
The War on Books and Ideas: The California Library Association and Anti-Communist Censorship in the 1940s and 1950s

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ABSTRACT

USING PRIMARY SOURCES AND RELATED documents, this article chronicles the California Library Association's (CLA) battle against anti-Communist censorship attempts from 1946 to 1956 in schools and public libraries as well as on the legislative front. An overview of the "Fiske report," published in 1959, is offered as an explanation of how intellectual freedom challenges impacted California librarians of the period.

INTRODUCTION

California Library Association (CLA) President John D. Henderson (1941) predicted that the 1940s would mark a time of "war on books and ideas" (p. 120) for librarians everywhere. Worldwide, public libraries were being suppressed into "political servitude" as fascist regimes assumed power. After all, people may make history, Henderson pointed out, but ideas make people, and so what better way to control others than to control what they read. "The problem of censorship," one intellectual freedom advocate advised, "in relation to library services is a perennial one. But it takes on particular urgency at the present time, as repressive movements against so-called 'radical' literature . . . endanger the freedom of research and discussion that is basic to American democracy" (Haines, 1941, p. 138).

THE BIRTH OF TWO COMMITTEES

Into this political climate was born the CLA "Committee on Intellectual Freedom to Safeguard the Rights of Library Users to Freedom of

Inquiry," created in 1940 just four months after the establishment of the American Library Association's own committee of the same name. Helen E. Haines, collection development professor and author of the library school standard *Living With Books*, was appointed chair. The purpose of the committee, according to Haines (1941), was "to serve as a medium through which the CLA can affirm professional policy regarding individual or organizational attempts to restrict library service to readers by censorship of library collections or by the suppression of particular books" (p. 138). Furthermore, the committee supported the principle that "the public library must be free to furnish materials on all subjects of public interest and to represent, in that material, conflicting points of view" (p. 138).

Ironically, almost simultaneously in another part of the state a second committee concerned with censorship was also taking shape. After ten years of aggressive agitation by farm and dock labor unions, Californians were ripe for legislation to suppress "radical" thoughts and actions (Scobie, 1974). Therefore, in early 1941, a legislative Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities in California was established with State Senator Jack Tenney appointed as chair. Predating U. S. Senator Joseph McCarthy's House Un-American Activities Committee by an entire decade, the "Tenney Committee," as it came to be known, was charged with investigating and ascertaining "all facts causing or constituting interference with the National Defense Program in California or rendering the people of the State . . . less fit physically, mentally, morally, economically or socially" (Barrett, 1951, p. 13). Included within this committee's investigative purview were members of the Communist Party, Fascist organizations, German Nazis, and any other group known to wish harm on the people of the United States.

EARLY INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM EFFORTS

Though her committee did not meet during its initial year of existence, Haines (1941) nevertheless was able to account for two notable intellectual freedom activities in her first annual report. In February, a CLA Bay District Library Discussion group featured a presentation by Max Radin, former nominee to the California Supreme Court whose nomination had been turned down because of past suspected "radical activities" (Barrett, 1951, p. 11). Contending that, as Americans, "[w]e are committed to serving the general ideal of our country," he asserted that democracy can be maintained "without withholding information about the other side for fear that readers would be contaminated" (Radin, 1941, p. 19). At a second CLA meeting, two months later, Stanford University Librarian Nathan Van Patten (1941) advocated a similar message, urging colleagues to "resist every attempt which may be made by individuals or organizations to suppress particular books, pamphlets, peri-

odicals, and newspapers" (p. 344). Haines (1941) called both speeches "valuable contributions to the professional literature of the year" (p. 138).

With the exception of an exhibit displayed at two public libraries in recognition of Freedom of the Press Week, the Committee on Intellectual Freedom remained relatively quiet over the next few years (Haines, 1945a). Haines noted in her 1945 annual report: "no reports of restrictive action affecting the right of libraries to supply controversial material for freedom of inquiry by readers have come to this committee during the year" (Haines, 1945b, p. 76). Apparently the local library community had successfully carried out ALA's wartime admonition that "[w]ith such minor limitations as are occasioned by military necessity, librarians will protect the right of inquirers to find in the library material on all sides of controversial issues" (Nyholm, 1942, p. 149).

