LIBRARIANS AS CENSORS:
WHY DON'T WE PRACTICE WHAT WE PREACH?
Speech for Oklahoma Library Association, March 11, 1988
Barbara Jones, Director of Library Services
University of Northern Iowa

When I began speaking to various educational groups about intellectual freedom, I was always relieved when the group was librarians. I felt that we shared common professional assumptions and that the experience was similar to "preaching to the converted." I now believe that my attitude and approach were simplistic. Both intellectual freedom, as practiced in the real world, and librarians, as professionals in the real world, are too complex to dismiss with assumptions and platitudes.

I begin with a definition of the "censoring librarian," as a contrast to the "selecting librarian." Then I will talk about the practice of censoring vs. the practice of selection. Finally, I will talk about what, indeed, we preach, as a profession, about intellectual freedom.

First, a plea from one of intellectual freedom's fearless leaders, Dorothy Broderick, who suggests that the commonly-used term, "self-censorship," is misleading. It implies the action of a librarian who settles down some evening, with great anticipation, to a best-seller; slams the book shut, 50 pages in; and exclaims, "This makes me gag!" This kind of personal choice is every reader's privilege - even a librarian's!

What I'm talking about is the librarian who is a censor in relation to his/her organization, be it a public, school, or academic library. The censoring action is a decision, a choice, regarding a prospective purchase or something the library owns. This decision is usually exclusionary, negative, based on ideology, and often based on one work, or parts of one work. While the censorship decision is often contrary to the goals and mission of the organization and library users being served, it might not be a law-breaking decision. Or, if it is contrary to the First Amendment, it may never be recognized as such, or ever be exposed. There might not be case law for clarification. What I'm getting at here is NOT that we should avoid the courts in our pursuit for intellectual freedom, but that more likely the arena will be a board room or city hall - a local issue. More likely, this decision is contrary to the ethics of the library profession and other related professional organizations. We need to focus here.

I have heard very seasoned, good librarians say that 1) since we can't afford to buy much, we can't possibly be fair to all sides anyway; and 2) with the knowledge explosion we must choose and that selection process is censorship. These are notions I hope to dispel, because they become an easy excuse for those of us who, understandably, do not want to make an uncomfortable decision, especially in the current political climate. But add up each of these decisions and we come up with a pattern that hurts the library user and, ultimately, ourselves as a profession.

Let's distinguish censorship and selection, and then look at three situations in which a librarian might be tempted to censor.

In researching this contrast, I found that so many of the admirable contemporary guidelines echo Lester Asher's classic, "Not Censorship But Selection," published in 1953 in Wilson Library Bulletin and updated in 1983. For example, the excellent National Council of Teachers of English "Statement on Censorship and Professional Guidelines" is almost identical and also illustrates how related professional organizations often share librarianship's dependence on intellectual freedom.

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on but our own fragile opinions, corrupted as they are by our own jungle of prejudices... After all, if my only justification for rejecting a book is that it triggers my gag reflex, what's to stop everybody from attacking my book selections?" (Top of the News, Winter 1984, p. 153.)

Dorothy Broderick says, "As a rule of thumb, librarians ought to be sure that at least twenty-five percent of the materials they buy for the library are personally offensive to them." (Building Library Collections, Sixth Ed.) But if the point here, of course, is that there are ways to depersonalize the selection process - written policies are invaluable. Also I read this comment and realized that this librarian did not seem to feel there were professional ethics to fall back on - and that worries me - I will discuss it later.

So why are we still talking about intellectual freedom? The game is up, the battle is over, and the war has been won. The grave threat to intellectual freedom that were supposed to be so alarming when Ronald Reagan and his spiritual advisor Jerry Falwell took office six years ago have proven to be impotent...

