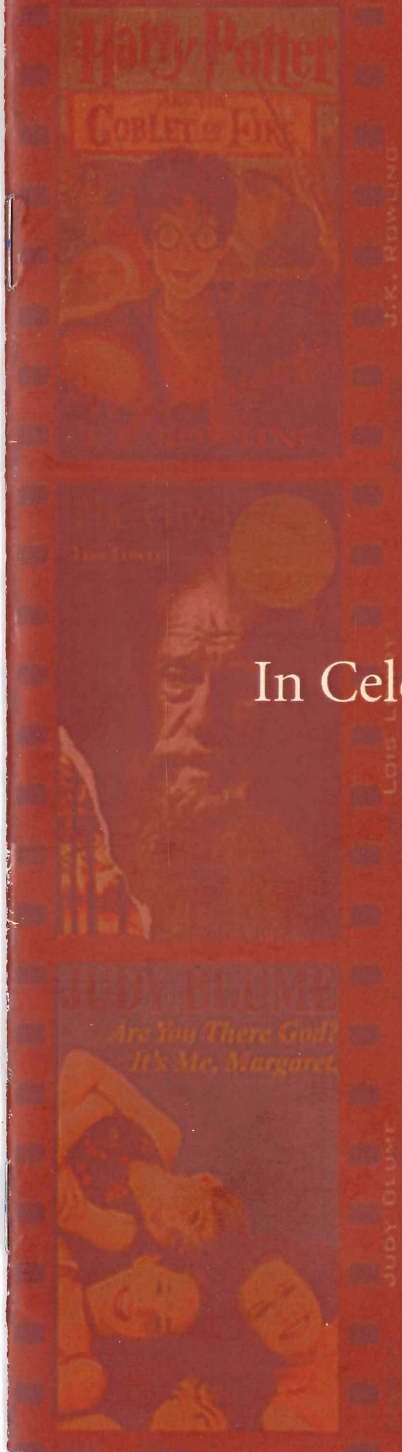


# Cornellians and Banned Books

In Celebration of the 25th Anniversary of  
**Banned Books Week**  
September 23-30, 2006



Cornell University  
Library

## Introduction

Cornell University Library recently honored the 25th anniversary of Banned Books Week – a nationwide initiative to help people celebrate the freedom to read from a broad range of possibilities. This freedom stems from the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which guarantees freedom of speech and freedom of the press. Threats against reading materials occur regularly and come from both the left and the right and all points in between. The top three reasons for challenging books include their being “sexually explicit,” containing “offensive language,” and being “unsuited to age group.” Over the years, works by Cornell authors Toni Morrison, Vladimir Nabokov, Kurt Vonnegut, and E.B. White have come under attack. Five of their books are among the top 42 of 100 best novels of the 20th century that have been challenged or banned. And this year’s Reading Project choice, *The Great Gatsby*, by F. Scott Fitzgerald, is also on that list.

We asked various Cornell faculty members, librarians, administrators, and students to choose a favorite banned book and tell us something about their choice. Their responses helped shape a display in Olin Library during Banned Books week, and are reproduced here. Randy Wayne, Associate Professor of Plant Biology, was inspired to contribute an essay on “Profiles in Courage in Medical Science,” in which he describes the impact that censorship has had on medical procedures.

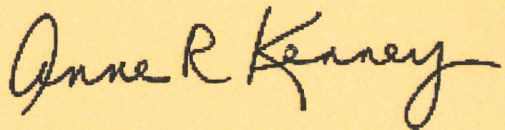
In tandem with the exhibit, we solicited comments via a flip chart from those who viewed it. Forty-one people responded. Books ranging from the *Bible* to *The Satanic Verses* were mentioned. One viewer wrote that *To Kill a Mockingbird* had “saved and

transformed my life.” (The book had also been chosen by two Cornellians in this display). Many viewers expressed surprise to learn that such books as *Winnie the Pooh* had been banned. “Beyond the shock value of the display,” one viewer noted, “I’d be interested in knowing by what and where they were banned.” (The American Libraries Associate maintains a wonderful website on banned books, including the reasons for censorship at [www.ala.org/ala/oif/bannedbooksweek/bannedbooksweek.htm](http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/bannedbooksweek/bannedbooksweek.htm).)

