

# Reexamining the Origins of the Adoption of the ALA's Library Bill of Rights

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## ABSTRACT

This paper chronicles and examines the development of the idea of intellectual freedom within the context of the American Libraries Association (ALA), specifically how events and statements related to censorship and free access to books and library services helped originate the *Library Bill of Rights (LBR)* and influenced its adoption by the ALA in 1939. These events are located broadly during the Great Depression, temporally framing the beginning and end points of the analysis between the response of the ALA to article 305 of the Smoot–Hawley Tariff in 1929 and the appointment of Forrest Spaulding to a special ALA committee on censorship by December 1939. This paper has a dual objective. It provides evidence that librarians and the ALA were concerned and alert to the importance of intellectual freedom in spite of the lack of articles about censorship indexed in *Library Literature*, and that the ALA's adoption of the *LBR* was not in response to the pressures against *The Grapes of Wrath* as suggested in the ALA's *Intellectual Freedom Manual*.

Freedom from censorship is the most priceless possession of the library.

— Alvin Johnson, *The Public Library—A People's University*, 1938

The *Library Bill of Rights (LBR)*, or as it was originally named, *Library's Bill of Rights*, of the American Library Association “serves as the library profession's interpretation of how the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution applies to libraries” (Office for Intellectual Freedom, 2010, p. xix). Specifically related to the First Amendment, the *LBR* interprets how “the freedom of speech, or of the press” applies to library practices. The ALA interprets these freedoms broadly to include intellectual freedom, “a freedom of the mind, a personal liberty and a prerequisite for all freedoms

leading to action.” Intellectual freedom is “the bulwark of our constitutional republic . . . [and] . . . the rallying cry of those who struggle for democracy worldwide,” according to the ALA’s *Intellectual Freedom Manual*, the official interpretive document and guide on implementing the *LBR* within the context of US libraries (Office for Intellectual Freedom, 2010, pp. xvii–xviii).

Libraries, particularly public libraries, play a vital role within American society. They are “centers for uninhibited intellectual inquiry,” and “librarians have taken upon themselves the responsibility to provide, through their institutions, all points of view on all questions and issues of our times, and to make these ideas and opinions available to anyone who needs or wants them, regardless of age, background, or views” (Office for Intellectual Freedom, 2010, p. xviii).

It is within the context of library spaces that intellectual freedom may be threatened, restricted, or denied in the form of censorship. Censorship in the context of libraries is defined as a “change in the access status of material, based on the content of the work and made by a governing authority or its representatives. Such changes include exclusion, restriction, removal, or age/grade level changes” (Office for Intellectual Freedom, 2010, p. 417).

The *LBR*, “the profession’s basic policy statement on intellectual freedom involving library materials” (Office for Intellectual Freedom, 2010, p. 15), was adopted by the Executive Council of the ALA on June 19, 1939, and has been amended five times: October 14, 1944; June 18, 1948; February 2, 1961; June 27, 1967; and January 23, 1980. The inclusion of “age” was reaffirmed on January 23, 1996.

However, the purpose of this paper is not to recount the history of the changes of the *LBR* from its adoption to the present. I will instead chronicle and examine the development of the idea of intellectual freedom within the context of the ALA, specifically how events and statements related to censorship and free access to books and library services helped originate the *LBR* and influenced its adoption by the ALA in 1939. I locate these events and statements in era of the Great Depression, temporally framing the beginning and end points of my analysis between the response of the ALA to article 305 of the Smoot–Hawley Tariff in 1929 and the appointment of Forrest Spaulding to a special ALA committee on censorship by December 1939.

Some library scholars have formulated particular conclusions about librarians’ ideas and reactions toward censorship in the 1930s, and about the origins of the adoption of the *LBR*. The late David K. Berninghausen, former chair of the Intellectual Freedom Committee, wrote that “it is apparent from the literature of librarianship that before 1939, American libraries were not generally alert to the importance of freedom to read. Very few pieces on censorship in libraries appeared in the index to *Library*

*Literature* before that time. Some of those few articles clearly supported censorship” (Berninghausen, 1970, p. 19). And, the late Judith F. Krug, founder and former director of the ALA’s Office of Intellectual Freedom, stated that the ALA’s “basic position in opposition to censorship finally emerged in the late 1930s, when John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* became a target of censorship pressures around the country. . . . ALA’s initial response to the pressures against *The Grapes of Wrath* was the adoption in 1939 of the *Library’s Bill of Rights*” (Office for Intellectual Freedom, 2010, p. 15).

