

# FIRST, THEY CAME FOR THE BOOKS!

by MATT BORS

"CONGRESS SHALL MAKE NO LAW RESPECTING AN ESTABLISHMENT OF RELIGION, OR PROHIBITING THE FREE EXERCISE THEREOF; OR ABRIDGING THE FREEDOM OF SPEECH, OR OF THE PRESS; OR THE RIGHT OF THE PEOPLE TO PEACABLY ASSEMBLE, AND TO PETITION THE GOVERNMENT FOR A REDRESS OF GRIEVANCES."

- AMENDMENT I, BILL OF RIGHTS

**D**ESPITE THIS CLEAR AND SIMPLE LANGUAGE, BOOKS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN ATTACKED BY THOSE THAT THOUGHT THEM LEWD, DANGEROUS, OR OFFENSIVE. MANY OF OUR GREATEST INVENTIONS - PAPER, THE PRINTING PRESS, THE INTERNET - HAVE SERVED TO DISSEMINATE INFORMATION. AND A STEADY STREAM OF CENSORS HAVE ARISEN TO SUPPRESS, BAN, OR BURN THAT INFORMATION.

**BANNED BOOKS WEEK** HAS BEEN OBSERVED DURING THE LAST WEEK OF SEPTEMBER SINCE 1982. THE ACLU, THE AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION, AND TEACHERS ACROSS THE COUNTRY URGE PEOPLE TO PICK UP AND READ A BOOK THAT'S BEEN CENSORED OR BANNED.

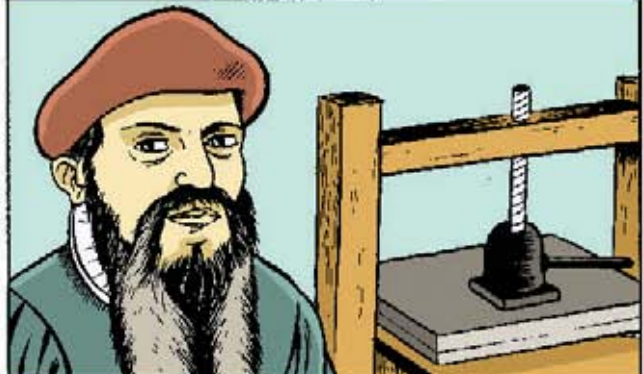
JUST TO NAME A FEW:  
"FOREVER" BY JUDY BLOOM  
"SLAUGHTER HOUSE FIVE" BY KURT VONNEGUT  
"DADDY'S ROOMMATE" BY MICHAEL WILLHOITE  
"HOWL" BY ALLEN GINSBERG

THE FIRST MASSIVE BOOK BURNING TOOK PLACE WAY BACK IN 213 B.C. WHEN THEY WERE HANDWRITTEN BY SCRIBES. **QIN SHI HUANG**, THE FIRST EMPEROR OF A UNIFIED CHINA, ORDERED UNAPPROVED HISTORY BOOKS TO BE BURNED.



THEY WOULD SOON BURY AT LEAST 460 UNFAVORABLE SCHOLARS WHO HELD UNAPPROVED KNOWLEDGE.

IN 1440, ACCESS TO BOOKS MADE A HUGE LEAP FORWARD WHEN **JOHANNES GUTENBERG** INVENTED THE PRINTING PRESS. TO CENSORS IT WOULD JUST MEAN MORE BOOKS TO BAN.



THE FIRST BOOK HE PRINTED, THE BIBLE, IS ONE OF THE MOST CENSORED AND CONTROVERSIAL WORKS IN HISTORY, WITH MUCH OF THE CENSORING COMING FROM RELIGIOUS FACTIONS QUIBBLING OVER DIFFERENCES.



GIN SHI HUANG'S METHOD OF BANNING BOOKS, THEN MOVING ON TO OUTRIGHT KILLING FOLKS, WOULD BE A RECURRING THEME THROUGHOUT HISTORY. AS NUMEROUS DISSIDENTS AND "HERETICS" WOULD FIND OUT. ONE OF THE NAZI PARTY'S FIRST MOVES WAS TO BURN "UN-GERMAN" LITERATURE.



TODAY, A NUMBER OF COUNTRIES, SUCH AS AUSTRIA, FRANCE, GERMANY, AND CANADA HAVE LAWS AGAINST BOOKS THAT DENY THE HOLOCAUST, SUCH AS EARNEST ZÜNDEL'S 1980 BOOK "DID SIX MILLION REALLY DIE?"



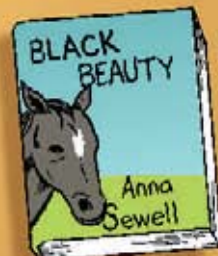
NOT MUCH FOR FREE SPEECH HIMSELF, ZÜNDEL PAMPHLETED STREETS IN CANADA TO URGE THE BANNING OF "SCHINDLER'S LIST."

