



IFRT

report

Intellectual Freedom Round Table of the American Library Association

HEADQUARTERS

JAN 20 1993

LIBRARY

No. 35

Winter 1993

The Merritt Fund Needs Your Support

The LeRoy C. Merritt Humanitarian Fund was established over twenty years ago to give direct financial aid to librarians threatened with loss of employment or discharged because of their stand for the cause of Intellectual Freedom. After 1975, the fund added support for librarians subjected to discrimination or denial of due process on the job.

LeRoy C. Merritt, a strong opponent of censorship, was a library school educator, a California Library Association Intellectual Freedom Committee chair, a member of the ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee, and editor of the *Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom* for eight years.

The fund has been active in recent years, and the amount of money currently available has now fallen to less than \$5,000. Due to the fact that it gives money directly to individuals, contributions are not tax deductible. This has an impact on the level of giving, and makes smaller contributions from a large number of donors important.

Send contributions to the Leroy C. Merritt Humanitarian Fund, 50 East Huron Street, Chicago, IL 60611.

Benefits of Membership

Tom Budlong, IFRT Chair

One of the questions most frequently asked of the IFRT leadership is "What do I get for my membership contribution?" The IFRT is the largest and one of the fastest-growing round tables in the ALA. Unlike the Intellectual Freedom Committee which is appointed by the ALA President, the IFRT is open to every member of the Association. It provides a forum in which any member can express concerns and become involved in discussing the many censorship issues of the day. The IFRT attempts to serve its members and the Association in a number of ways.

For those who are able to attend ALA conferences, there are a variety of committees in which one may participate. With the exception of the actual deliberations of the awards committees, all meetings of the IFRT, including those of the Executive Board, are open to everyone. As an organization devoted to free speech, we welcome and encourage participation by visitors at our meetings. These additional insights contributed to our discussions often have an impact on the results. Perhaps the best way to become involved in an IFRT committee is just to show up at a committee meeting—odds are you'll be drafted if you show any interest in participating.

The IFRT chooses the theme and presents the major program on intellectual freedom at the annual conference and also co-sponsors numerous programs with other divisions. Members are also invited and encouraged to attend the annual "Get to Know Intellectual Freedom" reception and have an opportunity to express their opinions at the IFRT Soapbox program.

Given the hard economic times of late, we understand that many of our members are unable to participate in conferences. The Executive Board has wrestled for some time with ways to provide better services and involvement for these members. One way is that we have begun to make improvements in the *IFRT Report* to make it a more valuable publication to you, our members. You will begin to see expanded coverage of what is going on with censorship issues and cases around the country. We have begun a "Letters" column and strongly urge you to write in and share your concerns with your fellow members. We would also invite you to contribute articles on intellectual freedom to the newsletter.

The bottom line is for us to make the IFRT responsive to your needs. Please continue to let us know how we are doing and how we could be doing better.

Report From the States: An Overview

Prior to the ALA annual conference each year, the IFRT solicits information from state Intellectual Freedom Committee chairs. This information is distributed at the annual Soapbox/Membership meeting as the *IFRT Report from the States*. The *Report From The States* provides valuable information concerning state intellectual freedom committee activities and censorship issues throughout the country. Equally important is the information presented concerning current legislative activity at the state level.

The *Report From The States* for 1991-1992 indicates that the state IFCs are very active. Twenty-nine states responded to this year's two page survey. A brief overview of the survey results follows.

Twenty-eight states listed activities ranging from workshops and seminars to lectures, exhibits and pre-conference programs. Three states are planning a central state clearinghouse for reporting and handling IF challenges, while one state already has such a mechanism in place. Twelve states reported on legislative activity and resolutions. They are primarily engaged in monitoring legislation related to censorship issues, especially that which would impact libraries and library staff. Ten states were in the process of revising or writing state Intellectual Freedom Handbooks and seven states were planning to conduct or had recently completed statewide IF surveys.

One survey was being planned as part of a graduate thesis by a library school student in Washington. The thesis focuses on censorship challenges to books in public libraries and public school libraries across the nation and within the state. The purpose of the survey is to determine the current status of censorship challenges.

