

Book banning

Shelf life in libraries shouldn't be perfect

Words are dangerous. That's been the justification for censorship, and particularly for banning books.

We're not talking words of the sticks-and-stones variety, but poetry, novels, and philosophy.

One of the more recent examples has been the banning of two books about alternative lifestyles — "Heather Has Two Mommies" and "Daddy's New Roommate" from elementary schools.

Across the country, people have fought tooth and nail to keep these books out of school libraries.

After all, out of sight must automatically equal out of mind. And out of mind means their kids can postpone finding out about differences in sexuality, race, or religion.

Sometimes the banned books really seem to be a stretch, like Hans Christian Andersen's "The Little Mermaid."

Other than having a sanitized and sugary Disney movie made from it, what's the problem? Clearly, it's satanic and pornographic, at least according to those who would ban it. I always knew those mermaid costumes were a little too revealing.

With political correctness wafting through the air, it's no wonder book banning is at an all-time high. Our sensitivity to everyone and everything is superficially amazing, despite the fact little has actually changed. Since we must protect this rarefied atmosphere, freedom of speech gets caught in the crossfire.

Nowhere is banning more prevalent than in elementary, junior high, and high schools. "Concerned" parents may not want their children to read anything that presents a new, unwanted point of view.

Libraries have to and do listen to public input. Since they receive



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state funding, they have little choice. Fortunately, bookstores have the freedom to put on their shelves just about whatever they want so long as it sells. But what about people who may not have the money to buy those books pulled off the shelves of their local library? What are their options?

Admittedly, libraries must have some limitations. They are limited by space and funding as well as public taste.

Madonna's "Sex" may not be your cup of tea, but others would argue the pictures have an artistic value. If we ban a book containing nudity, doesn't it follow we should also remove nudes from the walls of art galleries?

Free speech has never been so fragile as in an age where our television sets may soon have a mandatory V-chip and our Internet rights may soon be curtailed. Even freedom of religion comes into the book-banning crossfire when some want to stop the Bible and the Talmud from staying on the library shelves. Hey, at least they're being egalitarian about it.

People having minds of their own is an explosive concept to censorship advocates. We may choose to read the Bible or visit a Robert Mapplethorpe exhibit. We may even think it's OK for children to read Laura Ingalls Wilder's "Little House on the Prairie" series, criticized for its portrayal of Native

Americans. And if we do any of these things, censorship supporters could call us bad parents or proponents of pornography.

I've been called worse things. How about you?

As for your childhood favorites, how about Alice in Wonderland? After all, it promotes drug use. Or even that dictionary you never even opened? It contains so-called obscene words.

The most insidious targets are books that heralded an age of change in society. J.D. Salinger's "The Catcher in the Rye" introduced us to Holden Caulfield, a Generation-X kid way ahead of his time. James Joyce questioned the value of religion. John Steinbeck made the common man as interesting a topic as the lives of the rich and famous.

Their social criticism is exactly why they're considered dangerous. Books which raise thoughts and heighten sensitivities more than any politically correct terminology are being banned for the ideas they contain. Only "nice" books praising our oh-so-democratic society are allowed here, please.

Limiting ourselves to this kind of book would be like living in a world of perpetually nice people. Artificial, unnatural, and not very interesting.

If we lived in such a place, a library of happy, neutral and completely useless books could exist. But in our own imperfect world, we need social critics. We may identify with their viewpoints, and at the very least we should celebrate the diversity of opinions.

Tomorrow kicks off Banned Books Week. Take a long look at your bookshelves and see what might not be there if book banning continues to run rampant.

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The N Stands For Knowledge

by James Zank



Helter Skelter

O.J. trial conjures odd images of Manson

The nervous eye twitches and double takes; entertain my reality for a moment. Forget your views, the publicity, and allow me a stitch in time to explain how the real crime of the century holds the keys to our current crime of the century.

Two words folks: Helter Skelter.

Innocence and guilt. Show me someone who thinks they're innocent and I'll show you the truly guilty. You don't know the answer but I do; my guess, my hypothesis, my chance to play Russian Roulette with one Magic Bullet theory in the chamber. If a soliloquy is given in the forest, will anyone still not hear it? My generation's too damn young, our yellow hearts are scared off by racist words pouring out of the head of a stupid cop; too young to remember the creepy-crawl. The answers are so obvious.

Arise. Helter Skelter: Charles Manson's plan to ignite the black/white conflict, inspired by the Beatles' "Revolution #9." Poor O.J., how could he have known? How could he have realized that he would play the catspaw in this sinister game? Nicole "Sharon Tate" Simpson — the notion probably never entered her head that she was the token victim in the butchery reprise; that she would be walking through the Valley of the Dolls.

It's all too perfect. The prominent sports hero guaranteed to have the cash necessary to prolong the trial, make a mockery of the already ridiculous system; fuel the fires of ethnicity, pride, hatred, violence. A man so beloved that his presence would immediately spark the conflict and draw the lines.

The beautiful honey-blond actress who would produce earthquakes in comparison to uncomfortable Jungle Fever shudders.



Aaron McKain

"On your mark, get set, hate."

Ron Goldman, slain love interest of Simpson, replaces Jay Sebring, massacred former fiancé of Tate.

Second verse, same as the first. Finally, Mr. Manson, aka Jesus Christ, would get a chance to put his plan into action; enact revenge on the glamorous establishment that snubbed him.

No sense makes sense. His madness was simple: commit a series of brutalities against the young, white, and gorgeous; frame the black community, thus sending white society into mass paranoia, driving them to invade the inner cities and begin a genocidal conflict.

The surviving blacks would appeal to the white establishment, forcing them to acknowledge the horrors they had unleashed. The division occurs. Conservatives against the left, rich vs. poor, and when the system had worn itself down, the black populace would rise up and end it all. Charlie would make his Biblical return from the desert and volunteer his leadership to the black conquerors.

Lucky for Mr. Manson, we're

already half there.

A bloody glove, the message "Death to Pigs" smeared all over the walls of the Labianca residence. Both clues left to make it painfully obvious who the killer was. Maybe too obvious? Col. Mustard in the conservatory with the wrench and a potential race riot. 1 2 3 4 5 6 ... all good children (go to heaven).

Look at us. Love us. Rag dolls chewing each other apart. Oblivious, obvious pawns in another game. We certainly haven't allowed ourselves to wander this far into the meat grinder by accident.

We sat around the campfire waiting for someone to throw a match on the smoldering embers of Rodney King. Here's our chance. On your mark, get set, hate. Drool, sweat, and start a war over a footprint. Who's really guilty anymore? It's all the same, it's all the same, it's all the same

Charlie became the martyr for the counterculture; O.J. is becoming the messiah of the ghetto. A multimillion dollar, international celebrity who's suddenly everybody's Joe Lunchbox, fighting the good fight against The Man for the common and colored folk.

Watch us slaughter each other like sheep over the inane, arbitrary outcome resulting from a mixture of money, race, fame, filibuster, media, and corruption. In short, the American Judicial System.

Watch the cities go up in flames in the name of Justice. "Tomorrow we're homeless, tonight it's a blast."

Man's son. I don't know about you all, but I hear Charlie laughing.

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