Another person commented that “just because some fool banned it does not make it good.” One of the last flip chart comments came from someone, who, I’m guessing, hails from California: “Whoever bans books should just, like, stop now.”

Other library-sponsored Banned Book Week events included a Speak Out, co-sponsored with the Cornell American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) on Sept. 28th at Ho Plaza, and an exhibition in the Severinhaus Reading Room of Kroch Library on books banned in Asia during the 20th century.

Many thanks to Rachel Brill and Tiffany Howe for their design work and to the Conservation Department staff for mounting the exhibit.



Anne R. Kenney

Senior Associate University Librarian

Public Services and Assessment

Cornell University Library

# 50 Selected Banned Books: How Many Have You Read?

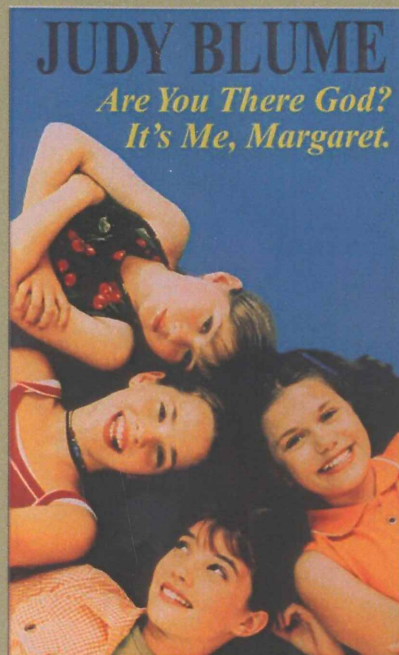
- 
- The Great Gatsby, F. Scott Fitzgerald  
Catcher in the Rye, JD Salinger  
The Grapes of Wrath, John Steinbeck  
To Kill a Mockingbird, Harper Lee  
The Color Purple, Alice Walker  
Ulysses, James Joyce  
Beloved, Toni Morrison  
The Lord of the Flies, William Golding  
1984, George Orwell  
The Sound and the Fury, William Faulkner  
Lolita, Vladimir Nabokov  
Of Mice and Men, John Steinbeck  
In Cold Blood, Truman Capote  
Catch-22, Joseph Heller  
Brave New World, Aldous Huxley  
Animal Farm, George Orwell  
Satanic Verses, Salman Rushdie  
As I Lay Dying, William Faulkner  
A Farewell to Arms, Ernest Hemingway  
Heart of Darkness, Joseph Conrad  
Winnie-the-Pooh, AA Milne  
Their Eyes were Watching God, Z. Hurston  
Invisible Man, Ralph Ellison  
Song of Solomon, Toni Morrison  
Things Fall Apart, Chinua Achebe  
Native Son, Richard Wright  
One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, Ken Kesey  
Slaughterhouse Five, Kurt Vonnegut  
The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas, G. Stein  
On the Road, Jack Kerouac  
Tropic of Cancer, Henry Miller  
Atlas Shrugged, Ayn Rand  
To the Lighthouse, Virginia Woolf  
Portrait of a Lady, Henry James  
Go Tell it on the Mountain, James Baldwin  
The World According to Garp, John Irving  
All the King's Men, Robert Penn Warren  
A Room with a View, EM Forster  
The Lord of the Rings, JRR Tolkien  
Schindler's List, Thomas Keneally  
I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, Maya Angelou  
Midnight's Children, Salman Rushdie  
Lady Chatterley's Lover, DH Lawrence  
Sex, Madonna  
Private Parts, Howard Stern  
Harry Potter (Series), J.K. Rowling  
The Handmaid's Tale, Margaret Atwood  
The House of Spirits, Isabel Allende  
Bless Me, Ultima, Rudolfo A. Anaya  
One Hundred Years of Solitude, Gabriel Marquez

# First Banned in 1970

Discussion of menstruation and breast development •  
Perceived as promoting anti-christian themes

Are You There God?  
It's Me, Margaret.