New Hampshire and Kansas included statewide survey results in their reports. Both surveys looked at censorship issues but varied slightly in content. One (NH) generated a 37% response rate while the other (KS) achieved a 78% response rate. The New Hampshire survey included library selection policies; complaint

procedures; treatment of sensitive or controversial materials; circulation policies for those materials; issues relating to patron confidentiality; challenges to materials and the number and type of materials challenged. The Kansas survey covered the following areas: patron complaints regarding materials in the collection; the source of complaints (groups or individuals); the number & type of materials challenged; and the subsequent treatment of challenged materials.

The results of the Kansas survey led to four basic conclusions which may have relevance for all states. 1. Every library can expect to have some material which will generate complaints. 2. The number of challenges per library appears to be increasing over time. (A comparison of the results recorded in the 1989-1990 Kansas survey to this year's indicates more challenges per library.) 3. Librarians need to be thoroughly familiar with such documents as the Library Bill of Rights, the Freedom to Read Policy and the Intellectual Freedom Manual. 4. Librarians should realize that help and support in fighting censorship challenges is available both on the state and national level.

*Mary Bailey Croxen
Frances Loeb Library
Graduate School of Design
Harvard University, Cambridge, MA*

Here and There

VLA Honors John Swan

The Vermont Library Association recently established an intellectual freedom lecture series as a way of honoring the work of John Swan, Director of the Bennington College Library. In a November 4th ceremony at Bennington College, preceding the inaugural lecture, Paula Baker, President of the VLA, praised John Swan's "Herculean" efforts on behalf of intellectual freedom. She cited his extraordinary contribution to the profession at both the state and national levels.

Gordon M. Conable, President of the Freedom to Read Foundation and Director of the Monroe (Michigan) County Libraries, delivered a lecture

entitled "Can Free Speech Survive the Information Age?" Conable began by observing that a new morning had dawned in American politics, and speculated on the effect the Clinton presidency might have on the Supreme Court, the National Endowment for the Arts, and a wide variety of intellectual freedom issues. He was particularly concerned about the misuse of federal power under the Bush administration in gagging certain agencies or institutions that received government funding. He then turned to his primary theme: the manner in which intellectual freedom issues have been transformed as a result of the electronic revolution.

Conable addressed an extraordinarily broad range of issues raised by the electronic media and computing. He spoke of the implications of the new media for copyright, privacy and censorship. He mentioned hackers and Madonna, the National Research and Education Network, and information redlining (the removal of individuals from the information loop based on income or other criteria). He directed the attention of librarians to the way in which the economy of the library is related to the economy of the book, explaining that the library was well-prepared by tradition to purchase books but not prepared or not often willing to pay for the "metered billing" common with electronic services.

Conable repeatedly emphasized the crucial role that libraries perform in providing free access to information. By contrast, he then spoke of the federal government's languishing role as a sort of peoples' information broker, using "privatization" of public information as a key example. Again and again, the President of the Freedom to Read Foundation stressed the importance of First Amendment freedoms in protecting our most fundamental right to freedom of expression in *any* form. Conable concluded by saying "it's a brave new [electronic] world, and I hope we all survive it."

In the company of librarians such as John Swan and Gordon Conable, one could feel surprisingly confident about the future of First Amendment freedoms and free access to information.

*Patrick Max
Castleton State College
Castleton, Vermont*

Son of Sam Revisited

The State of New York has enacted a modified version of the "Son of Sam" law, which seeks to prevent criminals from profiting from their crimes. The previous version of the law was struck down in December 1991 by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Simon & Schuster v. New York State Crimes Victims Board*.

In *Simon & Schuster*, the Court held that the State has a compelling interest in preventing criminals from profiting from their crimes and in compensating the victims of crime. The Court struck down the New York law only because it was not properly drawn to achieve the State's objectives. The state sought to compensate victims by confiscating any royalties or income accruing to the criminal from the production of a book or other work describing the crime. By singling out income related to expression, the law was found to place an unconstitutional burden on free speech.

In *Simon & Schuster*, the Court seemed to leave an opening for the content-based regulation of speech so long as it was for compelling reasons and properly drafted. The new version of the statute seeks to correct the defect in the previous law by including profits from all activities associated with the crime, not just those generated by books, movies, and other productions. In doing so, the New York State Legislature may well have overcome the free speech concerns expressed by the Court in *Simon & Schuster*. However, the argument can be made—and in fact was made in a concurring opinion in *Simon & Schuster*—that any restriction aimed at the content of speech should be impermissible.

