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A Historical Analysis of Book Challenges and Banning in Louisiana

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Abstract

This article explores the history of challenges and bans on library and school materials in Louisiana from 1938 to 2024. It provides context for recent legislation, particularly Act 436 of 2023. The article reviews incidents documented in newspaper articles and library publications, focusing on challenges related to race, sexual content, political views, and LGBTQ+ themes. It discusses the roles of librarians, school boards, and community groups in these circumstances. The historical challenges and book bans in Louisiana reveal a recurring pattern of moral and political arguments used to justify censorship. This pattern directly influences, and is echoed by, recent legislation, including Act 436. The article concludes by reflecting on the ongoing nature of these issues and emphasizing the importance of intellectual freedom.

Keywords: intellectual freedom, censorship, book bans, Louisiana libraries

This article examines the historical challenges and bans related to library and school materials in Louisiana. It provides the context for recent library legislative measures, including Act 436, which was passed during the 2023 legislative session in Louisiana. Senator Heather Cloud, R-Turkey Creek, introduced Act 436, which mandates that libraries take community standards into account when acquiring materials. Community standards refer to local norms regarding sexual decency and are considered when determining if a work is obscene, as clarified in the 1973 Supreme Court ruling in *Miller v. California* ("Community Standards," 2025).

In this ruling, Chief Justice Warren Burger concluded that material is deemed "obscene" and may be restricted if an average person, applying local community standards rather than uniform national standards, finds that it appeals to prurient interests, if it is patently offensive, and if it lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value (*Miller v. California*, 2023). These three criteria for determining whether a work is obscene are known as the Miller Test.

Defining community standards is challenging and has become increasingly complex with the rise of modern online communication (Steiner, 2024). Act 436 raises significant ethical and legal concerns. For instance, situations may arise where a library board is primarily composed of members appointed by local elected officials who share similar political beliefs. This could result in a narrow determination of which library materials are deemed appropriate for the entire community, focusing solely on one aspect of the Miller Test. In contrast, only a court has the authority to determine if a work is obscene, based on the three aspects of the Miller Test, and thus not protected by the First

Amendment (Hudson, 2025). An applicable case is *Sund v. City of Wichita Falls, Tex.* (2000), where two children's picture books, *Heather Has Two Mommies* (1989) by Leslea Newman and *Daddy's New Roommate* (1990) by Michael Willhoite, featuring gay and lesbian parents. The books received positive reviews from professionals and contained no nudity or obscene content. Opposition to the books arose from individuals and local groups on religious grounds. A local religious leader checked out the books and refused to return them, claiming they conveyed a "homosexual message." In response, the library purchased replacement copies and returned them to the children's section.

However, under pressure from local groups, the city council passed a resolution allowing the removal of any children's book from the children's section to the adult section if at least 300 library cardholders signed a petition, with no right for citizens to appeal. Chief Judge Buchmeyer ultimately ruled that this resolution was unconstitutional based on the First Amendment, which safeguards the right to receive information and ideas, and the Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection Clause, which prohibits the government from censoring library materials or restricting access to diverse viewpoints (Chrastka, 2024; *Sund v. City of Wichita Falls, Tex.*, 121 F. Supp. 2d 530 [N.D. Tex. 2000], n.d.).

Additionally, Act 436 mandates a library card system that restricts minors' access to digital content, requiring permission from their parents or guardians. It also establishes a procedure for library patrons to request reconsideration of a library material's inclusion in a collection (*Resume Digest Act 436 [SB 7] 2023 Regular Session Cloud*, 2023).

Senator Cloud criticized the state's libraries, saying they have not done "their due diligence" in creating standards like the bill would require (Potter, 2023, para. 13). She

stated, "librarians she encountered would not know the first step to take if a parent or guardian disapproved of a book and turned it in" (Britton, 2023, para. 7). However, it should be noted that many public library systems in Louisiana have policies in place for materials selection and reconsideration. Additionally, the core textbook *Foundations of Library and Information Science*, written by Richard E. Rubin and published by the American Library Association (ALA), covers libraries' history and mission, the profession's values and ethics, information policy, intellectual freedom, and legal issues. This textbook is often a part of library science graduate programs (*Foundations of Library and Information Science, Fifth Edition*, n.d.).

According to the ALA, "a challenge is an attempt to remove or restrict materials, based upon the objections of a person or group. A banning is a removal of those materials" (*Challenge Support*, n.d.). The incidents in this article were primarily sourced from newspaper articles and the American Library Association's *Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom* and *Journal of Intellectual Freedom & Privacy*. Not all instances of book challenges are reported, mainly due to the library or librarian's fear of negative attention or controversy. Some librarians engage in what is known as soft censorship. This involves altering their book selections based on the current political climate rather than following their established selection policies. To avoid conflict, they may choose books that are less likely to spark controversy. This practice affects the availability of materials on topics that have historically been targeted by challengers, such as race or LGBTQ+ issues, and unintentionally marginalizes certain perspectives and voices. Furthermore, it conflicts with the ALA's Code of Ethics, which states, "We uphold the principles of intellectual freedom

and resist all efforts to censor library resources” (*ALA Code of Ethics*, n.d. , para. 8).

Reporting book challenges is essential because they document attempts to restrict access to information and ideas. This process helps track trends, understand the motivations behind these challenges, and coordinate effective responses. It is crucial to develop resources to defend library materials and proactively protect against challenges before they occur (*Book Ban Data | Banned Books*, n.d.). The ALA estimates that for every challenge reported, as many as four or five go unreported (*100 Most Frequently Challenged Books by Decade | Banned Books*, n.d.).

Certain themes frequently arise in Louisiana’s history of challenges to library materials and book bans. Concerns about racial themes and integration have consistently been a reason for these challenges, especially during the Civil Rights era. Additionally, materials containing sexual content or themes related to sexuality, as well as those considered “obscene,” have often been targeted. In recent years, there has been an increase in challenges to materials featuring LGBTQ+ themes, often as part of organized efforts by conservative groups.

This article presents historical events and trends from each decade to provide context for book bans and challenges during that time, along with specific examples of bans or challenges that have occurred in Louisiana.

Timeline

The 1930s: Jim Crow Laws and the Foundations of the Civil Rights Movement

In 1883, the Supreme Court ruled that the Fourteenth Amendment protected African Americans from discrimination by states, but not from private individuals or

businesses. This interpretation was further defined by the 1896 case *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which established the doctrine of "separate but equal" accommodations. Signs designating facilities as "Colored" or "Whites Only" became common. However, in 1954, the Supreme Court overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson* (Library of Virginia, n.d.).

During the Great Depression, African Americans were frequently the "last hired and first fired," resulting in higher unemployment rates compared to White individuals. This situation heightened racial tensions and contributed to incidents of violence. During the early 1930s, lynching incidents rose significantly, peaking in 1933 with a total of 28 occurrences (Library of Congress, n.d.).

The 1930s also saw the growth of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which focused on challenging discriminatory laws regarding education and voting rights (*Who Is Walter F. White?*, n.d.).

1938

A researcher investigating the role of rural public libraries in adult education found evidence of censorship. The public libraries established in Louisiana's black schools tended to avoid adding "books that describe the emancipated Negro" to their collections (Knott, 2015, p. 202). Notably, obscenity was not the driving factor behind this decision; rather, it was about controlling the narrative.

The 1950s: Teens, Youth Culture and Challenges to Jim Crow Laws

In the 1950s, a new teenage culture began to emerge, characterized by rock and roll music and a consumer-driven lifestyle (*Popular Culture and Mass Media in the 1950s*, 2025). With more free time and disposable income, teenagers became a focal point of

cultural concern, leading to worries about youth crime and the perceived decline of traditional family values (Barnosky, 2006).