Judy Blume



Sherry Martin  
Assistant Professor  
Government Department

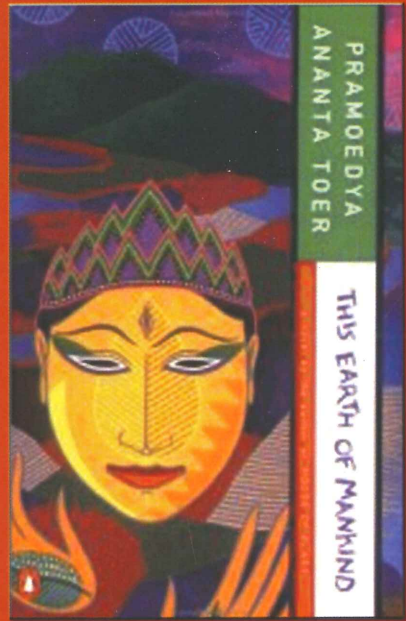
I read Judy Blume's *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* while sitting on the floor on the far side of my bed, facing away from the doorway. I did not keep the book hidden from my mom because frank discussions of puberty were taboo in our household- they weren't. I kept this secret because it represented the first time my best girl friends and I had something exciting and all of our own to whisper about. I loved the heady mixture of fear and exhilaration, anticipation and impatience,...and sometimes shame... that infused Margaret's letters to God. I was struck by the idea that God had time to lend a friendly and sympathetic ear to the innocent troubles that plague adolescent girls. In retrospect, I see this as a very powerful message for girls to take away at a life stage that adults view as truly troubling for girls. Judy Blume reminds us that in a better world the "troubles" that multiply during adolescence should be the ones that build people up rather than tearing them down.

# First Banned in 1979

Each book is seen as a covert attack  
and it is a crime to possess them.

## The Buru Quartet

Pramoedya Ananta Toer



Lisa J. Sansoucy  
Graduate Student  
Government

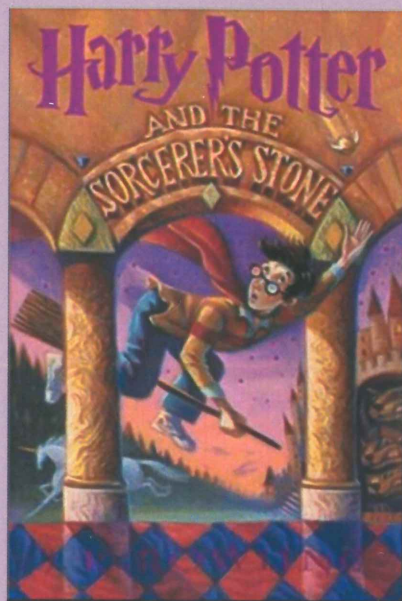
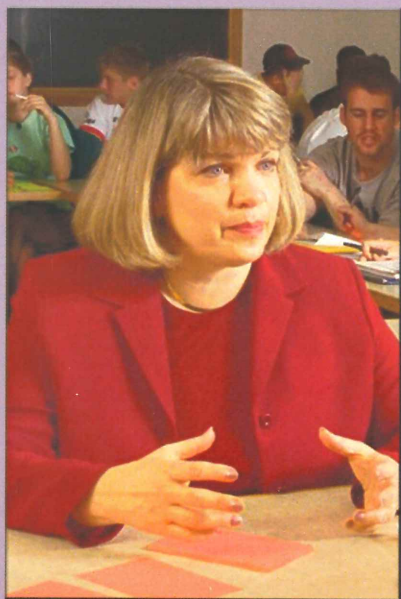
My choice is the *Buru Quartet* by Pramoedya Ananta Toer. Pramoedya, who died this past May, was Indonesia's most famous writer and political dissident, nominated many times for the Nobel Prize for Literature. He fought in the Indonesian revolution of 1965. Shortly thereafter, however, in the brutal crackdown of the Suharto regime, he was sent to a penal colony on the remote island of Buru. He was detained there under extremely harsh conditions for 11 years without trial or any formal charges. He wrote the four extraordinary novels that make up the *Buru Quartet* in the rare moments in prison when he was allowed to write. All of his work was banned in Indonesia. Pramoedya came to Cornell in April 1999 and the Southeast Asia Program has a video of his visit. The Program has also published English translations of many of his stories. I choose this work because of Pramoedya's great courage, extraordinary literary talent, and commitment to social justice.

