

In recent years, book challenges have become increasingly popular across the United States. While the majority of these challenges pursued material found in public school libraries, restrictions are now moving forward to target public libraries. This shift in focus has a potential to move beyond the scope of American youth, instead impacting the availability of books to everyone in the community. Keen to these trends, the ALA has found that nearly half of the book challenges that occurred between January and August of 2023 took place in public libraries. Notably, the majority of challenged books are by or about people of color or members of the LGBTQA+ community. Many classic and contemporary authors, including Margaret Atwood and John Green, have fallen victim to book challenges across the country. Contributing to the nationwide struggle, groups such as Moms for Liberty and Utah Parents United have published lists of “objectionable” books and lobbied for new legislation and policies that would make it easier to challenge books in the future.

In light of this, the upcoming statistics reflect a new reality for librarians and libraries nationwide: our profession is moving towards the front lines of the continuing culture wars. Deborah Caldwell-Stone, director of the ALA’s Office for Intellectual Freedom, details the shift from school to public libraries, stating that, “Now, we’re seeing those same groups come to public libraries and come after the same books, essentially depriving every one of the ability to make the choice to read them.”

As future librarians, this article illustrates an imperative shift in focus throughout the profession, as librarians move to protect the fundamental freedoms of the public. It brings issues and trends to our attention, as well as highlights some of the impacts that this movement has had on the nation. Thus, a question arises: is there a way to find a compromise between groups that aim to ban books and libraries that move to protect books?

Reference

Harris, E. & Alter, A. (2023, September 21). Book Bans Are Rising Sharply in Public Libraries, *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/21/books/book-ban-rise-libraries.html>Links to an external site.