

The Fight for the American Public Library

By
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ATTACKS ON BOOKS,
LIBRARIES,
AND LIBRARIANS
IN THE U.S. ARE
ESCALATING RELENTLESSLY
IN INCREASINGLY DIRE WAYS—

BOOKS BANNED,

BUDGETS SLASHED,

LIBRARIANS HARASSED,

THE ENTIRE PROJECT

OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY
(AND PUBLIC SCHOOL LIBRARIES)

BEING PUT INTO QUESTION.

"Never seen anything like this": U.S. librarians report book bans hit record high in 2022

Record book ban attempts reported last year

School librarians vilified as the 'arm of Satan' in book-banning wars

A Fast-Growing Network of Conservative Groups Is Fueling a Surge in Book Bans

WHY SOME FLORIDA SCHOOLS ARE REMOVING BOOKS FROM THEIR LIBRARIES

With rising book bans, librarians have come under attack as 'groomers' and 'pedophiles'

Proud Boys join effort to ban 'Gender Queer' book from school library — rattling students in suburban Chicago

North Dakota Could Jail Librarians Who Don't Comply with Anti-LGBTQ+ Book Bans

Libraries Across the US Are Receiving Violent Threats

Nashville public libraries close due to bomb threat, police investigation ongoing

A School Librarian Pushes Back on Censorship and Gets Death Threats and Online Harassment

As the Public Focuses on Book Bans, the Right Is Quietly Defunding Libraries

Censorship wars: Why have several communities voted to defund their public libraries?

Book Banners Are Now Trying to Close Public Libraries

If at first you don't succeed, defund the public library

LISTEN: Libraries Are on the Chopping Block in Eric Adams' New York

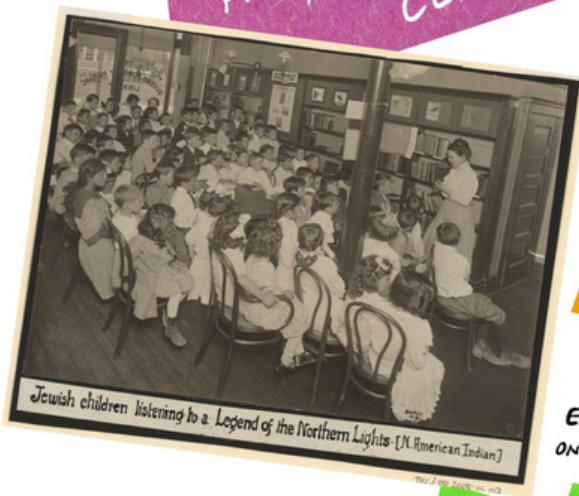
Missouri state House Republicans vote to defund public libraries

LIBRARIES HAVE ALWAYS BEEN
A BATTLEGROUND FOR CONTROL
OVER WHAT BOOKS PROVIDE
"APPROPRIATE" KNOWLEDGE.

THE EARLIEST AMERICAN ITERATIONS
OF LIBRARIES — COLONIAL "SOCIAL LIBRARIES" —
WERE ESTABLISHED TO **MOLD THE CHARACTER**
OF AFFLUENT WHITE MEN.



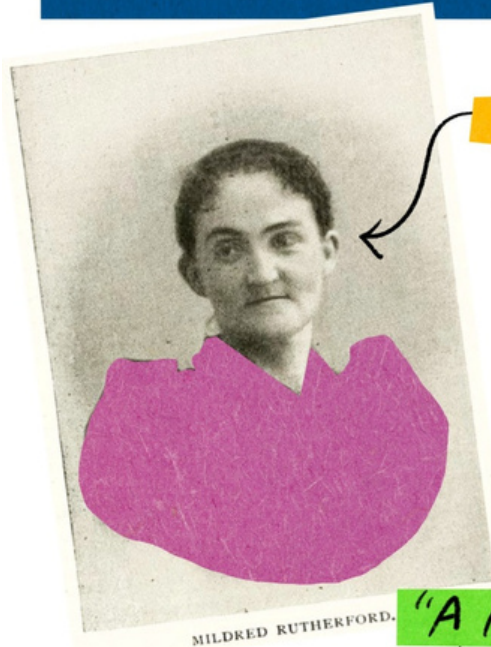
IN THE LATE 19TH CENTURY BOOKS AND LIBRARIES WERE SEEN AS VEHICLES TO PROMOTE CIVILITY AND MIDDLE CLASS VALUES.