# First Banned in 1998

References to the Occult • Violence •  
Promotes evil and erodes morality

## Harry Potter Books

J.K. Rowling



Harry Potter is my favorite banned book series because not only is it a family favorite of ours, but it pulled millions of kids into reading. Addiction to books is something we need more of in our world! The HP books are full of moral dilemmas, ambiguities and brave children and the world just wouldn't be the same without them.

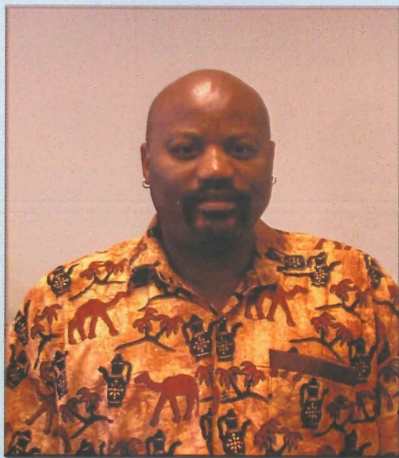
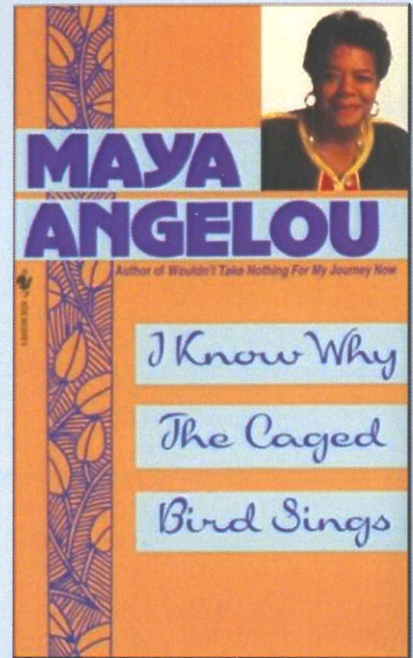
Deborah Streeter  
Professor  
Applied Economics and Management

# First Banned in 1996

Scenes of incest • Profanity • Sexual content • Violence

## I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings

Maya Angelou



Eric Kofi Acree  
African Librarian

Maya Angelou's *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings* has so much meaning to me. It seems as if I read this book all throughout my teenaged years. This book is the first in a string of books that Angelou would write about her life. Other books include *Gather Together in My Name*, *Singin' and Swingin'* and *Gettin' Merry Like Christmas* and *The Heart of a Woman*. In *Cage Bird*, Angelou writes about growing up in Arkansas with her brother Bailey during the 1930s in which lynching and Jim Crow were the lay of the land. Angelou also shares how she was tormented by the belief that she was an ugly child who would never measure up to the standard of beauty. For her that standard meant being white with long blond hair. She also writes about how she and her family coped with the sexual molestation and rape that she experienced as a child. What always struck me with this book is how Maya developed various ways to survive, and how her story can be used as an example to people on how to overcome life's bitter pill, and eventually accept who you are.

