

RESEARCH MEMORANDUM

To: Interested Parties

From: American Accountability Foundation

Date: August 11, 2023

Re: ALA President Emily Drabinsky is a Radical Marxist and Queer Activist

Emily Drabinski has been elected to serve as the American Library Association's (ALA) president for the 2023-2024 term. Emily Drabinski is a radical, self-avowed Marxist and queer activist. Drabinski's writings and comments put her *far* outside of the American mainstream. Her comments also suggest she is using her perch as ALA president to push her radical Marxist and queer theory agenda at community libraries throughout the country in the pursuit of "social change."

Emily Drabinski has:

- Said her queerness subverts "normal family types."
- Complained that religious works under the Dewey Decimal System are "overwhelmingly Christian" and that heterosexuality is presented as "normative."
- Criticized library system for reifying "understandings of gender as a binary system with only two acceptable gender markers."
- Claimed she found a "magical" library book at 14-years-old that featured "fantastic queer sex in a field."
- Was "crushed" that libraries are removing LGBTQ content from children's sections.
- Supported drag queen story hours.
- Said centering queerness at libraries is more important than libraries' supporting democracy and citizenship.
- Said of being a Marxist: "it's very much who I am and shapes a lot of how I think about social change."
- Said "critical librarianship" centers "commitment to social justice and social change."
- Worked with a "hardcore Marxist" journal named "Radical Teacher."
- Called conservatives "far-right, white supremacist, fascist."
- Described those that oppose inappropriate books in libraries as the "Christo-fascist right."
- Called parents an "angry, white mob."
- Said libraries are "good places that do all kinds of things that people on the right don't like."



ON QUEER THEORY AND RADICAL GENDER IDEOLOGY

SAID HER QUEERNESS SUBVERTS “NORMAL FAMILY TYPES”

During a recorded lecture in 2021, Emily Drabinski talked about “Teaching the Radical Catalog” for the Information Literacy Group. Emily Drabinski criticized library categorization systems as upholding heterosexuality. She further said that her type of queerness subverts “normal family types”:¹

Emily Drabinski (06:14):

But women are tied here. That's another thing that men the unmarked category have family, marriage, and women. Sexual life is the general category. Heterosexuality is not named but implied. It's the norm that does not need to identify itself, and against which everything else must be understood and defined. Then we begin, uh, in HQ 71, 71, 72 to talk about sexual deviations. And what comes after that are things that are deviations from the norm. Bisexuality, homosexuality, and lesbianism. Those are listed in the classification as two different things, transvestism, transsexualism, and then we move to sort of more socially. Uh, you can see it as sort of progressing from socially best and more, most acceptable to least acceptable sadism, masochism, fetishism, prostitution, and then masturbation. And I think it depends on how the cultural moment views masturbation. But to see it in this list, um, tells us something about how it was viewed at the time that the classification was developed.

Emily Drabinski (07:27):

And then sexual life is followed by what it's all ostensibly for the family, marriage and home. And for those of us whose queerness includes the subversion of those kinds of normal family types, this ideological story excludes us and the ways that we form familial connections and how we engage in reproductive labor. So how do I as a, an information literacy librarian, teach students to navigate this problematic structure to fit themselves and their beautiful profusion of ways of being into a classification structure that would order their lives in this way? And because classification structures determine how we order books on shelves, what does this mean for how students encounter their own stories when they're navigating through library stacks?

Emily Drabinski (17:04):

That's what you're after. But for the, the, the terms that the, the cataloger is used, this is reduced to minority women, it's reduced to feminine beauty, to personal beauty to stereotypes, right? What's missing from this list is anything that would capture what Tanisha Ford's work is striving towards, right? Greater equality, uh, sort of collapse of white supremacy and patriarchy. Uh, it's sort of flattens and against the bullhorn image that we see here. Uh, and that's, I think, a problem, right? That's a mismatch. So when we're sort of talking about, about, uh, subject headings and, and designing exercises that help students sort of, uh, encounter the catalog and encounter

¹ YouTube "Main Stage - Teaching the Radical Catalog, Emily Drabinski" [July 12, 2021](#)



information organization as a thing that exists in the world, we can take the time to sort of talk through and talk out with them what that subject language does, what it highlights, what it makes findable.

COMPLAINED THAT RELIGIOUS WORKS UNDER THE DEWEY DECIMAL SYSTEM ARE “OVERWHELMINGLY CHRISTIAN” AND THAT HETEROSEXUALITY IS PRESENTED AS “NORMATIVE”

In academic paper titled “Queering the Catalog: Queer Theory and the Politics of Correction” published in 2013, Emily Drabinski discussed “queer theory” and criticized traditional “hegemonic library classification structures” and that it is important to engage “queer theory and library classification and cataloging together” to encourage “new ways of thinking about how to be ethically and politically engaged on behalf of marginal knowledge formations and identities who quite reasonably expect to be able to locate themselves in the library”:²

Critiques of hegemonic library classification structures and controlled vocabularies have a rich history in information studies. This project has pointed out the trouble with classification and cataloging decisions that are framed as objective and neutral but are always ideological and worked to correct bias in library structures. Viewing knowledge organization systems from a queer perspective, however, challenges the idea that classification and subject language can ever be finally corrected. Engaging queer theory and library classification and cataloging together requires new ways of thinking about how to be ethically and politically engaged on behalf of marginal knowledge formations and identities who quite reasonably expect to be able to locate themselves in the library. Queer theory invites a shift in responsibility from catalogers, positioned to offer functional solutions, to public services librarians, who can teach patrons to dialogically engage the catalog as a complex and biased text, just as critical catalogers do...