The author goes on to say that "intellectual freedom has become a giant case of hypocrisy in library land." We are "systematic censors" because, for example, we don't buy books on "how to kill other human beings without leaving evidence." That's okay, says the author, as long as we are great advocates for IF in the private sector. For example, the 7-11 Stores ought to be able to sell Playboy - libraries shouldn't have to buy it. (Wilson Library Bulletin, Feb. 1987, pp. 32-33)

I have several problems with this statement. First, I think that the Reagan administration has brought with it an atmosphere of repression of access to information. The statistics of book challenges collected by the Office for Intellectual Freedom show that any kind of societal censorship, even if it's Playboy in the private sector 7-11 Stores, affects libraries. Some of the attempts to monitor on-line databases, plus the FBI "Library Awareness Project," are two more examples.

Also, this statement is an example of that "cop-out" mentality I spoke about earlier - an excuse to abandon IF because it's an impossible goal. I would guess that most of us would not buy a "how to" on the perfect murder. I wonder if one has been published that would meet our selection policy criteria? I would also point out that I think most of us would add murder mysteries to our collections, many of which do try to describe the "perfect crime." Anyway, I know from my grass-roots work that this kind of book is not usually the problem. It's usually a book with some literary merit that has been chosen by a selection process. That should, by the way, give us cause for comfort - it makes the challenge process easier.

We cannot ask library users to depend on the private sector for all questionable materials. In many rural areas of Iowa, for example, people cannot afford to buy children's picture books. For reasons of what I hope is a professional commitment to encouraging literacy, I think libraries should provide access to these materials. The graphic depictions of anatomical parts in some of them, of the violence of the Holocaust in others, must then be dealt with as legitimate professional and community concerns - not avoided.

In summary, I want to observe two things about the previously cited "yes, but's" aimed at intellectual freedom. First, I believe that some can be solved by establishing the difference between censorship and selection. Second, I believe that some can't be solved easily. They require discussion with colleagues, study - maybe a whole conference! But I think we're often too eager to grab onto these "tough calls" or to "political realities" and use them as an excuse for ignoring the principles of intellectual freedom. The "tough calls" are what make our jobs interesting - and what make our jobs professional. Like doctors, lawyers, and teachers, we have ethics and guidelines, constantly subjected to interpretation. That's why it is so very important for the library profession to articulate its ethics.

I now present three examples of situations I've heard about, all of which ended with the library, the librarian, and the user majority prevailing. I want to analyze each situation not only to find
the "handles" for solving it, but also to identify what I think are some very real, deep-seated fears that I really believe can be put to rest in the vast majority of cases.

1. A Boy Scout troop gets done with its meeting early so the scoutmaster sends the boys over to the public library to look at sports magazines. One enterprising scout takes his buddies over to the 300's, to the sex books. At the next Library Board meeting, one youngster's mother and grandmother tearfully plead that while their child's life has already been ruined, the Board has a chance to save the rest of the youths by putting the books in a restricted area. "It's not really censorship," I call this case.

The librarian here had, at her disposal:

a. A history of a trusting relationship with her Board.

b. A policy on open access to all library materials.

c. A collection development policy on sex books - (Leroy Merritt's *Book Selection and Intellectual Freedom* has an excellent section on this issue.)

d. ALA statements on the access rights of children, and on closed sections.

What could have been at stake, of course, was her job and her friendships (if the community is small). I want to emphasize that in most cases I've been involved with, the librarian does not lose his/her job and discovers a great support group out there. I will never forget the school teacher in Iowa who called our state IFC with a problem with her School Board. Two days later at the hearing she had expert witnesses from the University of Iowa, librarians, media center people - and the local television station. I realize this isn't always the appropriate strategy - in this case it was - but I remember her amazement that so many professional groups had a stake in the outcome!

2. Let's talk about school libraries. In Racine, Wisconsin, librarians began to express dissatisfaction with the selection policy and method for selecting library materials in the Racine Unified School District. When the Wisconsin Library Association looked into it, they collected such remarks as: "In order to stay out of trouble, I select only 'safe' materials which limit my students' exposure to different ideas." Further investigation uncovered widespread censorship of such materials as *Catch-22, Rolling Stone, Ebony, Sky and Telescope,* and *Wisconsin School Musician.* When the IFC contacted the District office, the reply was: "Many school media librarians received their library training at library training at library departments or schools and attended classes with students studying to be public, special or academic librarians. With a few minor exceptions, they were indoctrinated with patriotic zeal into an ultra liberal selection philosophy promoted across the country by the intellectual freedom committees which do not take a moderate middle-of-the-road approach."

