

Librarians for the Left

By Fred Lucas

Summary: Like many national organizations, the American Library Association has long been captured by the Left. It postures as a champion of free speech rights, but in fact it twists the ideas of censorship and free speech to meet the ideological requirements of left-wing activism.

It was a landmark week: September 30 through October 6, the 30th annual Banned Books Week, sponsored by the American Library Association and other partners, in which Americans are implored to protest censorship by reading a list of “banned” books throughout the United States.

It sounds like a noble goal for anyone who supports the First Amendment, regardless of political views. Who wants to ban books? In reality, virtually no one, though the American Library Association (ALA) would have us believe we either live in a country where federal agents are reading over your shoulder, or unenlightened masses of farmers with pitchforks are marching to burn books.

“In honor of the 30th anniversary of Banned Books Week, the Office for Intellectual Freedom delivers the 50 State Salute to Banned Books Week in coordination with ALA Chapters,” the press release said. “The 50 State Salute consists of videos on how each state celebrates the freedom to read.”



Poster boy for the activist Left: The American Library Association believes U.S. Army Private Bradley Manning did nothing wrong by allegedly leaking thousands of classified documents to WikiLeaks in what was one of the largest security breaches in U.S. history.

Toward the end, the release does concede that although books are “targeted with removal or restrictions in libraries and schools,” in a “majority of cases, the books have remained available.” The key word is *targeted*. The overwhelming majority of books identified in Banned Books Week appear on the list after a parent objects to the presence of a book with sexual or violent content in a public school library.

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A somewhat alarmist headline in *USA Today* last year (August 18) warned, “Book battles heat up over censorship vs. selection in school.” But the story said that schools banned “more than 20 books and faced more than 50 other challenges this year.” A total of 348 parental challenges were made in 2011, which seems rather paltry in the context of 100,000 public schools with 50 million students, and 10,000 non-school public libraries. (*USA Today*, September 6, 2011)

The ALA Action Guide even states, “Each year, the American Library Association is asked why the week is called Banned Books Week instead of Challenged Books Week, since the majority of the books featured during the week are not banned, but ‘merely’

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challenged. There are two reasons. One, ALA does not ‘own’ the name Banned Books Week, but is just one of several cosponsors of BBW; therefore, ALA cannot change the name without all the cosponsors agreeing to a change. Two, none want to do so, 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.” (<http://www.librarian.net/stax/1858/>)

The phony issue of banning books was on display in the 2008 presidential campaign after Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin was tapped as Arizona Sen. John McCain’s vice presidential running mate. As mayor of Wasilla, Alaska in 1996, Palin asked the town librarian what would happen if anyone objected to an inappropriate book. The Wasilla librarian Mary Ellen Emmons was also the president of the Alaska Library Association, the state chapter of the national group. Though no attempt was ever made to remove any books, Emmons’ objections became national news in 2008. “I told her clearly, I will fight anyone who tries to dictate what books can go on the library shelves,” Emmons said. “And I told her it would not be just me. This was a constitutional question, and the American Civil Liberties Union would get involved, too.” (L. Brent Bozell III, “Who’s the Library Bully,” *Creators Syndicate*, September 19, 2008)

The notion of banned books itself is absurd, wrote columnist Jonah Goldberg. “When the

American Library Association talks about censorship of books, it invariably refers to ‘banned or challenged’ books,” Goldberg wrote. “A ‘banned’ book is a book that has been removed from a public library or school’s shelves or reading lists due to pressure from someone who isn’t a librarian or teacher. In practice, this means pretty much any book that’s pulled off the shelves of a library can be counted as ‘banned.’ Even so, that’s very rare, which is why the ALA lump ‘banned’ and ‘challenged’ together. Moreover, it’s crazy. If the mere absence of a book counts as a ‘ban,’ then 99.99% of books have been banned somewhere.”

Nevertheless, ALA Director of the Office of Intellectual Freedom Judith Krug asserted, “Every time there is a formal challenge, the final intent is to ban the book.”

Hyped or not, opposing the removal of a book from a school or public library is entirely within a library organization’s purview. But the ALA’s agenda goes much further. The group is not made up of the stereotypical pocket protector-wearing book stackers whose biggest threat is saying “shush.” Rather, it is a group as dedicated to a left-wing agenda as MoveOn.org or the ACLU.