Civil and youth leaders across the country believed that comic books were a significant contributing factor to juvenile delinquency. Many comic books were frequently banned due to their perceived association with “children’s literature.” However, some comics and graphic novels contain adult themes. Challengers of graphic novel collections in libraries and schools often argue that images can be more powerful or persuasive than written words, especially for young children. Additionally, the graphical images or depictions in a graphic novel may appear more overt to potential censors than textual descriptions (Beaty & Weiner, 2019).

In 1954, the Comics Code Authority was formed, a group of “comic book publishers that set out to censor any material that might cause offense,” and local governments across Louisiana debated banning comic books (Beaty & Weiner, 2019). Clara Haupt, an Evangeline Parish librarian, presented a list of comic books that were “condemned by specialists in child education” at a parent-teacher association meeting (“Comic Book Ban List Discussed at V-Platte P-TA Meet,” 1955, p. 24). Many cities across the state, such as Lafayette, Donaldsonville, Baton Rouge, New Orleans, and Monroe, either banned or restricted the sale of crime, horror or love comic books (“N.O. to Launch Comic Book Ban,” 1949; “Objectionable Comic Book Ban Studied,” 1954; “On Certain ‘Comic Book’ Ban Finds Study by Council Committee,” 1955).

Moreover, the 1950s were a transformative decade for the Civil Rights Movement. A notable event was the Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which

overturned the "separate but equal" doctrine established by *Plessy v. Ferguson*. This ruling declared that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional (Editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.).

In 1955, a 14-year-old teenager named Emmett Till was lynched in Mississippi for allegedly whistling at a White woman. National magazines published photographs of his open-casket funeral, which brought the issue of racism in the South to global attention. The same year, Rosa Parks was arrested in Montgomery, Alabama, for refusing to give up her bus seat to a White passenger (Vox, 2020).

Additionally, the Civil Rights Act of 1957 was passed, marking the first federal civil rights legislation since Reconstruction. This act allowed the federal government to have a part in addressing racial discrimination and protecting voting rights (Vox, 2020).

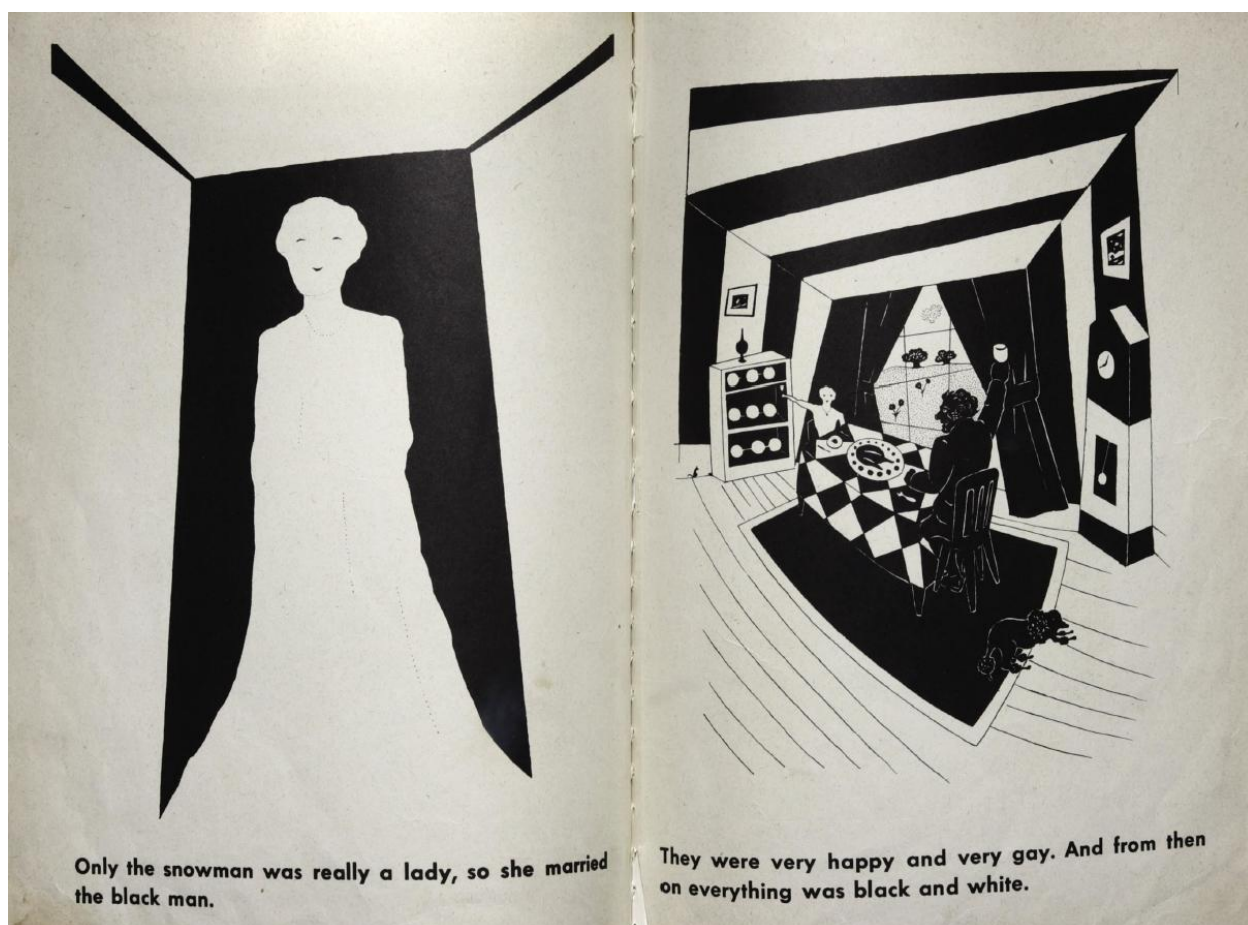
1956

School board members from Bossier and Claiborne Parish School Systems ordered the removal of *Life*, *Time*, and *Look* from school library shelves. The reason cited for this action was the magazines' "distorted views on segregation in our schools and their seemingly systematic campaign to prejudice and inflame the American people against the South," specifically citing an article in *Life* about the Emmett Till case and an article in *Look* about the South and the Supreme Court (Bixler, 1956, p. 1).

1959

A patron of Shreve Memorial Library in Shreveport, Louisiana, filed a complaint against the children's picture book *Black and White* by Margaret Wise Brown, illustrated by Charles G. Shaw. The book tells the story of a Welsh coal miner who falls in love with a

woman made of snow. The editor of the conservative newspaper *Shreveport Journal*, George W. Shannon, criticized the book as "insidious interracial propaganda." He asked, "How would you feel if your child heard a bedtime story about a black man and a white lady who found happiness and gaiety in their lives by getting married?" Shannon also stated that "circulating books that endorse racial integration among adults is one thing, but deliberately distorting the minds of children is another." He demanded a "re-evaluation of all the children's books in the library to check if any others contained similar content" ("Library Board to Meet--Censorship of Children's Books to Be Discussed," 1959, p. 1).



Brown, M. W. (1944). *Black and white*. Harper & Brothers.

Soon after the complaint, Inez Boone, the chief librarian, discarded *Black and*

White, citing that the book was worn out ("Fant in Favor of Book Removal," 1959, p. 1).