In 1946, supporters of intellectual freedom were soon startled into action, however, when Tenney's committee began to investigate well-known authors such as Carey McWilliams, Langston Hughes, and Sherwood Anderson. Any textbooks with which they and other suspected "subversives" were associated came under particular scrutiny (Matthews, 1981, p. 53). As the Senate Investigating Committee on Education made clear: "If there is a covey of writers who have been affiliated with a long series of front organizations and they unite in providing basic materials . . . for use in . . . our public school system, then obviously such books should be viewed with suspicion" (California Legislature, 1953, p. 150).

One such "suspect" was the *Land of the Soviets* (Stewart, 1942), a social studies textbook challenged by a member of the Glendale Board of Education on February 18, 1947 (California Legislature, 1947, p. 313). After discovering that its editor, Maxwell Stewart, was "listed with such outstanding Communists and fellow travelers as John Howard Lawson, Langston Hughes, Dashiell Hammet, Haakon Chevalier, etc.," Tenney's committee quickly condemned the book as "pure pro-Soviet, pro-Communist propaganda" (Tenney, 1947, p. 643). The use of such a textbook in schools, they added, could only be motivated by "a sinister objective."

Meanwhile, in Northern California, a similar attack was being waged by the Sons of the American Revolution against the *Building America Series*. Purposely written to provoke classroom discussion and thought, this multivolume set of textbooks had been used in classrooms nationwide for over thirteen years (Wiles, 1948, p. 109). Nonetheless, anti-Communist watchdogs claimed the books' controversial style "studiously" underplayed the good aspects of the American way of life, while displaying all of its faults (California Legislature, 1953, p. 151). According to Richard E. Combs, member of both the Tenney Committee and the Senate Committee on Education, the *Building America Series* placed "undue emphasis on slums, discrimination, economic royalism, unfair labor practices, crooked politicians, organized crime and vice, moral decadence and a

great many other elements that comprise the seedy side of life" (cited in California Legislature, 1953, p. 151).

The *Building America* issue came to the attention of the CLA Committee on Intellectual Freedom with the publication of an article in the *Los Angeles Times*, February 25, 1947 ("Textbook Series"), detailing the testimony of Tenney Committee member Combs. CLA's reaction was immediate, passing resolutions in early 1947 in support of the use of both *Land of the Soviets* and *Building America* as textbooks (Matthews, 1947, p. 1172). In addition, a task force was formed to respond to allegations against *Building America*. Led by San Bernardino county librarian Helen Luce, a group of public and school librarians carefully reviewed each volume of the series and, in a CLA-sponsored pamphlet entitled *The Right to Know: An Analysis of the Criticisms of Building America* (California Library Committee on Intellectual Freedom, 1948), rebutted Combs's objections point by point. Called by one educator "the most complete refutation of the reports of the investigators working for the California Senate" (Wiles, 1948, p. 111), the pamphlet proved Combs's criticisms to be unfounded and exaggerated.

At stake here were much more far-reaching intellectual freedom issues than just the proposed suppression of provocative textbooks. Fueled by citizens' complaints, the Tenney Committee proceeded to introduce several bills "designed to prevent the teaching of controversial subjects . . . and to increase the legislative control over the selection of textbooks and educational policies" (Barrett, 1951, p. 300). Among them was SB 1026 (1947), which would have revamped the school social studies curriculum by prohibiting the introduction of any kind of "propaganda" in the classroom. For the first time, California's long-standing tradition of an educational system independent of politics was seriously threatened (Scobie, 1974, p. 204). Recognizing this, the Southern and Mount Shasta Districts, representing well over half the membership of CLA, quickly passed and sent to the legislature a resolution opposing SB 1026 (Matthews, 1947, p. 1172). The bill, which was passed by the Senate, eventually was defeated by the Assembly.

INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM AND THE OATH OF LOYALTY

No sooner did word of CLA's Sacramento victory go out to the media ("Status," 1948, p. 65) than more trouble began to brew in Southern California. On April 27, 1948, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors adopted a program requiring all county employees to sign a four-part loyalty oath, including: (1) the standard oath promising support of the constitutions of the United States and California; (2) a promise to not advocate or become part of an organization that advocates the overthrow of the American government; (3) a declaration of any aliases used; and (4) disclosure of support for any of the organizations targeted by the

Tenney Committee (California Legislature, 1949, p. 595). Seventy-five employees, including twenty from the county library, refused to sign section 4 on grounds of “invasion of intellectual freedom” (“Effect on the Los Angeles County,” 1950). A lawsuit on behalf of these employees soon followed.

Though the signing of loyalty oaths had long been the practice of many governmental agencies, the Los Angeles County situation was particularly distasteful because of the requirement to disclose whether the employee had ever “been a member of or directly or indirectly supported” any of the 142 organizations and publications listed by the Tenney Committee (Hughes & Smith, 1950, p. 106). Besides the broader civil rights issues represented here, the matter was even more thorny for librarians who could have appeared to be “supporting” communism by including communist materials in their library collections. As Hughes and Smith wondered, was a librarian who circulated or made available a copy of the *New Masses* “directly or indirectly supporting” the *New Masses*? Likewise, was anyone who read communist tracts guilty of supporting the communist party?

Nettled by the library employees who refused to sign the oath, the Board of Supervisors next turned its attention to the county librarian, John D. Henderson, whom they claimed had advised staff to refrain from signing the affidavit of loyalty (Smith, 1970, p. 91). In addition, the supervisors decided to create a five person board to examine all books purchased and circulated by the county library. As Supervisor Jessup explained, “we should have the committee examine all books on the shelves of the public library due to the fact, in my mind, I am not satisfied our librarian—Mr. Henderson—is free of those liberal thoughts that we don’t like to see in the mind of the head of our library” (cited in Berninghausen, 1948, p. 1545). Though this action was applauded by Jack Tenney (“Tenney Offers Aid to County in Red Inquiry,” 1948), even the traditionally conservative *Los Angeles Times* saw the supervisors’ move toward the creation of a censorship committee as a “grave error” (“Showing How Easily Censorship can Happen,” 1948).

The library community, which was outraged nationally as well as statewide, swiftly rallied its forces. Not only was this the first time a “board of censors” was being considered by a political body, but this was the first reported case of a direct attack against a librarian for his “liberal ideas” (Berninghausen, 1948, p. 1546). Miriam Matthews, as chair of the CLA Committee on Intellectual Freedom, testified on Henderson’s behalf at an open hearing before the Board of Supervisors (Matthews, 1981, p. 54). Along with A. A. Heist of the American Civil Liberties Union, she also worked fast to round up support by the League of Women Voters, the Parent-Teacher Association, the Democratic party, the American Library Association, and local newspapers (“Los Angeles Supervisors Intend No

County Censorship," 1948, p. 1732; Smith, 1970, p. 90). Prominent Angelenos, such as Harold Hamill, director of the Los Angeles Public Library, and Lawrence Clark Powell, librarian at the University of California, Los Angeles, came to Henderson's defense in the press (Berninghausen, 1948, p. 1546). For its part, CLA passed a "Resolution on the Los Angeles County Library Committee" outlining the professional collection development and intellectual freedom responsibilities of librarians, while decrying any attempt to thwart those efforts through a censorship board ("Proceedings 50th Annual Meeting," 1948, p. 76).

Eventually the board abandoned the lay censorship committee idea thanks, in large part, to the CLA and other organizations' efforts to bring the issue to the public's attention (Berninghausen, 1949). However, the oath of loyalty suit raged on for several more years, prompting the CLA Committee on Intellectual Freedom to draft a "Resolution Protesting Loyalty Investigations" ("Proceedings 50th Annual Meeting," 1948, p. 77). Objecting on the grounds that they intimidate employees, create an atmosphere of surveillance and suspicion, endanger civil rights, inhibit freedom of expression, and imply guilt by association, the resolution protested all repressive loyalty investigations in California, "such as those which require the disclosure of organizations to which an employee belongs or has belonged. . ." (p. 77). The resolution was adopted by CLA and served as a model for ALA's own statement on the abuse of loyalty oaths in libraries (Robbins, 1991, p. 103).