THE WORLD'S MOST UNSAVORY REGIMES ARE NOTORIOUS FOR THEIR MEDIA CLAMPDOWNS AND HATRED OF THE WRITTEN WORD.



AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI PUT A HIT ON THE AUTHOR FOR SO-CALLED BLASPHEMY.

BANNED BY SOUTH AFRICA'S APARTHEID REGIME!



AMERICA, BY COMPARISON, HAS MADE IT HARD TO BAN BOOKS THANKS TO THE LANGUAGE OF THE FIRST AMENDMENT. OUR FOUNDERS UNDERSTOOD THE NEED TO PROTECT SPEECH AND WRITING FROM GOVERNMENT CENSORSHIP.

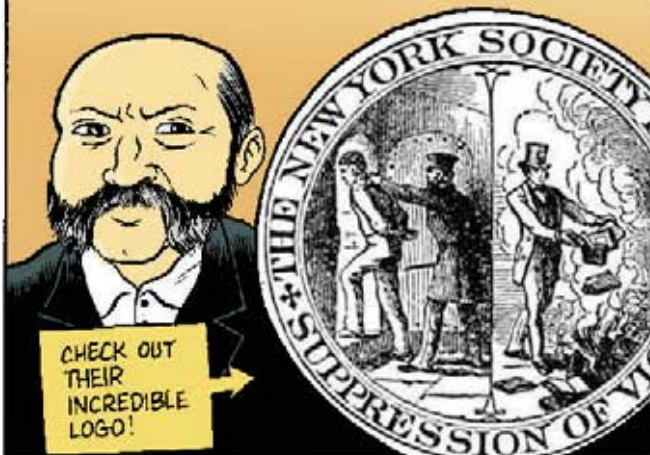
HE WHO DARES NOT OFFEND CANNOT BE HONEST.

THOMAS PAINE WAS INDICTED FOR TREASON IN ENGLAND IN 1792 FOR WRITING "THE RIGHTS OF MAN."



BUT THROUGHOUT OUR HISTORY, MANY WOULD RISE TO CHALLENGE, OR COMPLETELY DISREGARD, OUR RIGHT TO READ WHAT WE PLEASE.

ONE OF THOSE PEOPLE WAS ANTHONY COMSTOCK, A MORAL CRUSADER WHO FORMED THE NEW YORK SOCIETY FOR THE SUPPRESSION OF VICE IN 1873. THEY SUCCEEDED IN BANNING JAMES JOYCE'S "ULYSSES" IN THE UNITED STATES AS WELL AS MANY BOOKS ON CONTRACEPTION AND ANATOMY, WHICH WERE DEEMED "LEWD AND LASCIVIOUS."



FEDERAL ANTI-OBSCENITY LAWS WERE PASSED THAT YEAR, NAMED AFTER COMSTOCK, WHO WOULD PERSONALLY ENFORCE THEM IN THE STREETS. THEY STATED IN PART:

Be it enacted... That whoever... shall sell... an obscene book, pamphlet, paper, writing, advertisement... or other article of an immoral nature... or any article whatever, for the prevention of conception, or for causing unlawful abortion... shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and on conviction... shall be imprisoned at hard labor in the penitentiary for not less than six months.





HYSTERIA BROKE OUT IN THE 50s AROUND COMIC BOOKS. IN POST-WAR AMERICA, CRIME, SCIENCE FICTION, AND HORROR COMICS WERE FLYING OFF THE SHELVES. PARENTS WERE ORGANIZING BURNINGS, CLAIMING THEY CAUSED CRIME AND MASTURBATION.



SENATE HEARINGS WERE HELD ON COMICS AND JUVENILE DELINQUENCY IN 1954.

FREDRIC WERTHAM WAS A PSYCHIATRIST AND AUTHOR OF THE ANTI-COMICS MANIFESTO, "SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT." HIS TESTIMONY BEGAN THUSLY:

I THINK HITLER WAS A BEGINNER COMPARED TO THE COMIC BOOK INDUSTRY.



THERE'S NO TELLING WHAT TYPE OF READING COULD INSPIRE "DEVIOUSNESS" OR VIOLENCE. TED BUNDY WAS A BIG FAN OF **CHEER-LEEDING MAGAZINES** - SHOULD THEY BE BANNED?



AND MANY PSYCHOPATHS HAVE CITED THE BIBLE OR KORAN AS THEIR INSPIRATION.

NEVERTHELESS, GROUPS CONTINUE TO PUSH FOR BANS ON WHATEVER THEY FIND DISTASTEFUL - FROM "THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES" TO "HARRY POTTER."

IT PROMOTES WITCHCRAFT AND OCCULTISM! I PREFER MY CHILDREN READ THE CALMING PROSE OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION.



