

TO: ALA Executive Board

RE: Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF) Report

ACTION REQUESTED/INFORMATION/REPORT:

Report: No Action Requested

ACTION REQUESTED BY:

N/A

CONTACT PERSON:

Deborah Caldwell-Stone
Director
Office for Intellectual Freedom
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DRAFT OF MOTION:

N/A

DATE: October 12, 2021

ATTACHMENTS:

None

Advocacy, Policy Development, and Outreach

The Office for Intellectual Freedom worked with representatives from the Intellectual Freedom Committee, Public Policy and Advocacy, and the Office for Diversity, Literacy and Outreach Services to draft a position statement addressing ongoing efforts to censor books and materials addressing racism, Black American History, and diversity. The ALA Executive Board approved the [ALA Statement on Censorship of Information Addressing Racial Injustice, Black American History, and Diversity Education](#) on August 18, 2021.

Intersection of Intellectual Freedom and Social Justice Working Group

The working group re-convened in September 2021 following the Executive Board's July 2021 vote to extend the term of the working group through 2022. The group continues to work cooperatively on a draft report that will respond to the charge from the ALA Council to identify alternatives to neutrality rhetoric, as instructed by the "Resolution on White Supremacy and Fascism Being Antithetical to Librarianship" adopted by ALA Council at ALA's 2021 Virtual Midwinter Meeting. The working group's goal is to share a completed draft report with ALA members attending ALA's Virtual LibLearnX event in January 2022. The working group plans to host a program featuring small group discussions led by working group members. The goal of the program is to foster member engagement and gather feedback on the language in the draft report.

Intellectual Freedom Committee

The Intellectual Freedom Committee met in September to review past work and to adopt its agenda for the coming year. A number of subgroups comprised of committee members and volunteers will work on creating or updating statements and policies addressing intellectual freedom. These subgroups will work on a draft Q and A on Problematic Authors and review the Freedom to Read Statement, a core policy document that has not been revisited or revised since 2004. In addition, the IFC has joined with the Intellectual Freedom Roundtable, the Committee on Professional Ethics, and the Freedom to Read Foundation to form the Joint Professional Values Programming Subgroup. The joint subgroup will coordinate efforts among these four member groups to create and propose conference programming, webinars, and other continuing education opportunities that address intellectual freedom, privacy, and other core professional values.

The IFC Privacy Subcommittee continues to work on the Vendor Privacy Resolution, as assigned by ALA Council. It is also preparing to release the Privacy Field Guides, an IMLS-funded project led by Privacy Subcommittee chair Erin Berman and Bonnie Tijerina. The Field Guides will replace the Privacy Toolkit previously published by the Privacy Subcommittee.

Committee on Professional Ethics

The Committee on Professional Ethics first met in August. Its agenda for this year includes a review and possible rewrite of the preamble to the Code of Ethics; developing two draft Q & As, one on Ableism and one on Sexism; and a proposal to develop a document addressing collection development practices that may become an interpretation of the Code of Ethics.

Staff Activities

Director Deborah Caldwell-Stone

- "Freedom of the Press, Assembly, and Speech: First Amendment Issues Today," ALA Virtual Annual Conference, 6/25/21 (Sponsored by the Intellectual Freedom Committee)
- Collection Development Policy Training, Staff and Trustee In-Service, Grand Marais Public Library, 7/28/21
- "Banned: How Censorship Impacts the First Amendment," Carnegie-Pittsburgh Public Library, 8/19/21
- "Advocating in Advance: Keeping Ahead of Legislation and Local Initiatives," with PPA's Megan Cusick, United for Libraries 2021 Virtual Conference, August 2021

Assistant Director Kristin Pekoll

- "2020 Censorship by the Numbers," on-demand "News You Can Use" session, ALA's Virtual Annual Conference
- Long Island Library Pride Alliance 9/14/21
- AASL Affinity Group 9/15/21

Public Challenges

The Office for Intellectual Freedom continues to address an unprecedented number of challenges and controversies arising from the ongoing campaign by conservative advocacy groups to suppress and censor books and resources that are anti-racist, address the United States' history of racism and slavery, or reflect the lived experiences of Black, Indigenous, and persons of color.

A parallel effort by some of the same organizations targets books and resources reflecting the experiences and concerns of LGBTQIA+ persons or non-fiction works addressing human reproduction and sex education, such as Robie Harris' *It's Perfectly Normal*.

From June 1, 2021, to September 30, 2021, OIF has tracked 155 unique censorship incidents. OIF provided support and consultation on 120 of those cases.