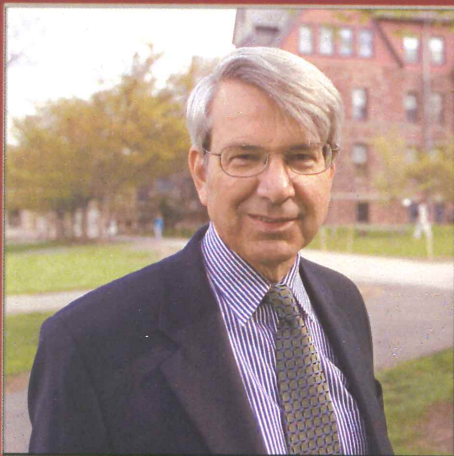
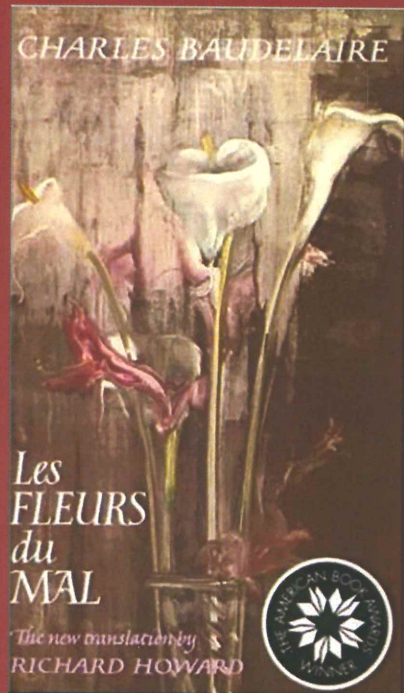


# First Banned in 1857

Themes of sex and death

## Les Fleurs du Mal

Charles Baudelaire



Jonathan Culler  
Professor

English and Comparative Literature

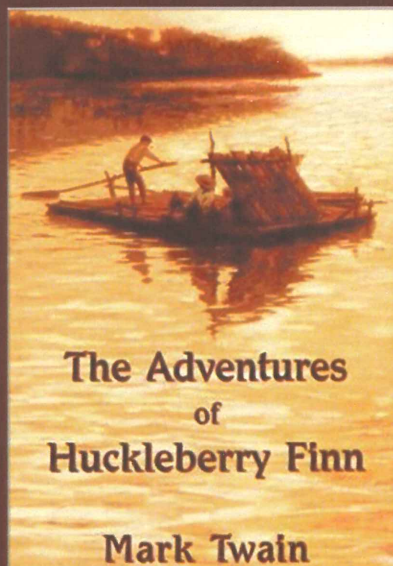
Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* (The Flowers of Evil) of 1857, his collection of poems which led T. S. Eliot to call him "the greatest exemplar in modern poetry in any language," was seized upon for its appearance and prosecuted for "outrage to public decency." The court found Baudelaire and his publisher guilty, judging that some of the scenes he presents "necessarily lead to the excitement of the senses by a crude realism offensive to decency." Six of the 100 poems in the collection were banned (they were then published in the Netherlands) and were excluded when a new augmented edition was published in 1861. Although *Les Fleurs du Mal* swiftly became one of the classics of French literature, the ban was not overturned until the middle of the 20th century.

# First Banned in 1885

Subversive in its challenges to immoral laws •  
"more suited to the slums than to intelligent,  
respectable people" • Recent challenges portray the book  
as racist due to language in the text

## The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

Mark Twain



I choose *Huckleberry Finn* as the banned book that means the most to me. There is a very sad irony in the fact that this book is so frequently banned. It is one of those contributions to American literature most likely to stimulate reflection about the wrongs of racism and oppression. We are too literal-minded, and too lacking in appreciation of the irony that Twain perfects, if we assume that the book's linguistic realism and its accurate portrayal of racist sentiments could somehow make it complicit in the racism it so forcefully challenges.