AND IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY, PUBLIC LIBRARIES WERE "KEY PARTNERS" IN THE AMERICANIZATION MOVEMENT WHICH SOUGHT TO EDUCATE IMMIGRANTS ON THE RIGHT WAY TO BE A PATRIOTIC AMERICAN —

HOW TO EAT, HOW TO THINK, HOW TO TALK, AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, HOW TO BLEND IN.

THERE IS ALSO AN
ENDURING AMERICAN TRADITION
OF SINGLE INDIVIDUALS AND
SMALL, RABIDLY ENERGIZED GROUPS
WHO BELIEVE THAT
THEY ALONE SHOULD HAVE
THE RIGHT TO DICTATE
WHAT EVERYONE IN THEIR
COMMUNITY, COUNTY, AND COUNTRY
READ AND THINK.



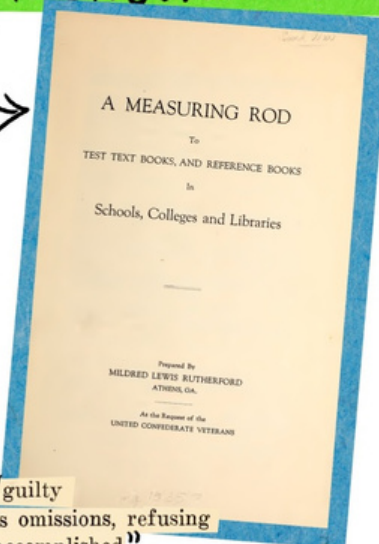
IN 1919,
MILDRED LEWIS
RUTHERFORD,
THE HISTORIAN
GENERAL OF THE
UNITED DAUGHTERS
OF THE CONFEDERACY
(A NATIONAL NETWORK
OF WHITE WOMEN WHO
CAME TOGETHER POST-
CIVIL WAR TO GLORIFY
CONFEDERATE SOLDIERS
AND THEIR EFFORTS)
WROTE,

"A MEASURING ROD"

THE SLIM PAMPHLET
WAS A GUIDE ON
HOW TO REMOVE
BOOKS FROM
LIBRARIES AND
SCHOOLS THEY
DIDN'T LIKE.

IT CLAIMED THAT THE
TEXTBOOKS AND BOOKS BEING
OFFERED AND TAUGHT TO
CHILDREN IN THE SOUTH WERE "guilty

not only of misrepresentations but of gross omissions, refusing
to give the South credit for what she has accomplished"



RUTHERFORD WAS A
WHITE SUPREMACIST.

SHE CLAIMED THAT BLACK PEOPLE
ENSLAVED ON SOUTHERN PLANTATIONS

“were the happiest set of people
on the face of the globe”

AND THAT

“the Ku, Klux Klan was necessary
to protect the white woman.”

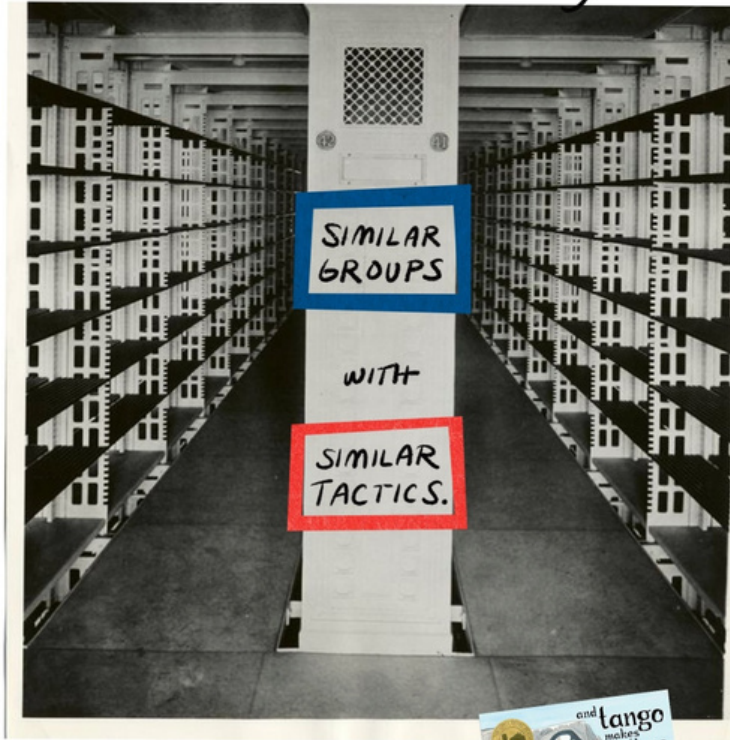
THE CHECKLIST SHE ASSEMBLED
TO MEASURE BOOKS AGAINST
REPRESENTS HER VIEWS,
WITH “TRUTHS” LIKE —

