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## Public libraries are under siege

**Charita M. Goshay** The Repository

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You probably have to be nerd to get it, but there's something about a library.

A building dedicated solely to showcasing knowledge that virtually anyone can have access to may well be one of the greatest ideas we humans have ever concocted.

The world can be found within those walls.

For years, we've been told that social media is the be-all-end-all when, in truth, it's been more Pandora's Jar than a font of wisdom. But a tablet can never supplant the experience of exploring a space where everyone has a shared love of the written word.

**New library coming to Canton:** Stark Library unveils \$54 million plan for new Main Library, Operations Center

For people who love to read, checking out an armful of books you've been looking forward to is the equivalent of a Christmas gift.

The public library is one of those elements that defines a healthy community.

This week marks National Library Week, created to celebrate our country's embrace of "Open to All," the phrase found etched on so many library buildings.

Yet in some places, public libraries find themselves being turned into culture-war battlefields. While some ignore public libraries altogether, others are convinced that libraries are now bastions of radicalism.

In Missouri, the state legislature has decided to kill a fly with hammer. Rather than finding a solution for children's books some people have found objectionable, House members recently voted to defund the state's public library system.

According to reports, the defunding proposal was made in response to an ACLU lawsuit over a state law which bans sexually-explicit material from school libraries — which has nothing to

do with public libraries.

When did we become a sum-zero country, one in which we lack the ingenuity to come together to craft workable solutions?

PBS recently reported that the vast majority of public libraries in Missouri are located in small towns, and that 20% of the state's residents — more than 1 million people — don't have access to high-speed internet.

It's not a little ironic that the people so often heard yelling for freedom and individual choice are erecting barriers to those very same things.

In 2022, U.S News & World Report ranked Missouri 30th in education. It's hard to see how allowing less access to books will help this.

Ohio, by the way, is 31st.

The argument that people can just access material through the internet isn't even remotely the point, especially in communities where the only access to the internet is the public library.

As is always the case with extremism, what began with book bans has now grown to killing the messenger.

The American Library Association states that 2022 was a record-breaking year in demands for censoring library books and other material in the 20 years that the group began tracking such cases.

According to the association: "A record 2,571 unique titles were targeted for censorship, a 38% increase from the 1,858 unique titles targeted for censorship in 2021. Of those titles, the vast majority were written by or about members of the LGBTQIA+ community and people of color."

Who reasonably believes there was a bumper crop of controversial books produced in 2022? In fact, many of the books subject to complaints are classics, from "To Kill a Mockingbird" to "Where the Wild Things Are" to "The Diary of Anne Frank."

**Half-told history:** Baseball, American history isn't complete without Roberto Clemente's story

The newest trend is white-washing history, such as neglecting to state specifically why Rosa Parks was arrested.

Knowledge has always been a dangerous thing. It's why teaching slaved people how to read was against the law.

It's why access to information is always the first casualty of despotism.

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