"IT HAPPENED IN BURBANK"

Over the next three years, threats to intellectual freedom continued but at a less frenetic pace. With Jack Tenney, who had resigned his post in 1949, no longer at the helm of the California Un-American Activities Committee, investigations into the background of suspected "subversives" became less vicious and sensational (Barrett, 1951, p. 352). For instance, a statewide loyalty bill, SB 515 (1949), which originally defined a "Communist" as "a person . . . who prints, publishes, edits, issues or knowingly circulates, sells, distributes or publicly displays any book, paper or document . . . containing or advocating Communism" ("Legislative Action," 1949)—wording which alarmed librarians and, therefore, was actively opposed by the CLA—was passed without the offensive definition of "Communist" ("State Legislation on Loyalty," 1949). During this period, copies of *Intellectual Freedom is Every Librarian's Responsibility* were distributed to all CLA members ("Status," 1948, p. 65) and the CLA Committee on Intellectual Freedom published a short-lived run of its *Intellectual Freedom Bulletin*.

Then, on June 14, 1951, an article in *Alert*, a "strident anti-Communist newsletter," was released on "The Library Situation and What Can be Done About It" (Smith, 1970). In it, authors Norman Jacoby and Edward

H. Gibbons recommended that civic leaders “watch the policy of their libraries in the circulation and promotion of subversive publications” (cited in Smith, 1970 p. 92). One should check the “balance” in the library’s collection between pro- and anti-Communist literature, they admonished, and make sure that staff know how to identify a pro-Communist tract. The records of authors and publishing houses should also be checked as well as the records and “organization alliances” of staff. But be prepared, they advised. *“You will be astounded at what you will find out. You will also be astounded at the defensive and antagonistic reaction that will be provoked in many library circles by even the most conservative approach to this problem”* (cited in Smith, 1970, p. 92).

Despite this final warning, a Burbank Public Library trustee invited Jacoby and Gibbons to the July 1951 library board meeting to discuss their recommendations. As a result, the library trustees passed “a unanimous request that the City Council instruct the City Attorney to draft a resolution to the League of California Cities to approve the labeling of subversive and immoral books in California public libraries” (Smith, 1970, p. 93). On September 4, 1951, the City Council voted unanimously to act on the library board’s proposal.

Reaction by Burbank citizens was rapid and heated. At the City Council meeting the following week, local resident Thoburn E. Lyons protested the council’s action, saying that “we should watch carefully the methods we use, lest we destroy the very thing we seek to protect” (“Protest Heard on Library Red Screening,” 1951). Two days later, Donald C. Skone-Palmer, chair of the local International Association of Machinists’ legislative committee, reminded council that the labeling of authors is the “first step toward censorship” (“Council Asked to Reconsider,” 1951). Though the mayor admitted that he believed the city librarian should have “the benefit of some formula to assist . . . in the choice and rejection of printed materials . . . so that, insofar as possible, the reading public may be safeguarded against the insidious poisonings of professional, international propagandists,” the council agreed to “maintain status quo” until a statewide investigation could be conducted (“Library ‘Audit’ Plans Dropped,” 1951, pt. 1, p. 1). No local library censorship committee would be established; however, a resolution to the League of California Cities was submitted requesting a survey of representative jurisdictions to determine how they “resolve the problem of the infiltration of insidious propaganda and other printed material inimical to the American way of life into their public libraries” (pt. 1, p. 2).

As soon as the CLA Committee on Intellectual Freedom heard of the situation, a resolution addressed to the League of California Cities was drafted against the use of labeling in libraries (“San Francisco Conference,” 1951, p. 105). Not only was it approved by CLA, but the chair of the committee was directed to attend the league’s convention and present

CLA's case (Smith, 1970, p. 94). Once the league heard CLA's resolution, they failed to take any action on Burbank's proposal, ending the matter altogether. The threat of censorship had once again been successfully defeated. In their report of the incident to the American Library Association, Smith and Detchon (1952) congratulated CLA for its role in the successful outcome, noting the importance of "the Committee on Intellectual Freedom, to whose chairman all developments in the case were sent, enabling her to present a resolution to the [league's] convention on short notice" (p. 87).

