

Cultural Daily

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Literature: The Content Wars

Adam Leipzig · Tuesday, September 28th, 2010



The Color Purple, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Catcher in the Rye* – classics of American literature, and books some political and parent groups continually try to pull off library shelves. To draw attention to our freedom to read, a freedom that (surprisingly) some would challenge, the American Library Association and other groups have declared this Banned Books Week. You'll find "banned book read-outs" going on at local bookstores.

What would be worse than banned books? How about works you didn't even know were banned – works that never made it onto the shelves or screens or downloads in the first place, so you were not aware they were being censored.

That's exactly what may be happening with all forms of creative content as digital delivery systems ramp up. Digital delivery, for those who still have difficulty understanding Twitter, is how books arrive on your Kindle or how movies are starting to show up at theatres. For movies, gone, soon, will be the days of celluloid and heavy film canisters. Not only will movies be digital, but they will be delivered to the theatres via satellite or high-speed internet connection: just like an e-book. They'll just exist as data files on a cinema's server.

Once movies are delivered this way, it will become easy to change them quickly, and to change their content for specific purposes. An R-rated movie in New York might have a PG version playing in Louisville. The abortion reference in a film in Los Angeles might not appear in the version shown in Tucson. The pro-Glenn Beck T-shirt worn by a main character on a Kansas City movie screen might be swapped out for a Rachel Maddow T-shirt in San Francisco.

The same could easily be true of the books we read electronically (publishers are already exploring custom editions), and the television shows we watch.

Soon it would no longer even be news that some content was being proactively censored. All of this would play into the narrowing of the American mind and the increasing polarization of our common attempts at dialogue. If you never come across new ideas that might challenge your thoughts, your thoughts will never change.

In Ray Bradbury's classic novel, 451 degrees Fahrenheit was the temperature at which books burned. Soon, it may happen, easily, with little notice and at room temperature, with the click of a mouse.

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