

Not Wanting Libraries

by Jonathan Wallace

A new Arkansas law, “Act 372, would make it a misdemeanor offense, punishable by up to a year in jail and a fine of up to \$2,500, for librarians and booksellers to furnish minors with materials deemed 'harmful' by authorities”. Martin Pengelly, “‘Criminal liability for librarians’: the fight against US rightwing book bans”, *The Guardian*, August 5, 2023

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2023/aug/05/criminal-liability-librarians-us-rightwing-book-bans-arkansas-democracy-forward> This kind of legislation is more or less epidemic throughout Trump Universe (the red states) right now.

I am such a Whig that I was unable to process the Information the first time I read such a news article: Don't you realize you will drive librarians out of your state, and libraries will close? My Whig mind literally could not at first take in that *anyone wouldn't want libraries*.

But there may be no place for libraries in Trump universe. “These growing campaigns want to suppress certain ideas and content areas, so the defunding of libraries, book bans, the educational gag orders that affect higher education and K-12, and even anti-drag show legislation are all connected. They’re mechanisms in a larger campaign to control what is and isn’t allowed in public spaces.”

Fabiola Cineas, “The rising Republican movement to defund public libraries”, *Vox.com*, May 8, 2023

<https://www.vox.com/politics/2023/5/5/23711417/republicans-want-to-defund-public-libraries-book-bans>

The article does something I had always thought wouldn't be needed; it explains the case for libraries: they are a Speech Locus (as well as Nexus), also “ a community hub where people can get assistance with a variety of services, including help with taxes during tax season, and computer and internet services. Libraries host job fairs and provide job application assistance. The library also provides meeting rooms, study rooms, and in many cases serves as a heating and cooling center, and offers restrooms, for people who are unhoused. Traditional library services that the state could lose

include literacy services for kids like summer reading programs and storytime events. 'We are a real lifeline for a lot of people'".

To the other side, though, libraries seem to be a danger, stirring with sexuality, provocation, independence, gender fluidity, gay influences-- and dissent. Libraries contradict the Stupid Voter Project-- people who spend too much time in libraries might not vote for the politicians who want to close them, after all (which is one of those statements which is both nuanced and obvious).

The push to close libraries is already happening. "In Jamestown, Michigan, the local public library has about six months until funding runs out and it may be forced to shut down. Last week, residents voted against passing a millage, which raises property taxes, to fund" it. "A public library in Vinton, Iowa — a small town with about 5,000 residents — temporarily shut down in July after most of the staff quit because of threats against its LGBTQ members...The library reopened with an all-volunteer staff". Nathalie Baptiste, "The Right-Wing Plot To Destroy Public Libraries", *Huffington Post*, August 6, 2022 https://www.huffpost.com/entry/gop-libraries-culture-war_n_62ed58cfe4b09fecea4defc3 "Voters will decide in November whether to shut... down" the library in Dayton, a "one-stoplight farming community in the southeastern corner of Washington". David Gutman, "Book battles are raging nationwide", *The Seattle Times*, August 13, 2023 <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/book-battles-are-raging-nationwide-a-wa-library-could-be-nations-first-to-close/>

For me, as a thirteen and fourteen year old, the library was a place I spent many Saturday afternoons, one day browsing through old issues of *Fantasy and Science Fiction Magazine*, another making a very premature attempt to read Proust. In adult life, at my local Amagansett library, I would visit every week, sit in the reading room absorbing two articles on very diverse topics in the *New York Review of Books*, then check what was new on the nonfiction shelves which I might want to Glean for the Mad Manuscript. The library was a refuge, a safe haven; I became friendly with the librarian and

even assisted with a couple of legal matters.

I have understood for a while, and analyzed here, that the United States are now inhabited by two incompatible groups, with the other one intent on creating a sort of Fourth World autarchy. Be careful what you wish for: the masters of Trump Universe, their children and grandchildren will have to live in the world they made, with its ignorance, want, violence and pollution. In the galactic quadrant of my pleasant Thought Experiment, Labrador, you could grant them a planet, then observe them for two hundred years. I am pretty certain they would be out of business in that time. However, the Wicked Problem we face today is that, not satisfied simply to live alone in the world they want, they intend to make us all live in that world too. And may succeed.