ALA has established the “Social Responsibility Roundtable,” the “Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Roundtable,” the “Rainbow List” of the best gay books, and it bestows the Stonewall Award each year for best gay-themed books. This certainly seems like political advocacy. Moreover,

while bemoaning supposed censorship, the ALA has opposed attempts to have more Christian-themed books in school libraries, and also has rejected attempts by members to take stands against real book banning and anti-free speech threats in other countries.

Meanwhile, the organization has turned a blind eye to some of the most illiberal regimes around the world while creating alarmist fears in the U.S. with posters that warn patrons the FBI wants to see their library records.

Protecting Some Points of View, Opposing Some Censorship

The ALA was founded on October 6, 1876, during the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. Its stated mission was to improve the nation's libraries. The organization's current strategic plan is called ALA Ahead 2015. It "calls for continued work in the areas of Advocacy for Libraries and the Profession, Diversity, Education and Lifelong Learning, Equitable Access to Information and Library Services, Intellectual Freedom, Literacy, Organizational Excellence and Transforming Libraries," according to the ALA website.

As we shall see later, the organization frequently falls short of living up to the Library Bill of Rights that the ALA Council adopted on June 19, 1939. These are:

- 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 that 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."

In 2008, the ALA ignored librarians who were banning books they didn't like. In Fairfax County, Virginia, conservative Christian students and parents tried to donate more than 100 books to more than a dozen high school libraries. The books were produced by Focus on the Family and included such titles as, *Marriage on Trial: The Case Against Same-sex Marriage* and *My Genes Made Me Do It! A Scientific Look at Sexual Orientation*. The county librarians said the books did not meet "school system standards" and had to include two positive reviews from "professionally recognized journals." (*Washington Post*, October 3, 2008)

Fox News reported that books that did make the cut in the Fairfax County libraries were *Baby Be-bop*, which was the "coming-out story of a gay teen, which includes descrip-

tions of his sexual encounters in bathroom stalls with men he never talks to," as did *Love & Sex: Ten Stories of Truth*, which "describes a gay teen's relationship with his tutor."

Parents and Friends of Ex-Gays & Gays Director Regina Griggs said she asked the ALA to issue a statement during Banned Books Week urging the Fairfax County school libraries to carry the ex-gay books. But the ALA did not get involved, presumably because it did not advance their agenda. (Diane Macedo, "Gay Reversal Advocates Say School Libraries Banning Their 'Ex-Gay' Book," Fox News Channel, October 22, 2009)

In July 2009, controversial author Robert Spencer, who has written extensively on Islamist radicalism, was set to participate in a panel discussion at the ALA's annual general meeting. The panel was titled, "Perspectives on Islam: Beyond the Stereotyping." But ALA cancelled the panel after Ahmed Rehab, the executive director of the Chicago chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) wrote a letter to the ALA and issued a press release saying Spencer expressed "grotesque viewpoints that lie well outside the bounds of reason and civilized debate."

Whether one supports or opposes Spencer's writings or the ex-gay books is beside the point. The point is that the ALA has staked a claim as the vanguard of free speech, protecting the expression of ideas "some consider unorthodox or unpopular." By its own broad definition of censorship, the ALA declined to stand against censorship. In these instances, the ALA essentially violated three points of its "Bill of Rights": protecting "all points of view," "challeng[ing] censorship," and "cooperat[ing] with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas."

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Ignoring Freedom to Read in Cuba

The ALA operates the same way on the international front. Library associations of the Czech Republic, Latvia, Estonia, and Poland advocated for the release of 65 Cuban librarians and dissidents who made books available that were not approved by the Cuban libraries. Cuban judges ordered the “incineration” of the prisoners’ libraries, which contained the works of Martin Luther King, Jr., and books such as George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*.

The Polish Library Association issued a statement, “The actions of the Cuban authorities relate to the worst traditions of repressing the freedom of thought and expression.” The Organization of American States, Amnesty International, and Freedom House called for the release of the prisoners. Meanwhile, the ALA has referred to the political prisoners as “so-called librarians.”

The rank and file members of ALA—70 percent in a January 2006 online survey published in *American Libraries Direct*—said “Yes” when asked, “Should ALA Council pass a resolution condemning the Cuban government for its imprisonment of dissident ‘independent librarians’?” But the ALA Council opposed resolutions introduced and refused to post the matter on the “Book Burning in the 21st Century” page of the group’s website.

