

## ABSTRACT

Censorship and Freedom:  
American Libraries and the World Wars

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In the First World War, almost all American libraries embraced censorship in the name of patriotism and paternalism. By the time America entered the Second World War, however, the majority of librarians had notably transformed their stances and affirmed the importance of the public's right to read. This thesis is an examination of the two wars and their accompanying debates on censorship, as well as the years between that led to such incredible changes. This thesis also includes a case study on the public library in Portland, Oregon, using primary sources to track how national debates and trends affected a single location during these tumultuous years.

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CENSORSHIP AND FREEDOM:  
AMERICAN LIBRARIES AND THE WORLD WARS

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

In the first seventeen years of the 20th century, American librarians were beginning to debate whether or not their paternalistic censorship for the good of the public was, indeed, for the good of the public. When the United States entered the First World War, however, most of that debate was placed to the side, as librarians approached censorship as their contribution to the war effort and their patriotic duty.

After the First World War was over, the embracing of censorship remained for a few years, but in the mid-1920s American librarians began once again to question the validity of censorship. By late 1939, those opposed to censorship had gained so much ground that the American Library Association was the first national association to formally adopt a stance opposing censorship, particularly on the basis of politics, religion, and nationality.<sup>1</sup>

The Second World War was on the horizon, however, and once more the beliefs and ethics of American librarians would face the pressures of war. How would the two decades of debate fare against fervent American nationalism? Would librarians use censorship once more in the name of the war effort, or would they hold to their ideals of freedom of information?

The goal of this thesis is to explore the answers to those questions, as well as the particulars of the First World War (why was censorship so unreservedly embraced?) and

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<sup>1</sup> David A. Lincove, "Propaganda and the American Public Library from the 1930s to the Eve of World War II," *RQ* 33, no. 4 (Summer 1994): 517, accessed January 15, 2015, JSTOR.

the years of peace (how did most American librarians turn against censorship in only two decades?). This thesis also includes a case study into the Library Association of Portland, Oregon, to discover how the librarians of a single city reacted to, moved with, and helped create national trends in the debate over censorship.

## CHAPTER TWO

### America's Libraries in the First World War

#### *Antebellum*

Before the United States entered the First World War, librarians were starting to push back against the prevailing ideas of paternalistic censorship. Most librarians still viewed censorship as being for the good of the public, but there was a growing movement that wanted to uphold the public's freedom to both read and hold minority views, rather than undermining them for the supposed sake of the public.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, American librarians were also debating the accessibility of foreign-language materials, and had been for many years.<sup>2</sup> Would immigrants be better served by gaining information about America in their native tongue and becoming more American more quickly, or would only offering English titles, and thereby forcing the immigrants to learn English, help the immigrants become more American over the long term?<sup>3</sup> The librarians were not yet concerned with the origin of the immigrants, or the languages of their texts, merely with the Americanization of both.

Despite the focus on Americanization, when working with other libraries abroad, American librarians embraced the international spirit. In the antebellum years, librarians were heavily involved in international work, seeing the librarian and scholarly

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<sup>1</sup> Evelyn Geller, *Forbidden Books in American Public Libraries, 1876-1939* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984), 108.

<sup>2</sup> Plummer Alston Jones, Jr., *Libraries, Immigrants, and the American Experience* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 12.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

communities as without borders.<sup>4</sup> When the British entered the war in 1915, American librarians were dismayed by the difficulties (caused by British censorship) in obtaining German propaganda, which the Americans saw as purely educational.<sup>5</sup> The sudden enforcement of borders where there previously were none shocked the internationally-minded community, or at least that portion of it that was not yet at war.

Aside from the sudden difficulties in obtaining literature from Europe, the war (while it was solely European) did not hugely affect American librarians. For the most part, they managed to maintain neutrality as a profession and in their inventories, at least in the American conflict between pacifists and supporters of the European war. Some librarians, particularly pacifist librarians, pushed for advocacy and not simply a lack of censorship, but that call returned to haunt them when the United States entered the war in April of 1917.<sup>6</sup>

### *Wartime (Spoken)*

When the war finally reached the United States, the national wave of fervent patriotism put a sudden and dramatic (though not complete) stop to the burgeoning debate on the merits of paternal censorship. The debate would return when the war was over, but for the duration of the war, censorship was the rule.

One example of the censors' train of thought comes from the Wisconsin State Library Commission. The commission revised its traditional position on neutrality, arguing that wartime conditions superseded purely academic concerns (such as a

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<sup>4</sup> Geller, *Forbidden Books*, 109.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

professional debate on censorship); the Wisconsin libraries must use their power as a public agency for the good of the country.<sup>7</sup> As far as the commission was concerned, not using one's strengths to help the war cause was equivalent to treason, and one of the library's key strengths was the ability to choose what would be readily available for public reading, and what would not be.

Most of the actual censorship was focused on politics. The St. Louis Public Library proudly announced in 1918 that it had removed not only literature that supported the German state, but also any books that discussed neutrality, socialism, or pacifism.<sup>8</sup> The Cleveland Public Library, in the same year, took a firm and public stand to remove all literature that might make the public question the American government or the war effort, and particularly those which might make the public sympathize with any enemy nation.<sup>9</sup> Libraries that announced their political censorship clearly expected it to be met with praise and applause from the public. This severe political censorship was apparently regarded as neither severe nor radical by those who implemented it; it was the logical duty of the library in war, and librarians deserved the praise they got for doing their part.