Another children's picture book, *First Book of Fishing* by Edwin Herron, was challenged by the *Shreveport Journal* as "integration propaganda" ("Library Board to Meet--Censorship of Children's Books to Be Discussed," 1959, p. 1). The book depicted "black and white children fishing and picnicking together" (Weeks, 2015, para. 13). Boone stated that "the drawings [in the book] presented as typical scenes that were not typical for the area" and "probably would be discarded, [b]ut she said she wanted to get the library board's opinion before making a final decision" ("Library Bans Book with White, Negro Children at Play," 1959, p. 18). Several years earlier, Boone also discarded a book that depicted Black and White children swimming together, most likely the 1950 children's book *Swimming Hole* by Louis Darling, Jr. In that book, a White boy moves into a new neighborhood where some of the neighbors are Black. The boy realizes that "his sunburn is more of a problem" than integrated swimming (Bradley, 2015, para. 5).

In response, the board voted to authorize library staff to select or discard books at their discretion ("Board Backs Librarian on Censorship Stand," 1959). Boone placed the books on a restricted shelf, then changed her mind and put them back in general circulation. She stated she "would rather close the library than bow to censorship of a sort which, she said, would never end" ("Controversial Books Restored to Shreveport Library Shelf," 1959, p. 11).

Boone's situation illustrates the difficult circumstances many librarians in the South faced during this period. They often found themselves caught between their professional ethics, which supported open access to information, and the risk of severe

backlash from the community, including the potential loss of their jobs or even violence (Graham, 2001). Although Boone initially decided to remove the books, she later reconsidered and remained committed to intellectual freedom, even under intense social pressure.



The Times. (July 31, 1959). Newspapers.com. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-times/134014799/>



NO CENSORSHIP in Shreveport libraries, the Shreve Memorial Library Board voted yesterday in reply to demands for withdrawal of some children's books on charges of racist propaganda. Seen above are chief librarian Miss Inez Boone (left) and board Chairman Mrs. Marvin Bass presenting the policy statement to the board for a vote. The vote was unanimous. (Times Photo by Lloyd Stilley)

The Times. (July 31, 1959). Newspapers.com. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-times/144094780/>

The 1960s: The Cuban Missile Crisis, Civil Rights Movement, Sexual Revolution, and the First Young Adult LGBTQ+ Book

In October 1962, the Cold War reached a critical point during the Cuban Missile Crisis, which brought the world to the brink of nuclear war. The Communist Soviet Union had secretly deployed nuclear missiles in Cuba. After intense negotiations between President John F. Kennedy and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, Khrushchev agreed to dismantle the missiles in exchange for the United States' promise not to invade Cuba (Editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2025).

The Civil Rights Movement continued to evolve during Freedom Summer in 1964, when student rights organizations aimed to register as many African American voters as possible in Mississippi, a state that had the lowest Black voter registration rates. Hundreds of student volunteers traveled from the North to Mississippi to assist in this effort. In response, white supremacist groups and local law enforcement resorted to violence and intimidation. Tragically, three civil rights workers, James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner, were murdered. This incident drew national attention to the issue of voter suppression and helped garner support for the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which prohibited racial discrimination in voting (*Voting Rights Act (1965) | National Archives*, n.d.). African-American author and activist James Baldwin actively supported Freedom Summer and wrote to the House Un-American Activities Committee, which targeted civil rights activists, regarding the deaths of Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner (Kratz, 2021).

In 1966, researchers William Masters and Virginia Johnson published their

groundbreaking study, *Human Sexual Response*. This was the first comprehensive scientific examination of the physiology of human sexual activity. Their work challenged prevalent myths about sexuality and laid the foundation for sex therapy (Rogers, 2025).

Moreover, John Donovan's novel *I'll Get There, It Better Be Worth the Trip*, which features a gay protagonist, was published in 1969 as the first LGBTQ+ young adult novel (Donovan, n.d.).

1962

Plaquemines Parish librarian John Uhler resigned from his position, claiming that Leander H. Perez, Sr., the Democratic political boss and president of the parish council, had pressured him to censor materials that were favorable to African Americans and critical of Perez himself. Uhler also accused Perez of instructing him to deny library services to African Americans (Black, 1962). Perez was a staunch segregationist who viewed integration as a Communist scheme aimed at promoting racial mixing. He sought to deny Louisiana's electoral votes to liberal candidates and actively suppressed the Black vote (Jeansonne, 2023). Furthermore, the Archdiocese of New Orleans excommunicated Perez for pressuring White parents not to enroll their children in desegregated Catholic schools, which ultimately led to the destruction of one such school in a suspected arson attack (Black, 1962). Uhler's decision to resign rather than comply with demands for censorship was a clear and public rejection of such practices, demonstrating that professional ethics were non-negotiable.

Dr. R. L. Parkman, Jr., a representative of the Bossier Parish Conservative Club, raised concerns about Communist literature in local public and school libraries. He

proposed adding patriotic works to counteract the perceived leftist bias in books provided by the state library system to the libraries in the parish. The Bossier Parish Police Jury organized a meeting with the public library board to address these concerns, and the Bossier Parish school superintendent, Emmet Cope, expressed that teachers have been proactively removing books deemed subversive from school libraries (Charles Merritt, 1962).

1964

The New Orleans Police Department received telephone complaints about obscenity in James Baldwin's novel *Another Country*. The book contains themes of "black rage, interracial sex, homosexuality, white guilt, urban malaise" (Pierpont, 2008, para. 18). The District Attorney removed copies of the book from the library shelves and ordered it not to be sold in local bookshops. However, despite this order, several bookshop managers continued to sell the book, and the police subsequently arrested them. The bookshop managers sued, and at the trial, university professors and a librarian testified about the content of the book. The judge found that the city failed to prove its case regarding the book's obscenity, and as a result, the librarian returned the books to the library shelves (Charles Merritt, 1964). This ruling represents a significant victory for intellectual freedom in Louisiana.

1966

Human Sexual Response by Masters and Johnson, which was deemed the first comprehensive study of human sexual anatomy and physiology conducted in a laboratory setting (Rogers, 2025), was reported by the *Daily Advertiser*, a Lafayette, Louisiana

newspaper, to be unavailable in any public library in the state of Louisiana. Libraries responded that the book was a technical study and deemed it inappropriate for the average person. Additionally, they expressed concerns that the book might reach an unintended audience. Moreover, the libraries were reluctant to involve themselves in the sensitive issue of censorship (“Book Ban,” 1966).

1968

The St. Tammany Parish School Board removed certain magazines, including *Life*, *Look*, *Saturday Evening Post*, and *Time*, from its school libraries. The board claimed that these magazines were biased in their presentation of news and editorial comments and did not provide any educational value to the students at St. Tammany Parish schools. The school superintendent announced that a committee would be formed to review the publications purchased by the school (“The Books Are Still Banned,” 1968).

The Tangipahoa Police Jury considered closing the Tangipahoa Parish Library due to a patron's complaint that the book *The Instrument* by John O'Hara was “highly objectionable” (“Should Library Books Be Censored? We Say ‘No!’” 1968, p. 1). The book centers on the promiscuous life of a Broadway playwright who embarks on numerous romantic relationships.

The 1970s: Organized Book Banning Campaigns, *Island Trees School District v. Pico*, School Textbooks, and the Rise of Young Adult Novels

In the 1970s, organized book banning campaigns emerged, led by conservative parent groups and local school boards. These groups aimed to remove books from school libraries and curricula that they considered anti-American, anti-Christian, or sexually

explicit. During this period, there was a significant increase in the number of book challenges.