This paper has a dual objective. It provides evidence that librarians and the ALA were concerned and “alert” to the importance of intellectual freedom in spite of the lack of articles about censorship indexed in *Library Literature*, and that the ALA’s adoption of the *LBR* was not in “response to the pressures against *The Grapes of Wrath*.” Ignoring Evelyn Geller’s assertion (1984, p. 147) that during the 1930s, “coverage of censorship was skimpiest in [the *ALA Bulletin*],” compared to the *Library Journal* and the *Wilson Library Bulletin*, I exclusively use as primary sources issues of the *Bulletin of the American Library Association (ALA Bulletin)* during the years 1929–1939. I demonstrate that librarians and others interested in the role and work of libraries were alert and responded to issues regarding intellectual freedom on national and international levels. I also demonstrate that the *LBR* was adopted independently of national attention from the banning of *The Grapes of Wrath* from the shelves of several US public libraries, agreeing with Louise Robbins (1996, p. 152) that “there is little evidence that the banning of John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* was the triggering event for the adoption of the *Library’s Bill of Rights*.”

Librarians were not silent concerning censorship before the 1930s. Evelyn Geller (1984, pp. xv–xvi) distinguishes three distinct periods between 1876, the year that the ALA was formed, and 1939, the year the ALA adopted the *LBR*. The founding leaders of the ALA mostly “avoided controversial literature and endorsed the librarian as moral censor,” describing the period from 1876 to 1900 as embodying “values populism, neutrality, and censorship.” 1900–1922 were years “in which censorship as a professional value was reflected in closed-shelf policies that attempted to resolve competing demands for restriction and for controversial books.” 1923–1939 was the period of the “emergence of an ideology of freedom as a value central to the goals of libraries.”

Within this emergence, Geller (1984, p. 135) refers to the period between the years 1923 and 1930 as a “critical shift” in librarians’ attitudes concerning censorship when librarians “destroyed the[ir] overt commitment to censorship.” However, a stance of neutrality still guided most librarians’ attitudes toward censorship during this period. “Opponents of censorship laws did not necessarily support the new literature or oppose

its control. They objected to the *mode* of control, feeling that the issue did not belong in the political arena" (Geller, 1984, p. 146) but belonged to the autonomous personal preference of individual readers. The Smoot–Hawley Tariff Act was an event that began to unify librarians on a national level against censorship, viewing it as an antidemocratic idea and contrary to the idea of intellectual freedom and self-improvement.

The Smoot–Hawley Tariff Act of June 1930 raised tariffs to unprecedented levels in the United States. The intention of the Act was to protect US farmers against overseas agricultural imports. However, the Act grew beyond its primary purpose. "Once the tariff schedule revision process got started, it proved impossible to stop" (U.S. Department of State, n.d.).

In 1929, Senator Reed Smoot (R, Utah) debated Senator Bronson Cutting (D, New Mexico) over section 305, which was originally included in the 1922 Tariff Act and was carried over into the Smoot–Hawley Act. Section 305 prohibited the importation of "immoral articles," including books deemed as such ("Free Speech," 1930, p. 48). Senator Cutting spoke against prohibiting books based on morality. He proposed an amendment that changed the motivation behind prohibiting foreign books on a moral basis to ideas in books that urged "forcible resistance to any law of the United States, or containing any threat to take the life of or inflict bodily harm upon any person in the United States" (p. 49). Cutting also opposed allowing unqualified customs clerks to judge the contents of a book, stating that they would have to have read the "book as a whole" to determine whether it was obscene or not. Smoot replied, it "would be better . . . that a few classics suffer the application of the expurgating shears than that this country be flooded with the books . . . that are wholly indecent." Cutting responded, "The only policy we can accept in this matter is the belief that the American people in the long run can be trusted to take care of their own moral and spiritual welfare; that no bureaucratic guardian has competence to decide for them what they shall or shall not read." Cutting's amendment passed in the Senate by a vote of 38 to 36 (Oboler, 1979, pp. 66–67).