CALIFORNIA SCHOOLS UNDER FIRE

A year later, the CLA adopted yet another resolution, this time supporting "the teaching of UNESCO in the public schools of California and opposing the censorship or elimination of books and materials on subjects relating to UNESCO and world understanding from classrooms and libraries of all types" ("It Happened in Pasadena," 1952, p. 90). The controversy here centered on the teaching of "world understanding," as stated by the goals of the United Nations. While some viewed Unesco as the "means to peaceful progress" (p. 89), others felt threatened by a perceived weakening of American standards. As Benemann (1977) explains: "[I]n 1952 the idea of a world federation was viewed with suspicion . . . by a number of Americans. They believed membership [in the United Nations] would require a lessened allegiance to the United States and would, more abhorrently, ask Americans to live in peaceful acceptance of their communist neighbors" (p. 306).

In Los Angeles, the situation came to a head in August 1952 when the Board of Education held a series of public hearings to decide whether or not to ban the study of the United Nations doctrine. Though it was agreed that teaching about Unesco was allowable, the book *The E in UNESCO* was ordered off school library shelves with a warning that "other documents and publications . . . may have to be withdrawn after review by the board in line with the formulation of a comprehensive policy on controversial matters" (Benemann, 1977, p. 307). For some 150 school librarians this censorship nightmare, which would last another five years, had just begun.

A similar campaign against "world understanding" in the classroom was waged in Marin County but was lost in 1953. Campaign leader Anne Smart remained undaunted; however, after changing strategy, she renewed her attack. Bypassing the school district, she sent a letter to the *San Rafael Independent-Journal*, claiming that twenty-four books on the local high school library reading list were written by authors "well documented from state and federal government sources" as communists or communist affiliates (Benemann, 1977, p. 307). She then prodded the grand jury to investigate further. They found "that some of the books [on the library's

list] ridiculed our American way of life and were definitely placed in our school library to plant seeds of Communism in the minds of our children" (Mosher, 1959, pp. 56-57). Moreover, the grand jury recommended that each school board should "appoint a group of three or four responsible and interested citizens to check the present books [in the library] and review all new books with the assistance of the librarian" (p. 57).

The district superintendent of schools and the board of trustees did not cave in to Smart's tactics and, in fact, voted to retain all the library books in question—an action which the CLA wholeheartedly endorsed (Smith, 1955, p. 121). But Smart's words did not fall completely on deaf ears. In January 1955, State Senator John F. McCarthy of Marin County, along with Senator Nelson S. Dilworth of the California Un-American Activities Committee, introduced a bill, SB 241, which would have required the formation of special boards to review materials being added to school library collections. The CLA Executive Board voted quickly to pass a resolution in opposition to the bill (Mosher, 1959, p. 58), while CLA members were urged to write the Senate Education Committee advising them that this bill "violates the principles of intellectual freedom" ("Senate Bill," 1955).

Though sponsorship for this bill was eventually pulled—due, apparently, to the number of protests McCarthy received (Moore, 1955, p. 58)—other legislation soon followed promoting a similar agenda. SB 1671 (1956), or the "Book Bill," as Assembly Education Committee Chair Donald D. Doyle (1957, p. 43) called it, and its companion bill AB 987 (1958), prohibited the selection or retention "of books or other materials which teach, advocate, sponsor, or otherwise tend to propagate ideas or principles contrary to or at a variance with the duties required of teachers" (Moore, 1955, p. 228). In particular, "the duties" targeted here were those which impressed "upon the minds of the pupils the principles of morality, truth, justice, and patriotism" (Doyle, 1957, p. 43). SB 1671 was supported by the California Teachers Association, the Affiliated Teachers Organizations of Los Angeles, the California School Board Association, the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Anne Smart (Moore, 1955, p. 227). It was opposed by the CLA Intellectual Freedom Committee, as it was now called. Using "inside" legislative contacts, the committee sent a delegation of librarians to testify before the legislature if necessary (Mosher, 1959, p. 59). Ultimately both SB 1671 and AB 987 died in committee.