Books & Graphic Novels	90
Programs	11
Displays & Exhibits	24
Other Challenged Resources (student publications, reading lists, pamphlets, First Amendment Audits, online resources, artwork)	30

Recent Public Challenges and Bans

- Central York School District (Pennsylvania): Last October, the all-White school board voted unanimously to withhold access to list of diverse educational resources recommended by its own diversity committee. The banned resources included a children's book about Rosa Parks, Malala Yousafzai's autobiography, and a CNN Sesame Street town hall on racism.
- Elmbrook School District (Wisconsin): The conservative law firm Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty demanded that the Elmbrook School District to remove two books it deemed "sexually explicit," *Queer* and *This Book is Gay*. The district has suspended both books from its middle school libraries and district-wide Sora e-book app.
- Jonesboro Public Library (Arkansas): Following challenges to its PRIDE Month display, two members of the library board of trustees proposed policy changes that would have made all displays, speakers, and book materials purchases subject to individual approval by the library board, to avoid controversy over LGBTQIA+ materials. The proposals were tabled after a large number of residents objected to the proposed changes.
- Campbell County Public Library (Wyoming): Following complaints about the library's display of LGBTQIA books in June, a local organized group is now demanding that the library remove a range of materials from the children's and young adult areas of the library that include LGBTQIA+ books and books that address human reproduction. The group has filed a criminal complaint with the local sheriff, claiming that the challenged books are obscene.
- After a parent launched a social media campaign claiming that Newbery-Award winning author Jerry Craft's books contained "critical race theory," the Katy, TX School District "paused" an author event that would have featured Mr. Craft and have suspended his books.

Banned Books Week 2021

At a time when a growing number of LGBTQIA+ books and books that focus on racism and racial justice are challenged for removal from the library and school bookshelves, this year's Banned Books Week (Sept. 26 – Oct. 2, 2021) served as a reminder of the unifying power of stories and the divisiveness of censorship, a reflection of the 2021 theme, "Books Unite Us. Censorship Divides Us." Graphic artist Dorothea Taylor of T.P. Design, Inc. created compelling visuals for the theme and Banned Books Week Honorary Chair and New York Times bestselling and banned author Jason Reynolds spotlighted the theme in social media, programs, and media interviews.

Throughout Banned Books Week, OIF highlighted the incredible work of libraries promoting the freedom to read by sharing their displays and programs via social media, including an [intricately carved pumpkin](#), [banned book trading cards artwork](#), and [book displays](#) based on this year's theme. Banned and challenged authors also drew attention to censorship attempts, including Alex Gino, Kelly Yang, Nikole Hannah-Jones, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Laurie Halse Anderson, Gene Luen Yang, Angie Thomas, Marianne Celano, Marietta Collins, Ann Hazzard, Daniel Haack, Phil Bildner, Laurin Mayeno, and Robert Liu-Trujillo.

OIF offered products on both the ALA Store and the ALA Graphics Gift Shop on Spreadshirt, with help from Rachel Johnson and Production Services. Materials included the [Books Unite Us](#) poster (digital and print), Field Report (digital and print), bookmarks (digital and print), T-shirts, and a water bottle.

The [ala.org/bbooks](#) microsite offered librarians program ideas, history, challenged books lists, infographics, and promotional tools to learn about and teach banned books year-round. Popular videos on the Banned Books Week Facebook page included discussions with banned and challenged authors, hosted by the Banned Books Week Coalition: "[A Conversation With Gene Luen Yang: Censorship in Leander, Texas](#)," "[Censorship of Children's Books: A Conversation with the Creators of Something Happened in Our Town and One of a Kind, Like Me](#)" and "[Ask Jason Reynolds Anything \(About Banned Books\)](#)." OIF also hosted a letter-writing campaign during the week titled [Dear Banned Author](#), with printable postcards and author mailing addresses.

A highlight of Banned Books Week was the "Ideas & Actions" virtual event on September 29, hosted by One World, an imprint of Random House and co-sponsored by ALA. The event asked advocates, leaders, and banned and challenged authors "What do you wish you had learned in school but didn't?" Featured authors included Ta-Nehisi Coates, Nikole Hannah-Jones, Ibram X. Kendi, Bryan Stevenson, Cathy Park Hong, Heather McGhee, and Adam Serwer.

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. Both OIF and FTRF were sponsors of the podcasts, which were released throughout Banned Books Week.

The American Library Association, libraries, and banned and challenged authors were spotlighted in articles during Banned Books Week — from *Teen Vogue*, NPR, and *Publishers Weekly* to BuzzFeed quizzes and *Washington Post* features on our honorary chair, Jason Reynolds. USA Today staff also reviewed 30 banned and challenged titles and defended what they meant to readers. OIF Director Deborah Caldwell-Stone also participated in nearly a dozen interviews to discuss OIF’s work, censorship trends, and the impact of censorship on students and communities.

Publications and Continuing Education

On September 14, 2021, the Office for Intellectual Freedom and ALA Editions published *A History of ALA Policy on Intellectual Freedom, A Supplement to the 10th Edition of the Intellectual Freedom Manual* to accompany the 10th edition of the *Intellectual Freedom Manual* published in January 2021. Edited by Martin Garnar with the help of assistant editor Trina Magi, the new edition is significantly improved over past editions. Outdated materials have been eliminated and the introductory and historical essays have been revised to focus on contemporary issues like social justice while preserving the history of ALA's policies concerning intellectual freedom.

The Office for Intellectual Freedom is working co-operatively with the new Continuing Education unit to develop new webinars and courses centered on intellectual freedom, privacy, and professional ethics. Two webinars, one on privacy audits and a second on vendors and privacy are currently in the planning stages. A recent e-course on the First Amendment co-sponsored by OIF, the Freedom to Read Foundation, and the Continuing Education unit just concluded in August 2021.