In 1975, a conservative parents' group called Parents of New York United presented a list of nine books to the Board of Education of the Island Trees Union Free School District. This list was obtained at a conference organized by People of New York United, a conservative organization composed of parents concerned about educational legislation in the state. One of the speakers at the conference was an attorney from The Heritage Foundation, and the list of objectionable books was partially produced by Concerned Citizens and Taxpayers for Decent School Books of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, an organization led by Willard Barbour "Babs" Wilson Minhinnette.

Parents of New York United claimed that these books were “anti-American, anti-Christian, anti-Semitic, and just plain filthy.” Among the titles listed were *Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut and *Best Short Stories by Negro Writers* by Langston Hughes. As a result of these complaints, the school district removed the books, which led four high school students to file a lawsuit. Ultimately, in 1982, the Supreme Court ruled that the government cannot restrict speech simply because it disagrees with the content, affirming that libraries are places of “voluntary inquiry” (*Island Trees School District v. Pico*, 1982).

The Kanawha County Textbook Controversy is another significant example of conflicts over educational content in schools during the 1970s. In 1974, residents of Kanawha County, West Virginia, protested a state mandate that required the inclusion of multicultural and multiethnic curricula. Opponents of this mandate viewed the content as anti-Christian, unpatriotic, and inappropriate (*KNIGHT: Culture-War Heroine Gets Her Due*

- *Washington Times*, n.d.; Walker, 2024). In response, students stayed home from school, and coal miners, along with other workers, went on strike (Kay et al., n.d.).

As its first public action, the nascent conservative think tank The Heritage Foundation sent a lawyer to provide legal assistance to the boycotters (Budryk, 2023). The protests escalated, leading to violent incidents, including attacks on school buildings with Molotov cocktails and dynamite, as well as assaults on school buses involving firearms (Kay et al., n.d.). Extremist groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan, also became involved (Vass, 2021).

To address the rising tensions, the school board sought a compromise by temporarily removing the controversial books and establishing a citizen review committee. However, this effort ultimately failed. Eventually, the school board decided to reinstate most of the books, but some were placed under restrictions requiring parental permission for students to access them (Kay et al., n.d.).

Also, during this decade, realistic "problem novels" for young adults became increasingly popular, like *The Chocolate War* by Robert Cormier and *Forever* by Judy Blume. These novels tackled challenging and often controversial issues that many teenagers face in their daily lives, such as family struggles and teen sexuality. As a result, these books frequently became targets for censorship and book challenges (Danya, 2011).

1970

The Louisiana Legislature passed Act 500 (RS:17:355), which directed the State Board of Education to take all necessary measures to ensure that books, films, and other library resources were thoroughly screened, reviewed, and approved by the State Board of

Education and local parish or city school boards. This was to ensure that inappropriate, offensive, and unacceptable content was not distributed or made available to the students in any public school system in the state. By 1975, the law was being used by citizens to remove books they deemed “obscene or un-American” from school libraries (Sanderson, 1975, p. 5). In response, the state Superintendent of Education, Louis Michot, sent a letter to parish and school superintendents outlining procedures for their upcoming book purchases for the school year. The letter said,

If any librarians begin preparation of their orders prior to notification of the allotments, we suggest that you advise them that they or their principals will be required to sign a statement as follows: I certify that the attached order for library books does not contain any of the following: textbooks, sex education books, denominational books for religious instruction, professional books for the faculty, books that contain offensive and unwholesome language, and audio-visual materials. (“Library Screening Urged,” 1975, p. 7)

The Louisiana Library Association requested that Michot withdraw his letter and repeal RS 17:355 (“State Library Association Assails ‘Bookbanners,’” 1975). However, Babs Minhinnette, the chairman of Concerned Citizens and Taxpayers for Decent School Books and a close associate of Louisiana politician and former Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, David Duke, praised Michot's letter (Reed, 1992). Minhinnette stated that the group found it “nauseating and disgusting that the Louisiana Library Association should defend pornography” (Minhinnette, 1975, p. 2). The group also expressed doubts about the qualifications of librarians to oversee the expenditure of tax money. Minhinnette (1975)

suggested that book suppliers must certify that their books meet established standards of decency and propriety. In addition, Concerned Citizens and Taxpayers called for the removal of five books from the state's list of recommended books: *Sociology: the study of Human Relationships*, *Introduction to the Behavior Sciences*, *Justice in Urban America Series*, *Quest for Liberty*, and *Great Negroes, Past and Present*. The reasons for the challenges were that the materials were "aimed at promoting polarization between blacks and whites by advocating "rape" of the white race, or they disagreed with the philosophy of the author, or they felt that the book held Communist beliefs" (Sanderson, 1975, p. 5). Minhinette (1972), who was also chairman of Females Opposed to Equality, head of the National Association for the Advancement of White People (Maginnis, 1992), and an officer of the Christian Defense League, also advocated that public schools should include books that deny the Holocaust ("Show the Other Side," 1978).

1972

A parent complained to the Vernon Parish library board regarding a book their child had checked out. As a result, the board called a meeting and adopted a policy for purchasing library materials, stating

the Library cease, desist and refrain from purchasing, distributing or exhibiting any book or other written composition which primarily appeals to the prurient interest of the average reader, of any lewd lascivious, filthy or sexually indecent written composition, printed composition, book, magazine or pamphlet, and further moved that the board proscribe further purchase of that type material which is contrary to the laws of Louisiana. ("Vernon Parish Library Establishes Policy for Buying Books,"

1972, p. 2)

The board instructed the librarian, Miss Martha Hagewood, to destroy all copies, claiming it was "unsuitable for juveniles and a waste of money for adults" ("Vernon Parish Library Establishes Policy for Buying Books," 1972, p. 2). Hagewood refused to disclose the book's title, fearing it would promote circulation. Hagewood suggested a separate section for juveniles, requiring written permission from parents before the child could check out books from that section. However, she pointed out that it would be challenging to determine which books would fall into this category. The library board president, F. E. Hernandez, claimed that the move was not censorship, as people could still purchase and read whatever they pleased. According to him, state law on pornography should determine whether books are appropriate, and if they fail to meet the standards, the board will dispose of them by burning them (Krug & Harvey, 1972).

1975

In East Baton Rouge Parish, a parent filed a complaint about the book *Sunshine* by Norma Klein, citing concerns over its content and language. A teacher assigned the book as part of a literature class, and it tells the story of a young woman with terminal cancer. The teacher reported that only one student raised concerns and offered them the option to choose another book instead. However, the school principal decided to discontinue using the book in class.

In a separate incident, another parent complained about the language and images in the *Mass Media and the Popular Arts* textbook. As a result, the school principal confiscated all copies, despite the district's policy stating that the superintendent must

approve the removal of any instructional materials (Krug & Funk, 1975a).

The school board established a grand jury to investigate the complaints and created a formal process for filing them. Some teachers and librarians expressed frustration with the process, as it overturned months of work on textbook guidelines and grievance procedures (Krug & Funk, 1975b).

1976

With one abstention, the Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted six to three to approve all the books in the state textbook list. Despite complaints from the Baton Rouge-based group Concerned Citizens and Taxpayers for Decent School Books, this decision was made (Krug, & Funk, 1976).

The 1980s: Continued Organized Challenges and Establishment of Banned Books Week

In the 1980s, the young adult “problem novel” remained popular, and the trend of organized challenges to books continued, primarily driven by conservative and religious groups. The complaints usually centered around explicit language, sexual content, and political views. However, librarians and school boards frequently defended intellectual freedom, citing national legal precedents, such as the *Island Trees* decision, to support their decisions. Additionally, the American Library Association established Banned Books Week in 1982 to raise awareness about censorship (Bennett, 2024).

