

Kurt Vonnegut

Dear Friend,

On April 21, 1970, a teacher at Jefferson Davis High School in Montgomery distributed copies of "Welcome To The Monkey House," one of my short stories, to her junior English class.

She was fired the next day for distributing "literary garbage."

The ACLU filed suit on behalf of the teacher, and on June 9, 1970, she was reinstated. Quoting from an earlier Supreme Court decision, the judge ruled:

Our nation is deeply committed to safeguarding academic freedom, which is of transcendent value to all of us and not merely to the teachers concerned. That freedom is therefore a special concern of the First Amendment, which does not tolerate laws that cause a pall of orthodoxy over the classroom. ... The classroom is peculiarly the "marketplace of ideas."

Until very recently, there have been few attempts by school officials and others to censor library and textbooks.

Now, the book-burners are back.

Last June a group in Warsaw, Indiana publicly burned 40 textbooks the school board had found to be "objectionable." Buoyed by public support, the school board then fired three teachers and dropped nine literature courses. A federal judge upheld the school board. The ACLU is appealing the case.

The American Library Association reports that complaints to public libraries have increased fivefold since the election of Ronald Reagan.

Self-styled censors have undertaken a new national effort to rid classrooms and libraries of books of which they disapprove.

-- Rev. Tom Williams of the Abingdon, Virginia Emmanuel Baptist Church demanded that the local librarian show him who had checked out certain books, including Philip Roth's Goodbye Columbus and Sidney Sheldon's Bloodline, because he felt they were "strictly filth."

When refused, he obtained other clergy support and is now threatening to remove the library board members and to have a public referendum on the November 1981 ballot asking voters "if their tax dollars should be used to purchase pornography through the public library."

- Rev. George Zarris, chairman of Moral Majority in Illinois, has openly encouraged the removal and burning of "unfit" library books. Because of community pressure, State Senator Jeremiah Joyce has introduced a bill into the Illinois General Assembly that would make librarians liable for prosecution for distributing "harmful" material to minors.

The Island Trees, N.Y. school board removed nine books from high school libraries, including my own Slaughterhouse Five and Bernard Malamud's The Fixer. The ACLU successfully appealed from a lower court's decision upholding the removal but the case might still be reviewed by the Supreme Court.

A Vermont school district's ban on Dog Day Afternoon and The Wanderers was upheld by a federal court last October.

I am offended as a citizen, as a writer, and as an ACLU member that certain elements are trying to drag us backward to the darker days of censorship.

The freedom to choose or reject ideas, to read books of our choice, and to publish freely is the very bedrock of our free society. The First Amendment is a prohibition of governmental interference with free speech.

Because of public apathy, the best friend we have against the censors and book-burners, the American Civil Liberties Union, is in dire financial straits.

In 1933, the ACLU won an historic anti-censorship decision admitting James Joyce's Ulysses into the U.S. They have led the fight ever since.

"I'd hate to think what the First Amendment rights would amount to today -- if they still existed -- without the vigilance and dedication of the ACLU," said New York Times columnist Tom Wicker. "The severe challenges to free speech and free press that we've seen in recent years, not all of which

have been overcome, make it clear that if he hadn't had the ACLU, we'd have had to invent it."

Many of us don't remember the time when we were told what we could read.

The idea of censorship is appalling, even to many conservative leaders:

"Don't join the book-burners," said President Eisenhower in 1953. "Don't be afraid to go into your public library and read every book as long as any document does not offend your ideas of decency. That should be the only censorship."

Cases of textbook burning and library censorship have been reported so rapidly in the past few months that the ACLU is physically and financially unable to cope with the legal burden.

No book placed in a public library should be forcibly removed. No textbook should be burned. The book-burners must be stopped.

I have never written a letter asking anyone to help a cause. Because I feel so strongly about what is happening in our country today and because I know the tremendous financial burden being placed on the ACLU, I have decided to do what I can to fight this ugly and dangerous trend.

You have benefited from the past work of the ACLU.

Now the ACLU needs you to help bear the cost of this new fight.

The "New Right," the "Moral Majority," and the television preachers receive millions of dollars each week from their supporters. We need to do the same, or they will go unchallenged.

I urge you to send as big a check as possible to the ACLU today. I will do the same.

Sincerely,



Kurt Vonnegut

P.S. Just reading about a book-burning is bad enough. Seeing one must be a sick and saddening experience. The enclosed photograph scares the daylights out of me.



Dear Kurt Vonnegut:

Yes, I'll help fight the book-burners.
The check for my gift or membership is enclosed.

Contributions Only:

\$20 \$30 Other \$ _____

I want to join the ACLU Citizen's Lobby. Please send me a free subscription to *Civil Liberties Alert*, ACLU's legislative bulletin published 8 times a year.

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Membership	Individual	Joint
Basic	<input type="checkbox"/> \$20	<input type="checkbox"/> \$30
Contributing	<input type="checkbox"/> \$35	<input type="checkbox"/> \$50
Sustaining	<input type="checkbox"/> \$75	<input type="checkbox"/> \$75
Supporting	<input type="checkbox"/> \$125	<input type="checkbox"/> \$125
Life	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1,000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1,000

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When you join ACLU you will receive . . .

- A subscription to *Civil Liberties*, keeping you up-to-date on major challenges to your rights and freedoms.
- Membership in the local ACLU chapter in your area and all periodicals and bulletins published by your local chapter.
- Voting rights to elect the members of the board of directors of your ACLU chapter.

A copy of the last financial report filed with the New York Department of State may be obtained by writing to: New York State Department of State, Office of Charities Registration, Albany, New York 12231, or to ACLU.