V.
Slaves Were Not Ill-Treated in the South. The North Was
Largely Responsible for Their Presence in the South.

—AND IT ENCOURAGED THOSE WHO
COULD TO PULL BOOKS FROM THE
SHELVES THAT DID NOT MEASURE UP.

THE UDC'S CENSORSHIP EFFORTS
FOCUSED PRIMARILY ON
HISTORICAL MEMORY
AND RACE,
AND THEY WERE INCREDIBLY
SUCCESSFUL — ITS GUIDES,
RECOMMENDATIONS, AND BLACKLISTS
GOT BOOKS BANNED + TEACHERS FIRED.

ALMOST EXACTLY **100 YEARS LATER,**
TODAY'S BOOK BANNING EFFORTS
AND ATTACKS ON PUBLIC AND SCHOOL LIBRARIES
ARE BEING DRIVEN BY



JUST AS IN MILDRED'S
DAY, BOOKS FOR

**YOUNG
PEOPLE**
ARE AT THE
FOREFRONT
OF THE DEBATE.

RACE AND HISTORICAL MEMORY
ARE AGAIN KEY DRIVERS OF THE
BANS, AS ARE BOOKS THAT ARE WRITTEN
BY AND DISCUSS QUEER AND
TRANS PEOPLE.



ACCORDING TO PEN AMERICA,
40% OF BOOKS BANNED BY
SCHOOLS LAST YEAR CENTER
CHARACTERS OF COLOR,
A FIFTH DEAL DIRECTLY WITH **RACE**

AND RACISM,
AND NEARLY HALF OF BANNED
BOOKS FEATURE LGBTQ+
THEMES AND CHARACTERS.

THE BANS BUILD ON
A LEGISLATIVE MOVEMENT
THAT AIMS TO RESTRICT WHAT
YOUNG PEOPLE CAN BE TAUGHT
WITH REGARDS TO RACE, HISTORY, POLITICS,
SEXUAL ORIENTATION, AND GENDER IDENTITY.

PEN AMERICA ALSO KEEPS A LIST OF
"EDUCATIONAL GAG ORDERS"

State	Bill Number with hyperlink to legislative page/draft	Date Introduced	Status as of April 17, 2023	Primary Sponsor	Description	Explicitly Targets	Enacted
Alabama	HB 7	1/20/2023	Pending	Rep. Ed Oliver (R)	Prohibits public K-12 schools and universities from compelling students or employees to adopt or affirm certain ideas related to race, color, religion, sex, ethnicity, or national origin. Students and employees may not be required to attend any class, training, or orientation where these ideas are promoted.	Public K-12, public colleges	Pro
Arizona	HB 2389	1/24/2023	Pending	Rep. Jennifer Longtin (D)	Prohibits public K-12 schools from adopting any textbook or instructional materials that contain any matter "relating adversely" on people on the basis of race, ethnicity, sex, religion, disability, nationality, sexual orientation, or gender identity.	Public K-12	Not
Arizona	SB 1750	2/2/2023	Pending, passed by Senate	Sen. Justice Haddock (R)	Prohibits public K-12 schools and charter schools from teaching in the library or using in the classroom any book that is "biased" or promotes "gender fluidity" or "gender pronouns." Parents who identify such a book may submit it to the state Department of Education for review, where it will be added to a list of prohibited books statewide.	Public K-12	Not
Connecticut	SB 280	1/18/2023	Pending	Sen. Robert Sampson (R)	Prohibits public K-12 schools from adopting a curriculum that "includes the teaching of biased political ideology or make any individual feel discriminated, guilt, anxious or any other form of psychological distress on account of the individual's race or sex." In the bill, "biased political ideology" is defined as including certain concepts related to race or sex.	K-12	Not
Florida	SB 261	2/24/2023	Pending	Sen. Alexis Catalayud (R)	Creates right of private action for students, teachers, and faculty who believe they have experienced discrimination under HB 7. Prohibits public colleges and universities from offering any major or minor that is "based on or otherwise utilizes pedagogical methodology associated with Critical Theory," including "Critical Race Theory."	K-12, colleges	On