Drabinski noted that “queer theory is distinct from lesbian and gay studies”:³

..Queer theory is distinct from lesbian and gay studies, and this distinction, while necessarily drawn in broad strokes, is helpful for understanding the potential limits of a corrective approach to classification and cataloging. Lesbian and gay studies grew out of the recognition that those identities were largely absent from the historical record...

...Where lesbian and gay studies takes gender and sexual identities as its object of study, queer theory is interested in how those identities come discursively and socially into being and the kind of work they do in the world. Lesbian and gay studies is concerned with what homosexuality is. Queer theory is concerned with what homosexuality does...

² CUNY Academic Works, Emily Drabinsky, “Queering the Catalog: Queer Theory and the Politics of Correction,” [2013](#) (Page 94)

³ Ibid. Page 96



Drabinski bemoaned that “works about religion in the Dewey Decimal System are overwhelmingly Christian” and that readers learn that “heterosexuality is normative”:⁴

...Works about religion in the Dewey Decimal System are overwhelmingly Christian; works about heterosexuality are barely named as such in LCSH. As a result of these failures, biased ideological stories continue to be “told” by the organizational systems. As users interact with these structures to browse and retrieve materials, they inevitably learn negative stereotypes about race, gender, class, and other social identities. For example, they “learn” that ethnocentric myths are true, like that Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism are minor religions compared to Christian monotheism. Similarly, they “learn” that heterosexuality is normative, that gay and lesbian sexuality is the only sexual identity that ought to be examined, and that queer sexuality is inherently deviant...

CRITICIZED LIBRARY SYSTEM FOR REIFYING “UNDERSTANDINGS OF GENDER AS A BINARY SYSTEM WITH ONLY TWO ACCEPTABLE GENDER MARKERS”

Emily Drabinski's 2014 article published in the *University of Vermont ScholarWorks*, "What's Gender Got to Do With It? A Critique of RDA Rule 9.7," criticized library systems for marking gender using fixed categories, which she claims “reifies contemporary understandings of gender as a binary system with only two acceptable gender markers (male or female)”:⁵

...By marking the gender of the author using a fixed category, the LC interpretation of RDA reifies contemporary understandings of gender as a binary system with only two acceptable gender markers (male or female). Even if catalogers indicate gender using alternate labels, RDA's insistence on the relevance of gender as a descriptive attribute reifies regressive social binaries and is passively hostile to transgender individuals. The implications of this queer analysis for both descriptive cataloging and future retrieval systems are explored in more detail below...

Drabinski continued on to claim that while gender is “experienced as natural and binary by many people, it isn't by everyone”:⁶

...The problems begin with the assumption that gender is a natural human characteristic that is easily identified and fits into a simplistic binary. While gender is certainly experienced as natural and binary by many people, it isn't by everyone. In fact, gender identities are complex and varied, particularly in queer and transgender communities. One struggles to imagine how a cataloger might mark the gender of, for example, a creator who alternates between male and female pronouns. Or uses “they” and “their” or “ze” and “hir.” Or uses no pronouns at all...

...

⁴ Ibid. Page 97

⁵ UVM Scholar Works "What's Gender Got to Do With It? A Critique of RDA Rule 9.7 " [April 24, 2014 \(Page 5\)](#)

⁶ Ibid. Pages 8 & 9



Because RDA limits authors to one of two gender categories--or even three or four or seven, if the categories were expanded to make room for a richer understanding of gender-- catalogers would always be forced to mash and meld the complexity of gender into a predefined, stable, and unchanging box that can never contain the contextual and performative aspects of, especially, trans- and gender-queer identities...

DRABINSKY FOUND “MAGICAL” LIBRARY BOOK AT 14 YEARS OLD THAT FEATURED “FANTASTIC QUEER SEX IN A FIELD”

In an article titled “Gendered S(h)elves: Body and Identity in the Library” for *Women & Environments International Magazine* in 2009, Emily Drabinski claimed that “queers of all kinds have always found a home in the library” and that it was a reading a library book that made her decide she was a lesbian. Drabinski cited a scene from a book where characters named “Sissy Hankshaw” and “Bonanza Jellybean” had “fantastic queer sex in a field, so fantastic it caused the cranes to alter their migration patterns”:⁷