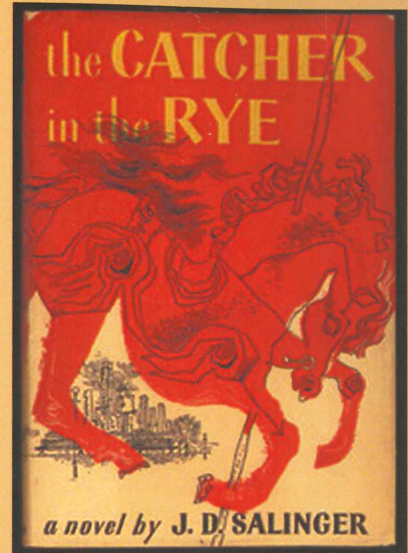
Michelle Moody Adams  
Vice-Provost for Undergraduate Education  
Hutchinson Professor and Director of Ethics  
and Public Life

# First Banned in 1954

Profanity • Sexual references • Blasphemy

## The Catcher in the Rye

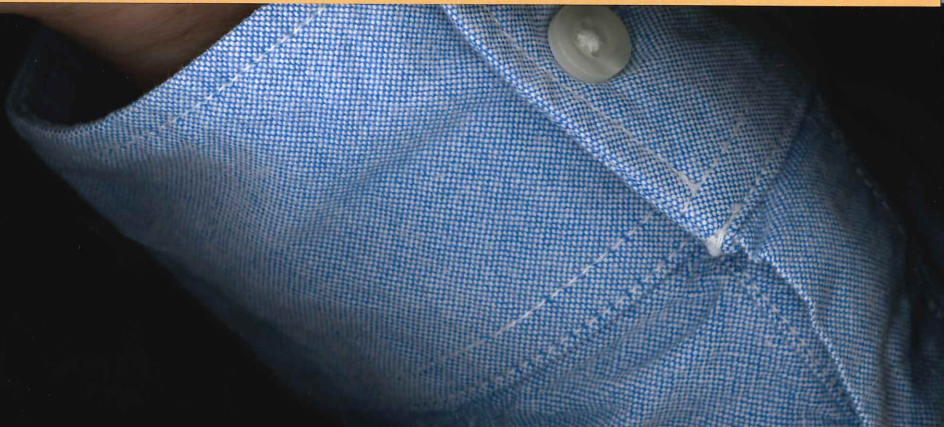
J.D. Salinger



William Arms  
Professor  
Computer Science

My mother was a person whom teenagers confided in and came to with their worries. *The Catcher in the Rye* was one of her favorite books. She urged all teenagers to read it, to see that they were not alone in facing the insecurity of growing up. A reason why people relate to Holden Caulfield is that his tangle over sex reflects their own. Not surprisingly this unsettles some people, but that is a reason to recommend the book, not to ban it.

P.S. Incidentally, I believe that Holden was named after Holden Bowler, a close friend of my parents and my sister's godfather, who knew Salinger when they were both struggling in New York.



# First Banned in 1954

Immoral, including sexual content • Covering child murder

## Lord of the Flies

William Golding



A banned book that made the most impression on me was *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding. Quote from the book: "Ralph wept for the end of innocence, the darkness of man's heart, and the fall through the air of a true, wise friend called Piggy."