DR. SUESS' CHILDREN'S BOOK, "THE LORAX," HAS BEEN CHALLENGED FOR BEING A THINLY VEILED ENVIRONMENTAL ALLEGORY.

MISTER!

HE SAID WITH A SAW DUSTY SNEEZE.

I AM THE LORAX. I SPEAK FOR THE TREES.



IN 1987, THE ANCHORAGE SCHOOL BOARD EVEN WENT SO FAR AS TO BAN **THE DICTIONARY** ITSELF FOR CONTAINING SLANG DEFINITIONS OF WORDS LIKE "BALLS."

"ANY PART OF A THING, ESP. OF THE HUMAN BODY THAT IS ROUNDED OR PROTUBERANT."



CENSORSHIP ISN'T JUST FOR CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIANS AND PARENT GROUPS. SOME ON THE LEFT HAVE ALSO SOUGHT TO STAMP OUT BOOKS THAT RUB THEM THE WRONG WAY. THE NAACP AND SOME SCHOOL OFFICIALS HAVE CHALLENGED MARK TWAIN'S "HUCKLEBERRY FINN" FOR ITS LIBERAL USE OF THE WORD "NIGGER."

THE BOOK IS POISON... IT IS ANTI-AMERICAN... IT WORKS AGAINST THE IDEA THAT ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL... ANYBODY WHO TEACHES THIS BOOK IS A RACIST!



JOHN H. WALLACE, ADMINISTRATIVE AIDE, MARK TWAIN INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL, FAIRFAX COUNTY, VA, 1982

THE SMALL BUT VOCAL ANTI-PORNOGRAPHY FEMINIST MOVEMENT IN THE 70'S AND 80'S ARGUED THAT PORNOGRAPHY CAUSES VIOLENCE AND OPPRESSION OF WOMEN. THEY MANAGED TO PASS A NUMBER OF CITY ORDINANCES THAT TREATED PORNOGRAPHY AS A VIOLATION OF WOMEN'S CIVIL LIBERTIES. COURTS STRUCK THEM DOWN FOR VIOLATING EVERYONE'S CIVIL LIBERTIES.





NAT HENTOFF WROTE ABOUT SOME OF THESE CASES IN HIS 1992 BOOK, "FREE SPEECH FOR ME, BUT NOT FOR THEE" - HOW THE AMERICAN LEFT AND RIGHT RELENTLESSLY CENSOR EACH OTHER." HE WROTE:

CENSORSHIP - THROUGHOUT THIS SWEET LAND OF LIBERTY - REMAINS THE STRONGEST DRIVE IN HUMAN NATURE, WITH SEX A WEAK SECOND.



MOST UPROARS OVER BOOKS IN AMERICA NEVER MAKE IT TO THE BANNING STAGE.

YOU DON'T OFTEN SEE THEM IN THE STREETS OR IN FRONT OF THE CAMERAS, BUT LIBRARIANS ARE PROBABLY THIS COUNTRY'S GREATEST DEFENDERS OF THE FREEDOM TO READ, QUIETLY STOCKING THEIR SHELVES WITH CONTROVERSIAL BOOKS.

THE  
CARTOONIST

SHHHH!

VERY  
QUIETLY.



THE SUPREME COURT HAS REPEATEDLY RULED THAT "OBSCENE" MATERIALS ARE NOT PROTECTED SPEECH. IN MILLER VS. CALIFORNIA (1973) THEY LAID OUT SOME GUIDELINES AS TO WHAT QUALIFIES.

BUT EACH OF US HAS OUR OWN INTERNAL BAROMETER AS TO WHAT IS OFFENSIVE. THERE'S REALLY NO OBJECTIVE WAY TO DEFINE "OBSCENE," OR EVEN "PORNOGRAPHY."

IT IS PATENTLY  
OFFENSIVE.

LACKS ARTISTIC,  
LITERARY, AND  
SCIENTIFIC  
VALUE.

HAS THE SOLE PURPOSE  
OF APPEALING TO ONE'S  
PRURIENT INTERESTS.



I KNOW IT  
WHEN I  
SEE IT.

ONE MAN'S  
VULGURITY  
IS ANOTHER  
MAN'S LYRIC.

JUSTICE  
POTTER  
STUART

JUSTICE JOHN  
MARSHALL HARLAN



IN RAY BRADBURY'S CLASSIC NOVEL "FAREHEIT 451," AMERICANS ARE DEPICTED AS ANTI-INTELLECTUAL HEDONISTS WHO WATCH HOURS OF TELEVISION A DAY WHILE THE GOVERNMENT TORCHES ALL THE BOOKS.

THE STORY MAY NOT BE THAT UNLIKELY OF A SCENARIO, BUT FOR THE TIME BEING, IT'S STILL CONSIDERED SCIENCE FICTION.

YES, PEOPLE  
HAVE TRIED  
TO BAN IT.