PROFESSIONAL DIFFERENCES

Though the "war on books and ideas" continued beyond this point, the attacks on intellectual freedom took a decided turn by the mid-1950s. Joseph McCarthy had been discredited by 1954 and even Anne Smart found that her political agenda was often overshadowed in the press by

the salacious nature of some of the books she challenged (Benemann, 1977, p. 307). The library profession, which had weathered anti-Communism, seemed to be regaining its strength. In the west, the California Library Association and the School Library Association of California (SLAC) developed a joint "Intellectual Freedom in Libraries" policy which laid out a proactive, as well as reactive, plan of attack. Statewide, the associations promised to track and oppose any legislation which might jeopardize library collections or interfere with the professional activities of librarians, while supporting any legislation which strengthened the position of libraries in society. Locally, they proposed interceding in situations which promoted administrative restrictions on collection development and library practices. They also advocated the development of a materials selection policy in every library (CLA Intellectual Freedom Committee, 1958, p. 259). During the last two years of the 1950s, CLA representatives kept busy upholding intellectual freedom in schools (Merritt, 1958; 1959), public libraries (Merritt, 1958), publishing houses (Merritt, 1958), and the legislature (Madden, 1959; Merritt, 1959).

Yet not all librarians were satisfied with CLA's efforts in this area. Sensing the statewide frustration over continued legislative battles and constant threats from agitators like Anne Smart, the CLA Intellectual Freedom Committee proposed undertaking a study of censorship pressures and their effects on California librarians and book selection practices. A sponsor was found—the Fund for the Republic—and a possible research director, Marjorie Fiske, was named. However, approval of the project did not come easily. Some CLA officials felt uncomfortable joining forces with the Fund for the Republic, which was currently under Congressional investigation. Others feared possible retaliation from legislators who were needed to support library legislation. While still others claimed that CLA did not have sufficient facilities or resources to take on such an enormous endeavor. Therefore, J. Perriam Danton, dean of the School of Librarianship at the University of California, Berkeley, was approached. He committed his school to the project as long as he had CLA's endorsement. To quell all fears, a committee of librarians was then appointed by CLA president Carma Zimmerman to recommend whether or not the association should become involved in the study (Mosher, 1959, p. 62). After several months of consideration, it was decided that the University of California should move ahead with the project and that the CLA should assist in every way possible (Reid, 1956, p. 80).

The purpose of the study, according to Fiske (1957), was "to indicate which book selection problems recur frequently throughout the state, which seem to be unique, how they have been handled and how librarians and others concerned believe they should be handled" (p. 21). Therefore, over the following two years, 204 interviews were conducted with school librarians and administrators, as well as municipal and county li-

brarians, in twenty-six communities (Fiske, 1959a). The results turned the library profession upside down.

Fiske (1959b) found that, though nearly half the people interviewed expressed “unequivocal freedom-to-read convictions” and only a few believed that controversiality should be taken into account when making book selection decisions, in reality nearly two-thirds of the respondents had practiced self-censorship at one time or another, and of these nearly one-fifth habitually avoided controversial material altogether (p. 68). Furthermore, in over 80 percent of the libraries studied, circulation of materials was restricted in some way, and in nearly one-third of the jurisdictions, controversial items had been permanently removed from the collection. This, despite the fact that Fiske could find little evidence of actual “outside” challenges to the materials (Fiske, 1959a, p. 52).

To help explain this phenomenon, Fiske looked at several variables, including the political make-up of the community, the structure of the library’s parent organization, and personal, as well as professional, characteristics of the librarians studied. She found that library staff often felt isolated and misunderstood. School librarians in particular did not feel “well-integrated” into the larger organizational framework, perhaps because, as some respondents voiced, the library was viewed as a possible source of controversial materials (Fiske, 1959b, p. 70). Furthermore, librarians felt isolated from their peers, citing what they perceived as a lack of support by the state and national library associations. “Most common was the complaint that the two state groups (CLA and SLAC) do not come to grips with controversial issues either on the local or the state level. Members do not feel that they will be backed up by the profession in the event of a local controversy” (Fiske, 1959a, p. 104).