Another common form of censorship in many libraries was censorship based on language. This included both literature written in German and literature translated from German into English. The New Orleans Public Library removed all German literature from 1916 to 1919, and the Queens Borough Public Library removed German literature

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Jones, Jr., *Libraries*, 23.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

not just from their shelves but also from their public reports in 1919 and 1920.<sup>10</sup> The point of removing the censored books from their public reports was, in essence, to remove temptation. If the patrons of the library knew that a book existed, they could go looking for it elsewhere, even if they could not get it from the public library. Taking books out of the reports or the public card catalogs took them (mostly) out of the public eye, and left library patrons to read only those appropriately patriotic books that were still in circulation.

The libraries were not alone in their censorship of foreign language material. Thomas Montgomery, president of the American Library Association, noted in 1918: “It is evident that the German language is to be driven from our schools,”<sup>11</sup> showing it to be common knowledge that the German language itself was thought unpatriotic. Montgomery seems to have been simply noting fact; for him, removing German language instruction from schools was a necessary step that was neither welcome nor unwelcome. The public also added their efforts when possible: in Cleveland in 1918, one woman, a library patron who had requested information on the Reformation, apparently refused the first book the librarian offered her because it had “too much in it about the Germans.”<sup>12</sup>

Some librarians were cautious about censorship in this area. As the editorial from the May 1917 edition of *Library Journal* notes, librarians “should do their best... to make citizens of German birth and Germans in the midst of us, who are not disloyal to the home of their adoption, feel as much at home in our libraries and among our people as

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas L. Montgomery, “Civilization,” *Library Journal* 43 no. 8 (August 1918): 551.

<sup>12</sup> “An extreme case of anti-Germanism,” *Library Journal* 43, no. 3 (March 1918): 185.

those to the manner born.”<sup>13</sup> The censorship of the language, along with the constant awareness of Germany as an enemy nation, was not to become a hatred of German immigrants, so long as those immigrants were loyal to America before Germany. This line drawn by the editor of *Library Journal*, between people and ideas, makes it very clear that even some of the radical censors of the time still operated under a professional code of ethics; their professional ethics were different than contemporary ones, rather than being nonexistent.

One last type of censorship was more a deliberate choice of desirable literature and less a removal of undesirable books. The *Library Journal* notes in May 1917 that librarians should not place the emphasis solely on “books regarding war, but also on books representing patriotism, the history of our country, high standards of citizenship and a broad humanity of internationalism.”<sup>14</sup> Removing unpatriotic literature would not benefit the library patrons if there was no loyal literature offered in its stead.

The debate on censorship was not entirely dismissed, however. Some librarians still argued for moderation in the face of zeal. However, moderate does not equal liberal, and many of the moderates thus spent much time both decrying the most severe censorship and endorsing the more moderate (but still, to a contemporary view, rather excessive) censorship.

One particularly moderate-not-liberal example can be found in the March 1918 editorial of *Library Journal*. The editorial concedes that some librarians “have perhaps been overzealous in unduly including books and pamphlets... In war, it may be said,

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<sup>13</sup> “War is upon us,” *Library Journal* 42, no. 5 (May 1917): 345.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

there is only one side, but this is true only in an extreme sense.”<sup>15</sup> Yet it goes on to say, “Books of this [propagandist] character may fairly be withheld from the public,”<sup>16</sup> which is a fairly conservative view, from the contemporary standpoint. The piece ends on a note more liberal than others of its time: “The ban should scarcely be extended to cover pacifist literature, at least those which treat of the general subject of peace.”<sup>17</sup>

Another moderate viewpoint was held by a librarian at Princeton University, Ernest Richardson. He argued that free trade of ideas was an essential freedom, but limited like all other freedoms, and in war it must be limited to exclude anything which may help the enemy.<sup>18</sup> He concluded, however, that in America, as was not the case in Britain, “the people are sovereign, they have the right to know, and information cannot be withheld from them which could be kept from subjects.”<sup>19</sup> Censorship, then, was another wartime hardship like rationing, but in a democratic country it could only be taken so far, because democracy requires an educated and aware public.

Pacifist and moderate librarians did have to be careful, however. The then-president of the New York Library Association, Edward Stevens, announced himself to be a pacifist in his 1917 address to the association, but took great care to disavow any connection to various pacifist groups, including conscientious objectors. He named himself a “militant pacifier,” one who prefers peace but who, once drawn into a conflict,

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<sup>15</sup> “The long-looked for book campaign,” *Library Journal* 43, no. 3 (March 1918): 145.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Geller, *Forbidden Books*, 113.

<sup>19</sup> Ernest C. Richardson, “The Question of Censorship in Libraries,” *Library Journal* 43, no. 3 (March 1918): 154.

will end it as quickly as possible. His entire introduction consisted of seven sentences and around 300 words; six of those sentences mention peace. Of the peace-mentioning sentences, four mention war in a positive light, one mentions war in a negative light, and one does not mention it at all.<sup>20</sup> He spends almost as much time positively talking about war as he does peace. It is remarkable that he had to devote so much time to appeasement in order to hold to both his principles and his reputation. This level of care speaks to the power which rested behind the uncompromising patriotism of the time. A hint of disloyalty (to America or to the war effort) was a dangerous thing, and so the line between loyalty and professional principles was a precarious tightrope to walk.

### *Wartime (Silent)*

Sometimes, it is the words that go unsaid that are of most interest. To cover what the librarians at the time said and wrote about censorship is a key part of understanding their professional views on the topic, but so too is reading between the lines and seeing what was not said.