Glen Secor
Yankee Book Peddler,
Contoocook, NH

Celebrating the First Amendment

In October, Massachusetts residents had the chance to participate in a Freedom Festival. According to its printed literature, the Freedom Festival was established "to celebrate the First Amendment through events demonstrating that free expression is not a liberal or conservative idea, but part of our shared American legacy." Singer/songwriter David Herlihy, who is a member of the local rock group *O Positive*, developed the idea and was one of the driving forces in making the festival a reality. The Freedom Festival attracted numerous volunteers and a host of sponsors, including the *Boston Herald* newspaper, Houghton Mifflin publishers, and Blue Cross/Blue Shield. Massachusetts Governor William Weld and Boston Mayor Raymond L. Flynn declared the week of October 18–24 Freedom Week to mark the occasion.

The celebration started in historic Faneuil Hall on Sunday, October 18th, with a discussion featuring New York Times columnist Anthony Lewis, National Coalition Against Censorship Executive Director Leanne Katz, nationally-syndicated radio talk show host Gene Burns, and radio show host/TV commentator David Brudnoy. There were several other Sunday events including a theatrical exploration of issues of race and censorship, and "The Express-way", an information area featuring groups interested in freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of religion and freedom of political assembly. Among the exhibitors was the Massachusetts Library Association Intellectual Freedom Committee, whose display of banned and challenged books was very popular. The week continued with an art exhibit and an "Eat Think and Be Merry" dinner dance at which the keynote address was given by Spin Magazine editor Bob Guccione, Jr.

Profits from the festival will go to a number of organizations, including the Massachusetts Library Association IFC. All indications are that the Freedom Festival will become an annual event.

Paul Vermouth

Open Hearing on Access to Controversial Materials

During the ALA Midwinter Meeting, the Intellectual Freedom Committee and the Coordinating Committee on Access to Information will sponsor "The Rubber Hits the Road: An Open Forum on Access to Difficult Books." Librarians and library directors involved in recent controversies over *Daddy's Roommate*, the children's book which depicts life in a gay household, and Madonna's *Sex* will share successful strategies for protecting and implementing local policies which are consistent with ALA policies on open access to library materials and intellectual freedom. An open discussion on handling highly controversial materials will follow their presentations.

The open hearing will be held on Saturday, January 23, from 8:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. The location of this event will be in Colorado Convention Center-A207.

IFRT to Celebrate 20th Anniversary

The IFRT is now approaching its twentieth anniversary year. During the ALA Annual Conference in 1973, an organizational meeting led to the creation of the IFRT. The first meeting of the IFRT Executive Committee was held during the 1974 Midwinter Meeting. Look for further information in the next issue of the IFRT Report.

Intellectual Freedom Programs and Meetings

1993 Midwinter Meeting—Denver

Time	Room
------	------

Friday, January 22

Freedom to Read Foundation Board of Trustees	9:00 am–12:30 pm 2:00 pm–5:00 pm	HYAT-Florentine HYAT-Florentine
Freedom to Read Foundation Reception	5:00 pm–6:30 pm	HYAT-Vista

Saturday, January 23

Intellectual Freedom Committee	8:00 am–12:30 pm	HYAT-Anaconda 202
IFC/IFRT/Div. IFC's Joint Mtg.	2:00 pm–4:00 pm	HYAT-Anaconda 202
IFRT Bylaws & Organization Comm.	2:00 pm–4:00 pm	CCC-Hall A, #62

Sunday, January 24

IFRT Eli Oboler Mem. Award Comm.	8:00 am–9:00 am	BRO-Welton
Intellectual Freedom Committee	8:00 am–11:00 am	HYAT-Anaconda 202
IFRT Program Planning Committee	9:30 am–11:00 am	CCC-Hall A, #62
IFRT Immroth Mem. Award Committee	11:30 am–12:30 pm	HYAT-Directors
IFRT Membership Promotion Comm.	11:30 am–12:30 pm	RAD-Birch
IFRT Executive Committee	2:00 pm–5:30 pm	HYAT Anaconda 202

Monday, January 25

IFRT Publications Committee	11:30 am–12:30 pm	WSTN-McCourt
IFRT Oboler Award Committee II	2:00 am–4:00 pm	BRO-Blrm. A
Intellectual Freedom Committee	2:00 pm–4:00 pm	HYAT Anaconda 202

Tuesday, January 26

IFRT Executive Committee	11:30 am–12:30 pm	HYAT Parisienne
Intellectual Freedom Committee	2:00 pm–5:30 pm	HYAT Anaconda 202

Note: Room assignments may change; refer to your official conference program for possible changes.