*Queers of all kinds have always found a home in the library. Books are often the first refuge of the outsider, and the trope of feeling alone until finding that single magical book on the library shelves that makes the self make sense is a common one. **(Mine was Tom Robbins' Even Cowgirls Get the Blues, when I was around 14. When Sissy Hankshaw and Bonanza Jellybean had fantastic queer sex in a field, so fantastic it caused the cranes to alter their migration patterns, my body told me I was probably whatever that was!)** This will to identity is strong and persistent, perhaps, as Foucault (1977, 101) writes, “the highest temptation ... the longing to be another, to be all others; it is to renew identifications and to achieve the principle of time in a return that completes the circle”. This article seeks to complicate the romantic notion of the library as a space of uncritical identity formation. Rather than imagining the library as a deep well where anything and everything can be found, articulating the library as a space of rigorous organization and discipline allows us to understand both the limits and potentially libratory aspects of library space...*

WAS “CRUSHED” THAT LIBRARIES ARE REMOVING LGBT CONTENT FROM CHILDREN’S SECTIONS

In a tweet from March 13, 2023, Emily Drabinski tweeted that it was “crushing” that LGBT content was removed from children’s and young adult sections:⁸

⁷ *Women & Environments International Magazine*, “Gendered S(h)elves,” [Fall 2009](#)

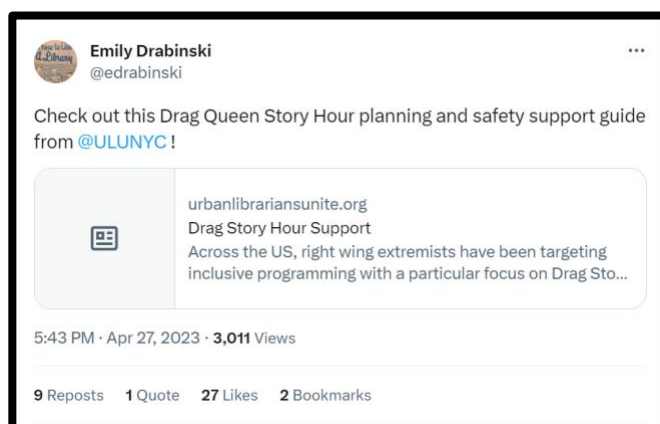
⁸ Twitter, @edrabinski, Tweet from [March 13, 2023](#)





SUPPORTS DRAG QUEEN STORY HOUR

In a tweet from April 2023, Emily Drabinski tweeted about a guide that helps librarians plan drag queen story hour events:⁹



Drabinski also defended drag queen story hour by questioning “who could be against story hour, right?” in an interview for WNYC’s *All of It* in September 2022:¹⁰

Emily Drabinski (09:40):

*I mean, I think what we need are more librarians, right? That, like, one of the stories that I heard at the conference last week was from a librarian who said that her library has collaborations and connections that she's built with other public and private institutions in her town that **when the right showed up about a drag queen story hour and like, who could be against story hour, right?** It's just baffling to me. Um, it didn't get a lot of traction. The community, 'cause the community saw the library as the place that it was the where the diaper bank ran was run. You know, it's like they have the community blood drives. And so in a lot of parts of the country, the*

⁹ Twitter, @edrabinski, Tweet from [April 27, 2023](#)

¹⁰ Pod Chaser, All of It, "Talking Banned Books With The American Library Association's Next President" [September 22, 2022](#)



library is sort of the heart of the community and the thicker the connections we can make to our patrons and to our community, the more, the better we're able to sort of fight back against these incursions. So I think the last thing we need is sort of armed librarians. What we need are librarians to be fully resourced and supported.

SAID CENTERING QUEERNESS AT LIBRARIES IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN LIBRARIES' SUPPORTING DEMOCRACY AND CITIZENSHIP

In an article titled "Queering Library Space: Notes Toward a New Geography of the Library," Emily Drabinski advocated for "a space based on an ideology that centered notions of queerness and difference rather than of democracy." In essence, arguing that libraries should no longer serve a function as pillars of a democracy:¹¹

...If we concede that sexuality generally, and queer sexuality specifically, makes a habit of exceeding bounded systems, the organizing principles of library space become open to question. Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner locate queer culture in terms that make explicit the difficulty of containing it:

By queer culture we mean a world-making project, where 'world,' like 'public,' differs from community or group because it necessarily includes more people than can be identified, more spaces than can be mapped beyond a few reference points, modes of feeling that can be learned rather than experienced as a birthright. The queer world is a space of entrances, exits, unsystematized lines of acquaintance, projected horizons, typifying examples, alternate routes, blockages, incommensurate geographies (1998, p. 558).

When we think of queerness as this volatile and this much in motion, its escape from the containment of the classification scheme that would keep it housed in a particular class number is less surprising. **This constitutes a fundamentally different way of imagining the role of the library. A space based on an ideology that centered notions of queerness and difference rather than of democracy and citizenship would need to reflect this kind of expansiveness.** How might we imagine spaces of "incommensurate geographies"?

The field of queer geography engages this question and encourages us to think through the effect of queerness on social spaces. In Larry Knopp's analysis of queer and feminist geographies, he articulates the idea of place through the lens of queerness. Places, he writes, "are constituted by ever-changing practices and purposes that are both informed by and generative of all kinds of lingering legacies, including myriad intended and unintended consequences. Many of these legacies are themselves products of the interactions between human beings, their material and semiotic creations, and nonhuman forces, in complex networks and relationships (such as those embodied in technologies, institutions, and infrastructures)" (2007, p. 50).

