between the World and Me*), Nikole Hannah-Jones (*The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story*), Ibram X. Kendi (*How to Be an Antiracist*), and Bryan Stevenson (*Just Mercy*), Cathy Park Hong (*Minor Feelings*), Heather McGhee (*The Sum of Us*), and Adam Serwer (*The Cruelty Is the Point*).

While the freedom to read was recognized throughout the week, the Office for Intellectual Freedom was simultaneously offering support to libraries facing censorship and tracking censorship incidents. This Banned Books Week spotlighted the benefits of unrestricted reading, but it was also a reminder of where to turn to when books continue to be banned and challenged on communal shelves.

appropriate materials dealing with gender or sexual identity, to date prosecutors have refused to pursue these complaints. More alarming are statements made by elected officials in a number of states supporting the censorship of diverse books, with an accompanying promise to pass legislation to suppress or censor books based on the false claim that such works are subversive or harmful to minors.

The Office for Intellectual Freedom staff, working in partnership with Public Policy and Advocacy Office, has developed a State Legislative Toolkit to assist state chapters and individual members in opposing adverse legislation like the book censorship bills proposed by elected officials. The toolkit offers advocates guidance to effectively navigate legislative sessions, as well as proactively respond to adverse legislation. In addition, it offers resources for developing well-written library policies and contact information for ALA's intellectual freedom and legislative support services

In closing, the Intellectual Freedom Committee thanks the division and chapter intellectual freedom committees, the Intellectual Freedom Round Table, the unit liaisons, and the OIF staff. The IFC would like to again thank their outgoing members for their incredible dedication and leadership, as well as welcome incoming committee members and committee associates.

Respectfully Submitted,

ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee

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INFORMATION ITEM: CD #19.1: ADD RESSING CHALLENGES TO BOOKS BY
PROBLEMATIC AUTHORS: Q&A

ADDRESSING CHALLENGES TO BOOKS BY PROBLEMATIC AUTHORS: Q&A

Challenges to the content of books and other materials are a familiar experience for library staff. ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom has provided many resources to navigate such challenges on its online [Challenge Support page](#). However, the distinction between authors that are challenged based on the content of their work and authors that are challenged based on actions they have taken outside that work has yet to be fully explored.

This Q&A will focus on questions about the activities of an author that are unrelated to the authors' published works. These activities can include espousing problematic beliefs, giving material support to problematic causes, supporting problematic policies and policies, harassment, cyberbullying, fraud, disinformation, and criminal activity. There are also issues when an author's problematic views influence the content of their works, further complicating the topic.

"Problematic Author" has become a label used to highlight actions by authors that are objectionable to some and impact the author's reputation. This label could be used to limit access to the author's work. Library workers must consider whether censorship is playing a role when thinking about the term problematic and deciding what library workers are responsible for and the actions we should take. As part of our professional responsibility, library workers have a duty to understand the context of each case, examine how that context impacts materials, and determine if actions are based on professional opinion, popular opinion, or influenced instead by personal moral standards. Each case must also be evaluated and placed within the context of history. Library workers will need to measure how the use of the term and application of the label "problematic" could impair intellectual freedom.

What is a problematic author? Who determines whether an author is problematic?

In this document, problematic is a term used to refer to the actions of a person that violate some form of ethical, moral, cultural, or legal standard. Often, this term is used in relation to issues of systemic oppression and representation. In this use, problematic can include, but is not limited to, elements of sexism, racism, classism, ageism, homophobia, transphobia, colorism, ethno-nationalism, and other marginalization. For the purposes of this document, a problematic author is one who has committed problematic actions outside their writing.

The term problematic can be vague and subjective and mean different things to different people. There is no single authority on what is problematic. Information provided by advocacy groups affiliated with marginalized communities are one type of resource for determining whether someone's actions are problematic. Be aware that marginalized communities are not monoliths, and a wide spectrum of perspectives exist around these conversations. What one person in a group

It's fine for anyone to not want to read work from an author who has committed problematic acts. However, library workers shouldn't let their personal preferences override professional ethics.

Are there authors that are just TOO problematic?

"Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation." [-Article 1 of the Library Bill of Rights](#)

If the book meets the criteria of a collection development policy, then the book's author should not be a factor in the decision to acquire.

Is it okay to label books by problematic authors?