CURRENTLY THERE ARE UPWARDS OF
90 BILLS PENDING,
ALMOST ALL CENTERING AROUND HOW
RACE AND LGBTQ+ ISSUES
ARE TAUGHT.

AND LEGISLATION THAT HAS PASSED IS
EXPANDING — THE "DON'T SAY GAY" LAW
IN FLORIDA THAT PROHIBITS INSTRUCTION ON
SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY
WAS RECENTLY EXPANDED TO APPLY TO
ALL ELEMENTARY GRADES FROM PRE-K TO 12.

GROUPS LIKE



USE SOCIAL MEDIA AND ONLINE FORUMS TO RALLY PARENTS AND OTHERS TO THE CENSORSHIP CAUSE —

CREATING THEIR OWN RATING SYSTEMS



DESIGNING "SLICK SHEETS" THAT GIVE PARENTS FODDER FOR COMPLAINTS

DETAILED ACTION GUIDES

Step-by-step instructions to protect your children.

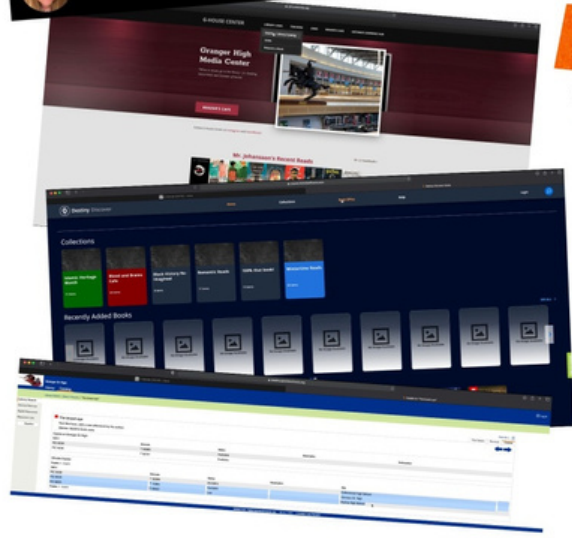
STEP 1
Join the LaVerna in the Library Facebook page

KNOW YOUR RESEARCH ALREADY EXISTS

STEP 2

- 1. **RateBooks.org** is a searchable website that has cataloged the rated reports of over 300 books that are commonly found in public school libraries. **Browse the website** to see what types of books are available and how the rating system works.
- 2. A lot of book locations in Google My Maps was created for many Utah districts. **Browse the maps** to see what is available in schools. As some books may have been removed, see **Step 1** for instructions on how to search your school.

How to find books in Utah Public School District Libraries



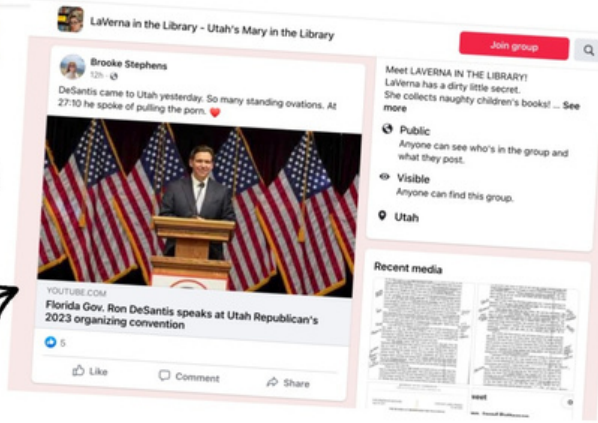
YOUTUBE TUTORIALS

ABOUT HOW TO FIND TARGETED BOOKS IN SCHOOL LIBRARIES ACROSS DISTRICTS

AND FACEBOOK GROUPS

THAT POST POLITICIZED NEWS + CALLS TO ACTION.