When we imagine space in this way, rather than in terms of the rigid ordering project of libraries as we currently imagine and manifest them, we open a possibility for a new

¹¹ Emily Drabinski "Queering Library Space: Notes Toward a New Geography of the Library" [June 10, 2008](#)



kind of generative space. **The social space of the library changes from that of an ordering machine that subordinates objects in a classification scheme that serves the citizen-making project of democracy.** Instead, perhaps we can begin to imagine a spatial practice of the library that would place the queer books at the West Gate branch at the first order of social space. While this work of imagination is beyond the scope of this paper, I hope it gestures toward the space we might think next.



ON BEING A MARXIST

“IT’S VERY MUCH WHO I AM AND SHAPES A LOT OF HOW I THINK ABOUT SOCIAL CHANGE”

In an interview with Brook Gladstone of public radio station, WNYC, Emily Drabinski was questioned about her “I’m a Marxist lesbian” statement, which Drabinski resolutely stood behind:¹²

(4:21)

BROOKE GLADSTONE **You tweeted excitedly, “I’m a Marxist lesbian, and I won!”**
And for some reason, this elicited a bit of a backlash.

EMILY DRABINSKI It really did. And I was very surprised because the end of that tweet, which no one ever mentions, is that I also said, “my mom is so proud of me.”

BROOKE GLADSTONE It did show you had a loving mom. **It doesn't really quite address the Marxist lesbian part.**

EMILY DRABINSKI **No. And it's very much who I am and shapes a lot of how I think about social change** and making a difference in the world. But of course, I tweeted it into the middle of an extremely fractured society. One where we have the rise of an extremist right that has come for everything that I care about.

BROOKE GLADSTONE And accordingly, conservative media took on your tweet. The Breitbart piece had the catchy title, “Dewey Decimal Disaster.” I can't believe I'm saying this, but didn't Breitbart have a point when it said you brought an explicit political agenda? I mean, you wrote that the consequences of decades of unchecked climate change, class war, white supremacy, and imperialism have led us to the mess we're in.

You also noted if we want a world that includes public goods like the library, we must organize our collective power and wield it. The American Library Association offers us a set of tools that can harness our energies and build those capacities. You must have known that in espousing values other than the freedom of information, the err library value, that you are walking directly into a buzzsaw.

EMILY DRABINSKI Huh? You know, I didn't start the buzzsaw. The problem is not Breitbart publishing an article about me. The problem we're facing is disinvestment in public institutions and public goods. **And I guess you could say I bring a political viewpoint to that, but I don't see how a person couldn't. All of us are working from a set of assumptions about the world and things that we see as normal.** Those of us who are on the outside of the status quo, I would say we are forced to sort of articulate those ideologies to ourselves, but everyone is shaped by one.

Drabinski also denied that there is public concern about libraries grooming children, which she claimed is “an extremist view of libraries”:¹³

¹² WNYCStudios.org, “Libraries Under Attack,” [November 11, 2022](#)

¹³ WNYCStudios.org, “Libraries Under Attack,” [November 11, 2022](#)



(6:40)

BROOKE GLADSTONE The Federalist's take on your appointment was headlined "Amid Public Concern about Grooming Kids, American Library Association Picks President Who Pushes Queering Libraries."

EMILY DRABINSKI First, I would say that there are no public concerns about libraries grooming children. That is an extremist view of libraries. Almost no one in the public shares that view. I just would want to push back against any idea that this is a public concern. So these right wing attacks attempt to force us into talking about their agenda, and I'd like to talk a lot less about it to be honest.

LAWS ARE NOT A "THING TO BE COMPLIED WITH."

In a stunning refutation of the rule of law and any need to activists or libraries to comply with the norms or laws in their communities, Drabinski stated on a 2023 episode of the UK interview show Copyright Waffle that she and her colleagues do not need to follow laws.¹⁴

You know, in the law there are many, many places where the law just doesn't apply. Right? And so to me, the the only way to think that the law is cut and dried and applied equally and can be complied with, like, the only way you could think that is if you had never been subject to the law, and those of us who have been subject to the law, you've been, you know, you are overpoliced or over incarcerated as, uh, you know, your commute that happens to your community or you know, you've been on strike. And the state brings all of its forces to bear upon crushing you, you know, like once you've been up against the law on the, like the, and had it wielded against you. And that's really most of us, although maybe not most of us in libraries, which is another conversation, but it, it becomes difficult to think about laws as something of the sort of real thing that needs to be complied with

"CRITICAL LIBRARIANSHIP" CENTERS "COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL JUSTICE AND SOCIAL CHANGE"

In a 2019 article for CUNY AcademicWorks, Emily Drabinski authored an article titled "What is Critical About Critical Librarianship?". In it, she said that one of the key elements of "critical librarianship" is the longing to "disrupt the quo" and "center a commitment to social justice and social change" – serving as another example of Drabinski wanting to use libraries to push a political agenda:¹⁵

...This approach to knowledge organization offers one point of access into critical librarianship. Next, I will offer some of what I see as the foundational elements of a critical approach to our work. I'd caution that this is mostly just what I'm talking about when I'm talking about critical librarianship. There isn't a central organizing

¹⁴ Copyright Waffle "Episode 23 with Emily Drabinski" [June 2, 2023](#)

¹⁵ CUNY AcademicWorks, "What is Critical About Critical Librarianship," [2019](#)



committee making decisions about what must be changed and how we will organize to make that change. I see this as both a strength and a weakness of critical librarianship—it is a loose enough affiliation that one can likely find comrades somewhere underneath the big tent. But to the extent that social and political change require organized, concerted effort, #critlib is less good at producing that. **What I see in that big tent, though, is this: a persistent longing for a librarianship that looks and acts in ways that disrupt the status quo, that center a commitment to social justice and social change,** that elevate and amplify the voices of a diverse group of librarians, and that grapple directly with the problems of power concentrated in the hands of a only a few...