BRO	Brown Palace
CCC	Colorado Convention Ctr.
HYAT	Hyatt Regency
RAD	Radisson
WSTN	Westin Tabor Ctr.
#	Table number

Would
you
call
Mother
Goose
a
bigot?



OPEN
BOOKS
FOR
OPEN
MINDS

Would
you
call
Huck
Finn
a
racist?



OPEN
BOOKS
FOR
OPEN
MINDS

Would
you
keep
her
from
flying
on
Halloween?



OPEN
BOOKS
FOR
OPEN
MINDS

Guest Editorial

"P.C." : The Issue That Won't Go Away

John Swan

When Fran McDonald deputized a group of us, under the stalwart leadership of Dorothy Broderick, to examine the controversy over "political correctness" for its possible relevance to librarians, we assumed that we would be the objective observers of somebody else's mud-wrestling match. The endless tales of intolerance and bigotry and internecine warfare on college campuses didn't seem to involve librarians, on the left or the right. We were wrong, of course, as we should have known, because a quick glance at our own experience in the IFRT showed us that we librarians are just as capable of stereotyping and prejudging and name-calling as anyone else—better, maybe, since we know where the dictionaries are.

The media orgy over the always-ill-defined "P.C." issue is over, more or less; the mud has dried, if not disappeared. But this does not mean that the behaviors and attitudes that fueled the furor have also disappeared, and this is true whether you believe "P.C." to be a genuine problem or just a club with which the Right has been bashing the Left. Our IFRT subcommittee was properly chastened by the abundant evidence in the ranks of librarianship: charges of racism hurled by a very few, but a very vocal few, against those who opposed the information boycott of South Africa, and of anti-semitism leveled by another few at those who oppose Israel's West Bank policies; a librarian losing his job for organizing a program on the Palestine issue; two respected researchers being ostracized for presenting findings discouraging to minorities; and many other signs of a tendency to dismiss rather than invite dialogue, even among professional colleagues.

Following the pattern of Dorothy Broderick's successful ALA conference program of about a decade ago, "Censors are People, Too," our subcommittee came up with a proposal for another such workshop-based event in which we would all have the opportunity to improve our awareness or our own dark corners of intolerance. It has turned out that health and logistical problems have frustrated our plans, at least for now. This doesn't mean, however, that we can afford to let the issue drop. It is true that a call to improve communication skills and reduce interpersonal hostilities has all the intellectual excitement of a sermon about seeking the good and shunning evil, but the fact is that we librarians can be a difficult bunch of people. Active idealists championing noble causes like intellectual freedom and social justice can easily become hardened ideologues who see bigotry in disagreement and treachery in difference. And yes, the problem is complicated by the fact that the world is indeed well-stocked with bigots and traitors.

Not to be too discouraging: There have recently been encouraging signs of cooperation between groups with a history of mutual wariness, and there is much good will to be tapped. As the last Annual Conference showed, there are events, such as the IFRT "Get Up On Your Soapbox" membership meeting, which allow opportunity for extended dialogue. It may be that just creating more opportunities within the library community to air differences will engender a stronger will to tolerate and even to listen to them. Such programs or discussion groups of whatever format are potentially more enlightening, or at least interesting, than our more usual gatherings of the like-minded, however "P.C." they might be.

IFRT Publications Committee member John Swan is a former chair of the IFRT and former editor of the IFRT Report.

The *IFRT Report* is an irregular publication of the Intellectual Freedom Round Table of the American Library Association and is sent to members of the Round Table. Membership information and/or correspondence about your subscription should be addressed to IFRT, Office for Intellectual Freedom, American Library Association, 50 East Huron Street, Chicago, Illinois 60611. The current editor of the *IFRT Report* is Paul Vermouth, Rm. 14S-222, M.I.T. Libraries, Cambridge, MA 02139. Letters to the editor are welcomed.

Intellectual Freedom Round Table
American Library Association
50 East Huron Street
Chicago, Illinois 60611

FIRST CLASS