It Only Takes One

The pages of a book singeing in a fire. Spit from an angry parent’s mouth at a school board meeting. Handcuffs being shackled on the wrists of a librarian. Shelves sitting empty in libraries. These are not images from a distant time and place in the past. These images are occurring today all around the United States over one topic: books. All it takes is a simple Google search to see hundreds of current new stories that show the attacks on books. The attacks on Intellectual Freedom. The attacks on the advancement of human thought. Even though librarians and educators are fighting back, book banning is threatening Intellectual Freedom which in turn threatens our democracy, our way of life and the development of our society.

 Book banning is threatening our right to Intellectual Freedom. The American Library Association (ALA) defines Intellectual Freedom as “the right of every individual to both seek and receive information from all points of view without restriction” (Intellectual Freedom and Censorship Q & A 2007). Book banning is a direct violation of the Intellectual Freedom that is deserved by citizens. When a book is banned, seeking and receiving information from all points of view becomes impossible. For instance, in Tennessee, the McMinn County Board of Education “voted to remove the Pulitzer Prize-winning graphic novel *Maus* from an eighth-grade module on the Holocaust [because of nudity and curse words](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/27/us/maus-banned-holocaust-tennessee.html)” (Harris). In doing so, they are limiting the perspective that book can bring to students when learning about the Holocaust. They are attempting to shut out the realities and the horrors of a historical event. Therefore, the

viewpoint of the 8th grade students in that district becomes limited. According to *The New York Times*, instances such as this one is becoming common. In fact, the number of book challenges in 2021 has surged “to the highest level since the American Library Association began tracking book challenges 20 years ago” (Harris). It is encouraging to note, however, that when the book was banned, the sales of this book skyrocketed, putting the book in even more hands. According to National Public Radio, “Rich Davis, who owns Nirvana Comics, told the [Jewish Telegraphic Agency](https://www.jta.org/2022/01/28/united-states/the-great-maus-giveaway-is-on-as-bookstores-professors-and-churches-counter-tennessee-school-boards-ban) that because the county is only home to about 50,000 people, the outpouring of support could potentially make it possible "to donate a copy of 'Maus' to every kid in McMinn County” (Treisman).

 To say that Intellectual Freedom is important is an understatement. It is the basis of any democracy and denying Intellectual Freedom to citizens undermines that democracy. The American Library Association makes it clear that for a democracy work, “our citizenry must be well-informed” (Intellectual Freedom and Censorship Q & A 2007). In the same breath, the ALA makes it clear that libraries are the places that house this information and give people the option to inform themselves. Without this ability, citizens cannot equip themselves properly and make decisions for themselves effectively. The censorship of materials by the government affects access to information that allows people to govern themselves and should not take place. The ALA also makes it clear that “under the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, each of us has the right to read, view, listen to, and disseminate constitutionally protected ideas, even if a censor finds those ideas offensive” (Intellectual Freedom and Censorship 2007). Our democracy and way of life is threatened when a book is banned.

Some people may argue that one book is not important. Based on history, it only takes one book to be banned to start an avalanche of loss of freedoms. One book being banned turns into one giant book burning. One library closed down leads to the destruction of a culture. One librarian threatened with arrest leads to a decline in the profession. Banning books changes our way of life; it prohibits the growth of our society. It also diminishes our governmental institutions when the freedom to read becomes a political issue. For instance, in Wyoming, a county prosecutor’s office considered criminal charges against library employees for stocking books such as “This Book is Gay” and “Sex Is a Funny Word” (Harris). When Intellectual Freedom is not protected by the very same people put in positions to protect the law, our democracy becomes corrupt.

Laurie Halse Anderson, author of *Speak*, puts it best when she says, “Censorship is the child of fear and the father of ignorance.” Although it is unfortunate to see current images of book burnings, angry parents spewing hate at school board meetings, librarians being criminalized and empty bookshelves, fear and ignorance must not take over. Banning books does that. Librarians and educators across our country must continue to fight for Intellectual Freedom. It is a fight worth more than we will ever know.

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