And even more brazenly political, Drabinski cited the election of Donald Trump as an opportunity for libraries to “create research guides that help people understand how to resist authoritarian regimes”:¹⁶

...I will close this piece with a few issues in our field that I think critical librarians must address. Many of these are about us as the people who make libraries work. I believe we matter. Our work matters. Who we have at our reference desks and in our classrooms matters. **Since the election of Donald Trump, an American instance of a global right wing turn, we have seen an explosion of texts defining the role that libraries can play during difficult times. We can offer information and entertainment, space for groups of people to meet and connect and organize. We can create research guides that help people understand how to resist authoritarian regimes.** All of those things that libraries do are well described elsewhere. What we sometimes miss is the importance of beginning our critical work with ourselves...

WORKED WITH THE “HARDCORE MARXIST” JOURNAL, “RADICAL TEACHER”

In an interview with the *Copyright Waffle* podcast, Emily Drabinski discussed her experience writing for the journal "Radical Teacher" and efforts to turn it into an open-access journal, which would essentially remove article author copyrights. She recalled that even among the socialists, feminists, and “anti-racists” that were among its authorship, there was significant disagreement among contributors about not retaining ownership rights to their intellectual work when considering the transition to open-access status. She also said “everybody there was a hardcore Marxist, all of them”:¹⁷

Emily Drabinski (28:49):

It's interesting. Like I, think about, I've worked on this journal, called “Radical Teacher,” and it was....And we, we made it an open access journal because it was long story that I won't get into, but one of the **things I remember most about that, and it was a socialist, feminist, anti-racist journal of teaching practice. So everybody there was a hardcore Marxist, all of them, you know?** Uh, but when we were talking about going open access, that people were very uncomfortable with

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Copyright Waffle "Episode 23 with Emily Drabinski" [June 2, 2023](#)



the idea that they would not own the rights to their, to the intellectual output of the journal. And so it was like, it wasn't so much that, you know, like people aren't seamless in their political viewpoints. And often when it comes to your own experience, I want everything else to be free, but me, I have to be paid.

Later, Drabinski was asked to name people who inspire her. She named three people, two of which – Miriam Kaba and Ruthie Gilmore – are prison abolitionists, and the other, a transgender rights activist:¹⁸

Emily Drabinski (40:24):

...Dean Spade is one of my heroes, a transgender rights activist, and he founded the Sylvia Rivera Law Project here in New York City, uh, which is a law project for working class people of color, uh, low income, gender expansive people. And it's an example of an organization that was built by and for the people that it serves and is an example I think, of creating in the present on the ground, the world that we want in the future. Other people who do that every day. Miriam Kaba is an abolitionist whose work inspires me every day. Uh, she's got project called the, I think it's the Million Things podcast, where this question of what am I gonna do? How do I, how do I survive? And how do I help my neighbors? And how do I do anything in a world that feels so bleak sometimes and argues that it will take a million things. So you just gotta try, throw something against the wall, see what works. Uh, and Miriam does that every day. So those are two of my heroes. Ruthie Gilmore is a prison abolitionist whose theories about the state and theories about power, shape, how I think about everything that I do in my world. So those are three of my heroes. And then I try to meet one every day, <laugh>, you know? Mm-hmm. I think everybody has something to teach us, so mm-hmm...

Drabinski continued on to say that prisons are “horrific”:¹⁹

Speaker 3: (41:43)

Thanks for that. I, I'm, I'm thinking back to when you were talking at, at LILAC actually your, your keynote talking about, it's not quite the topic of copyright, but about prisons and about thinking about the future and how, what the future might look like, and, and that we do just assume that it is natural to lock people up. Mm-hmm. And, um, it clearly doesn't work very well, does it? Mm-hmm.

Emily Drabinski: (42:05)

It's just, it's just horrific. And one of the things, the great shames of our time that I, I think we'll look back and think that was, you know, I'm, I'm hopeful that my child will be able to have a child who will be able to have a child who will look back at this time in history as, as, uh, truly horrific.

CALLED THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS METHOD FOR CLASSIFYING BOOKS “ROOTED IN HISTORICAL STRUCTURES OF WHITE SUPREMACY”

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.



