

# ***Everything Old is New Again:***

## ***The déjà vu of Censorship and Intellectual Freedom in the 21st Century***

*Rendez-vous des Bibliothèques Publiques du Québec*  
May 11, 2023

Peter D. Coyl, MLIS

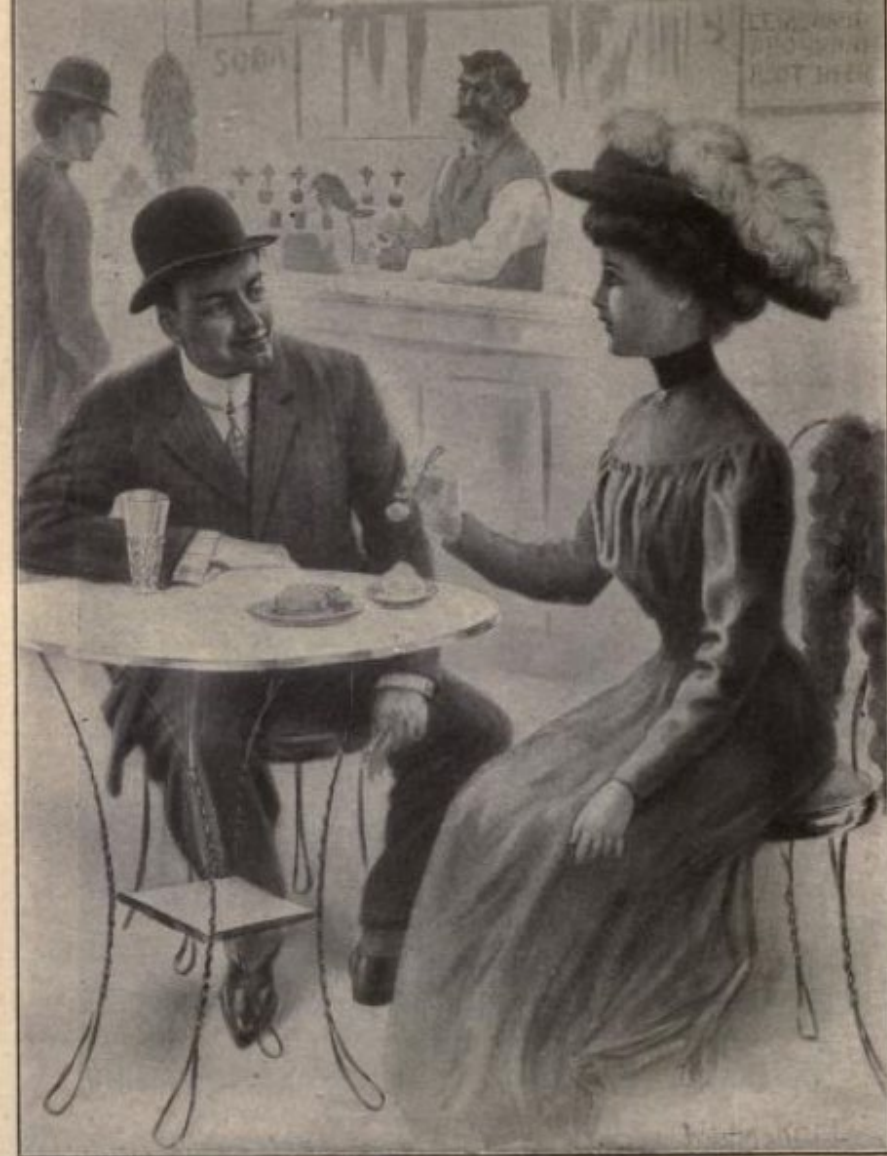
*Library Director & CEO*

*President*



# **Censorship is about power and control**

- Might makes right
- History is written by the victors



**THE FIRST STEP.**

Ice cream parlors of the city and fruit stores combined, largely



**“The War on the White Slave Trade” by Ernest Albert Bell.  
Chicago: 1910**

# *White Slave Panic*

- False narrative that immigrants were enticing women into sexual slavery

All Europe, North America, Panama, South America, Egypt and other parts of Africa, India, China and Japan are the fields of operation of these atrocious men and serpentine women.

By no means all the traffickers are French. Many are Jews, many are Italians and Sicilians, some are Austrians, Germans, English, Americans, Greeks. But it is Paris that has made vice a fine art, and has made the white slave trade a wide-spread systematized commercial enterprise.