Krug even said, “I’ve dug in my heels ... I refuse to be governed by people with an agenda.” She added that the Cuba issue “wouldn’t die,” though she’d like to “drown it.” (Nat Hentoff, “American Library Association Shamed,” *Jewish World Review*, March 5, 2007)

Left-wing Agenda

The ALA’s values are largely reflected by the company it keeps. Speakers at the group’s annual conferences in recent years have



Self-portrait of a radical librarian: Mark C. Rosenzweig as pictured on his personal website. (<http://home.earthlink.net/~iskra/index.html>)

included perennial presidential candidate Ralph Nader, Vermont Senator and avowed socialist Bernie Sanders, feminist icon Gloria Steinem, environmental activist Robert Kennedy, Jr., and left-wing radio talker Amy Goodman.

One speaker who did stir controversy was former first lady Laura Bush, who spoke at the organization’s 2006 annual conference. A former librarian herself, Mrs. Bush didn’t speak about anything political in her speech titled, “School Libraries Work: Rebuilding for Learning.” But on a library e-mail list, ALA Councilor-At-Large Mark C. Rosenzweig railed against the first lady as a member of the Bush administration.

“I must, with the weariness and frustration that accompanies the anticipated yet still painful, hereby protest that this event turns our conference into a grand political photo-op for the administration of President George W. Bush whose administration bears such a heavy responsibility for, among other things

of which I will remind you, the debacle of the response to Hurricane Katrina and for its ongoing aftermath,” Rosenzweig wrote.

“Mrs. Bush is anachronistically called the ‘First Lady,’ with the fake gentility which is the hallmark of our provincial cult of the Presidency, but what she is, in (political) fact, regardless of her surfeit—to me—rather cloying charm and her much publicized attachment to libraries as the no-political-downside way of demonstrating Bush Administration largesse, is the First Supporter of President Bush and one [of] his most valuable public relations assets.... [S]he supports virtually every policy of her husband’s administration—tax cuts for the rich, the destruction of Social Security and Medicare, the privatization of public lands, the hand-outs to corporations, the support for the plundering by Big Oil, the covering for the abuses of the (pharmaceutical) industry, the invasion and occupation of Iraq (and the lies that were told to enable it), the blockade of Cuba and the threats to Latin America,

the nuclear saber-rattling, the USA Patriot Act, covert domestic surveillance, the attacks on the Bill of Rights and the entire Constitution, the flaunting of international law, and, let's not forget, 'Gitmo' and Abu Ghraib and Haditha."

The e-mail continued, "When you see her smiling demurely on the platform that we have provided for her and basking in the standing ovation Americans love to give to celebrities, know too that the smirking faces of Bush and Cheney and (Rumsfeld) are up there too, and that every clap of the hands and whistle and whoop are taken by them—and by the media who will witness this—as endorsement of their policies and their administration." (Michelle Malkin, "Unhinged Librarians," *Pittsburgh Tribune Review*, June 25, 2006)

In 2004, *New York Times* columnist David Brooks reported that "the ratio of Kerry to Bush donations was a whopping 223 to 1" among librarians. By contrast, the corresponding ratio for academics was 11 to 1.

David Durant, a librarian at East Carolina University, wrote in 2005, "Much has been made of the Left's domination of college and university faculties. Yet in terms of political composition, the library profession makes your typical Ivy League faculty look like the Heritage Foundation. Had the 2004 election been confined to librarians, I firmly believe that the presidential race would not have been between Kerry and Bush, but between Kerry and Nader."

In 2005, the ALA passed a resolution that "supports the right of every person to marry, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender couples, wherever they reside." The ALA established the Rainbow List in 2007 to "provide young people with books that ... relate to the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgen-

der, and queer/questioning experience." The ALA's Stonewall Book Award honors the best LGBT-themed book every year.

The organization's gay roundtable promotes a charter to exclude negative stereotypes. "In our homophobic society any work dealing with a gay theme is prone to include clichés and preconceptions of 'gay character.' It would be excellent to have a reviewer who is proudly self-identified as gay examine relevant books to point out negative stereotypical attitudes when they occur and to make suggestions as to how the librarian can best counteract such stereotypes."

Finances

The ALA takes in donations from the usual left-wing suspects in the world of philanthropy. Large donors include the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (\$15,638,592 since 2003), John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (\$1,565,000 since 1999), Carnegie Corp. of New York (\$1,142,650 since 2001), Ford Foundation (\$460,000 since 2001), George Soros's Open Society Institute (\$363,500 since 2004), John S. and James L. Knight Foundation (\$350,000 since 2000), and the extreme-left Tides Foundation (\$50,986 since 2004).