In a 2008 chapter she wrote for the book “Radical Cataloging: Essays at the Front,” Emily Drabinski called the Library of Congress method for classifying books “rooted in historical structures of White supremacy”:²⁰

...A student raised her hand and asked whether students specifically interested in the history of White women needed to search the catalog using the term WHITE. My colleague, a reference and instruction librarian with five years of experience, answered yes. While we might wish that LC acknowledged White as a racial category and marker for domination, it does not. LC is rooted in historical structures of White supremacy; as such, the catalog presumes White to be the normative term. The librarian got it wrong...

ENVISIONS A “SOCIALIST FUTURE”

Drabinski discussed her “vision of a socialist future” on the “SRSLYWRONG” podcast in May 2022:²¹

Emily Drabinski (16:26):

*You know, a really highly developed system of sharing. **So in my vision of a socialist future**, our systems for sharing are robust and everybody uses them. So there's a lot of left history. When I first started library school, Mitch Friedman was the president of ALA and his tenure was focused on worker rights as well and the welfare and working conditions of library workers. So I think about his tenure, when I think about a potential one for me, Pat Schuman as a past president from the early two thousands who fought really hard, difficult, good fights around filtering in libraries and the sort of weaponization of the protection of children, you know, as a way of shutting down access to information for people. So like what we're seeing in the book bannings, that's just a story that comes up and a fight that comes up.*

“PUBLIC PROJECT OF RAISING CHILDREN”

Drabinski said in an appearance on WNYC's *All of It* that is the job of libraries to support the “public project of raising children” and that “one of the principles of librarianship is that every reader has a right to decide for themselves what they read, and that includes children”:²²

Emily Drabinski (11:32):

*Well, I mean, parents are responsible for parenting their children. And we are, as libraries, responsible for providing resources and **support for the public project of raising children**. Um, we have policies, right? Most libraries have challenge policies, and it's our task to defend the policy, not the book. Um, you know, and so those exist in libraries, but I would also say, if you don't want your kid to read that book, then make sure that they don't check it out. **And, you know, the other thing I would say***

²⁰ Radical Cataloging: Essays at the Front, “Teaching the Radical Catalog,” [2008](#)

²¹ SRSLYWRONG “250 – Interview: Emily Drabinski for ALA President” [May 16, 2022](#)

²² Pod Chaser, All of It, “Talking Banned Books With The American Library Association's Next President” [September 22, 2022](#)



is one of the principles of, uh, librarianship is that every reader has a right to decide for themselves what they read. And that includes children, you know, so my kid right now is reading *Dune*. I can't imagine a more boring book. Like, it just, it's a genre I don't care about. I don't wanna read it. I don't understand why he's turning this pages like what is in his head. And he has a right to a private life as a reader just like I do.



ON CONSERVATIVES

“FAR-RIGHT, WHITE SUPREMACIST, FASCIST”

On July 20, 2023, Emily Drabinski took the stage at the Organizing for Change conference and discussed her election as President of the ALA²³. While discussing the resignation of a library director in Boundary County, Idaho, Drabinski claimed that the city and county governments, as well as the school board, had “been taken over by political extremists” that have a “sort of far-right, white supremacist, fascist” approach to politics:

Emily Drabinski (05:25):

*“So one of the differences about the right in the United States is that they're heavily, heavily armed. Um, and they had taken over every part of the city and county government in Boundary County. They owned the school board. They owned the city council, the sheriff's office, right? **Each of those public bodies had been taken over by political extremists who had a, who have a sort of far-right white supremacist fascist approach to, uh, politics, right?** They want to control the region. So Kimber's trying to run a library in this context. And libraries are fundamentally about access to ideas, free inquiry, freedom of information, freedom to have ideas to read about ourselves, to read, you know, as a, as a person who has read a lot of books, to try to both understand who I am, **but also just because it's fun and frothy to read about gay people doing gay things.**”*

Emily Drabinski (06:24):

“I have a right to read those materials, and the library has an obligation to provide those to me as part of the public that they serve. So in this case, the library was targeted for, its, uh, for this list of 300 books that the, the pro censorship advocates have come up with in the us. And they are going sort of library by library in a pretty coordinated effort to remove books about, uh, LGBTQ plus experience, about black experience, about the experiences of people, of color, of people, of a variety of genders, and, uh, have really been pushing to get these books completely out of the library. So they do that by, uh, running and taking over the library board. They do that by, uh, filing challenges, lots and lots of them. And that's what happened to Kimber. They filed a challenge, uh, on this list of 300 books that they said were, uh, pornographic and dangerous to children, books that represent life, that represent black life.”

Emily Drabinski (07:23):

“Uh, and the problem for Kimber was that she couldn't comply with their demands to censor those materials because the library didn't even collect 'em. Uh, they parked outside of her home with guns. They followed her home, her and her staff home at night. They, uh, terrorized the library workers and eventually pushed Kimber to leave the library. She, you know, I keep up to date with her because, uh, I can't believe what happened to her. And she's having difficulty even finding employment in the region,

²³ YouTube "Keynote 1- Emily Drabinski Organizing for Change" [July 20, 2023](#)



uh, given the reach and the scope of the, sort of the takeover of that part of our country by, uh, extremists. So that's the sort of question I have. I'd love to be asking affirmative questions about how we're gonna win. **But right now, the very well organized right has us a bit back on our heels. And it's everywhere. It's not just Idaho, it's in Michigan, it's in Missouri."**