Though some reviewers of the report, like Sabsay (1959), found little that was new or shocking here, others noted that Fiske’s findings were “embarrassing” (Smith, 1960, p. 223) and uncomfortable to the point of “squirming” (Castagna, 1960, p. 51). Newspapers, in particular, were disappointed in the dismal portrayal of their hitherto “fellow guardians of freedom of the press” (Sabsay, 1959, p. 222). As one Pasadena editorial noted: “Librarians are probably not trying to suppress so much as they are trying to stay out of trouble. But in deciding on book purchases they make a reprehensible mistake in kowtowing to questionably qualified critics” (“Books are Censored by Timid Librarians,” 1959, p. 3831).

So how did the library profession get to this point in California? The fear generated by the political climate of the period cannot be overstated. The State Legislature had made it clear that creative works were not to be trusted. “Communist propaganda is necessarily subtle,” it proclaimed. “It is much more difficult to detect Communist propaganda in a motion picture, in written form, or over the air, than it is to spot a Communist” (California Legislature, 1953, p. 150). In addition, nationally recognized

groups, such as the Chamber of Commerce of the U.S.A. (1948), advocated the public scrutiny of librarians and library collections. "The real danger," they claimed, "is not usually the attitudes of the librarians themselves. It is in the fact that *many of their important book review sources are infiltrated by Communists or sympathizers*" (p. 27).

It is no wonder, then, that Fiske (1959a) found the ghost of McCarthyism present during many of her interviews, even though the outspoken senator had fallen into national disfavor long before (p. 57). In one such interview, which Fiske described as having "strong paranoid undertones," a librarian explained, "I have avoided buying [books about Communism] because I do not trust my own judgment. I have traveled a lot . . . I might seem dangerous to some people" (p. 60). As Benemann (1977) poignantly relates: "The daily tirade of [anti-Communist] headlines had infected the profession with a virulent and crippling strain of angst. While the censor was rarely identified as being in the librarian's own community, he was felt to be nearby, watching, waiting" (p. 308).

This fear was further compounded, Fiske (1959b) discovered, by a general lack of self-esteem among librarians. While the people she interviewed admired within themselves a respect for ideas, knowledge, and intellectual freedom, they did not feel strong enough individually or professionally to assert these qualities "in the face of public disapproval or indifference" (p. 74). A painfully glaring example was the appearance of three Los Angeles school librarians on the television show, *See It Now*, on April 19, 1955. Investigating then current censorship challenges to school materials, Edward R. Murrow interviewed the infamous Anne Smart, who, surrounded by books, looked poised and confident. The librarians, on the other hand, appeared in silhouette for fear of retribution and nervously wrung their hands with each forced answer (Moore, 1955, p. 227; "Murrow's TV Program Exposes Book Banning," 1955, p. 1246). Many librarians who watched the show, Fiske (1959a) noted, felt it did them little credit (p. 54).

On the whole, Fiske found that librarians viewed themselves as "mousy" and "withdrawn" and generally unattractive—an image which was, unfortunately, frequently reinforced by the media. Before the movie *Storm Center*, about censorship in a small town library, was released in 1956, *Library Journal* predicted that: "Librarians will watch this film with interest and suspicion—waiting to see if the librarian proves to be a familiar stereotype" ("As Others See Us," 1955, p. 1458). Sure enough, though the librarian, played by Bette Davis, was obviously committed to the righteous ideals many librarians espoused, she nonetheless was "a middle-aged woman in sensible shoes, who wore only one hat" throughout the entire picture (Fiske, 1959b, p. 74). While some blamed the media for rarely portraying librarians in a positive and courageous light ("As Others See Us"), others felt the profession's public image would

improve considerably if CLA and others would take a stronger stand on controversial issues (Fiske, 1959b, p. 75).