Corporate philanthropies giving money to the ALA include the Verizon Foundation (\$3,020,947 since 2001) and the Dollar General Literacy Foundation (\$1,928,808 since 2007).

ALA vs. National Security

The nation's librarians took a hardline stance against certain post-9/11 national security policies as well as against the war in Iraq. This attitude pre-dates the War on Terror and was prevalent during the Cold War.

In late 1983, the ALA passed a resolution condemning the United States, more precisely

the Reagan administration, for withdrawing from the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The resolution said, "The ALA deeply regrets the decision of the President of the United States, on recommendation of the Secretary of State, to issue notice of the intention of the United States to withdraw from membership in UNESCO effective December 31, 1984." The reason the U.S. government withdrew, according to the Heritage Foundation, was to protest UNESCO's "growing politicization

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and anti-Western bias, rampant budgetary mismanagement, and advocacy of policies that undermine freedom of the press and free markets.”

One example was UNESCO’s advocacy of a “new world information order” to counter an alleged pro-Western bias in global news agencies. UNESCO reportedly even sought “the licensing of journalists, the creation of an international code of press ethics, and increasing government control over the media,” the Heritage Foundation said. It would seem almost unfathomable that an organization that purports to be dedicated to free speech at home and abroad could support such an agenda. The ALA nevertheless stated on December 16, 1983, that continued U.S. membership in UNESCO is in the “national interest.”

The ALA showed consistency in 1998 when the ALA’s Social Responsibility Roundtable condemned the Clinton administration for bombing Iraq, having previously condemned the first Gulf War under President George H.W. Bush.

Nor did the ALA fail to become hysterical when the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks led Congress to pass the USA PATRIOT Act. The ALA claimed the law would lead to FBI agents invading libraries to see what patrons were reading.

At least five of the 9/11 hijackers reportedly used computers at public or academic libraries to plot the 2001 attacks. Thus, a portion of the PATRIOT Act gave federal authorities access to library, bookstore, and other business records as part of terrorism investigations. Some libraries purged their records more frequently in reaction. They then began posting signs warning the FBI could check the records. In 2003, Attorney General John Ashcroft explained subpoenas



ALA Past President Mitch Freedman (at left) with Daniel Ellsberg at a 2011 event. (photo: American Library Association)

for such records must pass close scrutiny by a federal judge, and he added that the FBI’s 11,000 agents could not possibly begin to monitor the reading habits of any library patron it wanted. “The hysteria is ridiculous. Our job is not,” Ashcroft said.

It’s another case in which the ALA leadership is out of touch with its members. Librarians in Delray Beach and Hollywood, Fla., reported seeing some of the men involved in 9/11 using the library computers to communicate. But Krug of the ALA’s Office of Intellectual Freedom told the *New York Times* she “wished the librarian had followed library patron confidentiality laws and not reported the incident.”

What’s more, Assistant Attorney General Viet Dinh testified to the House Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution in 2003 that many libraries have been eager to cooperate with law enforcement. He said that an FBI survey found “libraries have been contacted approximately 50 times” by agents, based on “suspicion or voluntary calls from libraries

regarding suspicious activities. Most, if not all of these contacts that we have identified were made in the context of a criminal investigation and pursuant to voluntary disclosure or a grand jury subpoena.”

The ALA Policy Manual states “records shall not be made available to any agency of state, federal, or local government except pursuant to such process, order, or subpoena as may be authorized under the authority of, and pursuant to, federal, state, or local law relating to civil, criminal, or administrative discovery procedures or legislative investigatory power. Resist the issuance or enforcement of any such process, order, or subpoena until such time as a proper showing of good cause has been made in a court of competent jurisdiction.”

In January 2003, the ALA passed a resolution calling the PATRIOT Act “a present danger to the constitutional rights and privacy rights of library users.” ALA president Mitch Freed-

man seemed to think terrorism was little more than a pretext to spy on library users. “Looking for terrorists in a public library is just part of an overall strategy to diminish the civil liberties of American citizens,” Freedman said.

A May 15, 2003 press release from the ALA and American Booksellers Association asserted, “FBI agents do not need to prove they have ‘probable cause’ before searching bookstore or library records.” It continued, “Agents can get access to the records of anyone whom they believe to have information that may be relevant to a terrorism investigation, including people who are not suspected of committing a crime or of having any knowledge of a crime.”