facebook



THE GROUPS HAVE ALSO GOTTEN HEAVILY INVOLVED IN LOCAL SCHOOL + LIBRARY BOARD ELECTIONS —

ALPINE SCHOOL DISTRICT CANDIDATES

ENDORSEMENT PROCESS

UTAH PARENTS UNITED
IS PROUD TO ENDORSE

Cole Kelley
Alpine District 7

We believe Cole will reflect the values of Utah Parents and will protect our right to parent on the Alpine School Board.

UTAH PARENTS UNITED
IS PROUD TO ENDORSE

Charles Wood
Alpine District 2

We believe Charles will reflect the values of Utah Parents and will protect our right to parent on the Alpine School Board.

UTAH PARENTS UNITED
IS PROUD TO ENDORSE

LANA NELSON
Alpine District 4

We believe Lana will reflect the values of Utah Parents and will protect our right to parent on the Alpine School Board.

UTAH PARENTS UNITED

OFFICIALLY ENDORSES CANDIDATES,
AS DOES MOMS FOR LIBERTY.

THE GROUPS ARE HIGHLY POLITICAL—
FLORIDA CITIZENS ALLIANCE, FOR EXAMPLE,
HAS LONGTIME TIES TO GOVERNOR RON DE SANTIS,
AND ONE OF THE GROUP'S CO-FOUNDERS
DRAFTED A BILL THAT LET ALL RESIDENTS,
NOT JUST PARENTS, CHALLENGE SCHOOL BOOKS.

AS SCHOOL AND LIBRARY BOARDS
ARE TAKEN OVER BY POLITICIZED,
PRO-CENSORSHIP INDIVIDUALS
WORKING IN CONCERT WITH
STATE + LOCAL LEGISLATURES,
THEY ARE PUSHING IN SOME CASES—FROM



TO NOT JUST BAN BOOKS,
BUT DEFUND
LIBRARIES COMPLETELY.

SOMETIMES IT'S NOT EVEN A WHOLE GROUP.
THERE ARE CASES ACROSS THE COUNTRY WHERE
A SINGLE INDIVIDUAL
IS BEHIND HUNDREDS OF BOOKS
BEING PULLED FROM THE SHELVES.

IN FLORIDA,
ONE CONSERVATIVE ACTIVIST
HAS GOTTEN OVER
100 BOOKS REMOVED
THAT HAVE CONTENT HE FINDS
INAPPROPRIATE
AND SAYS WILL

DAMAGE CHILDREN'S
SOULS

INCLUDING BOOKS CENTERING
RACE + LGBTQ+ CONTENT,

HE'S ON A MISSION TO REMOVE
3,500 TITLES.



AND IN OKLAHOMA,
ONE FATHER **SUED** HIS
DAUGHTER'S SCHOOL DISTRICT,
AND GOT ALL **3,000**
GRAPHIC NOVELS
IN THE SCHOOL'S COLLECTION
RECALLED, AFTER SHE CAME
HOME WITH A BOOK HE DIDN'T
LIKE — AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL
GRAPHIC NOVEL WHERE THE
MAIN CHARACTER QUESTIONS
HIS FUNDAMENTALIST CHRISTIAN
UPBRINGING.

90% OF CHALLENGES
GO AFTER MULTIPLE TITLES AT ONCE,
AND OFTEN USE SIMILAR LANGUAGE —
SOMETIMES REPEATING A
VAGUE PHRASE
LIKE "PROTECT CHILDREN"
OVER AND OVER — TO OBJECT TO
HUNDREDS OF DIFFERENT TITLES.