1980

School Superintendent Sidney Seegers removed several books deemed objectionable from the library at Minnie Ruffin Elementary School in Monroe. The books

were held for review. One of the books was Norma Klein's *Naomi in the Middle*, about two sisters expecting a third sibling. It includes a scene where the characters discuss penises and vaginas (Yolen, 1974). Seegers stated that if the books were deemed objectionable, they would be destroyed. School Board member A. D. Foreman expressed that they did not want such books in their schools and had taken measures to ensure such incidents would not occur again (Krug & Rhodes, 1980).

1982

Barbara Williams, a parent of a student at Northside High in Lafayette, Louisiana, filed a complaint with the Lafayette Parish School Board against Maya Angelou's *And Still I Rise* because it “dealt with a young girl’s first sexual experiences” (“Lafayette Parish School Board Agrees to Review Library Book,” 1982, p. 10). However, a committee comprised of a principal, a parent, a guidance counselor, a librarian, and two teachers decided to keep the book in the library. Williams later filed a complaint against the book *Sharkey's Machine* by William Diehl because it contained "profanity, explicit language, and racial slurs" (Russell, 1982, p. 1). Williams said

How could this book be reviewed and not considered improper? The movie was rated R, and the book was rated XXX. How could any teacher put this on a reading list without reading it. The school system is not far from communism. We'd better get our heads on straight. (Russell, 1982, p. 1)

Williams also advocated for prayer in schools and a committee to screen all library books. School board president Preston Babineaux said the procedure would be "like trying to climb Mt. Everest in tennis shoes and having no rope. We have nearly 350,000 library

books in our system. Even if every one of our 2,730-plus employees read one book, it would be difficult” (Russell, 1982, p. 1).

Hubert Stilley, a member of the Livingston Parish School Board, reported that a parent had complained about the book *Double Take* by Richard L. Belair, available in the school library, due to its "objectionable language." Following the complaint, Stilley removed the book from the library shelves. Fred Banks, the procurement officer, explained that the state selects books from state-approved publishing companies, and the board members then choose from among them. Banks also said the board would develop a policy to review books (Krug, 1982, p. 83).

1984

Two books, *Edith Jackson* by Rosa Guy and *Then Again, Maybe I Won't* by Judy Blume, were banned by the St. Tammany Parish Public School System following a parent's complaint. The removal of the books was supported by a Masonic Lodge, a staff committee, and a school friends' group. However, after a lawyer and board member explained the Supreme Court's historic *Island Trees School District v. Pico* ruling, the school board voted to keep the books by a margin of one vote. The ruling stated that it is inappropriate for a board to ban books that are not "educationally unsuitable or pervasively vulgar” (“Island Trees Case Invoked in Louisiana Book Banning,” 1984, p. 1174).

Three books in the St. Tammany Parish library system faced challenges due to claims of pornography, immorality, and language. The books in question were *Lace* by Shirley Conran, *The Suicide's Wife* by David Madden, and *Daisy Canfield* by Ben Haas. The Library Board of Control president, Judy Wood, announced that the board would form a

committee to review the books in accordance with the library's collection development policy ("Covington, Louisiana," 1984).

1985

Joy Johnson, a columnist for the *Interstate Progress* newspaper, reported that she received several phone calls from the public regarding two books available at the DeSoto Parish Library: *The Joy of Sex: Gourmet Style* and *How to Make Love to a Man*. Johnson filed a complaint with both the DeSoto Parish Library Board and the DeSoto Parish Sheriff's Office, stating that the books were openly available on shelves and to minors if they had a note from their parents. She pointed out that in Shreveport, patrons had to be at least 18 years old to check out these books, but in DeSoto Parish, there were no such restrictions. The Library Board of Control stated they would investigate the complaints (Walker, 1985).

1988

A parent complained to Gordon Hutchenson, a member of the Baton Rouge school board, about the book *Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut. Hutchinson read two passages from the book and stated that it was "littered with dirty words" and not educationally valuable, requesting that the school board's Instructional Services Committee remove the book ("Parents, Teachers Fight Book Ban," 1988, p. 9). The Baton Rouge District Parent Teacher Association president warned that banning books could lead to censorship. An advisory committee voted 11-0 to keep the book in the library. Robert Meador, the school board's vice president, informed the parent that the decision would likely be upheld in court if they appealed it. Meador suggested that the board could change the selection process or make it more difficult for students to check out

controversial books.

The parent of an eight-year-old student at Jefferson Terrace Elementary in Baton Rouge filed a complaint regarding the book *Tailypo: A Ghost Story* by Paul and Joanna Galdone. The book is based on a folktale about a creature that haunts a woodsman who took his tail to eat for dinner. The parent expressed concern that the book was too scary for their child and inappropriate for their reading level. They requested that Principal Rudolph S. Rumfellow remove the book from the school library. However, Rumfellow refused to do so. Al Trickett, an East Baton Rouge Parish School Board member, supported Rumfellow's decision ("The Tailypo' Is Latest Book to Come under Fire," 1988).

The 1990s: Children's Books Featuring Same-Sex Couples and Families, the Harry Potter Series, and ALA's Book Challenge Database

The late 1980s and 1990s saw the release of some of the first children's books featuring same-sex couples and families, including *Daddy's Roommate* by Michael Willhoite (1990) and *Heather Has Two Mommies* by Leslea Newman (1989). Opponents of these books argued that they introduced children to the concept of homosexuality and promoted a lifestyle that contradicted their values (Steele, 2022). Additionally, the *Harry Potter* series faced frequent challenges during this decade due to its depictions of witchcraft. During this period, the American Library Association also began maintaining a formal database of challenged books (*Challenge Reporting* | ALA, n.d.).

1991

A Caldwell Parish librarian wrote to *School Library Journal*, suggesting that a nude illustration in Maurice Sendak's children's book, *In the Night Kitchen*, be covered with white

paint to create a diaper (Krug, 1991).

1992

A member of the Rapides Parish School Board, Kenneth Doyle, received a complaint from a minister regarding the book *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck, as it uses the Lord's name in vain. Doyle requested the removal of a book from an approved reading list. The board voted 7-2 in favor of retaining it. Another board member, Ruth O'Quinn, a retired teacher, stated that she had taught the book for 26 years and could understand why some parents might not want their children to read it. However, she also commented that it is up to parents to decide what their child should study (Krug, 1993).

The superintendent of Terrebonne Parish Public Schools removed *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* from a mandatory reading list due to its use of racial slurs. According to Charles Brown, the President of the Terrebonne Parish National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), teachers required students to read the book aloud, which led to ridicule when they recited the offensive words. A teacher explained that the book was read aloud because it is written in dialect and might be challenging for students to read independently. As a result, the Education Committee planned to establish guidelines for required reading (Krug & Reichman, 1992).

Kathy Bonds, a mother of a seventh-grade student, filed a complaint after her daughter checked out the book *Voodoo & Hoodoo* by Jim Haskins from the school library. After a committee reviewed the book, they voted to keep it but restrict it to eighth-grade students with parental permission. However, Mrs. Bonds appealed to the St. Tammany School Board, which later voted 12-2 to remove the book from the curriculum. The

decision was challenged by a group of parents who argued it was unconstitutional. In 1995, a federal appeals court ruled that removing the book violated students' First Amendment rights and that a trial would be necessary to determine whether the book should be removed. The court found that the school board members had not read the book or had only read excerpts provided by the Louisiana Christian Coalition, which collected 1,600 signatures to ban the book. Ultimately, the parties settled the case before trial by agreeing to keep the book on a designated reserve shelf ("Court Says Voodoo Book Ban Needs to Go to Trial," 1995).

