

# The Library Serves All Points Of View

First in three-part series.

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There's a book in the Santa Cruz Public Library system that has been singled out by the Moral Majority and the Rev. Jerry Falwell for expulsion from every public library and from every school library and classroom in the land.

It's called: "Our Bodies, Ourselves."

The book was written by the Boston Women's Health Book Collective. Its publication in 1973 by Simon and Schuster was hailed by the conservative Newsweek magazine with the statement: "From virginity to menopause, nutrition to karate, the female physical self is discussed with thoroughness, intelligence and fairness."

The Los Angeles Times reviewer declared: "One of the finest books to come out of the new women's movement . . . The book contains chapters on anatomy, myths about women, pregnancy, abortion, childbirth and sexuality . . . The simple sisterhood, deep humanity and reaching out of this book were irresistible to me."

But Falwell holds and expresses a different point of view. In a letter seeking funds to protect "our children's moral values," he stated: "I tell you, my friend—the little bit of this book that we have read is not only disgusting, it is shocking."

Later, in the same letter, he writes: "This is all part of the humanists' attempt to change our society. They realize that we will not endorse free love, free sex, so they are brainwashing our children . . ."

In addition to asking for financial support to eliminate such books from the libraries and schools, Falwell asks recipients of the letter to indicate with a checkoff in a box that "Yes! I will inquire in our local public libraries and let you know if 'Our Bodies, Ourselves' and/or 'Life and Health is available to our young people.'"

Yes, the local library system has received such inquiries . . .

"And that's fine," said Librarian Charles Atkins. "The public library exists to serve people with all points of view. We welcome inquiries about any of the

more than 300,000 books available throughout the library system.

"I want to stress that we are always willing to explain why we have purchased a particular book, why it is available on our shelves for our approximately 70,000 patrons to read or not read, as they choose.

"But I strongly doubt we would remove a book simply because someone disapproves of it. That would be censorship. We in the library system have neither the power nor the desire to censor books."

The key phrase in Atkins comment is "points of view." Atkins believes that the Rev. Mr. Falwell and his followers are as much entitled to their point of view in a democracy as are those who criticize the pressure on libraries and

schools to stock and use books only this group approves of.

"The library must safeguard points of view," Atkins said. "There are some people who criticize us strongly for having books favorable to or opposed to a particular religious faith.

"We have been much criticized, for instance, for buying some of the books written by some of the leading figures in the Watergate affair. But, seriously, how could anyone begin to understand any of that affair if he or she did not read the books by those who participated in the affair and by those who prosecuted them? A library must present information on all sides of an issue or a subject. Only then does a library have value for all of its users, for all of the community."

But what the Rev. Mr. Falwell is attempting, some say bluntly, is censorship.

And the American Library Association warns: "The freedom to read is essential to our democracy. It is continuously under attack. Private groups and public authorities in various parts of the country are working to remove books from sale, to censor textbooks, to label 'controversial' books, to distribute lists of 'objectionable books or authors' and to purge libraries."

Fact? Fiction?

Such books as "Huckleberry Finn," "Of Mice and Men," and "1984" are banned in some places in the U.S. the play "Death of a Salesman" by Arthur Miller was banned in some English high school classes in French Lick, Ind., be-

cause the Lord's name is taken in vain; some would ban Shakespeare's "The Merchant of Venice" because of the delineation of the character of Shylock, others want to ban "Little Black Sambo" because of its alleged racist overtones . . .

The ALA, in conjunction with the Association of American Publishers, asserts in a formal statement that has won the backing of many national teachers, ethnic and professional groups:

"We are deeply concerned about these attempts at suppression. Most such attempts rest on a denial of the fundamental premise of a democracy: that the ordinary citizen, by exercising his critical

judgment, will accept the good and reject the bad. The censors, public and private, assume that they should determine what is good and what is bad for their fellow-citizens."

Atkins said: "Censorship isn't new. Adolph Hitler burned books and others before him. It comes in cycles. Our library staff has discussed the current trend, the calls and complaints we receive. This was also a major topic of discussion at the recent ALA conference in San Francisco."

Various newspapers have asserted the new cycle of censorship began with the victory of the conservatives in the 1980 presidential and congressional elections.

(Tomorrow: "The Tropic of Cancer" was a problem.)

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