One thing should be made very clear to the girl who comes up to the city, and that is that the ordinary ice cream parlor is very likely to be a spider's web for her entanglement. This is perhaps especially true of those ice cream saloons and fruit stores kept by foreigners. Scores of cases are on record where young girls have taken their first step towards "white slavery" in places of this character. And it is

## *White Slave Panic*

- Women were choosing to be sex workers
- Xenophobia flamed by the “Know Nothing Party”
- The “Mann Act” made it a felony to cross state lines for immoral purposes

*Déjà Vu:  
Transfolks and Grooming*

**With rising book bans, librarians have come under attack as 'groomers' and 'pedophiles'**

Libraries around the country face increasing threats from right-wing activists and extremists who call staff “groomers”—accusing them of pedophilia—because they offer books that feature LGBTQ+ narratives or characters, or host queer-friendly events like drag queen storytimes. Dozens of libraries have been threatened with bomb or active shooter threats. In Florida, some school bookshelves stand empty, as teachers hide books to avoid felony charges after they were ordered to “remove or cover all classroom libraries until all materials can be reviewed” for “prurient” or “offensive” material. Right-wing activists and Republican lawmakers are attempting to group any books that include LGBTQ+ themes into these criminal definitions.

They have been labeled pedophiles on social media, called out by local politicians and reported to law enforcement officials. Some librarians have quit after being harassed online. Others have been fired for refusing to remove books from circulation.



**Stonewall riots began on June 27, 1969 which included singling out drag queens and cross-dressing patrons**

# Three-piece law

- Laws existed to prevent people from dressing up to cover for another crime
- Other laws existed which prevented someone from wearing clothes “not belonging to his or her sex”
  - This was the case in San Francisco starting in 1863
  - Cross-dressing was used by many sex workers to denote their availability

# ***Déjà Vu: Bans on Drag Performance***

**Restrictions on drag shows, pride parades in question as Senate approves bill**

At least 9 GOP-led state legislatures want to restrict or criminalize drag shows

**Tennessee governor signs drag show restrictions into law**

Conservative media and Republican lawmakers have claimed that their opposition to drag shows is about protecting children. They often repeat a homophobic trope that drag queens and the LGBTQ community are "grooming" young children.





REAR VIEW OF NEW YORK POST OFFICE.

# *Comstock and Obscenity*

- 1873 Comstock Act was passed
  - Defined contraceptives as obscene and illicit
  - Federal offence to mail or bring across state lines birth control
  - Made it illegal to sell, publish, or possess an obscene book but did not define obscenity

## *Déjà Vu: Contraceptives*

Supreme Court decision suggests the legal right to contraception is also under threat

**Birth control restrictions could follow abortion bans, experts say**

**Supreme Court says abortion pill mifepristone will remain broadly available during legal battle**

## *Déjà Vu: Book Lists*

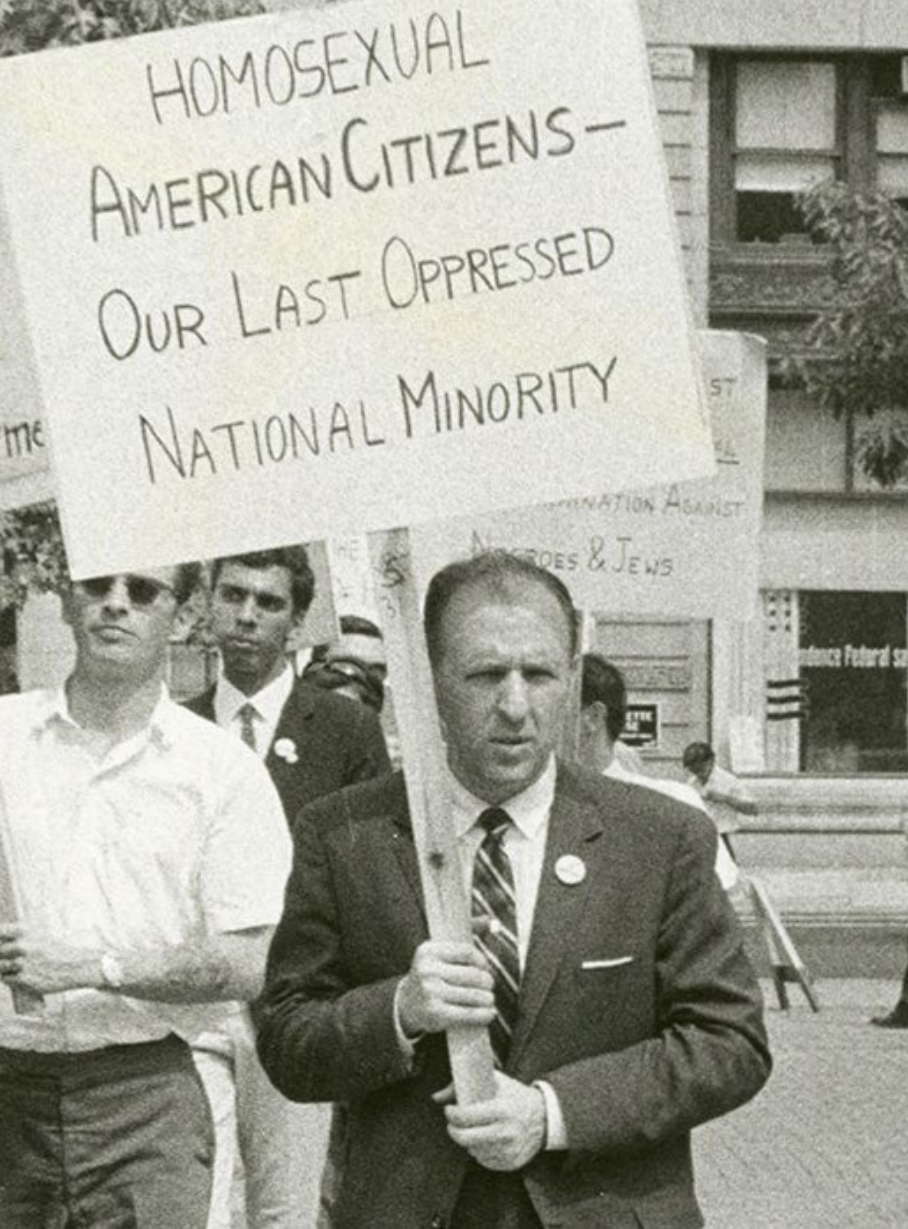
**Texas GOP Wants to Ban Books With Gay Characters From School Libraries**