In the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq, Freedman declared, “The American Library Association grieves for and deplores the catastrophic losses to Iraq’s cultural heritage that have already occurred with the destruction of the National Library Archives and

the Islamic library. Cultural heritage is as important as oil. Libraries are a cornerstone of democracy and are vital resources in the re-establishment of a civil society. We urge the administration to ensure that in the future the necessary resources will be made available to prevent further catastrophes.” (Paul Walfield, “The ALA Library: Terrorist Sanctuary,” *FrontPageMagazine.com*, May 8, 2003)

Most recently, the ALA passed a resolution in support of Army Private Bradley Manning at its annual meeting in June 2011. Manning is currently being held in detention at the Marine base in Quantico, Va., for leaking thousands of classified documents to WikiLeaks in what was one of the largest security breaches in U.S. history. The ALA resolution states, “the materials Bradley Manning is charged with releasing contained important revelations concerning the misconduct of American military forces and diplomatic corps, including the killing of civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan.” The resolution compares the WikiLeaks breach to leftist hero Daniel Ellsberg’s disclosure of the Pentagon Papers to the press.

The stated mission of the ALA is something every American should support. Every corner of the federal government—including the military—should face scrutiny from engaged groups and individuals outside of governments. The same is true of school boards.

The First Amendment is a cornerstone of what makes America a functional democracy, and there can’t be enough groups willing to fight to protect it. But the ALA has been a very selective watchdog of free speech, aligning itself only with positions of the far Left and ignoring censorship when it eviscerates mate-

rial ALA disagrees with. That undermines the organization and its mission, a mission that would be better served by an intellectually honest library association.

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Briefly Noted

The Left's obsession with voter ID laws amounts to "disenfranchisement hysteria," according to Colorado Secretary of State **Scott Gessler** (R). Photo ID requirements for voting, whether instituted in America or anywhere in the world, are "correlated with ... substantial increased voter turnout, and a whole lot of good things, and I think that shows that some of this disenfranchisement hysteria is, frankly, frankly silly," Gessler said during a panel discussion at the **Heritage Foundation** in Washington, D.C.

Democrats enlisted thousands of young illegal immigrants to drag their supporters to the polls last month, the *Wall Street Journal* reports. Because the workers are already unlawfully present in the United States, presumably all employment they engage in—including electioneering—already violates laws against unauthorized employment. One of the leading groups exploiting the free labor of undocumented workers is the **Colorado Immigrants Rights Coalition** (CIRC). Illegal campaign workers "are winning the hearts and minds of Coloradans through their efforts," said CIRC executive director **Julien Ross**. CIRC is a "partner" with the far-left **Center for Community Change** and the **National Day Laborers Organizing Network**.

During early voting last month **NAACP** activists reportedly took over a Houston, Texas polling station, urged voters to vote for the Obama-Biden presidential ticket, and also gave them rewards to do so. **True the Vote**-trained poll watcher **Eve Rockford** said members of the group appeared at the polling place wearing NAACP-labeled clothing. She said activists handed out water bottles to individuals standing in line waiting to vote and were also "stirring the crowd" and "talking to voters about flying to Ohio to promote President Barack Obama." NAACP members also moved Obama supporters to the front of the line, she said.

The U.S. Supreme Court declined to review the terrorism convictions of four leaders of a defunct U.S. Muslim charity. The men were found guilty in 2008 of using the **Holy Land Foundation** to funnel millions of dollars to the Palestinian organization **Hamas**, which the State Department labels a terrorist group. The foundation was closed by the government after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The **Council on American-Islamic Relations** (CAIR) was named as an unindicted co-conspirator by the judge at the original trial.

An attorney for an all-nude Latham, N.Y. strip club called **Nite Moves** contends the establishment is a tax-exempt entity because state law gives tax exemptions for "dramatic or musical art performances" at a "cabaret or similar place." Lawyer **W. Andrew McCullough** told the state's Court of Appeals that "the state of New York has no business differentiating between the Bolshoi and what we do." The *Nonprofit Quarterly* opines, "Possibly tempering [club owner Steven] Dick's credibility as a First Amendment defender is the fact that his passion in this arena seems to have coincided with his realization that he owed the state hundreds of thousands of dollars in outstanding sales tax payments."