

# The Rise of Prejudice: Book Ban [C1]

Le guerre culturali hanno portato a un aumento dei tentativi di vietare alcune letture nelle scuole e nelle biblioteche degli Stati Uniti. Ne parliamo con la presidente dell'Associazione americana delle biblioteche.



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In the 1930s a campaign was conducted by the German Student Union in Nazi Germany to ceremonially burn books. The books targeted were those viewed as being subversive or as representing ideologies opposed to Nazism. This common practice of authoritarian regimes seems extreme today. But, in fact, [challenging](#), censoring or [banning](#) books is very common in democracies, too.

## HUCKLEBERRY FINN

The US has been [challenging](#), censoring or [outright banning](#) books for centuries. This can be for political, moral or religious reasons. Mark Twain's book Adventures of Huckleberry Finn has been challenged numerous times, most recently because it is said to be "racially insensitive". Such controversies are often widely publicised.

## PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

However, the vast majority of challenges these days target books, old and new, written by or expressing the views of minority communities, especially the [LGBTQIA+](#), Black or Indigenous communities. Last year, the American Library Association (ALA) — the oldest and largest library association in the world — documented 1,269 attempts to censor library books and resources in the US. Around half of these were related to books held in school or public libraries. This is almost double the figure from the previous year, and the highest number recorded since the ALA began compiling such data more than twenty years ago.

## FREEDOM TO READ

Since 1982, the ALA has helped to promote Banned Books Week, an annual campaign that celebrates and defends the freedom to read. More recently, this has evolved into a national campaign called Unite Against Book Bans, which protects the rights of everyone to access a variety of books of their choice in libraries and elsewhere. To find out more, we spoke to Lessa Kanani'opua Pelayo-Lozada, president of the ALA. We began by asking her why book bans are suddenly a [hot topic](#). **Lessa Kanani'opua Pelayo-Lozada**(American accent): There is a coordinated and organised effort amongst groups who are a [vocal](#) minority trying to ban and silence the voices of [LGBTQIA+](#) and Black and Indigenous people of colour's stories and histories. We put out our top 13 list last year and the majority of titles focused on those two communities, [under the guise](#) of being sexually explicit or inappropriate, often [pushing a specific moral agenda](#). And so the American Library Association knows that this is a [vocal](#) minority because of a bipartisan survey that was conducted in March of 2022 that found that 71 per cent of voters were against book challenges in public libraries... so we know that these are just a [vocal](#) minority trying to push their own agenda on the broader society and to stop individuals from having their freedom to read what they want.

## MAKING A COMPLAINT

Libraries take stated concerns about the content of books very seriously. Pelayo-Lozada explained how the process of [challenging](#) a book works.

**Lessa Kanani'opua Pelayo-Lozada:** It's a little bit different for every institution... so my library, for instance, how a book challenge comes to light is somebody comes in and says that they [have an issue](#) with a book or a [display](#) or a program that's going on. And so then they'll have a conversation with the librarian. And then if they still are [upset](#), oftentimes if it's a legitimate concern, a conversation is all that's needed to help them understand how we select the materials for our libraries, how we decide what programs to host. But if they still want to challenge, then they're invited [to fill out a form](#) that asks them to provide reasons why they want to challenge the book... then a committee is formed to review it, to see if their reasons for wanting the book banned [uphold](#).

## FEAR OF DIFFERENCE

We then asked Pelayo-Lozada whether this was a reflection of supremacist values in American society. **Lessa Kanani'opua Pelayo-Lozada:** Yeah, it absolutely reflects our larger society and it reflects the divisiveness that we are experiencing. Libraries are stuck in the middle of these sort of culture wars, or woke wars, [if you will](#). But we know that libraries provide access to information for everyone, regardless of an individual's point of view and regardless of their background. And that's what libraries are for. They're there for everyone. And so we are being attacked right now because we are trusted public institutions and we are places for everyone. And that scares a lot of people who don't want others to have access to information or access to critical thinking and different points of view and different ways of living.

## AN ATTACK ON EMPATHY

So what happens when books are banned, and why is it so important to stop this happening? **Lessa Kanani'opua Pelayo-Lozada:** The [harm](#) of book bans is that when we limit an individual's right to access information, an

individual's right to see themselves in stories, then we are limiting especially our children's ability to develop empathy, our children's ability to understand the ways that other people live their lives. We're also taking away a parent's ability to have difficult conversations with their children. So often our children are going through things in life that a parent may not be able to fully explain to them, but they can use a book as a starting off point for a conversation about what their family's values are and how they operate in the broader realm of society. And when we take away a family's right to access the books that are right for them, then we are [doing our entire society a disservice](#) and honestly threatening the very existence of our democracy and our right to our [First Amendment](#), our ability to be able to see different perspectives and to have this... robust society that we say that we want.

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# Glossary

- **LGBTQIA+** = Lesbiche, Gay, Bisessuali, Transgender, Queer, Intersessuali, Asessuali ('+' include altre identità di genere)
- **hot topic** = tema controverso
- **upset** = turbato
- **uphold** = confermarsi
- **challenging** = contestare
- **display** = espressione
- **to fill out a form** = compilare un formulario
- **doing our entire society a disservice** = pregiudicare
- **have an issue** = avere un problema
- **harm** = male, danno
- **First Amendment** = Primo Emendamento
- **banning** = proibire
- **outright** = completamente
- **vocal** = che si fa sentire
- **under the guise** = con il pretesto
- **pushing a specific moral agenda** = promuovere degli obbiettivi
- **if you will** = per così dire