This case received much press coverage. Local citizens were, for the most part, outraged. The Wisconsin Library Association received the ALA IFRS State Program Award for their work on this case. And the problem has not been resolved, a perfect example that intellectual freedom awareness is NOT "neat and tidy" work. But what is fascinating is the WLA finding that all those librarians were censoring out of fear, yet found so much professional support within their district when they finally went public! And the letters to the Editor from their fellow citizens show that people really were crying out for fairness and were supporting the librarians.

3. Finally, a composite example of a research library, committed, as a member of a national and regional consortium, to collect South African materials at a "research" level. A bibliographer has been told by some students and faculty to cancel all subscriptions to white South African materials. (After all, the University has been divested!)

Here I want to emphasize how painful colleague pressure can be in these cases. Such epithets as "racist" are heard within the library profession and between librarians and teaching faculty.

My response would be the following:

1. In the recent Houston City Ordinance case, well publicized at last summer's ALA, the outcome is that the public library has been exempted from the ordinance and thus can buy materials from vendors who do business with South Africa. Preliminary legal opinion appears to support the idea that access to information differs from buying a can-opener and can be separated from a general economic boycott.

2. For academic libraries, the Council on Library Resources' 1985 statement on "Scholarship, Research, and Access to Information" is quite informative: The new and deeper affiliations, now taking shape among libraries and their parent institutions, carry both responsibilities and dependencies that affect access... As individual libraries become components of "the nation's library, the nation's scholars become their users. Thus a censorship decision at one academic library has a dramatic, widespread impact, even beyond university scholars. In Iowa, for example, the three state universities supply a great percentage of public library ILL requests for photocopies and other materials.

3. An academic library with this kind of in-depth collection would surely have a written selection policy statement to that effect.

4. Finally, I want to comment here on the stewardship of resources. It seems to me that it is a social and professional responsibility of librarians to preserve materials that have present and potential historic interest. These will in many cases be offensive to our personal beliefs regarding human rights. But I need only look at the usefulness of the Nazi war materials, not only in documenting an era we hope never to repeat, but also in bringing criminals to justice, to urge that we think three times before blocking access to information materials from oppressive political regimes.

I've talked a lot about the PRACTICING LIBRARIAN. On to the PREACHING. Do we advocate intellectual freedom as a professional standard? I see things that alarm me and things that reassure me. The Bundy-Stakem study in 1982 (WAS, April 1982, pp. 584-589), is somewhat reassuring, though I do see in some of the responses the kernel of the current

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MUSKOGEE HAS NEW HEAD LIBRARIAN

After many months of delay, the search for a Head Librarian for the Muskogee Public Library, the headquarters branch of the Eastern Oklahoma District Library System has been completed.

From the interviews conducted on site over a period of thirteen months, the Committee selected Marion Bryant, currently the Director of a Parish (County) Library in Louisiana. During her five-year tenure in the job, Bryant has conducted two successful mill levy campaigns to fund both the library facility and bookmobile service. She is a graduate of the LSU School of Library and Information Science, Baton Rouge.

Bryant assumed her duties with the Eastern Oklahoma District Library System on October 1.

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OLA SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS & DEADLINES

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<td>May 13</td>
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<td>June 1</td>
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TAKE AN ACTIVE INTEREST IN OLA
OLAY's Nominating Committee this year is selecting candidates for Vice-President/President-Elect, Secretary, and Treasurer (2 year term). Chair of the Nominating Committee is: John Walker
East Central University
Lincoln Library
Ada, OK 74820
405-332-8000

Nominating Committee Chairs for OLA Divisions and Roundtables are as follows:

Oklahoma Association of School Library Media Specialists
Mona Hatfield
Cascia Hall School
2520 S. Yorktown
Tulsa, OK 74114
918-742-7373

