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Editorial: Free to speak, free to read

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Baylor University introduced a new observance this week that has been going on for a quarter-century elsewhere.

- [Comment on this story](#) Baylor librarians are participating in Banned Books Week by scheduling readings from select books that have been purged from library shelves due to public or governmental pressure.

These include such classics as *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Of Mice and Men* and *Lord of the Rings*. Of current note is *Alms for Jihad: Charity & Terrorism in the Islamic World*. A lawsuit caused Cambridge Press to recall all copies of *Alms* in bookstores and ask that libraries remove it. To its credit, Baylor's library system refused. It is one of the books from which excerpts will be read aloud this week.

The word "banned" may overstate matters in many cases. Institutions public or private exercise discretion about what they avail the public. It's not necessarily censorship to say "no thanks" to something or for the public to complain about material. Often it comes down to the question of literary or scientific value versus something that has only prurient or exploitative value.

Right now Baylor has a controversy over a professor's Web site about intelligent design. The university pulled it down over concerns that it conveyed Baylor's endorsement of the concept. The professor says that a mutually acceptable disclaimer was composed to address the concerns, but Baylor still won't allow the site.

An issue of academic freedom or one of an institution taking care not to be misrepresented to the public?

Especially in an academic setting it seems anyone should be able to research any scholarly subject and express himself or herself about it using any means available. Then again, the university has a proprietary stake in how its name is used.

Regardless, this seems like a navigable dispute.

Separate entirely are occasional acts by government as an extension of us.

Throughout American history, even with a heritage of free inquiry, officials have buckled under efforts to make inquiry less free.

With the Internet explosion, new challenges ensue.

In the 1990s, Congress attempted to put controls on the Internet under the guise of fighting pornography. The Supreme Court overturned the Communications Decency Act.


Unlike so many other nations, ours is one that daily faces the challenges of free speech, free inquiry and freedom of conscience.

Crushing unpopular opinions and censoring information might be the impulse of a tyrannical majority. But the right of the individual to think, read and speak freely is the bedrock of this society. After all, it was formed so many years ago by people who fled oppression.

Read on.

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