1993

A mother lodged a complaint against the book *Little House on the Prairie* by Laura Ingalls Wilder with the Lafourche Parish school system. Brenda Pitre, a Houma Indian, found passages describing Native Americans offensive. She said, "white characters described Indians as devils, wild animals, and savages." A committee reviewed her complaint and rejected it, stating that "libraries should reflect all points of view" and "cannot remove books because of objections to their ideas. While the book may reflect some prejudiced views, it accurately reflected the prejudices of the time" (Krug & Reichman, 1992, p. 43).

Mildred D. Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, which won the Newbery Medal Award, was removed from the reading list at Arcadia High School. Several parents raised concerns that the book contains racist content. One parent stated that the book is "anti-white" and that "black students openly taunted white students when the passages were read in class" (Krug & Reichman, 1993, pp. 72-73).

1994

The parents of a fourth-grade student at Grayson Elementary School objected to using the book *Shiloh* by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor, as it contained some objectionable content, including references to urination, taking the Lord's name in vain, and the main character withholding information from their parents. The teacher and school administrator found a way to work with the student and avoid exposing them to the material, but the parents still objected to using the book. Following a discussion at a school board meeting, Superintendent Jim Turner stated that a healing process was necessary, and the matter needed to be put to rest (Gartman, 1994).

1995

A member of the Caddo Parish School Board, Ron Adams, called to remove two books from the Southwood High School library due to complaints from parents. Adams objected to the language used in *To Kill a Mockingbird* while describing *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* as "the closest thing to pornography I've ever seen." The Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum removed the books for review, and the principal of Southwood High School expressed concern that he was not consulted before the books were removed (Krug & Reichman, 1995, p. 183).

1996

Ron Adams again expressed concern about the book *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, which Huntington High School had assigned as required reading. Despite Adams's objections, the students opposed its removal, and Superintendent James Foster ultimately approved the book's continued use (Krug & Reichman, 1996).

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed a lawsuit against Ernest “Buddy” Reed, principal of West Monroe High School, on behalf of a student, the student's parents, and West Monroe school librarian Deloris Wilson. The lawsuit alleged that the principal had censored several magazines by tearing out pages or removing entire issues from the library. The magazines that were censored included titles like *Brides*, *Newsweek*, *Vogue*, *Discover*, *Essence*, *Louisiana Cultural Vistas*, *Seventeen*, *Smithsonian*, *Better Homes & Gardens*, *Business Week*, *Education Digest*, *Education Week*, *Jet*, *Leatherneck*, *Phi Delta Kappan*, *Science News*, *Sixteen*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Teen*, *T.H.E. Journal*, and *Young and Modern*. The reason for censorship was either references to homosexuality or abortion or pictures of nudes. The principal also removed four books from the library due to their sexual content (“West Monroe Principal Censored Library’s Magazines, Lawsuit Alleges,” 1997).

In 1999, after consultation with their attorney, the Ouachita Parish School board settled the lawsuit and returned the banned books to the shelves. The titles of the books that were returned were *Heartbreak and Roses: Real Life Stories of Troubled Love* by Janet Bode and Stan Mack, *Gays In or Out of the Military* by Ron Ray, *Everything You Need to Know about Abstinence* by Barbara Moe, and *Everything You Need to Know about Incest* by Karen Spies (“Four Banned Books May Return to High School Shelves,” 1999). Wilson’s case illustrates a transition from individual to collaborative, institutionalized defense, with professionals and a major civil rights organization joining forces to uphold intellectual freedom.

1998

The St. Tammany Parish Library Board of Control removed 345 videos with ratings higher than PG-13 from library shelves to decide on a circulation policy. The reason behind this was that several patrons complained about minors being able to check out R-rated material. Kristen Scott, the library system's president, voted against the removal, saying that censorship in one area could lead to censorship in others. The library initially allowed parents to mark their cards to ban their children from checking out R-rated films ("What Others around the State Are Saying," 1998).

However, in 1999, the ACLU filed a lawsuit against the St. Tammany Parish Police Jury after the jury prevented all minors from checking out videos without a parent and filling out a particular form. The executive director of the AFL-CIO also pointed out that some movies are not rated or pre-date the current rating system, which could make it challenging to enforce circulation policies. Moreover, the Police Jury violated state law by overturning the library board's decisions. Ultimately, a judge ruled that the Police Jury's actions were not legally binding. Later, the library board decided not to overturn "its policy that gave minors access to the library's R-rated videos unless their parents specifically requested a restriction" ("St. Tammany Library Censorship Struck Down," 1999, p. 11).

The 2000s: "Unsuited to Age Group", *ACLU V. Miami-Dade*, and The Calm Before the Storm

The children's picture book *And Tango Makes Three* by Peter Parnell and Justin Richardson (2005) tells the story of two male penguins raising a chick. The book has faced numerous challenges due to concerns about LGBTQ+ themes and its perceived

unsuitability for certain age groups. Notably, the book does not contain any nudity, obscenity, or sexually explicit content. Opponents of the book expressed their concerns in a manner that appeals to a wider audience. They used phrases like "inappropriate for age group" and steered clear of direct, legally questionable criticisms of the book's central themes, such as the portrayal of a family with same-sex parents, which are protected by the First Amendment. This trend of using established, culturally accepted rationales to obscure deeper ideological objections sets the stage for ongoing battles over censorship, particularly during the escalating and highly coordinated national censorship efforts later seen on social media in the 2020s.

Also, in 2009, the case of *ACLU of Florida v. Miami-Dade School Board* created a new and potentially dangerous legal pathway for censorship by introducing "factual inaccuracy" as a valid reason for the removal of books, effectively bypassing the protections established by the *Pico* decision. A parent, who had been a political prisoner in Cuba, objected to the book *Vamos a Cuba (Let's Go to Cuba)* by Alta Schreier (2001) because it presented an idealized view of the country rather than its harsh political realities. The school board subsequently removed the book from schools in the district, and an appeals court ruled that the ban did not constitute censorship since the book was removed for containing factual inaccuracies ("Supreme Court Lets Miami-Dade's *Vamos* Ban Stand," 2009).

2000

Bishop Edward O'Donnell, from the Catholic Diocese of Lafayette, removed a book by Flannery O'Connor from the Opelousas Catholic High reading list due to concerns that

the book's offensive racial slurs could worsen racial tensions. A group of African Americans found the use of the slurs inappropriate (“Banning of Books at Louisiana College Disservice to Students,” 2003; “Don’t Burn the Book,” 2000).

2001

The Caddo Parish School Board in Louisiana removed two books, *The Chocolate War* by Robert Cormier and *The Great Santini* by Pat Conroy, from the school curriculum after receiving complaints from parents. The books were added to the reading lists in 1999 without review by the school board. *The Chocolate War* portrays “the dark culture of intimidation underlying the seemingly wholesome surface of an all-boys Catholic high school” (Robert Cormier *The Chocolate War*, 2025, para. 1). *The Great Santini* depicts a strict and abusive Marine pilot father (“The Great Santini,” n.d.). Despite the protests from the Caddo Council of Teachers of English, the Caddo School Board upheld the decision to remove the books, citing a 1995 policy that required books on reading lists to be approved by school board members (“Book Bans Aren’t Recommended,” 2001).