No. Labeling books physically or in the catalog goes against intellectual freedom best practices. [Labeling Systems: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights](#) explains why this is not okay:

"Prejudicial labels are designed to restrict access, based on a value judgment that the content, language, or themes of the source, or the background or views of the creator are the v.

- ” During other service interactions
- ” When discussing the author and their actions with a user

However, library workers shouldn't let their own personal views impact how the author is presented or accessed.

What role do special collections or special libraries play?

Public pressure to isolate materials by problematic authors shouldn't be the reason for creating a special collection. This is especially true for school and public libraries.

- ” Are you still going to put materials into a special collection because of the problematic author's reputation? Then be sure to clarify the intention and purpose of the collection.
- ” Was the special collection created to isolate and segregate material by problematic authors? That's not okay. Doing that creates barriers and limits access by intentional act. This is intentional censorship.

Special libraries are different. They are often more discerning and intentional with content selection. The scope of their collection is often more limited and focused on specific topics or authors.

- ” retention cycles
- ” holds ratios

- | Origin
- | Background
- | Views of the creator

”

Should books by problematic authors be included in school curriculums and reading lists? If so, should educators address or point out the actions of the author?

Educators should decide. They can determine if a resource fits the need of the educational purpose by evaluating the content.

Decisions on whether or not to inform students, parents, or colleagues on the actions or beliefs of an author should be made based on the relevancy and timeliness of the information. Library workers need to select materials for their collections based on the content of the work itself and not the activity of the author.

Students should be free to read and examine any published works in the school library's collection. There may be many publications in library collections that would not stand the test of today's awareness of social harms with regard to an author. The purpose of collecting works is to retain the history of thought, not to judge it.

ACTION

When should a library take action regarding a problematic author?

Controversial authors are not new issues in librarianship. What is new is that publishers and authors are proactively ceasing publication of titles due to concerns about an author's character, viewpoints, or actions. Publishers may even ask libraries to rid their collections of these materials.

Library staff must carefully review their collection development policy prior to taking any steps. Just as a library should never remove a book because of one person or group's objection, it should not remove a book just because the publisher has asked them to do so.

ALA's [Library Bill of Rights](#) states that, "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."

How should libraries and library workers respond to concerns about owning or using a resource by a problematic author?

Library workers recognize that full, confidential, and unrestricted access to information is essential to intellectual freedom. Reading, listening, and viewing are individual, private matters.

Anyone is free to select or reject materials for themselves. However, the freedom of others to read or inquire, even of problematic authors, should not be restricted.

Selection and use of library resources does not mean endorsement of views expressed in those materials. It also does not mean an endorsement of the actions or views of their creator. The existence of a particular viewpoint or author in the collection is a reflection of the library's policy of intellectual freedom. It is not an endorsement of that particular point of view or person.

Library users are an important part of the selection process. Requests from users, regardless of problematic labels, are often considered when libraries make material selections.

"Best practices in collection development assert that materials should not be excluded from a collection solely because the content or its creator may be considered offensive or controversial. Refusing to select resources due to potential controversy is considered censorship, as is withdrawing resources for that reason." [Diverse Collections: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights](#)

Am I required to purchase or display a resource that I find problematic? Should libraries promote books written by problematic authors in their displays or programs? How should libraries manage promoting or not promoting titles by problematic authors?

Libraries are not required to purchase anything. However, you should strongly consider resources if they match these criteria:

- " They meet requirements of your collection development policy.
- " They have been suggested for purchase.

As for displays [Library-Initiated Programs and Displays as a Resource: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights](#) states the following:

"Library-initiated programs and displays utilize library worker expertise for community interests, collections, services, facilities, and providing access to information and information resources. They introduce users and potential users to library resources and the library's role as a facilitator of information access."

Materials created by problematic authors are included in a collection when they meet the selection criteria set by the library. Selecting materials is a key function that libraries use to fulfill their mission in the community. By including materials from all types of fallible humans within the collection, libraries will inevitably contain materials that are offensive to some members of the community.

Libraries need to have a policy and procedure in place to handle these objections. This policy should establish the framework for registering a complaint. That framework should provide for a review process with appropriate actions while defending and supporting the following:

Garnar, Martin and Magi, Trina (Eds.) [Intellectual Freedom Manual](#) tenth edition (2021), Chicago: ALA Editions.