IT'S HARD TO KNOW THE TRUE EXTENT OF BOOK CHALLENGES AND BANS, BECAUSE ACCORDING TO THE AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION,

82-97% OF THEM GO UNREPORTED.

EVEN WHEN KNOWN CENSORSHIP EFFORTS ARE UNSUCCESSFUL, AND BOOKS STAY ON THE SHELVES, THE CONSTANT BARRAGE OF THREATS AND VITRIOL BEING HURLED AT LIBRARIANS BY THOSE DEMANDING TO BAN BOOKS HAVE LINGERING

CORROSIVE EFFECTS.

LIBRARIANS ARE MORE OVERWORKED THAN EVER TRYING TO MANAGE AND DEAL WITH ATTACKS WHILE DEFENDING THEMSELVES AGAINST POTENTIAL DEFAMATION AND LITIGATION.



AND THE PRESSURE OFTEN LEADS TO LIBRARIANS CENSORING THEMSELVES IN ORDER TO AVOID CONFLICT (LIKE PULLING CERTAIN POTENTIALLY INFLAMMATORY TITLES BEFORE THEY'RE ASKED TO, OR CHANGING UP THEIR BOOK BUYING HABITS).

A NUMBER OF LIBRARIANS ARE LEAVING THE PROFESSION ENTIRELY, EITHER DUE TO STAFFING CUTS (ALMOST A 1/3 OF LIBRARIES HAVE LOST STAFF),

OR BECAUSE THE ATMOSPHERE
IS JUST TOO TOXIC.



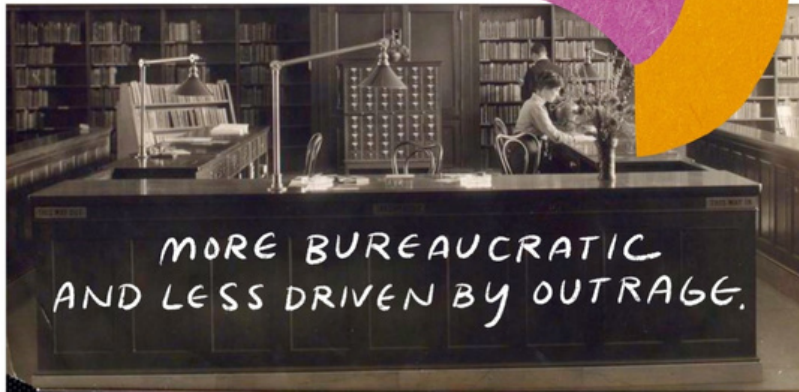
IN RESPONSE
TO THE
ESCALATING
EFFORTS
OF EXTREMIST
GROUPS,
THERE IS AN
INCREASINGLY
VOCAL
AND
ENERGIZED
ANTI-
CENSORSHIP
MOVEMENT
BUILDING.

THE
VAST
MAJORITY
OF
AMERICANS
(98% !)

LOVE THEIR PUBLIC
LIBRARY, AND 71% OF VOTERS
OPPOSE EFFORTS TO HAVE BOOKS
REMOVED FROM THEIR
PUBLIC LIBRARIES.

LIBRARIES ARE GETTING
MORE PREPARED
FOR THE CHALLENGES.

IN FERRISDALE,
MICHIGAN,
LIBRARIANS NOW PUT
THE ONUS ON THE
CHALLENGER,
NOT THE LIBRARY,
MAKING THE ENTIRE PROCESS



AND, LIBRARY WORKERS ARE
FORMING UNIONS TO PROTECT THEMSELVES.