There are a few explicit declarations of censorship; St. Louis and Cleveland public libraries<sup>21</sup> provide two good examples, with St. Louis boasting of its “Dead,” “Missing In Action,” “Wounded In Action,” and “Disabled Through Shellshock” lists.<sup>22</sup> These were met with public approval, and considering that public approval is usually appreciated by public institutions such as libraries, one might expect more of these proud declarations.

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<sup>20</sup> Edward F. Stevens, “An Honorable and Lasting Peace,” *Library Journal* 42, no. 11 (November 1917): 851.

<sup>21</sup> Jones, Jr., *Libraries*, 23.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

It is also clear, through asides in the professional literature of the time, as well as omissions in library reports, that political censorship was rampant, expected, and professionally correct. That a “ban should scarcely be extended to cover pacifist literature”<sup>23</sup> implies that there was a ban, and that a ban was professionally ethical (even necessary), but it does not directly call for one or support one. The unquestioned removal of German literature from the shelves and the reports for two years (in Queens)<sup>24</sup> is an astoundingly sweeping and unselective act of censorship.

With this much censorship occurring, one might expect rather more discussion about it, particularly in the vein of praise or guidelines. Yet there is remarkably little such direct discussion. What little there is (e.g., the March 1918 editorial in *Library Journal* and Ernest Richardson’s piece titled “The Question of Censorship in Libraries”) tends to be on the moderate side of the discussion. Why would there be no unreservedly positive discussion of such a widespread practice? Why would librarians in favor of this censorship not speak out against the moderates?

One possible answer is that there was no need for librarians to defend censorship. If it was such a widely accepted practice, then perhaps the occasional dissident did not matter. Perhaps there was no serious threat to the practice of censorship, and so its proponents did not bother to defend it. This would explain why the librarians did not seem to be ashamed of announcing their censorship, but also why they would have no serious professional discussion in support of it.

Another possible answer may be that while the public lauded censorship, the librarians did not. The patriotic pressure to censor (both political material and foreign

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<sup>23</sup> “The long-looked for book campaign,” 145.

<sup>24</sup> Jones, Jr., *Libraries*, 22.

language material) was largely applied by the public, after all. Could many librarians have turned to censorship under pressure from the public, not by their own choice? Forced into a (professionally speaking) ethically questionable corner by outside pressure, it would make sense that librarians would spend little time defending the practice. Hence their implicit decision: to censor for the sake of the nation and the sake of a job, but to do so quietly, without defending something in which they didn't believe.

These are two very different answers to the question of why librarians were remarkably silent on the issue of censorship during the First World War, and they are both equally probable and unprovable, if the only method of research is looking at the censorship discussion during the war. However, these two answers would have led to very different discussions after the war, and so it will be within the literature from that period that a stronger answer may be found.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Peace and the Second World War

#### *Post-War, Pre-Depression: the 1920s*

In the immediate years following the First World War, librarians retained their censorship policies, likely motivated by the unabated nationalism of the general American public, who were watching the chaos still happening abroad (particularly in Russia) and wanted no part of it.<sup>1</sup> However, censorship was no longer such an issue for the majority of Americans. It had become the new norm, both for most people and for the government. The Supreme Court had upheld the Espionage Act in 1919,<sup>2</sup> and by 1924 new curbs on immigration had been written into law.<sup>3</sup> Political censorship was widely accepted.

On a side note, this widespread support of censorship even after the war would suggest that the lack of arguments during the war in favor of censorship was caused in large part by the general acceptance of the practice. If this was indeed the case, then there would have been no particular need for vocal support of censorship, although some of those who did speak out in support may have seen a need arising either from the few dissidents or from their own consciences. Unfortunately, considering the dearth of primary sources on the subject, this is and must remain speculation.

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<sup>1</sup> Evelyn Geller, *Forbidden Books in American Public Libraries, 1876-1939* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984), 115.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

To return to the topic at hand, the post-war years, the library profession was growing and beginning to establish itself as a profession, even though librarians on the individual scale still had relatively little power. The American Library Association (ALA) was growing in influence, in no small part thanks to the Carnegie Corporation, which used the ALA to funnel grant money.<sup>4</sup> A new elitism emerged out of disappointment with the reaction of the American public to the booming economy. Many librarians were concerned with the focus on mass-produced entertainment and (what they saw as) the lower quality of fiction that was being published in response to the growing demand.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, censorship was often being passed off as mere book selection. As long as everything was available to qualified readers<sup>6</sup> (who could presumably discern truth for themselves), the library was fulfilling its role as the provider of intellectual freedoms. They were merely choosing quality books; the fact that their choices often neatly aligned with their moral and/or political values was purely incidental.

As America entered the second half of the 1920s, however, a new wave of censorship began to climb, mostly focused on moral or religious issues (alcohol, evolution, sexual ethics, etc.).<sup>7</sup> This new movement, interestingly enough, sprang more from the general public than from the library profession. The librarian response to this

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 117-19, 128.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 132-3.

public push for censorship was not as affirming and supportive as one might think, considering the general embrace of censorship by the library profession.

More liberal voices among the librarian community began to speak out against censorship. One librarian in 1928, in an article published by *New York Libraries*, wished for a public outcry against censorship, and for the public to consider exactly what right librarians had to censor their reading.<sup>8</sup> Others called for the hearing of all sides of an issue (although, in unsurprisingly human fashion, this seemed to occur most often when the unpopular side was the side already expressed),<sup>9</sup> or else they called for a focus on community, and the reaching of people, rather than on paperwork and academic ideals.<sup>10</sup>

The most important response, in terms of long-term impact, was that freedom was becoming the predominant virtue of the library profession. This sometimes manifested in unexpected ways. Some of the more conservative librarians began to defend censorship in the name of freedom.<sup>11</sup> Overwhelmingly, this was not individual and personal freedom, but rather the freedom of the institution to act independent of the community and to decide its own values (whether those values supported or opposed censorship). Still, freedom was becoming the core value for librarians, and this shift in values could easily be seen as the source and beginning of the shift in the censorship debate in the swiftly approaching 1930s.