The Executive Board of the ALA opposed section 305 "on the grounds that this clause creates an effective censorship over foreign literature" such as works of modern economics and accounts of foreign revolutions. The Board also suggested that section 305 was an insult to the intelligence of the American people "by implying that they are so stupid and untrustworthy that they cannot read about revolutions without immediately becoming traitors and revolutionaries themselves" (Munn et al., 1930, p. 11). The Board commented on Cutting's amendment of section 305, stating that it "was approved, not because it entirely represented our wishes, but . . . [s]ome gain is made by the new law in that a federal district court will decide the issue of obscenity rather than a customs official" (p. 144).

The ALA's response to the Smoot–Hawley Tariff Act was the first of several comments concerning censorship and intellectual freedom as recorded in the *ALA Bulletin* over the next decade.

In June 1931 at Yale University, the site of the ALA's annual conference, Adam Strohm of the Detroit Public Library, and President of the ALA, addressed the members and guests. "The leaders of public libraries are not charged with the pursuit of scholarship, but as promoters of sound public thinking we may perhaps speak in the same faith as our academic colleagues, as we are both defenders of the [US] bill of rights of a self-governing people to intellectual freedom." He followed this with a list of examples of frequently suppressed works of literature, claiming that such works accurately "sound the depths of human sympathy and good will," and "are a testament to noble sentiments from those who with deep affection have lived very close to the heart of nature and life" (Strohm, 1931, pp. 415, 418–419). These works were worthy of defending in libraries that regard educating the public as part of their mission.

At the June 1933 ALA conference in Chicago, two guest speakers addressed the importance of books and reading and how free access to books and ideas is a tenet of a free society. During the second general session, Arundell Esdaile, librarian, poet, and Secretary of the British Museum, addressed the importance of free and unlimited access to books, including novels of all kinds. This was an important topic for librarians because they occasionally debated whether public libraries should promote and shelve popular literature. Instead, some argued, they primarily should encourage the reading of serious literature. Evelyn Geller calls this the *elitist–populist* dilemma between professional librarians and their client patrons, "with respect to high and popular culture" (1984, p. 184). Some librarians felt obligated to promote only serious literature, while patrons increasingly were interested in popular literature. During the 1930s, librarians began to balance their roles as purveyors of serious literature and advocates of an educational agenda to include the promotion of popular literature as a form of leisure, yet legitimate, reading. Esdaile (1933, pp. 575–576) encouraged this shift. "I decry the issue . . . of novels in public libraries. Recreation books are as good, are they not? That some ideas are dangerous does not matter. Suppress the novel, make it difficult of access, even, and how much poorer should we be!"

During the third general session of the 1933 conference, Howard Mumford Jones (1933, p. 592), professor of English at the University of Michigan, lectured on "The Place of Books and Reading in Modern Society" in response to Adolf Hitler's rise to Chancellorship of Germany in January of that year; his February 2nd banning of all publications that contained "inaccurate information;" the April publications of two manifestos, "Twelve Theses Against the Un-German Spirit" and "*Feuersprüche*"

(fire incantations); and the May 10th book burnings on Berlin's Opera Square.<sup>1</sup>

Over the greater part of the earth active and violent movements are at work designed to mold the minds of men into a single set of ideas about the state. Bolshevism, Fascism, Hitlerism, Communism—whatever the name, the method in this respect is always one: it is to destroy the circulation of the ideas of one's opponents and to make propaganda for one's own ideas. Except in half a dozen nations, political censorship and state directed propaganda have become the commonplace of government. The United States is still fortunately to be counted in this list, though there are uneasy indications that the drive for regimentation of men's minds is gaining ground with us. I count it among the fundamental decencies of civilization that men should everywhere have the freest possible access to the knowledge of ideas through the ability to read and comprehend what they read. (Jones, 1933, p. 593)

Jones then asked rhetorically, "What is the place of books and reading in modern society?" He answered "that libraries and the ability to read books are fundamental guardians of popular liberty in a diseased and desperate world" (p. 593). Jones challenged the members of the ALA to take a stance against censorship and to stand for intellectual freedom. He said that in regimes where censorship was common, such as Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy, libraries were "nothing more nor less than agencies for government propaganda" (Compton, 1935, p. 718).