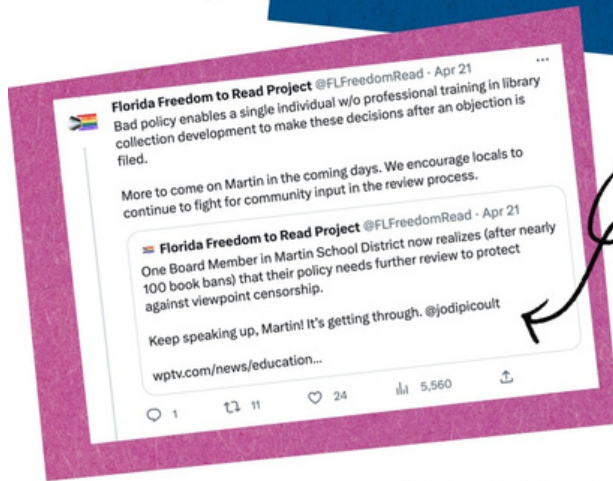


COMMUNITY MEMBERS
ARE ENGAGING IN
**CREATIVE
ACTIVISM**
TO INCREASE THE ACCESSIBILITY
OF BANNED BOOKS.

FLORIDA TEACHER ADAM TRITT
FORMED FOUNDATION 451
AFTER HE WAS ORDERED TO REMOVE
BOOKS FROM HIS CLASSROOM,
AND HIS GROUP NOW ORGANIZES
ACTIVITIES LIKE SETTING UP

**BOOK NOOKS AT LOCAL BEN & JERRY'S
ICE CREAM PARLORS WITH BANNED BOOKS.**

EVERYLIBRARY
HAS A ROUND-UP
OF PROPOSED AND
ENACTED
2023
"LEGISLATION
OF
CONCERN"
IN STATES
ACROSS THE
COUNTRY.



FREEDOM
TO READ
IN FLORIDA
MONITORS
RIGHT-WING
PRO-
CENSORSHIP
EFFORTS,

AND POSTS ACCESSIBLE
INFORMATIVE BREAKDOWNS ABOUT
WHAT IS HAPPENING IN BILLS, SCHOOLS,
AND LIBRARIES ACROSS THE STATE.

BUT TO TRULY
PROTECT OUR LIBRARIES,
EVERY COMMUNITY NEEDS ADVOCATES
FIGHTING FOR A DIVERSITY OF
THOUGHT ON SCHOOL AND LIBRARY
BOARDS, AND BEING AS
VOCALLY PRO
LIBRARIES AS AGAINST.



TO THAT END,
FOR THE PEOPLE
HAS CREATED A
"LIBRARY DEFENDER
RESOURCE CENTER"

THAT INCLUDES BOTH
NITTY-GRITTY
HOW-TO GUIDES
AS WELL AS
"LIBRARY DEFENDER"
STICKERS, FLYERS,
AND MORE THAT
ENCOURAGE PEOPLE
TO GET LOUD
AND BE PROUD.