College and University Division
Sue Ann Mozic Johnson
Oklahoma State University
Edmon Low Library
Stillwater, OK 74078
405-744-6305

Library Education Division
Martha Waltz
University of Science & Arts
Nash Library
Chickasha, OK 73018
405-222-3140

Public Libraries Division
Judith A. Waldon
Metropolitan Library System
131 Dean A. McGee
Okla. City, OK 73102
405-525-0571

Technical Services Roundtable
Linda Taylor
Oklahoma City Community College LRC
7777 S. May Avenue
Oklahoma City, OK 73159
405-682-1811

Junior Members Roundtable
James Donovan
St. John Medical Center
1923 S. Utica
Tulsa, OK 74104
918-744-2970

Reference Roundtable
Jane Taylor
Central State University Library
Edmond, OK 73060
405-341-2880

Social Responsibilities Roundtable
Carolyn Baker
Oklahoma State University
7777 S. Lewis
Tulsa, OK 74171
918-405-6889

Special Collections and Archives Roundtable
Joyce Varner
Muskegon Public Library
801 W. Okmulgee
Muskegon, OK 74401
918-682-6657

Support Staff Roundtable
Jean Bowers
Enid/Garfield County Public Library
PO Box 8002
Enid, OK 73702
405-234-6313


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The struggle between IFRT and SRRT and over intellectual freedom VS. non-neutral activism for information delivery.

I spent an afternoon at the University of Iowa School of Library and Information Science. Dean Carl Osgood was wonderful - he quickly pointed out in the Iowa catalog that one of their key "instructional objectives" is to:
articulate a philosophy of libraries
that includes an understanding of intellectual freedom and free dissemination of information ...

Statements of objectives, incidentally, are required by the ALA Committee on Accreditation for all library school programs.

Then spent the afternoon doing a non-scientific catalog study of almost all the ALA-accredited library school objectives statements. An alarming number of them say nothing about intel-

lectual freedom. I am particularly concerned that many of the "info science" programs don't mention IF or access issues, and I think that from a public policy point of view, that is shortsighted. (I must say here that Columbia, my alma mater, mentions IF, as does Oklahoma!) Let me read some of them:

Catholic University: Information is not value-neutral. The program emphasizes the ethical dilemmas faced by information professionals and the important policies and standards related to providing information.

My favorite is from SUNY/Albany: It is of paramount importance that the information professional/librarian resist censorship imposed either by public authority or private parties, because everyone, regardless of age, residence, minority status, health, or social condition should have access to qualified information services which are free, efficiently managed, pertinent to local need, timely, and comprehensive.

What really struck me was the SUNY/Albany goal "to support and assist professional societies in the development of standards of ethics and practice." I want to close with the thought that if librarians want to be considered professionals we need to have such standards of ethics and practice. Nowhere is that more apparent than in the arena of intellectual freedom and related access issues. Like medicine and law, our profession is an art. Access issues come up and the solutions aren't as easy as citing the Intellectual Freedom Manual or a law. And yet, it is crucial that that manual be there as a basic statement of philosophy. I worry when I see those guidelines being eroded by cynicism or indifference - or refusal of librarians to take the time to think a decision through when it might have a censorship motive with widespread negative implications. Let us pledge today to start with one, just one, selection decision we feel uneasy about, and work it through. Pick a tough one! We will learn so much about ourselves, our profession, and the community we serve.

(Barbara Jones is now Head of Reference, Minnesota Historical Society)
Message from the President

These are exciting times for the Oklahoma Library Association. There are a wide variety of activities being planned and carried out: the OLA/ODL Standards Committee continues its important work; the Legislative Committee finalizes arrangements for the annual Legislative Workshop to be held this year in Ada; other fall workshops have addressed legal reference service and automated serials control; the Membership Committee is diligently working on turning around an alarming decline in the level of membership in the Association; the two Sequoyah groups have been out in force across the state, promoting student participation in their awards; “Let's Talk About It” is gearing up for a new series of interesting programs; and these are only a few of your association’s activities.

