BOOKS CHALLENGED OR BANNED IN 2002–2003
Robert P. Doyle
Banned Books Week 2003 is the twenty-second annual celebration of the freedom to read. This freedom, not only to choose what we read, but also to select from a full array of possibilities, is firmly rooted in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which guarantees freedom of speech and freedom of press. Even as we revel in the increasing quantity and availability of information and reading material, we must maintain vigilance to assure that access to this material is preserved. Threats against the freedom to read still exist and come from all quarters and all political persuasions. Quite simply, censors are those who try to limit the freedom of others to choose what they read, see, or hear, even if the motivation for the restriction is well intentioned.

Sex, profanity, and racism remain the primary categories of objections, and most incidents occur in schools and school libraries. Frequently, challenges are motivated by the desire to protect children. While the cause is noble and commendable, this method of protection contains hazards far greater than exposure to the "evil" against which the protection is leveled. Supreme Court Justice William Brennan, in Texas v. Johnson, said, "If there is a bedrock principle underlying the First Amendment, it is that the Government may not prohibit the expression of an idea simply because society finds the idea itself offensive or disagreeable." Individuals may restrict what they themselves or their children read, but they must not call on governmental or public agencies to prevent others from reading or seeing that material.

The challenges documented in this list are not just by people expressing a point of view regarding these materials; rather, they have asked that these materials be removed from the school curriculum or library, thus restricting access to them by others. Even when the eventual outcome allows the book to stay on the library shelves and even when the person is a lone protester, the censorship attempt is real. Someone has tried to restrict another person's ability to choose. Challenges are as important to document as actual bannings, in which a book is removed from the shelves of a library or bookstore or from the curriculum at a school. Attempts to censor lead to voluntary curtailment of expression by those who seek to avoid controversy, a situation as critical as an actual banning, since in these cases the material may not be published or may not be purchased by a bookstore, library, or school district.

We have reason to be especially celebratory this year. Due to the commitment of parents, students, librarians, teachers, and other concerned citizens, more and more challenges are unsuccessful, and the reading material remains available.

It should be noted that this bibliography is incomplete because many prohibitions against free speech and expression remain undocumented. Surveys indicate approximately 85 percent of the challenges to library materials receive no media attention and remain unreported. Moreover, this list is limited to books and does not include challenges to magazines, newspapers, films, broadcasts, plays, performances, electronic publications, or exhibits.
This bibliography represents books challenged, restricted, removed, or banned in 2002-2003 as reported in the Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom from May 2002 through May 2003.


Angelou, Maya. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Bantam. Challenged as required reading for Hamilton, Mont. freshman English classes (2002). At issue are scenes in which the author explores her sexuality through intercourse as a teenager and the depiction of a rape and molestation of an 8-year-old girl; homosexuality is another theme explored in the book that has drawn criticism. Challenged, along with seventeen other titles in the Fairfax County, Va. elementary and secondary libraries (2002), by a group called Parents Against Bad Books in Schools. The group contends the books "contain profanity and descriptions of drug abuse, sexually explicit conduct, and torture." Source: Jan. 2003, p. 10.


________. *Witch Baby*. HarperCollins. Challenged, along with seventeen other titles in the Fairfax County, Va. elementary and secondary libraries (2002), by a group called Parents Against Bad Books in Schools. The group contends the books "contain profanity and descriptions of drug abuse, sexually explicit conduct, and torture." On March 10, 2003, the school board determined the book is suitable for elementary- and middle-school collections and placed a young-adult sticker on its spine. Source: Jan. 2003, p. 10; May 2003, p. 117.

Blume, Judy. *Forever*. Bradbury Pr. Banned from middle school libraries in the Elgin, Ill. School District U46 (1997) because of sex scenes. The decision was upheld in June 1999 after an hour of emotional school board discussion. After a


TO A BANNED BOOK


**Santiago, Esmeralda.** When I Was Puerto Rican. Addison-Wesley; Vintage. Challenged, along with
seventeen other titles in the Fairfax County, Va. elementary and secondary libraries (2002), by a group called Parents Against Bad Books in Schools. The group contends the books "contain profanity and descriptions of drug abuse, sexually explicit conduct, and torture." Source: Jan. 2003, p. 10.


**Twain, Mark [Samuel L. Clemens].** The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. Bantam; Bobbs Merrill; Grosset; Harper; Holt; Houghton; Longman; Macmillan; NAL; Norton; Penguin; Pocket Bks. Challenged in the Portland, Oreg. schools (2002) by an African-American student who said he was offended by an ethnic slur used in the 1885 novel. Source: Jan. 2003, pp. 11-12.


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