**North Dakota Anti-LGBTQ Bill Would Imprison Librarians for Not Removing Books**

**Wyoming librarians may face criminal charges for stocking LGBTQ books**

**Book ban underway as teachers fear prosecution in Florida**

**Idaho passes Russian-style gay propaganda law that would jail librarians for “objectionable” books**



**126 Homosexuals  
Fired by  
State Department**

***4 Homosexual  
By State Depo***

# *The Lavender Scare*

- President Eisenhower's Executive Order 10450 signed in 1953
- Conflated homosexuals with communists
- Fear that gay men and lesbians posted a threat to national security

# ***Déjà Vu: Threats of Employment***

**Lafayette Parish librarian who spoke against censorship of LGBTQ books may be fired Monday**

**Prosecutor to Librarian: Get Rid of  
LGBTQ+ Book or Face Felony Charges**

# ***Déjà Vu: Threats of Employment***

Lawrence said the anger of some community members focused on library director Amber McLain. Several people brought up that McLain is gay. One questioned, “Is she even Christian?” McLain recounted in an email response to questions from Bridge

“I had to change my name on Facebook for a time to prevent messages that were starting to come in,” McLain wrote.

“I never read any of them fully, but it was the typical fare — that I’m evil, that I’m indoctrinating kids. In March, a woman came into the library filming on her cell phone. She said she was looking for ‘that pedophile librarian’ and ‘the freak with the pink hair,’” which library staff presumed referred to McLain because the library director had dyed her hair pink.

McLain said she was not in the library at the time.

Soon afterward, she resigned.



**Book burning after looting of the Institute of Sexology (*Institut für Sexualwissenschaft*), May 6, 1933**

# *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft*

- Pioneer in research on gender and sexuality, including homosexuality, transgender, and intersex issues
- Provided sex education, including sexually transmitted infections and contraception
- Large library related to gender and same-sex relationships

# *German Student Union*

- Students from the *Deutsche Studentenschaft* broke into the building with a brass band accompanied them
- They sang the anthem of the Nazi party
- Destroyed thousands of items by blacklisted authors

- 4 days later the remaining items in the library and archives were taken outside and burned
- 40,000 people listened to a speech by Joseph Goebbels
- Other books were burned, but just ones from the institute

*Déjà Vu:*  
*Book Burning*

**“THERE NEEDS TO BE SOME BOOK  
BURNING:” MONTANA SENATE DEBATES  
OBSCENITY BILL**

Burn LGBTQ+ Books for Children, Group  
of Mothers Demands Local Library

Tennessee Rep. Jerry Sexton Vows to Burn  
Banned Books

Group demands books in Coventry Pride display be burned

**ANTI-BOOK BAN BILLBOARD BURNED IN  
LOUISIANA; FUNDRAISER, PROTEST  
PLANNED**

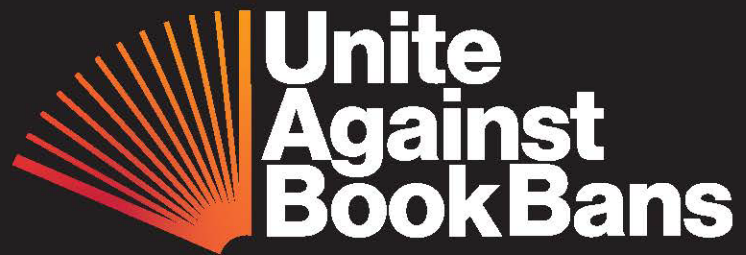
# *Déjà Vu:* *Book Sanctuaries*

**Broward County Library seeks to become book sanctuary following strict laws banning books in Florida, US**

**Stamford Designates Itself As A 'Book Sanctuary City'**

**Book Sanctuary Cities Like Chicago Are a Response to Book Bans, Censorship**

**The Toronto Public Library Just Got A Book Sanctuary Full Of 'Challenged Or Banned' Stories**



[UniteAgainstBookBans.org](http://UniteAgainstBookBans.org)  
[#UniteAgainstBookBans](https://twitter.com/UniteAgainstBookBans)