### *The Great Depression: the 1930s*

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>11</sup> David A. Lincove, "Propaganda and the American Public Library from the 1930s to the Eve of World War II," *RQ* 33, no. 4 (Summer 1994): 512, accessed January 15, 2015, JSTOR.

During the Great Depression, many public librarians saw reading rates climb, because the unemployed public “had the time to read and because they hoped reading would help them in one way or another.”<sup>12</sup> This was one of the few positive impacts of the Great Depression (considering the plummeting library budgets, and the rising unemployment even among librarians).<sup>13</sup>

Alongside the reading rates, however, the amount of overseas propaganda was also beginning to climb, particularly from the totalitarian governments growing in Germany and Japan.<sup>14</sup> This helped push the censorship debate forward; it was not a theoretical debate but a very real and pertinent one that the libraries faced every day.

There were many arguments made against censorship during this time period, some intellectual and some of more practical concern. One intellectual argument, advanced in the face of the rising tide of propaganda, was that libraries ought to offer truth, the full and unblemished truth, in an effort to combat the half-truths and misrepresented truths and full-blown lies that were unsurprisingly present in much of the propaganda.<sup>15</sup>

A practical consideration as to how to approach propaganda without censorship came from Stanley J. Kunitz, the editor of the *Wilson Bulletin for Librarians*.<sup>16</sup> Kunitz argued that, in order to properly consider themselves neutrally presenting both sides of an

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<sup>12</sup> Leon Carnovsky, “War and the Reading Public,” in *Books and Libraries in Wartime*, ed. Pierce Butler (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945), 107.

<sup>13</sup> Lincove, “Propaganda,” 511; Geller, *Forbidden Books*, 151.

<sup>14</sup> Lincove, “Propaganda,” 511.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 513.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

issue, librarians could not simply accept whatever propaganda was given to them on a controversial issue, as that would likely lead to an abundance of the majority opinion and a severe lack in the opposing sides. Rather, it was the duty of American librarians, so far as their budgets would allow them, to pursue whatever was lacking, and actively seek to balance their collections.<sup>17</sup>

Many librarians, however, still saw the need for censorship, at least where children's collections and morality issues were concerned.<sup>18</sup> They (and their more conservative colleagues who still advocated for political censorship) were often supported by library boards of trustees, who (more often than not) had the final say in censorship and who also tended to include the more conservative members of the local community.<sup>19</sup> One such trustee at the Seattle Public Library argued that because the library was run by taxpayers' dollars, it ought to follow the opinions of the majority of taxpayers, specifically the majority opinion upholding the censorship of minorities.<sup>20</sup>

The most important argument for censorship in this period, it would seem, was that libraries could not, and cannot, remain neutral. Libraries are inherently a part of their communities,<sup>21</sup> both influencer of and influenced by those around them. This makes them a force for good in the lives of their community, but also means that librarians must

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 514.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 517.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 516.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

decide the best way to serve said community.<sup>22</sup> The duty of librarians is to somehow balance truth, neutrality, and the desires of the community around them.

In 1939, the American Library Association demonstrated just how much the opponents of censorship had accomplished, as the first national Library's Bill of Rights was adopted (see appendix for full, original text). The ALA's Library Bill of Rights set forth broadened, ideal approaches to avoiding political censorship. It is important to note that it carried no proper weight and wielded no force to make libraries follow it (and, indeed, several months later, very few libraries had adopted it).<sup>23</sup> All the same, it marked an important milestone, as for the first time, a mainstream, national library association stated (however loosely) the importance of actively maintaining neutrality and resisting censorship. This was both a symbolically significant climax to two decades of debate, and a good sign (though not an entirely accurate prediction) of how American librarians would face the coming war.

#### *The Second World War: 1939-1945*

It stands as a testament to how far the debate on censorship had come since the First World War that as the Second World War approached (and began, and stretched out into its long six years), American librarians were not only fiercely debating censorship in the context of war (a mostly absent debate in the First World War), but the librarians were also aware that, as citizens of their country, they had more services they could provide than simple censorship or the lack thereof.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 517.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 517-18

Some librarians returned to (or perhaps had never abandoned) arguments used in the First World War to support censorship: the good of the nation, censorship's omnipresent nature, etc. One public librarian in particular, Felix Pollack, in early 1942, made the case for censorship by way of arguments that seemed to have sprung from the First World War, while he apparently remained ignorant of the actual impact of the First World War on the library profession.

Pollack seemed to think that the American librarian profession "was never before face to face with a threat to its very fundamentals and, hence, was never called upon to counteract it."<sup>24</sup> It is not clear why a historical lack of wartime crises for the library profession would be an argument in favor of censorship, unless Pollack meant to dismiss arguments against censorship on the grounds that the profession had never before considered the problem in light of wartime, and context (presumably) is everything. However, this is still a rather ineffectual move, considering that American librarians had indeed faced such a threat before, and had (in the years since) regretted the actions taken.

Pollack's argument was essentially that censorship and book selection were two terms for the same process, just with different reputations.<sup>25</sup> Assuming this to be fact, he proposed: "Why then, not be frank about [censorship]? Why not be honest, open, and wholehearted about it? Why not use an old, venerable, and unavoidable practice positively, purposefully, and systematically in order to do our part in the nation's defense

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<sup>24</sup> Felix Pollack, "Libraries in the Present Emergency," *Library Journal* 67, no. 1 (January 1942): 14.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

effort?”<sup>26</sup> In essence: censorship is already happening, so why not call it by its proper name and wield it openly as a force for good?

