

6-12-2009

Christian group sues for right to burn gay teen novel

Alison Flood

Follow this and additional works at: http://dc.uwm.edu/west_bend_library_challenge



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Flood, Alison, "Christian group sues for right to burn gay teen novel" (2009). *West Bend Community Memorial Library (Wisconsin)*, 2009. Paper 132.

http://dc.uwm.edu/west_bend_library_challenge/132

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by UWM Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in West Bend Community Memorial Library (Wisconsin), 2009 by an authorized administrator of UWM Digital Commons. For more information, please contact kristinw@uwm.edu.

Christian group sues for right to burn gay teen novel

Lawsuit also claims Francesca Lia Block's Baby Be-Bop 'constitutes a hate crime'

- [Alison Flood](#)
- Friday 12 June 2009 11.41 EDT

In a scene which appears to have been lifted straight out of Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451, a group of Christians in Wisconsin has launched a legal claim demanding the right to publicly burn a copy of a book for teenagers which they deem to be "explicitly vulgar, racial [sic], and anti-Christian".

The offending book is Francesca Lia Block's Baby Be-Bop, a young adult novel in which a boy, struggling with his homosexuality, is beaten up by a homophobic gang. The complaint, which according to the American Library Association also demands \$120,000 (£72,000) in compensatory damages for being exposed to the book in a display at West Bend Community Memorial Library, was lodged by four men from the Christian Civil Liberties Union.

Their suit says that "the plaintiffs, all of whom are elderly, claim their mental and emotional well-being was damaged by this book at the library," and that it contains derogatory language that could "put one's life in possible jeopardy, adults and children alike."

"The word 'faggot' is very derogatory and slanderous to all males," the suit continues. "Using the word 'Nigger' is dangerously offensive, disrespectful to all people. These words can permeate violence." The suit also claims that the book "constitutes a [hate crime](#), and that it degrades the community".

"They've filed a claim against the city of West Bend and the city has to decide if it is valid," said Deborah Caldwell-Stone, acting director of the ALA's office for intellectual freedom. "Their insurance company is evaluating the claim, but I would be very surprised if they found any merit in it ... Should they find any merit in this claim, we would certainly support the library in fighting it."

The legal challenge follows a lengthy campaign by some West Bend residents to restrict access to teenage books they deemed sexually explicit from library shelves, which was eventually thrown out at the start of June.

"Obviously we were really pleased with the outcome to that – there was a unanimous vote to keep the books in the library and we thought the matter should be over," said Larry Siems, director of the Freedom to Write programme at PEN America.

Siems said there was clearly "a bit of theatre" in the lawsuit which followed. "They've filed a lawsuit which has little possibility of going forward legally, and they're asking for damages

which include the right to burn a book. It does seem more to gain publicity than a real serious challenge." But, he said, PEN remained very concerned about the impulse behind the claim. "This is a group of people trying aggressively to rid the library of these books and that's very serious - it needs to be fought."

The claimants, he said, "have a right to continue to express their views, and this in a way is a creative attempt to express those views". But it's "also a dangerous game when you're talking about something like book burning, calling on the law to burn books. It's certainly completely un-American, and if they paused, I think they would agree."

It was not possible to reach the Christian Civil Liberties Union for comment.