Ironically, despite these words of encouragement and words of caution, the ALA's Executive Board took no stance regarding a letter requesting that they "take some action in regard to the burning of books in Germany by the Hitler regime." The Board considered the matter, "but it was the sense of the meeting that no action should be taken" (American Library Association, 2006, p. 214). It also considered a request to endorse the Roerich Peace Pact, "an agreement to safeguard artistic, scientific, and cultural institutions in time of war." Again, the Board declined, citing that "except for matters which directly concern the operation of libraries, the Board does not adopt resolutions commending the activities of other organizations" (Geller, 1984, p. 156). So, while American public libraries were encouraged by foreign and domestic ALA outsiders to uphold the freedom to read, the leadership of the national organization of American libraries responded with ambivalence on its stance about issues directly related to international censorship and intellectual freedom.

Little was recorded in 1934 in the *ALA Bulletin* regarding intellectual freedom or censorship. However, Jennie Flexner (1934, p. 497), the first Readers' Advisory librarian at the New York Public Library (NYPL), remarked in a speech to the third general session of the ALA annual conference in Montreal, "We [the library profession] are concerned with the book as the source of ideas, of uncensored factual information, as the

necessary medium for the spread of thought, the cultivation of the mind, the background for the weighing of essential values.” Flexner, the granddaughter of Jewish immigrants, was a champion of providing reading and educational materials to new immigrants through the NYPL. While she advocated quick assimilation to the immigrants’ new homes, she also supported their heritages by securing books and other reading materials in their native languages.<sup>2</sup> The rhetoric of intellectual freedom, the freedom to read, and anticensorship was becoming more common within the pages of the *ALA Bulletin*. This trend continued through the second half of the 1930s.

In January 1935, the ALA made its strongest statement against censorship since the Smoot–Hawley Tariff Act. ALA President Charles H. Compton and Secretary Carl H. Milam sent a letter of protest to US President Franklin D. Roosevelt against the banning of the pamphlet *You and Machines*, by William F. Ogburn, sociology professor at the University of Chicago. The pamphlet was intended as an instructional aid in the camps of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). The pamphlet was written and printed for CCC workers by a grant from the General Education Board to the American Council on Education. Before it reached the camps, however, it was banned by CCC director, Robert Fechner. *You and Machines* “focused on the social and economic consequences of the ‘rapid mechanization of production.’” However, Fechner feared that the pamphlet “might include a desire to destroy our present economic and political structures which are held to be responsible for present conditions” (Barry, 2001, p. 56). Instead of condemning the action taken by Fechner, the letter recommended that President Roosevelt “make it possible for the U.S. Commissioner of Education and the Educational Director of the Civilian Conservation Corps to direct the educational policies to be operative in these camps and to make available the reading matter essential in a modern program of education” (American Library Association, 1935, p. 117).

At the June 1935 ALA conference in Denver, Oscar L. Chapman (1935, p. 541), Assistant Secretary of the Interior, affirmed the part that public libraries play in promoting intellectual freedom to the citizens and residents of the United States. “It should never be trite to say that the very essence of democracy is the free sharing of ideas. . . . In no small part, the enlightenment, the perspective and understanding of the people depend on the effectiveness of the American public library.”

At the same conference, ALA President, Charles H. Compton (1935, p. 718), spoke to the Trustees Section, which was made up of library boards in the United States. They often had the power of influence to implement or deny acts of censorship in local libraries. Compton spoke of the “policy generally followed in the American public library of providing its public with the best books and magazines obtainable on all sides of all questions no matter how controversial. I count this freedom of the library as its

most precious asset. I bring this to your attention at this time because of the complete suppression of freedom of expression and the thorough regimentation of thought that have been taking place in so many other countries recently."

During the 1936 annual conference, US Secretary of the Interior, Harold L. Ickes (1936, p. 491), addressed the "Friends of the Library" luncheon from Washington. He highlighted, during a live radio broadcast, the themes of freedom and self-improvement through education, saying that the "library [affords] an opportunity for self-knowledge in an atmosphere of freedom."