Another article from early 1942, this one written by a college library assistant in New York, Benjamin Chubak, agreed vehemently with Pollack’s call for censorship:

We must forget our peacetime attitude of permitting the public to choose their own reading matter. If censorship is called for, then let us censor! But we must exercise extreme care not to make this process a painful one. . . .The process should be painless, unobtrusive, but cleverly and systematically imposed. We can become the disseminators of knowledge--call it propaganda, if you will--which will help us win our present struggle. . . . let us impose this knowledge on the people; it is for their own good. . . . this is war, let us use war-like methods.<sup>27</sup>

Interestingly, Pollack and Chubak differed on the importance of war as context. Pollack apparently believed in censorship at all times (although it usually was framed as selection), while Chubak clearly states that he does not back censorship in times of peace, but entirely supports it in the face of war. It seems that librarians who would have disagreed just a few years earlier were united in favor of censorship. This is a similar impact to the one that the First World War had on the burgeoning censorship debate: opponents combining for what they believe to be the good of the country. However, the much smaller impact of the Second World War (compared to the impact of the First World War) is a credit to how far the debate progressed in the years between.

Many librarians rallied against political censorship, however, in light of the censorship occurring in Axis countries. One librarian, writing in late 1942, neatly demonstrates the spirit of this response. Apparently, a German newspaper in 1941 had been “profoundly concerned over the menace of the American public library and its

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>27</sup> Benjamin Chubak, "The Librarian: Morale Builder," *Library Journal* 67, no. 8 (April 1942): 348.

harmful influence on the public, particularly on immigrants.”<sup>28</sup> In light of Germany’s heavy censorship policies, the librarian simply said: “This protest over the influence of American libraries is a great compliment.”<sup>29</sup> The disapproval of Germany was both high praise and a strong incentive to refuse to censor.

Other librarians spoke out against censorship, upholding the professional values for which they had fought so hard in preceding years. An article in the *Library Journal* in early 1942 argued against censorship, and instead called for the deliberate promotion of American values:

The abundance of propaganda must be sifted to the end that truth may be made apparent. ... Libraries should provide information on both sides of controversial questions and every effort should be made to interest readers in acquiring sufficient information that they may be able to arrive at sane conclusions. One may ask, 'What is fascism, or communism, or nazism [*sic*]?' But to be complete, must not one have equally reliable information on democracy...Libraries... are in position actively to promote the principles of democratic living, are in position, if you please, to continue the ideals of democracy in this our native land.<sup>30</sup>

Even in the face of war, or perhaps especially in the face of war, freedom of information had to be upheld, so far as many American librarians were concerned. Books favoring both Nazism and democracy should be provided, and the American people would find the truth on their own, and hold it all the more dearly for the work they put into the search. It was this search for truth – and access to the truth – which many librarians held as a significant “principle of democratic living,” and to win the war by

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<sup>28</sup> Marjorie F. Rumble, "Libraries at Home and Abroad in a World at War," *Library Journal* 67, no. 19 (November 1942): 941.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Mary Peacock Douglas, "Libraries and Our Democracy," *Library Journal* 67, no. 3 (February 1942): 116.

abandoning principles would be the same as losing it. There was no point in fighting for democracy if democracy was destroyed by its defenders.

However, while freedom of information was hugely important, it was not the only important duty American librarians held, and many of them knew it. Many librarians emphasized the importance of encouraging the population through leisure reading, arming them with vocational manuals, reminding them of their shared cultural heritage, and providing stability (particularly to children).<sup>31</sup> It ought to be noted that this was not a realization confined to the opponents of censorship; the footnote for the previous sentence contains authors quoted above as fully advocating censorship in wartime as well as authors opposed to it, plus one article focused on other issues entirely.

In the end, the reaction of American librarians to the Second World War revealed two important changes that had occurred since the First World War. First, the political forces outside of the libraries had shifted dramatically on their own positions on censorship, thanks in no small part to the harsh demonstration of the results of unrelenting censorship by totalitarian governments. Second, American librarians had realized that they wielded a force (and decision-making power) of their own, separate from their communities. They were still influenced by outside forces, but they were no longer entirely swept along in the nationalistic fervor that characterized the First World War. Librarians could stand on their own, as a profession, and debate the proper application (or lack thereof) of censorship in war, without fear of immediate reprisal from their communities. They had the ability to make their own ethical decisions, and they chose to use it, regardless (for the most part) of which side of the censorship debate they

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<sup>31</sup> Rumble, "Libraries at Home," 940. Douglas, "Libraries and Our Democracy," 115-16. Pollack, "Libraries in the Present Emergency," 17. Chubak, "The Librarian: Morale Builder," 347-8. Zada Taylor, "War Children on the Pacific: A Symposium Article," *Library Journal* 67, no. 12 (June 1942): 561.

supported. Despite the fact that censorship was still debated in the Second World War, the fact that librarians could even debate it (and were doing so) was a significant and impactful change from the events of the First World War.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### A Case Study in Portland, Oregon

The previous two chapters explored broad, sweeping changes across the United States as a whole, with particular examples from around the country. This chapter seeks to explore a single region's experience with censorship during the world wars. To accomplish this goal, this chapter is focused on the Library Association of Portland, Oregon, and also includes the conferences of the Pacific Northwest Library Association (PNLA), a professional association with which the Portland libraries were greatly involved during the appropriate time period.