Everet Hun Yi

President

Cornell American Civil Liberties Union

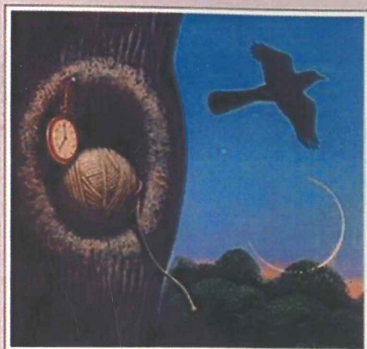
# First Banned in 1980

Profanity • Racial slurs

## To Kill A Mockingbird

Harper Lee

TO KILL A  
MOCKINGBIRD  
Harper Lee



Sarah E. Thomas

Carl A. Kroch University Librarian

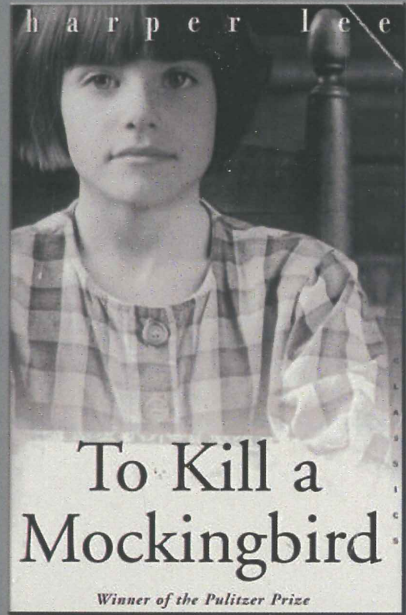
Harper Lee's novel describing racial prejudice and small-town interaction was published in 1961. Scout Finch, a nine-year-old girl, narrates the story with an innocence that grows wiser as violent events occur. Scout's lawyer father, Atticus Finch, defends a black man falsely accused of rape, and Scout helps defuse a mob outside the courthouse by disarming one of its angry men with a polite inquiry about his child. At the time of its publication, I was only a few years older than Scout, and the U.S. was aflame with passion over racial injustice. The minister of our rural Massachusetts church preached so hard about civil rights that parishioners stormed out of their pews. President Kennedy and his successor Lyndon Johnson promoted the Civil Rights Act, enacted into law in 1964. It was a time of intense turmoil, in which traditions and values were questioned and leaders and novelists laid out a course of moral action. *To Kill a Mockingbird* endures as a compelling book today because of the way it captures the passage of childhood to adulthood, and sadly, because so many of the issues it confronts remain with us.

# First Banned in 1980

Profanity • Racial slurs

## To Kill A Mockingbird

Harper Lee



I'd like to select *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Like many other people, I first read this book in junior high school. I remember being impressed by the strength of the main characters in the face of extreme pressure to go along with the bigotry of the masses. Atticus and Scout were early role models. I still think of them from time to time.

David Harris

Vice Provost for Social Sciences

# Profiles in Courage

(in Medical Science)



Randy Wayne  
Associate Professor

many  
high  
length  
res-  
11



Science has done a spectacular job in presenting to the inhabitants of the world both a description of that world and a prescription of how to live longer and healthier lives. The success of science (which does all it can to ensure that the descriptions and prescriptions are correct) has at its foundation the practice of skepticism. However, scientists are more skeptical of new theories than of old theories and this brand of skepticism comes at a price. One of the costs of science is the stifling of the publication or the acceptance of the publication of new experimental data and theories. Consequently, it takes a lot of courage for an author to publish data and theories that are at variance with current knowledge. It also takes a lot of courage for readers to ponder data and theories that are at variance with current knowledge. Thankfully there have been many scientific and medical heroes who have courageously fought against the scientific establishment for our health and well-being.