A SMALL BUT FORTHRIGHT COMMITTEE

Despite California librarians' claims to the contrary, the record shows that CLA actually accomplished much in its fight against anti-Communist censors during the 1940s and 1950s. In fact, according to founder Helen Haines (1948): "The little California Library Association Committee on Intellectual Freedom [was] . . . the only library organization to make forthright and continued protest over this advancing, restrictive movement" (p. 152). Though librarians, in their own paranoia, felt that CLA would not come to their defense "in the event of local controversy," in reality, CLA had quickly defended colleagues in Los Angeles and Burbank, as well as officially supporting the use of various textbooks statewide. The CLA Intellectual Freedom Committee had also helped to successfully defeat several censorious legislative bills during this period.

Not only did the committee fight against tyrannical legislation and censorship attempts, but it also constantly kept the ideals of intellectual freedom before the minds of California librarians. Embracing the notion that the "[m]astery of facts, reason, and a sense of values are fundamental here" (Haines, 1941, p. 139), the CLA made it a priority to keep its membership abreast of the latest developments on the censorship front. Inspiring, instructional, and informative articles upholding intellectual freedom or the right to read were regularly featured in the association's quarterly publication *California Librarian*. John Henderson, the Los Angeles County librarian who had survived the loyalty oath test with reputation intact, thanks in large part to CLA, was a frequent contributor, often reporting on the activities of the ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee of which he was a member (Henderson, 1953; 1955). And, of course, Helen Haines submitted many spirited works supporting the right to read. In one particularly passionate piece, she reminded librarians that they "cannot abandon freedom of the mind, the traffic of ideas, in face of the present nation-wide advance toward . . . censorship and elimination or suppression in libraries of legitimate materials of information and opinion" (Haines, 1951, p. 21). Not only was she responsible for shaping the intellectual freedom consciousness of CLA, but she had an enormous influence over ALA as well (Robbins, 1991).

The fight against censorship was also the topic of many CLA programs and workshops throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Intellectual freedom advocate John Anson Ford, the only Los Angeles county supervisor to stand by John Henderson during the "board of censors" incident, reassured conference attendees in 1950 that the public library should "remain a repository for the free expression of man, where others, equally free, may come to study a question from all sides" (Ford, 1950, p. 61).

Conference keynote speakers also addressed, in 1955, "Intellectual Freedom and the National Defense" (Finkletter, 1956), and methods of "Organizing for Effective Action" (Corey, 1956). Two years later, conference participants were pleased to hear California Governor Goodwin Knight (1958) declare education and free public libraries "the greatest safeguard and bulwark of our constitutional freedoms against Communist propaganda" (p. 60).

On a more local level, state and national intellectual freedom committee members brought techniques for dealing with censorship challenges to key CLA district meetings ("District Digest," 1955; "District Meeting Digest," 1955; "District Digest," 1956). To help librarians develop much-needed materials selection policies, the CLA Intellectual Freedom Committee also compiled kits with examples of policies adopted by public and school libraries (Mosher, 1970, p. 51).

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that the Tenney and McCarthy eras meant troubling times for California librarians. Professionally, their very foundation was shaken as belief in "intellectual freedom" became equated with things "subversive" and "sinister." It is no wonder, therefore, that librarians, once so committed to intellectual ideals and civil rights, began to doubt themselves and their professional affiliations.

Yet one group of librarians did remain fearlessly committed to their principles even during the darkest of political times. In his history of the American Library Association's Intellectual Freedom Committee, Berninghausen (1953) acknowledged that the California Library Association had one of the earliest and strongest intellectual freedom committees in the country. "[I]n fact," he added, "the national group learned much from California's experiences" (p. 816).

In 1957, then Fresno State College Librarian Henry Madden wrote, on behalf of CLA, to State Senator Louis G. Sutton for support of a bill to facilitate the temporary employment of "foreign librarians." Sutton's response was short and to the point: "[A]fter all the opposition the California Librarians [sic] Association gave the Unamerican [sic] Activities Committee from 1945 to 1951 and all the opposition the Librarians have given the Legislature in banning Communists [sic] books" (Sutton, 1957, p. 1) no such support would be forthcoming. Though unwittingly, Sutton had correctly recognized CLA's role in the fight against anti-Communist censorship, representing a small, but nonetheless meaningful, victory for all those librarians who had fought for intellectual freedom during the 1940s and 1950s.

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