#### *First World War Antebellum*

Prior to the entrance of the United States into the First World War, Oregon public libraries in general were mostly neutral in regards to the war. "While the United States remained a neutral power... the official public library line was likewise 'neutrality'."<sup>1</sup> While the United States was neutral, so were the libraries, and so they did not censor either side based on political reasons.

The Portland library in particular offered both bibliographies centered around peace and a map of the war (posted in the lobby).<sup>2</sup> The library did continue to receive all

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<sup>1</sup> Wayne A. Wiegand, "Oregon's Public Libraries during the First World War," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 90, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 40.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

the usual foreign periodicals, including both England and Germany,<sup>3</sup> even though their patrons did not always agree with what those periodicals had to say. Some periodicals, as a consequence, suffered the written wrath of their readers in 1915: “There has been so much mutilation and vigorous expression of opinion by pencil and fountain pen that it has been necessary to remove the English periodicals and papers from the open shelves.”<sup>4</sup>

Even though they did not politically censor at the time, some librarians were rather amused by what they perceived as the public’s hatred of censorship. Here’s one Portland librarian’s perspective:

To the free-born American, rampantly independent and vociferously guarding himself with that old blunderbuss volley of 'personal rights' from any attempted invasion of his inalienable privilege of going to the dogs in his own way, anything that savors of supervision or censorship partakes of the inflammatory character of the proverbial red rag to his bovine majesty.<sup>5</sup>

### *The First World War*

When America entered the war, neutrality quickly turned to war fever. Portland librarians readily censored books “that fostered disloyalty to the government” or even hinted at the possibility.<sup>6</sup> This included pacifist literature, non-fiction which portrayed war in a poor light, or anything which could be seen as supporting modern or historical

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<sup>3</sup> Library Association of Portland, *Fifty-second Annual Report of the Library Association of Portland, Oregon* 52 (October 1915): 17.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ethel R. Sawyer, “Questionable Books,” *Proceedings of the Sixth Conference of the Pacific Northwest Library Association* 6 (1915): 28-29.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Topping, “The Opportunities for the Public Library,” (lecture presented at the annual conference of the Pacific Northwest Library Association, September 2-3, 1918), quoted in *Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Conference of the Pacific Northwest Library Association* 9 (1918): 39.

Germany. This was a fine line to walk sometimes, as can be seen in this 1918 librarian's review of the book *Men in War* by Andreas Latzkos:

It is frankly anti-military, but equally anti-German. It strips war to the last shred of all the adornments in which it has arrayed itself, until it stands forth naked and revolting. ... 'Men in War' has been barred from the mails by the postal authorities and is undesirable from a military standpoint. The danger is that indiscriminating readers will fail to see that although it is a revolt against militarism it is not also a tract for pacifism.<sup>7</sup>

In this case (as with other war literature), librarians had to balance the importance of promoting anti-German literature against the fear of promoting pacifism. They also had to judge whether or not the public was capable of taking the 'correct' message from the text; in the eyes of the censors, the general public had to be protected from its own ignorance.

In a marked difference to pre-war sentiment, the public itself seemed to advocate for this censorship. At the annual conference in 1918 of the Pacific Northwest Library Association (PNLA), a representative from the Washington State Council of Defense spoke to the librarians on "the necessity of exercising a rigid censorship over the books that bore on the war; the weeding out of anti-ally and pro-German books; the dangers of insidious pacifist doctrines,"<sup>8</sup> exemplifying the new public call for strong censorship.

In Portland, censored books were mostly taken out of circulation, though not removed from the library inventory, only to be loaned out with the approval of the head

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<sup>7</sup> Mabel Ashley, "Some War Books of the Past Year," *Proceedings of the Ninth annual Conference of the Pacific Northwest Library Association* 9 (1918): 17.

<sup>8</sup> Ruth Karr McKee, "State Council of Defense and How You Can Help," (lecture presented at the annual conference of the Pacific Northwest Library Association, September 2-3, 1918), quoted in *Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Conference of the Pacific Northwest Library Association* 9 (1918): 38.

librarian.<sup>9</sup> This fate was incredibly mild compared to what certain members of the public wished for: total destruction of the books.

In early 1918, one of the censored books removed from circulation was accidentally recirculated. When the library board of trustees found this out, they decided to conduct another, more thorough search of the shelves (with the help of library employees), and found another hundred titles that they deemed “pro-Prussian” and ordered them, along with the rest of the censored inventory, to be placed under actual lock and key for the remainder of the war. Another motion, which was defeated, was to celebrate July 4th that year by burning the censored titles in the library furnace. A local chapter of the Elk Lodge bemoaned the defeat of the more drastic verdict, and praised “for his patriotism” the board member who had advanced the idea.<sup>10</sup>

Not all Portland librarians agreed with this censorship. Some believed in the public’s ability to find the truth through reading, and viewed an informed public as a stronger force for the war effort than an ignorant but fanatical public. As one Everett librarian said in 1918:

Are we then to be penalized for our reading, and, like the Germans, be allowed only books which sound the call to enlist in the service of Mars? Will not the call to a righteous war ring out more strongly if all the winds of false doctrine are swept away by the relentless force of intelligent public opinion?<sup>11</sup>

Not all Portland librarians agreed with the war, either, but any action which was seen as anti-war sentiment was quickly shut down by public opinion, as one librarian experienced rather severely. M. Louise Hunt was a Portland librarian who simply did not

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<sup>9</sup> Wiegand, “Oregon’s Public Libraries,” 57.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 57-58.