2005

Louisiana Representative A. G. Crowe, Jr., a Republican from Slidell, filed House Concurrent Resolution 119 to remove public library materials “containing the theme of homosexuality” and other “age-inappropriate topics” because they would be accessible to children. The resolution called on public libraries “to remove such material from the children’s book sections and confine it “exclusively for adult access and distribution” and stated, “materials concerning human sexuality and those of an arguably prurient nature should not be readily available to children, nor should the distribution of such materials be

supported by public funds.” Crowe said that a parent of a four-year-old girl contacted him after discovering the book *King and King* by Stern Nijland and Linda De Haan, a picture book in which a prince falls in love with another prince, in the children’s section of their local library. The complainant did not contact the library before contacting Crowe to voice his concerns. They believed that contacting the library would be useless since other libraries supported having the book in their collections. “The last page of the book clearly shows men kissing and clearly promotes the homosexual lifestyle,” Crowe said. He said that the book is marked as suitable for children aged six and above, but there should be a way to keep “these types of books” away from children. Joe Cook, executive director of the Louisiana chapter of the ACLU, said,

[i]t unfortunately, feeds into a mind-set of a certain segment of society that wants to demonize people who are gay, and that is not in keeping with the spirit of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. It’s an example of intolerance. Unfortunately, we have politicians who want to exploit the intolerance and use it to their political advantage. (Reichman & Krug, 2005, p. 154)

The Louisiana House Municipal, Parochial, and Cultural Affairs Committee rejected the resolution with a vote of 4-3 (“Library Limitation Proposal Rejected,” 2005).

2007

A citizen wrote a letter to the *Monroe News-Star* stating that the Lincoln Parish library director pulled the movie *Borat* from the shelves because he found it offensive (“Reader Offended by Library Action,” 2007).

2009

A parent of a Central Lafourche High School student complained about the book *Black Hawk Down* by Mark Bowden, which recounts the failed U.S. military mission in Mogadishu, Somalia, which resulted in the deaths of 18 American soldiers and 500 Somali residents. The parent cited concerns about the use of foul language. Jared Foreman, a 10th-grade teacher, assigned the book. Foreman defended the decision, saying that "there is so much more to *Black Hawk Down* than the words they used. It's about miscommunication and misunderstanding plans and that is exactly what education is supposed to eliminate" (Krug, 2009, pp. 9-10). As a result of the complaint, the principal asked the students to return their books to the school library.

The 2020s and Beyond: Social Media and Nationally Coordinated Efforts

Starting around 2021, book challenges began to evolve from isolated complaints by individual parents into organized and well-funded campaigns targeting multiple titles at once. Many of the challenged books featured stories by and about LGBTQ+ individuals and people of color. Opponents often labeled these books as "sexually explicit" or containing "profanity," terms that resonate more with the general public and are legally more defensible, rather than openly expressing their ideological objections. This trend has resulted in an increase in legal cases concerning library collections that challenge long-standing First Amendment precedents.

2020

The board of the Lincoln Parish Library removed children's books containing LGBTQ+ content after receiving complaints from a group of fifteen to twenty people

(Oltmann, 2020). However, the board returned the books to the shelves and reviewed the library's policy for unattended children. Vivian McCain, the director of the Lincoln Parish Library, stated that at the library, they believe it is the parents' responsibility to decide what their child reads, reviews, or looks at (Hudgins, 2020).

2021

The St. Tammany Parish School Board rejected two health textbooks, *Invitation to Health*, published by Cengage, and *Comprehensive Health Skills*, published by Goodheart-Wilcox after community members complained that they addressed gender identity and sexual orientation (Saggio, 2021).

At a board meeting of the Lafayette Public Library, Hilda Edmond, the Board of Control's vice president, expressed concerns about specific displays in the library that she found controversial. Although Edmond did not mention the LGBTQ+ displays specifically, there was recent controversy surrounding Pride displays. Edmond noted that she would like to discuss controversial displays with the board and the librarians in the future. Cara Chance, the manager of the North Regional Library, responded to concerns about censorship by stating,

There is no professional librarian who would bow to censorship. None. It is in the librarian's code of ethics not to bow to censorship, not to allow one person or group to dictate all of the information, and to impose their view on the entire community. (Oltmann, 2021, p. 18)

In 2022, Robert Judge, the president of the library board, attempted to fire Chance. He cited "willful insubordination" as the reason, which was seconded by board member

Stephanie Armbruster. This incident occurred after Chance included an LGBTQ+ title in a teen romance book display after library director Danny Gillane prohibited book displays that focus on specific populations (Capps, 2022).

The Lafayette Public Library Board rejected a \$2,700 grant offered by the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities (LEH) for a reading and book discussion program titled "Who Gets to Vote?" The grant was intended to hire two discussion facilitators and purchase books, including *Bending Toward Justice* by Gary May and *Vanguard: How Black Women Broke Barriers, Won the Vote, and Insisted on Equality for All* by Martha S. Jones. The board stated that the program did not represent "both sides" of the voting rights issue, which ultimately led to the sudden retirement of library director Teresa Elberson, who had served for 38 years. Following this decision, American Library Association President Julius C. Jefferson and United for Libraries President David Paige co-signed a letter to the Lafayette Public Library Board requesting that they reconsider their decision and update their policies and procedures regarding programming (Oltmann, 2021).

Michael Lunsford, the executive director of the conservative group Citizens for a New Louisiana, which is funded by dark money, challenged Juno Dawson's book, *This Book is Gay*, at the Lafayette Public Library (Taylor, 2022b). Lunsford discovered the book on a list of titles provided by MassResistance, an anti-LGBTQ+ organization. He described the book as pornographic and inappropriate for the teen section. He, along with board members Robert Judge and Stephanie Armbruster, met with the library director, Danny Gillane, to express their concerns. Judge and Armbruster voted to remove the book, with Armbruster arguing that it lacked merit. However, their motion failed, and the board

decided to move the book to the adult section instead (Knox, 2022b).

In 2023, the Lafayette Public Library board, led by Robert Judge, dismissed Gillane following an illegal executive session, without providing a reason for the decision. Board members later stated that the dismissal was due to personnel issues. In response, Gillane filed a lawsuit. During the interim, Assistant Director Sarah Monroe served as acting director until her resignation. Following this, Gillane was hired to replace her as interim director. A year later, the board voted unanimously to rehire Gillane (Taylor, 2024b).

2022

Kathy Lafleur, a patron of the Lafayette Public Library, requested the removal of a DVD titled *Scotty and the Secret History of Hollywood*, a documentary about the life of Scotty Bowers, who served as an unpaid pimp for many bisexual and homosexual liaisons in Hollywood from the 1940s to the 1980s. The film depicts Bowers's childhood during the Great Depression in Chicago, where he began engaging in sexual acts with Catholic priests for small sums of money ("Scotty Bowers," 2025). A committee comprising two librarians and one board member rejected the removal request, prompting Lafleur to appeal to the board. The board subsequently voted to restrict access to the DVD *Scotty and the Secret History of Hollywood* to patrons aged 18 and older. Board member Stephanie Armbruster said that the movie is evil, contains pornography, and "sensationalizes and normalizes pedophilia" (Taylor, 2022a). Board president Robert Judge attempted to remove all librarians from the reconsideration committee. However, the board voted to have a committee of one librarian and two board members.

Before joining the library board, Armbruster protested a proposed Drag Queen Story

Hour event with a local chapter of Tradition, Family, Property (TFP), a far-right, anti-LGBTQ+ organization that lacks a canonical relationship with the Catholic Church. (Mader, 2019; Praem, 2025; State Agency, 2012; Strand & Svensson, n.d.). The organization has links to Paul Weyrich, who was a conservative activist and co-founded The Heritage Foundation (Lernoux, 1989). The Heritage Foundation published the political initiative, Project 2025, which

makes claims that pornography, normally defined as content that is sexually explicit and designed to cause sexual arousal, is actually “manifested today in the omnipresent propagation of transgender ideology and sexualization of children.”