There also is the year-long preparation which goes into the annual conference. Under the capable leadership of Kathy Hale, Program Committee chair, and Ernestina Clark, Local Arrangements chair, the Program Committee is meeting on a monthly basis. Our 1989 Conference is to be held at the Sheraton-Century Hotel and the Myriad Convention Center, May 3-6. I have been particularly impressed by the quality of thought which is going into the various committee, division, and roundtable conference programs; with the effort being put into the planning, this year’s Conference should be even better than ever.

After much discussion among the Membership Committee, chaired by Wayne Felts, and the Program Committee, the program for the Annual Conference is being developed around the theme which the Oklahoma Library Association will be using throughout the year: “Oklahoma Librarians—Key to the 21st Century.” All of us believe that this theme fits well with what we are attempting to accomplish this year. And that is to focus attention and increase the visibility of the most important element in OLA: librarians’ sense of purpose, the commitment and devotion which we bring to our work, and the high value we place on the service which we give to our patrons. All of these factors make librarianship a noble and worthwhile profession and librarians a special breed of people. What we do and what we are are making a difference in people’s lives and that is important for us to remember. I believe our theme, “Oklahoma Librarians—Key to the 21st Century,” brings that message home.

Finally, a major goal I have for the year is the development of a “Statement of Professional Ethics” for Oklahoma librarians. The manner in which librarians conduct themselves in their jobs is an issue which the Executive Board will be addressing in the coming year. I will be appointing an ad-hoc committee to study this critical professional question and draft a statement for the consideration of the Executive Board and the general membership at Conference in May. Areas such as censorship, including self-censorship, political lobbying, professional responsibilities for continuing education, the distinction between one’s personal and professional philosophies, and other issues will be examined and a coherent statement, which will serve as a guide in future years, will result from their study. I can think of no better legacy which we can leave to the future of our profession. I urge all of you who are called upon to assist and cooperate in this important undertaking.

PUBLIC LIBRARY AFFILIATES NETWORK REPORT
Peggy Royster

It’s finally happened! After years of organizational struggles, the Public Library Association has an Affiliates Network which was launched during the ALA Annual Conference in New Orleans.

The mission of the network (PLAN) is “to serve as a communications link between the Board of Directors of PLA and state and multi-state library organizations.” Each member organization may appoint or elect a representative who will serve at least two years. Past President Susan McVey appointed me to be the first OLA Representative.

While discussing PLA Board activity, the 1989 National Library Week was applauded because finally it will focus on librarians. PLA also has a Membership Survey which is already in draft form. In the future, Texan Lowell Lindsey will be reporting on the PLA Board Activity to PLAN. He was elected as a Director-at-large to sit on the PLA Board.

Highlights of the State Reports:
MICHIGAN—They stopped sponsoring a Legislative Day; they give each legislator several nice gifts with a library slogan or logo all over it. OHIO, MASSACHUSETTS, WASHINGTON, WYOMING, & GEORGIA all reported developing standards for libraries based on performance measures. MONTANA has an exciting statewide fax network developed by the libraries in Helena to make people aware of libraries “as information centers.”

Most states reported problems with finding adequate funding. Ohio was the only state represented that claimed good luck—they recently changed the law to fund libraries with 6.3% of the state income tax receipts. They’re now trying to decide “how to spend all this money”(!)

A note that may be of interest to Oklahoma librarians is that other states are beginning to build coalitions with their Municipal League organizations. Following the successful example of Texas, these groups are developing joint educational and lobbying efforts. During the ’88 OLA Conference, the Public Libraries Division sponsored a program to explore the possibility of this in Oklahoma.

Nicky Stanke closed the first meeting of PLAN by voicing her concerns about establishing activities for the network to accomplish to benefit all of the members. The group will meet at MidWinter and Annual Conferences of ALA.