"CHRISTO-FASCIST RIGHT"

In an inflammatory blog post on *Truth Out* titled "Disinvestment Poses as Great a Threat to Libraries as Book Bans," Emily Drabinski recklessly targeted those with traditional Christian values, hurling accusations about them being part of a "Christo-fascist right."²⁴ Her divisive language seeks to vilify and discredit Christians:

...The current surge in challenges is part of a much longer story about bipartisan support for disinvestment in public goods, public institutions and public sector workers. What the right gets right about libraries is that they matter, and that any vision of a fully privatized and corporatized society requires dismantling those institutions that have survived, if barely, from the Reagan era until today. Moral panics often serve as cover for organized abandonment and violent attacks, and this blockbuster book ban moment is no different.

*We know that the way we define a problem shapes what we can imagine as solutions. **As long as we agree to the terms set by a Christo-fascist right, organized over decades and currently mobilized to attack schools and libraries and the people who work in them, we'll be stuck defending the indefensible, arguing for the right to read on very narrow terms.** We must advance an affirmative vision of libraries as one among many public institutions that require investment, not just in terms of books on shelves, but also in the infrastructure — buildings, people, systems — that connects people to each other and to the resources and services that enable us to live more than bare lives...*

CONSERVATIVES "DON'T WANT BLACK PEOPLE, JEWISH PEOPLE, GAY PEOPLE TO EXIST AT ALL"

In a *Thought Project* podcast appearance in 2022, Emily Drabinski discussed conservative efforts to keep inappropriate books out of libraries. She claimed that people who want to "ban books" don't want "black people, Jewish people, gay people to exist at all".²⁵

(12:02) Tanya: Absolutely. So, before we get to the big conversation between us about your candidacy for the American Library Association Presidency, I want to ask, you have done couple of podcasts. We're living in this era in America, in this moment in America and I think it harkens back to the McCarthy era and some different waves. But, can we talk about the banning of books and book lists and banning of books

²⁴ Truth Out "Disinvestment Poses as Great a Threat to Libraries as Book Bans" [September 26, 2022](#)

²⁵ Thought Project Podcast, "Emily Drabinski" [March 10, 2022](#)



and schools and in public libraries. And I wouldn't be surprised before this is all over that we're going to see burning of books.

Emily Drabinski: Oh yeah. I think you have seen that.

Tanya Domi: What are your thoughts on this? I know you have strong thoughts on it, but let's start about the banning of books and the intervention of "Parents trying to protect their children from Critical Race Theory."

Emily Drabinski: Yeah. It's just not about books. It's like the fight against gay marriage. Was not about, not wanting gay people to get married, it's about not wanting gay people at all.

(13:00) Tanya Domi: That's right.

Emily Drabinski: So, you ban books about LGBTQ experience or you ban books about black experience-

Tanya Domi: The holocaust.

Emily Drabinski: ... the holocaust, **you ban these books not because you don't want people to read them, but because you don't want black people, Jewish people, gay people to exist at all.** So, it's very scary and very violent and super organized. And I think, that's the thing that's most frightening to me.

(13:30) Tanya Domi: Yes.

Emily Drabinski: That these are not one off individual parents saying, "Oh, my child is precious."

Tanya Domi: Right. Most is being initiated by governors and-

Emily Drabinski: Oh yeah.

Tanya Domi: ... legislators and mayors and it's like, we've let loose a burning fire, that's just consuming people.

Tanya Domi: ... legislators and mayors and it's like, we've let loose a burning fire, that's just consuming people.

Emily Drabinski: **The right is highly organized and really well resourced.** There's a great book by Jen Trady called, "The Revolution That Wasn't." She talks about the influence of the internet on organizing and makes the case that I find compelling and true, **that the far right simply has access to more money and time.** And, there's a reason that their websites are prettier than a union website, because they just have more money and more resources.

(14:13)

Domi: More resources. Right.



“Angry, White Mob Parents”

Drabinski also claimed conservatives want a “white, Christian nation” and referred to parents trying to get inappropriate books off shelves as “angry, white mob parents”:²⁶

Emily Drabinski: ... to pour into that and they're better at organizing people around a disciplined party line, where we're against all kinds of difference. We want a white Christian nation and we're going to take steps everywhere we can to make that happen. And, they also know that people feel good when they can experience power in a collective act.

(14:38)

*Emily Drabinski: So, they produce ways into those feelings of solidarity that we work for on the left as well. But, I can with another **two or three angry white mob parents, organized to get a book off a library shelf and succeed** and get a feeling of real capacity and power to change the world. So I think, the right is just really better at doing that right now, because they have more resources and the party discipline is really for somebody on the left, it's sort of impressive to see.*

Drabinski then claimed that conservatives “don’t even want schools or libraries at all” and that it is an “abrogation” of librarians’ professional expertise to oppose inappropriate books in libraries:²⁷

(17:38)

Emily Drabinski: Yeah. But, they don't even want schools or libraries at all.

Emily Drabinski: They want all of it to be privatized and

Tanya Domi: Absolutely.