By holding the conference in Richmond, the ALA made inroads into the South. Many northern librarians balked at having the southern city, and its segregation laws, host the annual conference. However, a benefit from the ALA's meeting in the Virginia capitol was the establishment of a Committee on Racial Discrimination, chaired by Carl Roden of the Chicago Public Library, and charged with finding ways to serve all library patrons equally regardless of their race in a time when prejudice and discrimination were not only a personal preference, but were sanctioned by law.

To finish out the year, the President of the University of North Carolina, Frank Porter Graham (1936, p. 988), wrote for the December issue of the *ALA Bulletin*, reminding librarians of their social responsibilities for freedom in a world where much of the people were not free: "A library combines . . . the treasure house of old books and the creative center for the making of new ones, out of which have come modern science, modern industrialism, modern democracy. We need this creative center today as we see democracy threatened by dictatorships, by demagogues, and by haphazard social drift." Frank Porter Graham's article to the *ALA Bulletin* capped a year of inroads into the South, and looked forward to greater freedom and democracy for all library users (Preer, 2004, p. 153).

Carl Van Doren, biographer and literary critic, wrote a piece for the October 1937 issue of the *ALA Bulletin* titled "The American Imagination." He, like Arundell Esdaile, defended the novel and other popular works of literature, arguing that they had their place in the leisure reading of the public and, therefore, had their place on the shelves in public libraries. He urged librarians to resist the temptation to not give a place for works of literature that they personally did not deem worthy: "Librarians have, I suppose, a kind of temptation to censorship. I would to make one observation about the way in which censorship is connected with the idea of the imagination about which I am talking. One of the most debated books and plays of the last few years has been the wonder of the theater, *Tobacco Road*" (p. 651).

*Tobacco Road*, by Erskine Caldwell, was a popular novel published in 1932, but was more famous as a play. It opened on December 4, 1933, and closed on May 31, 1941, running for 3,182 performances, making it the



longest-running play on Broadway. The sentimental play is set during the Depression on a small Georgia farm. Van Doren (1937, p. 651) compares *Tobacco Road* to Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in that they were both "acts of the imagination" and both appealed to a large white audience who had never experienced life on a poor southern farm, just as most members of the white population in 1852 had never seen black slaves much less a window into their lives. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

made readers enter into a kind of imaginative sympathy with the slaves of the story as human beings, not merely as objects of sentiment or humor—or property. This [Stowe] did through appealing to all sorts of domestic sentimentalism, and she made it dramatic and agonizing. But it was a personal imagination trying to find something personal in lives that had not been personalized or imagined. The same thing is true of *Tobacco Road* and of other novels and stories and plays concerned with the recent depression. (p. 651)

Van Doren understood the value and place that popular literature had with the reading public. They should have the freedom to choose what to read for themselves. "It is for the librarian, I suppose, to give the imagination every chance, because the imagination is really the source of the librarian's existence. I know that some books do not look very imaginative, and a good many of them are not. But, in the long run, the imagination is a thing without which the human race could not be human" (p. 651).

In the December 1937 issue of the *ALA Bulletin*, Thyra Brown and Eleanor Harmon (p. 942) of the Seattle Public Library composed a dramatic dialogue addressing various concerns within the ALA. Harmon reacted to the professional objective "to improve the status of librarianship." She said that the ALA had been "sadly lacking in vigor" in "its protection and extension of the freedom of libraries and librarian. . . . I cannot recollect having heard of the Association taking action against abridgment of the library's freedom in the censorship activities of library boards. . . . Has the A. L. A. done anything to improve this unhappy situation?" Brown, coming to the defense of the ALA, responded, "Charles H. Compton has called upon trustees to be on their guard against certain trends toward suppression of thought that are evident in these United States" (p. 942).

The ALA had addressed censorship in their rhetoric, but they had not done enough, according to some members, to establish and approve formal statements that called for the protection of intellectual freedom and stood against the censoring of books. The sixtieth annual ALA conference met in Kansas City in 1938, where certain round tables took official stances against domestic and international censorship, and urged the ALA as a whole to do the same. Ruth Robi of the Public Library in St. Louis spoke to the Order and Book Selection Round Table on June 14.

Evoking the words of Chief Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., Robi said, "We must be more on our guard than ever in these days, when passions and feelings are running high, and keep ever uppermost in our minds the admonition of the late Justice Holmes to adhere to the principle of free thought, 'not free thought for those who agree with us, but freedom for the thought that we hate'" (Howard, 1938, p. 904).

