

# Book censors are cutting a wide swath

**L**OUISVILLE is noteworthy, among those who keep track of censorship in America, for the work of both Col. Ron Ray and E. Lynn Harris.

Both have written sexually explicit books on homosexual themes.

At last report, the work of Harris, a prominent gay novelist, was still on the library shelf at Louisville's Central High.



DAVID HAWPE

The school's site-based council voted to keep it there, despite protests from self-appointed community moral arbiter Dr. Frank Simon and others.

Dr. Simon presumably has not found the work of local attorney-author Col. Ray offensive, but it's available around here, too.

It describes such practices as mutual masturbation, fellatio/cunnilingus, anal intercourse, "fisting," "rimming," "golden showers," "fudge sports" and sadomasochism.

Col. Ray's work was pulled from the Ouachita Parish School library by God-fearing folks in Monroe, La., but restored to the shelf last year by the Ouachita Parish School Board. According to the card catalog, this same book is available in the Louisville Free Public Library's main circulation.

So is the Harry Potter series for kids, which, according to the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF), was the most often challenged literary work of 1999. Some people believe it encourages witchcraft and wizardry. But kids all over town, indeed all over the nation, are reading it.

OIF Director Judith Krug noted, during the recent national Banned Books Week, that "there are 40 million copies of these books out there; kids are giving up TV and video games to read. And people want to remove them? Wake up!"

Of course, given our Puritan heritage, it's most often sex that gets an author banned.

Looking down the librarians' list of 100 books most often challenged during the past decade, "sexually explicit" material was involved in 1,446 of those attempts at censorship. "Offensive language" accounted for 1,262 others, followed by "unsuited to age group" (1,167), "occult theme or promoting the occult or Satanism" (773), "violent" (630), homosexual theme or "promoting homosexuality" (497), "promoting a religious viewpoint" (397), "nudity" (297), "racism" (245), "sex education" (217) and "anti-family" material (193).

In case you were wondering, the most often challenged books during that period were the *Scary Stories* series by Alvin Schwartz, *Daddy's Roommate* by Michael Willhoite, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou, *The Chocolate War* by Frank Cormier, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain, *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck, *Forever* by Judy Blume, *Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson, *Heather Has Two Mommies* by Leslea Newman and *The Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger.

I know about that last one. My high school principal, W. S. Milburn, who hadn't even read the Salinger classic, ordered my teacher, Don Fiene, and another faculty member, local drama pioneer Richard Block, to stop assigning the "indecent" book. Both ended

up leaving the Male High faculty.

We loved it when the Rev. Robert Boyle, a Jesuit scholar and chairman of the English Department at Regis College, subsequently came to town and called *Catcher* a fine work of art. He said that teen-agers were reading it even if they didn't read anything else. And that teachers who shied away from it were saying to their students "to Hell with you."

I love the Jesuits.

I love Jean Fritz, too, even though I haven't met her. Texas school board members objected to a passage in her book *And Then What Happened, Paul Revere?* because it featured the British yelling, "Damn you, stop." But she backed the Stetsoned censors off, with proof from the Massachusetts Historical Society that the oath was used.

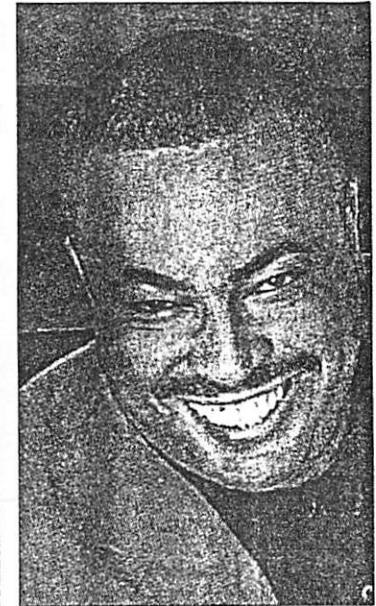
The fact that a bunch of Texans would complain about rough language shows that they at least have the capacity for irony.

No. 18 on the list of most-objected-to literature of the last decade was *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Kurt Vonnegut's brilliant anti-war fantasy that focuses on the firebombing of Dresden. The folks in Drake, N. D., who actually burned the book, probably missed that irony. Back in 1985, the book was challenged at the Owensboro High School library because of "foul language, a section depicting a picture of an act of bestiality, a reference to 'Magic Fingers' attached to the protagonist's bed to help him sleep, and the sentence, 'The gun made a ripping sound like the opening of the fly of God Almighty.'"

Faulkner's masterpiece *As I Lay Dying* (No. 35 on the list) was banned from the Graves County school district for a week in 1986, because it con-



Col. Ron Ray: His book on gays in military is controversial.



E. Lynn Harris' explicit novels raised a stir at Central High.

tained "offensive and obscene passages referring to abortion and used God's name in vain."

Status as a classic is no protection from the censors. We added a new word to the English vocabulary when Thomas Bowdler, in 1818, felt compelled to publish a G-rated volume of Shakespeare.

It's not exactly a classic, but I wonder what rating Bowdler would have given Ron Ray's book (*Gays: In or Out? The U.S. Military & Homosexuals* — a Sourcebook, Military Necessity &

*Homosexuality*) that was banned in Ouachita?

Of course, it doesn't take much to get a book banned. The Corona-Norco Unified School District in California did it to Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* in 1993, because it "centered around negative activity."

Nor is it just the comsymps and radlibs who have something to fear from the book-banners.

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## BOOK BANNING

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Last year, the Melvindale-North Allen Park School Board in Michigan decided to put a few books in the public school libraries that were critical of Darwin and his version of how we all got here. A chorus of the politically correct shouted against this.

They said there was no need for another book giving another side, because Darwinism is not scientifically controversial. And, they added, the books the school board wanted to add were religious, not scientific.



Dr. Frank Simon

Now let me get this straight.

We're supposed to ban all religious books? Like the Bible, the Koran, the Bhagavad Gita, the Tripitaka?

This obtuse, anti-religious outburst prompted Jonathan Wells, a University of California post-doctoral research biologist and senior fellow at Seattle's Discovery Institute, to point out, "The claim that Darwinism is not scientifically controversial is false."

He added that this was not a clash of fundamentalism with science. Rather, he said, "It is

about giving students access to books presenting the anti-Darwin side of a controversy which Darwinists pretend doesn't exist."

Wells said, "Certainly Darwin's theory should be taught in public schools, because it is enormously influential in our culture. But Melvindale's future citizens have the right, at the very least, to read arguments against it in their school libraries. Anything less would dishonor those before us who fought and died to assure the survival and the success of liberty."

I would say the same thing about access to *The Catcher in the Rye*. It has been not only a great, relevant read for teenagers, but also an enormously influential book. Keep it in the libraries, and in the curricula, along with critiques of its vision of adolescence.

Keep Ron Ray's smutty book (at least somebody in Louisiana thought it was smutty) in the Louisville library's stacks, alongside others that rebut his arguments against gays in the military.

Keep Darwin, and Darwin's critics, on the shelf.

Keep Harry Potter on the best-seller list.

Keep Frank Simon worried.

David Hawpe's column appears Sundays and Wednesdays in *The Forum*. You can read his columns at [www.courier-journal.com](http://www.courier-journal.com).