The mandate calls for pornography to be outlawed, and “the people who produce and distribute it should be imprisoned.” It further specifies that “educators and public librarians who purvey it should be classed as registered sex offenders.

(EveryLibrary Institute, 2024, p. 2)

David Pitre, a relative of Kevin Roberts, the current president of the Heritage Foundation, served on the Lafayette Public Library board and chaired the committee that hired the director. Armbruster was also a member of the director’s hiring committee during this time (Kevin D. Roberts, PhD, n.d.; Roberts, 2003; Taylor, 2023; Taylor, 2024a).

A grandparent living in Beauregard, Louisiana, requested that the Beauregard Parish Library reconsider the book *Sewing the Rainbow: A Story About Gilbert Baker and the Rainbow Flag* by Gayle Pitman. This nonfiction picture book, intended for children aged 4 to 8, tells the story of how the rainbow flag was created and emphasizes the importance of being true to oneself. Despite the request, the book remained in the library’s collection

(Knox, 2022a).

An anonymous state official informed Erin Sandefur, a member of the Livingston Parish Library Board of Control, that there was allegedly inappropriate material in the library. Sandefur provided a list of eight titles, out of which five contained LGBTQ+ themes. The titles on the list include *Dating and Sex: A Guide for the 21st Century Teen Boy* by Andrew Smiler, *Queer, 2nd Edition: The Ultimate LGBTQ Guide for Teens* by Kathy Belge and Mark Bieschke, *It Feels Good to Be Yourself: A Book about Gender Identity* by Theresa Thorn, *Polygamy* by Stefan Kiesbye, *Transgender People* by Tamara Thompson, *Sex is a Funny Word* by Corey Silverberg and Fiona Smyth, and *Gay Parenting*. All but two of the books were listed in the Young Adult section (Nicholson, 2022b). During the library board of control meeting, many citizens, including Amanda Jones, president of the Louisiana Association of School Librarians, spoke against banning books. Jones (2025) said

Just because you enter a library, it does not mean that you will not see something you don't like. Libraries have diverse collections with resources from many points of view, and a library's mission is to provide access to information for all users. All library users have the First Amendment right to borrow, read, view, and listen to library resources, according to the ALA. If an individual is concerned about a children's or young adult's resource or its location in the library, that individual has the right to go through the library's reconsideration policy that is already in place. Each family has the right to determine which library resources are acceptable for its own children, but individuals must also realize that they must afford the same rights to all other parents.

The board did not take action on the issue. Sandefur stated, “I don’t know who took this and ran with it and turned it into censorship and banning” (Nicholson, 2022a, para. 17). Director Giovanni Tairov responded, “Librarians do not fringe on anyone’s fundamental right to access information. It is the responsibility of the parents and guardians to guide their own children in the selection of reading materials” (Nicholson, 2022a, para. 16).

Jones later filed a defamation lawsuit against Michael Lunsford and Ryan Thames, the owners of conservative Facebook groups, accusing her of “fighting to keep sexually erotic and pornographic materials in the kids' section” (White, 2022, p. A5). In 2023, Tairov, who was recognized as the Louisiana Library Association's Library Director of the Year in 2019, abruptly resigned amid ongoing public disputes about library materials, which involved Lunsford’s group, Citizens for a New Louisiana (David, 2025).

2023

The guardian of a New Iberia Senior High student filed a complaint regarding three books in the school library: *Gender Queer: A Memoir* by Maia Kobabe, *All Boys Aren't Blue* by George M. Johnson, and *Flamer* by Mike Curato. The American Library Association included all three of these books on the 2022 list of most challenged titles. The Iberia Parish School District removed *Flamer* from the shelves for further review by a committee that included district librarians (White, 2023).

The St. Tammany Library Accountability Project, a conservative group, objected to almost 150 books, including many with themes related to race and the LGBTQ+ community. Some of the titles include *All Boys Aren't Blue* by George M. Johnson, *Blue is the Warmest Color* by Jul Maroh, *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison, *Extremely Loud and*

Incredibly Close by Jonathan Safran Foer, *The Freedom Writer's Diary* by Freedom Writers, and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky (Hess, 2022). These books were not publicly available for approximately 10 months while they were under review. However, after receiving letters of condemnation from the Tulane First Amendment Law Clinic and the ACLU of Louisiana, the St. Tammany Library Board of Control changed its policy. The books were made available to the public again during the review period. A panel of librarians and staff would decide about challenged materials, and patrons would be allowed to appeal to the library board. Any decisions made by the library board would be valid for five years, preventing abuse of the appeals process (Hutchinson, 2023).

2024

A member of the Livingston Parish community, Lisa Glascock, challenged the book *Queerfully and Wonderfully Made: A Guide for LGBTQ+ Christian Teens* by Leigh Finke. The Livingston Parish Council investigated whether the challenged material could be moved upon review. However, the Tulane First Amendment Law Clinic sent a letter stating that such a practice would violate the Constitution. The library director, Michelle Parrish, sought advice from the parish attorney, who warned that the Tulane First Amendment Law Clinic would file a lawsuit if materials were relocated upon review. Larry Davis, a library board member, motioned to request an opinion from the Attorney General's office. Despite Glascock losing her challenge, she planned to appeal the decision. Parish councilman Ricky Goff suggested moving controversial books to a higher shelf to prevent children from accessing them (DeRobertis, 2024).

In 2025, the board decided not to renew Parrish's contract, despite a successful

financial audit during her tenure and notable increases in public engagement. This included higher participation in the annual Summer Reading Program and Comic-Con event, as well as the successful passage of the library's property tax millage. This decision was influenced by Citizens for a New Louisiana. Michael Lunsford commented, "Livingston Library has been a project we've been working on for about three years" (David, 2025).

Conclusion

In the past, libraries and schools in Louisiana have faced material challenges similar to current trends. Challengers have accused librarians of promoting communism and un-American ideas, often targeting materials related to marginalized communities. Additionally, some have questioned the education and professional competence of librarians. Previously, complaints typically came from concerned parents and were handled on a case-by-case basis at the local level. However, this piecemeal approach has failed to establish stronger legal protections for intellectual freedom. The desire to control information persists, and those seeking this control have employed organized political campaigns and state-level legislative actions. This issue is not new; rather, it represents a critical new phase in an ongoing struggle, amplified by organized pressure groups and social media.

This moment calls for increased professional and public engagement. Librarians can respond to these formalized, politically driven challenges by advocating for legal precedents that support intellectual freedom and collaborating with organizations committed to the First Amendment and civil rights. They must also remain aware that the social media landscape, which drives these mass challenges, is often used to target and

harass librarians who are committed to their professional ethics, which the First Amendment protects.

Louisiana librarians, such as John Uhler and Deloris Wilson, among many others, have had to choose between upholding their professional ethics and facing retaliation or job loss. As historian Timothy Snyder (2017) stated,

If members of professions think of themselves as groups with common interests, with norms and rules that oblige them at all times, then they can gain confidence and indeed a certain kind of power. Professional ethics must guide us precisely when we are told that the situation is exceptional. Then there is no such thing as “just following orders.” If members of the professions confuse their specific ethics with the emotions of the moment, however, they can find themselves saying and doing things that they might previously have thought unimaginable. (p. 22).

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