<sup>11</sup> Ashley, “Some War Books,” 20.

buy war bonds. She was not legally compelled to do so, and she did not campaign against the war or against war bonds. She simply did not buy them.<sup>12</sup> An anonymous tip informed the local press of this fact, and Hunt very shortly became a target for wartime hysteria. The Portland library board met to consider her case; with the head librarian standing firmly behind her (though not behind her anti-war values), Hunt was cleared of disloyalty charges. The community, however, kept up the attack, in local newspapers, letters to the library board, and general public opinion. Hunt soon resigned, only three days after the uproar had begun, victim to the weaponized patriotism that the war had spawned.<sup>13</sup>

In retrospect, though the censorship during the First World War seems robust and unforgettable, by 1938, the Library Association of Portland had apparently let time weaken their hindsight. On their seventy-fifth anniversary, the annual report included a brief sketch of library history. When discussing the First World War, the association chose to focus on economic difficulties and the supplying of books to the military.<sup>14</sup> It did not mention censorship. While this might be seen as deference to brevity, the same article spent an entire paragraph (seventy-five words total) explaining that the noted anarchist and activist Emma Goldman had once applied for the use of the library's meeting hall and was accepted.<sup>15</sup> Still, no organization has ever wanted to think the

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<sup>12</sup> Wiegand, "Oregon's Public Libraries," 45.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>14</sup> William L. Brewster, "Historical Sketch," *Seventy-fifth Annual Report of the Library Association of Portland, Oregon 75* (October 1938): 44.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

worst of itself, and the Library Association of Portland, as well as the PNLA, certainly changed its views in the time between the world wars.

### *Between the Wars*

At the 1935 annual conference for the PNLA, a series of resolutions was presented by a Library Discussion Club of Seattle to the association for consideration. The first such resolution essentially argued that war takes away from culture and education; that fascism is contributing to war; and therefore the PNLA ought to declare itself opposed to war, war preparation, and fascism. Though discussion over the resolution seemed fairly evenly split, the committee eventually agreed to adopt a substitute resolution, that the association ought to stand for absolute freedom of discussion and opinion, and that such a resolution as originally presented was outside the scope of the association's jurisdiction.<sup>16</sup>

The following year, the PNLA considered "Periodicals of Change" in libraries. One librarian, Gertrude Watson, presented a paper on the topic. She argued that any refusal by libraries to carry periodicals consistently demanded by the public, regardless of how radical, communist, or socialist said periodicals may be, should not be tolerated. "The function of a periodical collection is," she explained, "to present a cross section of contemporary opinion. This requires that all sides of controversial questions of general interest be presented."<sup>17</sup> She then emphasized that her position was not one of neutrality: she was choosing a side and taking a stand against censorship, for the sake of the

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<sup>16</sup> Topping, "Opportunities," 39.

<sup>17</sup> Gertrude Watson, "Periodicals of Change--Propaganda," *Proceedings of the Twenty-Seventh Annual Conference of the Pacific Northwest Library Association* 27 (1936): 87.

libraries, the public, and democracy, because censorship could only aid the same social forces that put Hitler and Mussolini in power.<sup>18</sup>

The Library Association of Portland reported “unusual demands for the best books available on world affairs” throughout 1939,<sup>19</sup> just prior to the Second World War. The annual report made no mention of censorship of these books for one side or another, although it did mention elsewhere that the librarians were concerned that “Foreign newspapers and periodicals may be slow in reaching us.”<sup>20</sup> The annual report also comments that “[t]he war in Europe has greatly increased the importance of indexing events and people in the news as periodicals are received. All European maps have been in constant demand.”<sup>21</sup> In Portland, at least, it seems that the librarians were focused on maintaining the flow of information to a very interested public, rather than on monitoring the information received.

In the Pacific Northwest at large, however, librarians were certainly aware that the coming war posed the same questions (and the same dangers to ethics) that the last world war had. Some took immediate steps to counteract censorship: one librarian in Tacoma, Washington, reported that her library “tried to get rid of most of the [history] books written just after the last war because, of course, they were bound to be biased. Especially

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>19</sup> Library Association of Portland, *Seventy-sixth Annual Report of the Library Association of Portland* 76 (October 1939): 10.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 12.

is this true of histories of the war itself."<sup>22</sup> Northwest librarians were determined to not repeat the censorship of the previous war.

### *The Second World War*

Though, as one Portland librarian at the time said, the second world war seemed "some strange and dreadful echo" to the first war,<sup>23</sup> librarians' priorities entering the war appear at first glance to be rather different than they were in 1917.

As was the case in many other libraries, Portland librarians had a large portion of their attention focused on the sudden demand for technical materials due to the influx of new workers to the local shipyards. They compiled lists such as "Books on the Shipbuilding Industry for Executives and Engineers" and "Books for Shipworkers," and gathered information on a range of subjects "from cost estimating and keel-laying ceremonies to organization charts and personnel practice" and sent the information to the shipyards.<sup>24</sup>

The Portland library did make efforts to avoid the appearance of racism, a common source of censorship at the time.<sup>25</sup> In the 1941 annual report, the library takes the time to mention that they employed "two [African-American] pages, one Chinese and one Japanese"<sup>26</sup> and that the applicants to the Portland libraries made "a composite

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<sup>22</sup> Lola B. Bellinger, "Discarding Non-Fiction," *PNLA Quarterly* 6 no. 1 (October 1941): 59.

<sup>23</sup> Nell A. Unger, "Report of the Librarian," *Seventy-Ninth Annual Report of the Library Association of Portland* 79 (October 1942): 5.