*Emily Drabinski: It's tough. **And so, where are the librarians on that, pretty strongly against these abrogations of our professional expertise to select materials for our communities, like that's our core job.***

(18:20)

Emily Drabinski: I think our community's pretty cool, but American libraries are like any other American institution.

Tanya Domi: True.

Emily Drabinski: It's rooted in racial exclusions.

Tanya Domi: True.

Emily Drabinski: Black people not being banned from libraries in the South.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.



Tanya Domi: True.

Emily Drabinski: That's a part of our heritage.

Emily Drabinski: Yeah. And that's my job and Jenison Lucas is the current president of the Association of Library Services to children and her position on this is, I think, one of the clearest I've seen that, by politicizing what we do as professionals.

Tanya Domi: You compromise.

Emily Drabinski then said that conservative “activists” are “taking away our professional field of terrain of struggle”:²⁸

Emily Drabinski: Yeah. **These activists are taking away our professional field of terrain of struggle and it's not... Yeah. It's something we're all fighting against, I think.**

Tanya Domi: Absolutely. Okay. Well, I wanted to get that out on the table.

“ANGRY PARENTS SCREAMING ABOUT SEX ED AND THEIR FRAGILE CHILDREN”

In a post for TruthOut.org in January 2023, Emily Drabinsky denigrated “angry parents screaming about sex ed and their fragile children”:²⁹

...Linking a culture war with concrete policy is a hallmark of the right's rise to power. Angry parents screaming about sex ed and their fragile children generates a lot of media attention, as do the protests that push back. It can be harder to shine that spotlight on education policy that constitutes censorship by another name: the defunding of public institutions, including the library. One consequence of book banning efforts is that a whole lot of people are thinking a whole lot more about libraries and why they matter, and many of them are showing up in great numbers to defend the right to read. The project now is to meet that moment with a vision and plan that connects this new energy to longstanding organized struggles for increased public funding for public goods...

CLAIMED THE ALA PRESIDENT DRIVES THE NARRATIVE ON LIBRARY ISSUES

On the podcast “SRSly WRONG” in May 2022, Emily Drabinski discussed how the president of the ALA serves as the face of the organization, particularly when it comes to countering conservative efforts to keep inappropriate books out of libraries:³⁰

Emily Drabinski (04:06):

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ TruthOut.org, “As the Public Focuses on Book Bans, the Right Is Quietly Defunding Libraries,” [January 21, 2023](#)

³⁰ SRSlyWRONG “250 – Interview: Emily Drabinski for ALA President” [May 16, 2022](#)



So when something happens about libraries, there's a scandal, right? So right now in the United States, there's just nonstop constant barrage of book challenges organized right-wing attack on public institutions, right? We're seeing that. And one of the ways that attack is manifesting right now is through these organized challenges to books inside school libraries and inside public libraries. So that's happening and the press calls the American Library Association on the phone and talks to them and the person often that they'll call is the president. And so that president will tell a story to the public and tell a story to the membership about what's happening around issues of information access and public spaces inside of libraries. **So that's, I think where I see the president playing a role is as driving the narrative for people within the association and outside of it about what libraries are, about, what they're for, why they matter,** and how if the state would invest in them would reinvest in public institutions, libraries being one of those, but also childcare and healthcare and roads and bridges and green building initiatives and all those things.

LIBRARIES ARE “GOOD PLACES THAT DO ALL KINDS OF THINGS THAT PEOPLE ON THE RIGHT DON’T LIKE”

On the podcast *Citations Needed*, Emily Drabinski boasted that libraries are “good places that do all kinds of things that people on the right don’t like”:³¹

(36:39)

Emily Drabinski: It's so confusing. But I think in some ways, it's because the library is sort of the last public institution standing. The right has attacked public education for a long time, they're very far along in the process of dismantling that through vouchers, and privatization and charter schools and all that kind of stuff, and higher ed the same, right, you've got an institution that's been gutted by adjunctification and lack of resources, and the library is sort of the last one a little bit. It's also not as if it's been immune to sort of the forces of decimation, right? Like, you've got very, very few school librarians left, public libraries operating on sort of shoe strings, and we don't have the staff there who could sort of fight against these things. I think we're in kind of a fragile moment, **and we're also good places that do all kinds of things that people on the right don't like.**

“CHRISTO-FASCIST, RIGHT-WING” EXTREMISTS (AGAIN)

In an appearance on the *All of It* podcast in September 2022, Emily Drabinski again referred to conservatives as “Christo fascist, right-wing, sort of extremists”:³²

Emily Drabinski (06:07):

Well, we see the sort of disaster happening right now, and it's very, very real. I'm from, uh, Idaho is my home state, and following the book ban efforts there, which aren't

³¹ Citations Needed Podcast, “Episode 179: From Budget Cuts to Book Bans — The Decades-Long Assault on Public Libraries,” [March 29, 2023](#)

³² Pod Chaser, All of It, “Talking Banned Books With The American Library Association's Next President” [September 22, 2022](#)



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just, you know, sort of, were against an individual book and sort of filing a petition, but it involves armed, uh, Christo fascist, right-wing sort of extremists, bringing guns to public meetings, staking out the library of director's home, like it's really quite violent.