OKLAHOMAN WINS MEMBERSHIP

During the recent ALA Annual Conference in New Orleans, the Resources and Technical Services Division raffled a one-year membership in the Division. The winner of this membership is Susan Wolfram, Norman High School. Robert P. Holley, Chair of the RTSD Cataloging and Classification Section, pulled Susan’s name from over 250 submitted.
Government Documents of Interest to Librarians
By Steve Beleu,
U.S. Documents, ODL

This column identifies government publications that are of special importance to librarians, i.e., those that discuss library problems, reference works, etc. These publications may be available in any of the U.S. or Oklahoma depository libraries throughout the state or may be borrowed on interlibrary loan. U.S. documents that are for sale may be ordered from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

For State of Oklahoma publications you must contact the issuing agency. Key: "Sudocs" is U.S. Superintendent of Documents; "OPC" is the Oklahoma Publications Clearinghouse. Annotations for State of Oklahoma publications are written by Vicki Sullivan, OPC.


Explanations of how the BLS compiles the economic data that becomes the Consumer Price Index, Producer Price Index, Employment and Earnings, and other publications. Useful for understanding the uses and limitations of BLS data.


Evaluation of the Library Service program of the Veterans Administration, including the VALNET system, marketing, and user services.


List of U.S. government publications on literacy, including some ERIC documents, that are currently in print and for sale; also includes a list of out-of-print documents on literacy that are available from depository libraries.

THREE PUBLICATIONS ON JAPANESE TECHNICAL LITERATURE. Librarians who work with technical information should be preparing themselves to work with Japanese technical information in English translation. These publications can help librarians understand the nature of Japanese technical reports, and the various public and private sector organizations that translate them into English. They are available from the National Technical Information Service, 5285 Port Royal Road, Springfield, Virginia 22161, for the price indicated plus $3 postage per order.


Profile of Japanese technical literature in English translation, five case studies of how it has been used by American companies, a directory of public and private sector companies that compile and translate it, and a listing of some Federally-funded translations.


Overview of America's accessibility to Japanese technical resources, both in Japanese and in English translation, and the implications of using them.


Study of America's access to Japanese technical literature in these two specific fields.

BEASLEY TO HEAD DEL CITY LIBRARY

Executive Director of the Metropolitan Library System Lee B. Brawner has announced the promotion of Public Service Librarian Barbara Beasley to the position of branch head, Del City Library.

Beasley has worked at the Belle Isle Library as a public service librarian since August, 1984.

A graduate of the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign with an M.S. in Library Science, Beasley had previously been employed with the Chickasaw Library System in Ardmore as a children's and young adult librarian.

NOMINATIONS SOUGHT FOR BOGLE TRAVEL AWARD

The International Relations Committee (IRC) of the American Library Association is now accepting applications for the 1989 Bogle International Library Travel Fund Award.

The $300 award enables a librarian to attend an international conference. Applicants must be members of ALA and be planning to attend an international conference for the first time, either in the United States or abroad.

Additional requirements: evidence of interest in career-related international activities, evidence that the applicant's institution is committed to international relations and submission of a report to the Bogle International Library Travel Fund Committee within two months after the conference.

The application deadline is December 1, 1988, and application forms may be obtained from Robert P. Doyle, IRC Staff Liaison, American Library Association, 50 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611.
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CAPITAL PUNISHMENT
Caught between two states. T. Jacoby, Newsweek 111:67 My 2 '88
The U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to hear the appeal of Mississippi death row inmate Samuel Bice Johnson, who is contesting the legal arguments that led to his death sentence. In securing the death penalty, the prosecutor needed to show that "aggravating" circumstances in the case justified capital punishment. The crux of his argument rested on Johnson's prior assault conviction in New York, but after his Mississippi conviction Johnson reopened the New York case, and the special circumstances were removed.

CHILDBERG OF ALCOHOLICS
A cover story on the problems that face the children of alcoholic parents features profiles of four celebrities with alcoholic fathers, a report on Children Are People, a St. Paul, Minnesota, counseling and support organization for the children of alcoholics; an interview with Dr. Timmen Cermak, co-director of the Genesis psychotherapy center in San Francisco, co-founder of the National Association to Stop Child Abuse, director of the Association of Alcoholics Anonymous; and a profile of the Journal of Chemical Dependency Treatment.

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