ART BY FLYNN NICHOLAS

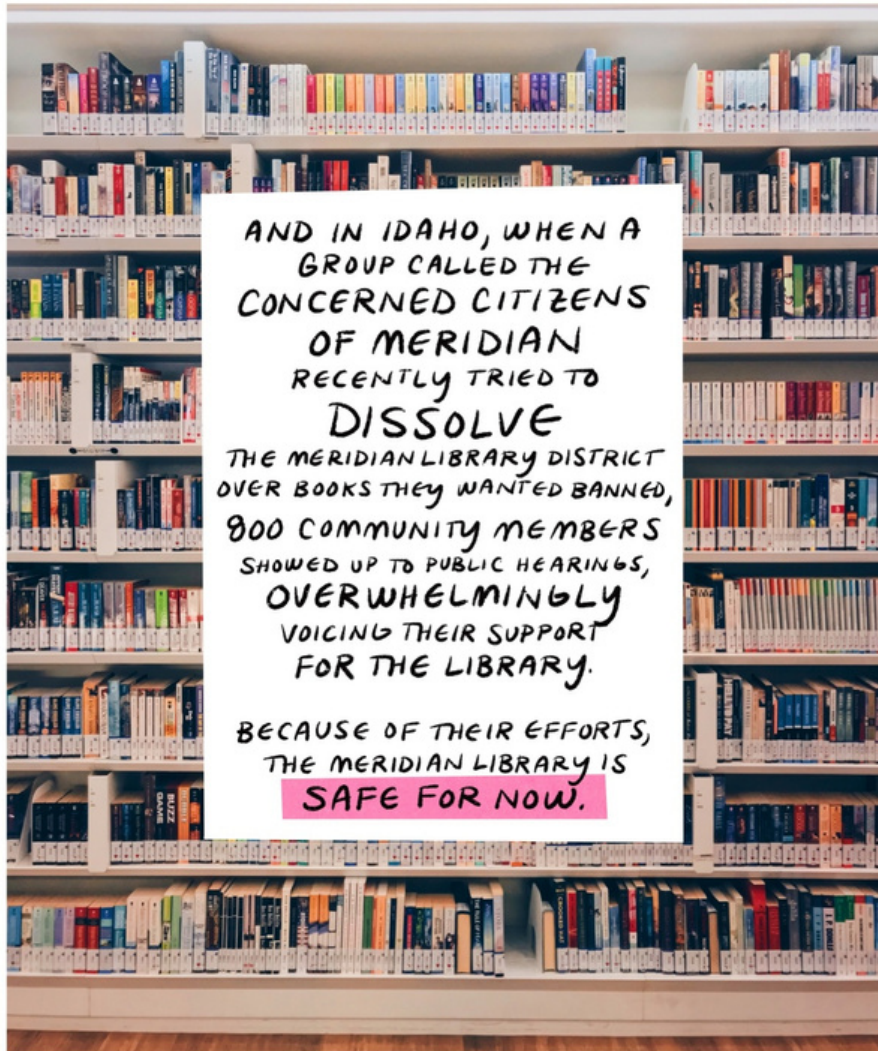


AND RED,
WINE & BLUE,
A GROUP OF
ANTI-
CENSORSHIP
SUBURBAN

WOMEN, HOLDS VIRTUAL
"TROUBLEMAKER TRAININGS"
TO HELP PEOPLE SPEAK UP
EFFECTIVELY AT BOARD MEETINGS.

WHILE THE ATTACKS ON LIBRARIES
ARE OVERWHELMING,
WHEN THE WHOLE COMMUNITY SHOWS UP
AND SPEAKS OUT, LIBRARIES CAN BE
PROTECTED.

PRO-CENSORSHIP SCHOOL BOARD
CANDIDATES BACKED BY GROUPS LIKE
MOMS FOR LIBERTY + THE 1776 PROJECT
WERE RECENTLY TROUNCED
IN ILLINOIS AND WISCONSIN
AFTER TEACHERS UNIONS AND VOTERS
STOOD UP AGAINST THEM.



Curious as to what is happening with libraries in your city? Want to get involved?

- ID groups in your state, city, and neighborhood that are fighting against censorship with Book Riot's continuously updated [anti-censorship list](#).
- Can't find a local group? [Create your own](#) with Fight For the First's support.
- [Collect data about your local library](#) to contribute to a national database about library boards or [sign up to run for your local library board via For the People](#).
- Use Unite Against Book Ban's [Toolkit](#) to petition local decision makers.

Further Reading/Listening/Watching:

- A Measuring Rod ([original 1920 pamphlet, Internet Archive](#))
- Twisted Sources: How Confederate Propaganda Ended Up in the South's Schoolbooks ([article, Facing South](#))
- "Closed by Order of the Governor": Teachers in the Crossfire of Florida's War on Public Education ([article, Mother Jones](#))
- From Budget Cuts to Book Bans: The Decades-Long Assault on Public Libraries ([podcast, Citations Needed](#))
- Conservatives Are Trying to Ban Books in Your Town. Librarians Are Fighting back. ([article, New Republic](#))
- A Fast-Growing Network of Conservative Groups is Fueling a Surge in Book Bans ([article, New York Times](#))
- Why Some Florida Schools are Removing Books from their Libraries ([article, New Yorker](#))
- Plot Twist: Activists Skirt Book Bans with Guerilla Giveaways and Pop-Up Libraries ([radio, NPR](#))
- School Librarians Vilified as the "Arm of Satan" in Book-Banning Wars ([article, LA Times](#))
- How to Ban 3,600 Books from School Libraries ([article, Popular Info](#))

Ariel Aberg-Riger is a visual storyteller and the author of *America Redux: Visual Stories from Our Dynamic History*. For more on how libraries came to be a critical piece of social infrastructure, read her [History of the American Public Library](#).