Going a step further, the Staff Organization Round Table (SORT), passed two resolutions (one on fascist book burning, the other on censorship), including one that the ALA neglected to make in 1933.

#### RESOLUTION ON FASCIST BOOK-BURNING

*Whereas*, It has been noted that fascism marks its rise to power by burning books, in many cases incunabula, items of finest world literature, etc., and

*Whereas*, It is this phase of fascist practice which is specially to be abhorred by librarians and all other workers dealing with books; now therefore be it

*Resolved*, That the Staff Organizations Round Table urge its parent organization, the A. L. A., to seek the cooperation of all library associations and book groups in the world to make common protest to the fascist governments against the practice of book burning.

#### RESOLUTION ON CENSORSHIP

*Whereas*, There has been evidence in this country of the exercise of bias in the selection of books and in the administration of library service; and

*Whereas*, Such practice is foreign to American democratic ideals; now therefore be it

*Resolved*, That the affiliated organizations of the Staff Organizations Round Table make it their responsibility to be on guard against the growth of such practices in their communities and libraries, and to report such breaches of library ethics to the A. L. A., with recommendations for appropriate action and publicity. (Staff Organization Round Table of the American Library Association, 1938a, pp. 968-969)

Late 1938 and 1939 revealed several statements made and actions taken against censorship and in defense of intellectual freedom. The ALA adopted the "National Plan for Libraries" in December 1938 as a guide for the ideas and practices of member libraries. In part, it stated that the "public library typifies democracy. It is used or may be used by all persons of all ages, of all levels of education, and of every economic status. . . . The librarian must not become a propagandist. The reader's freedom and the library's right and duty to furnish material on all sides of controversial subjects must, at all costs, be preserved. . . . The library recognizes no censorship except the community's own standards of good taste. It cherishes the right and welcomes the duty to supply its readers with books on all sides of controversial questions" (American Library Association, 1939a, pp. 136-137, 140-141, 147).

In the April 1939 issue of the *ALA Bulletin*, Lawrence Heyl (1939, p. 231), Chairman of the ALA Book Buying Committee, wrote that "librarians, officially . . . have only one position when it comes to anything

that concerns the interchange of ideas. We believe and maintain that our collections of books should represent all shades of opinion.” He wrote this article in response to libraries that questioned whether they should shelve two recently translated editions of *Mein Kampf*, stating that “it is most necessary that we keep as well informed as we can of what is going on in Germany, whether in the fields of politics, science, philosophy, or what you will.”

On June 19, 1939, at the annual conference in San Francisco, the ALA adopted the *LBR* (see its Appendix). Ernestine Rose, chairman of the Adult Education Board, proposed it and its preamble to the Council. “Today indications in many parts of the world point to growing intolerance, suppression of free speech, and censorship affecting the rights of minorities and individuals. Mindful of this, the Council of the American Library Association publicly affirms its belief in the following basic policies which should govern the services of free public libraries.” The ALA’s *LBR* was modeled almost verbatim on three of four clauses from Forrest B. Spaulding’s Library Bill of Rights for the Des Moines Public Library, adopted by its board in November the year before. It was published in the *ALA Bulletin*, the *Library Journal*, and the *Wilson Library Bulletin*. The first two “rights” address issues of collection development, regarding book selection and maintaining large subject coverage representing “all sides of questions.” The third “right” covers who may use meeting rooms, stating, “Library meeting rooms should be available on equal terms to all groups in the community regardless of their beliefs or affiliations.”

In his 1939 annual report, ALA Secretary Carl H. Milam (1939a, p. 537) wrote that “approving the *Library’s Bill of Rights* at the San Francisco conference and recommending its adoption by librarians and boards of trustees, the Council emphasized the fact that American library policy is based upon tolerance of minorities and impartiality in selection of materials and service to the public. It is possible that, in the future, the Association will find it desirable to take a more active part than heretofore in opposing the various forms of censorship which conflict with these principles.”