<sup>24</sup> Library Association of Portland, *Seventy-eighth Annual Report of the Library Association of Portland* 78 (October 1941): 7.

<sup>25</sup> Edward Wagenknecht, "What the Citizen Expects of His Library," *PNLA Quarterly* 5 no. 2 (January 1941): 85.

<sup>26</sup> Library Association of Portland, *Seventy-eighth Annual Report*, 15.

photograph of Democracy and its Defenders. German, Italian, Russian, English, Scandinavian, Chinese, Japanese; Catholic, Protestant, Jew, Buddhist.”<sup>27</sup> However, it should be noted that, in the annual report of 1942, the only reaction to the local Japanese internment camp (referred to as the “Japanese Evacuation Center”) was to note that plans had been made to provide library service to the camp, and that they were “fortunate” to have two former library pages in the evacuation group, who could serve as librarians at the camp.<sup>28</sup>

In terms of actual reading materials, Portland did maintain its subscriptions to German and Italian periodicals through 1940,<sup>29</sup> although by October 1941 they cut back to “only those for which we keep a bound file” since most continental European periodicals were not making it to the United States.<sup>30</sup> They also did not censor materials that promoted peace. As the 1943 annual report stated, “We have noticed with much satisfaction that, as popular as accounts of the war are, there is fully as much interest in books on peace aims and post-war planning.”<sup>31</sup>

Librarians in the Pacific Northwest area were certainly opposed to censorship as a whole. At the PNLA annual conference in 1941, the president (a university librarian in Eugene, Oregon) began the conference with a speech that removed all doubt about his professional views of censorship:

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>28</sup> Unger, “Report of the Librarian,” 5.

<sup>29</sup> Library Association of Portland, *Seventy-seventh Annual Report of the Library Association of Portland* 77 (October 1940): 8.

<sup>30</sup> Library Association of Portland, *Seventy-eighth Annual Report*, 12.

<sup>31</sup> Library Association of Portland, *Eightieth Annual Report of the Library Association of Portland* 80 (October 1943): 13.

In the present phase [of the war] the library must see to it that it provides all the possible safeguards for preserving our democracy. This can be done in three ways: first, by choosing books on the basis of their value and usefulness to the community, and not because of the race, nationality, or political or religious views of the writers; second, by representing so far as possible all sides of any controversial question, by books and other reading matter...<sup>32</sup>

Other Pacific Northwest librarians agreed. One librarian noted in a paper on wartime and children's books (both oft-censored areas) that many books had recently been published with a "strongly nationalistic tendency" that would "ridicule or patronize other nations" (particularly Axis nations) "or to lavish indiscriminating praise on our own country. These are not attitudes which can be considered desirable in the creation of a lasting peace." Children's books ought not to anger the children against the current enemy, but should prepare them to make and maintain peace after the war was won.<sup>33</sup>

This long-term view is almost completely alien to the censorship attitudes of the First World War. The contrast is almost immeasurable between not trusting the general populace with anything that praised the Axis, and trusting children to see the enemy forces as human and worthy of dignity.

### *Chapter Review*

The Portland library, and the Pacific Northwest as a whole, embraced censorship both before and during the First World War, alongside a local community that celebrated fervent patriotism for the sake of the war. Yet in the years afterward, Portland and Pacific Northwestern librarians came to the realization that censorship was not the

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<sup>32</sup> Willis C. Warren, speech given at the annual conference of the Pacific Northwest Library Association, Victoria, B.C., Canada, August 27-29, 1941, quoted in *Proceedings of the Thirty-Second Annual Conference of the Pacific Northwest Library Association* 32 (1941): 13.

<sup>33</sup> Siri Andrews, "War, Books, and Children," *PNLA Quarterly* 6 no. 4 (July 1942): 163.

highest good; rather, it was a tool made for dictatorships, not for democracies. When these librarians were faced once more with a world war, they held firm to their newly-found professional ethics, and fought for democracy by embracing the difference of opinions that makes it possible. While some parts of this history may be regrettable, even during the better times, it is still a history that gives hope in the form of better truths to find, and higher standards to hold.

American librarians as a whole showed the positive effects that two decades' worth of debate can have on a single profession, and the effects that said profession can have on a nation as a whole. As one librarian in 1945 said, "What war - modern war at least - does to the popular view of great libraries is to drive home the fact to those who are willing to see it that whatever a great reference library may be to any given individual, or any group of individuals, it is a vital necessity to a *nation*."<sup>34</sup> Libraries have substantial power in their communities and their nations, and American librarians between the First World War and the Second World War managed to both grow into that power and learn how to debate, in proper democratic fashion, the ethics and proper use of that power.

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<sup>34</sup> Archibald MacLeish, "The Library and the Nation," in *Books and Libraries in Wartime*, ed. Pierce Butler (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945), 145.

## APPENDIX

## APPENDIX

### American Library Association's Original Library Bill of Rights

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:

1. Books and other reading matter selected for purchase from the public funds should be chosen because of value and interest to people of the community, and in no case should the selection be influenced by the race or nationality or the political or religious views of the writers.

2. As far as available material permits, all sides of questions on which differences of opinion exist should be represented fairly and adequately in the books and other reading matter purchased for public use.

3. The library as an institution to educate for democratic living should especially welcome the use of its meeting rooms for socially useful and cultural activities and the discussion of current public questions. Library meeting rooms should be available on equal terms to all groups in the community regardless of their beliefs or affiliations.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> American Library Association, "Council," *ALA Bulletin* 33, no. 11 (October 1939): 60-61, accessed April 25, 2016, JSTOR.

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