By December 1939, the ALA Executive Council had taken a more “active part” by appointing Forrest Spaulding as chair of a special committee on censorship, “following the recent banning by a number of libraries of John Steinbeck’s *Grapes of Wrath*. The committee is to report on existing censorship and to formulate a statement of policy for the board’s consideration” (American Library Association, 1939b, p. 767). In 1940, this special committee on censorship evolved into the Committee on Intellectual Freedom, to Safeguard the Rights of Library Users to Freedom of Inquiry. The purpose of the committee was “to throw the force and influence of the ALA behind any individual librarian or any library board confronted

with any demands for censorship of books or other material upon a library's shelves" (American Library Association, 1940, p. 469).

The Intellectual Freedom Committee, as it became to be known, actively gathered information about books that had been banned from public libraries. They solicited data, requesting that libraries contact them for advice on how to handle situations where books were challenged or banned. According to Forrest Spaulding (1941, p. 622), requests came in from "librarians, library trustees, and in one instance a school superintendent, for information as to how best to curb the activities of individuals and minority groups advocating censorship of library shelves or the suppression of particular books. [I]n some instances it has been learned that the weight of an ALA committee's recommendation has been of definite aid to local library administrations."

Again, I agree with Louise Robbins (1996, p. 152) that "there is little evidence that the banning of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* was the triggering event for the adoption of the Library's Bill of Rights." In his Secretary's Report, Carl Milam highlighted the "tolerance of minorities and impartiality in selection of materials and service to the public" as primary reasons for adopting the *LBR*. In the preamble to the 1939 *LBR*, Ernestine Rose indicated that "many parts of the world point to growing intolerance, suppression of free speech, and censorship affecting the rights of minorities and individuals." Both Milam's statements and the *LBR*'s preamble provide evidence that ALA members were aware of and concerned about the growing threats to intellectual freedom abroad in places like Hitler's Germany, and locally, surrounding issues of the pamphlet *You and Machines* and the novel *Tobacco Road* just to restate two examples. Milam's statement and the *LBR*'s preamble also reveal that there was growing concern about racial segregation and prejudice that came to the forefront at the 1936 conference in Richmond, leading to the creation of the Committee on Racial Discrimination. The adoption of the *LBR* was in response to the culmination of global and local threats to intellectual freedom and, to a lesser extent, racial discrimination. This response would not have occurred without the alertness, thoughtful rhetoric, and deliberate actions from advocates, both librarians and nonlibrarians, for intellectual freedom as recorded in the *ALA Bulletin*.

Additionally, and to support my conclusion from a well-researched secondary source, Rick Wartzman (2008) makes no mention of the ALA or the *LBR* except for a note from the very last page about statistics on challenged books in libraries in the twenty-first century in his 2008 investigation of the "burning and banning" of *The Grapes of Wrath*. Wartzman's research partially highlights the efforts of librarian Gretchen Knief and the banning of Steinbeck's novel from the Kern County Library in Bakersfield, California. The Kern County Board of Supervisors voted, four

to one, to ban *The Grapes of Wrath* from its library and schools in August 1939, two months after the adoption of the *LBR*. *The Grapes of Wrath* was published in March 1939, and actions taken to ban it from libraries were in their earliest stages of development when the *LBR* was adopted three months later. Most organized bannings and burnings of *The Grapes of Wrath* took place after June 19.

I do not suggest that the banning of *The Grapes of Wrath* had no influence upon voting members of the ALA who adopted the *LBR*, but I suggest through careful research from the pages of the *ALA Bulletin*, “the official organ of the Association,” that there is no evidence of a direct relationship between the two events. The accumulation of factors and events in the ten years leading up to the adoption of the *LBR* was more influential to its adoption than a singular “reaction” or “triggering event” that suggests a simple cause and effect between the banning of Steinbeck’s novel and the adoption of the *LBR*. The *ALA Bulletin* does reveal, however, an alert and concerned ALA about censorship and intellectual freedom, and that there may be a direct relationship between the banning and burning of Steinbeck’s great novel and the formation of the “special committee on censorship,” the predecessor to the Intellectual Freedom Committee and the Office of Intellectual Freedom, in which David Berninghausen and Judith Krug were so active. For intellectual freedom advocates like them and Forrest Spaulding, and for the legacies they established, I am most grateful.

## NOTES

1. See also Hill (2001); and Polastron (2007), 179–181.
2. For more on Flexner, see Feinberg (1995); and Preer (2001).

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