*Edward Jenner*

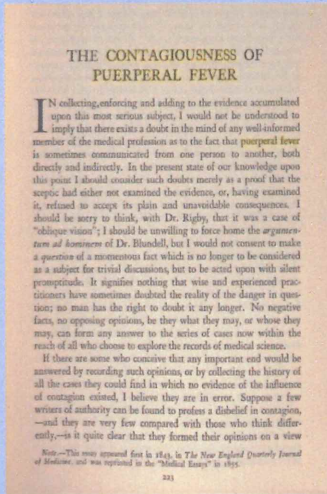
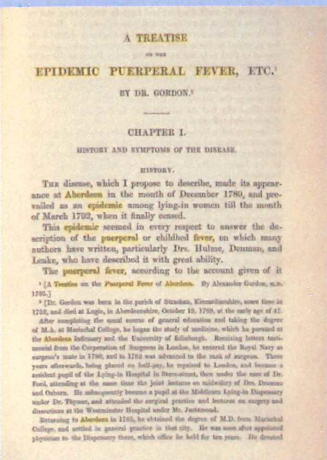
One such hero is Edward Jenner who observed that milkmaids who had contracted the annoying cowpox were immune to the deadly smallpox. Consequently, he proposed that infecting a healthy person with the pus from the cowpox pocks would make them immune to smallpox. He tested his theory by inoculating James Phipps, an 8-year old boy, with the pus from the pocks of Sarah Nelmes, a milkmaid who had just developed cowpox. This treatment made James Phipps immune to smallpox. Jenner had invented an effective vaccine against the deadly smallpox.

However, when Jenner reported his results to the Royal Society they suggested that he should not risk his reputation by presenting something "so much at variance with established knowledge." Thankfully, in 1798, Jenner privately published his work "An Inquiry into the Causes and Effects of the Variolae Vaccinae, a Disease Found in Some of the Western Counties of England, Particularly Gloucestershire, and Known by the Name of Cow Pox" and within a few years vaccinations for smallpox became common practice. Vaccinations (a word that comes from the Latin root for cow) against many illnesses have contributed greatly to the health and well-being of the people of the world.

Other heroes include Alexander Gordon, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and Ignaz Semmelweis who proposed that childbed fever could be prevented if medical doctors washed their hands before delivering a baby. Until the mid-17th century women tended to give birth at home, but the birth of babies in atypical positions were difficult and lying-in hospitals were created where physicians were trained in how to use forceps to deliver babies. With the advent of lying-in hospitals came epidemics of puerperal fever (childbed fever), which was fatal. It was typically thought that puerperal fever was caused either by a miasma (bad air), a poor balance of the four humors in the body, or by the woman's state of mind, and thus puerperal fever was not and could not be contagious. However, the site in which the placenta used to be attached is a large open wound susceptible to infection.

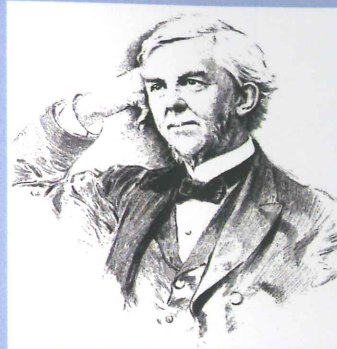
In 1795, Alexander Gordon provided epidemiological evidence that puerperal fever was contagious and suggested that it was transmitted from patient to patient by the midwives and physicians.





He wrote in his book, *Treatise on the Epidemic of Puerperal Fever of Aberdeen*, "I arrived at that certainty in the matter that I could venture to foretell what women would be affected with the disease, upon hearing by what midwife they were to be delivered, or by what nurse they were to be attended, during their lying-in: and almost in every instance my prediction was verified." Gordon's words were ignored by the medical establishment.

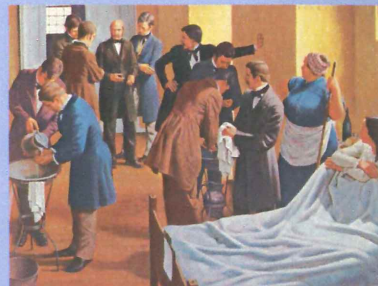
In 1843 Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote in a paper entitled, "The Contagiousness of Puerperal Fever" that "disease known as Puerperal Fever is so far contagious as to be frequently carried from patient to patient by physicians and nurses." His evidence was that the frequency of the disease was correlated with who the doctor was more than any



Oliver Wendell

other factor. The key factor, according to Holmes, was whether or not a given doctor washed his hands routinely; for example, did the doctor wash his hands after performing an autopsy and before delivering a baby? Doctors were insulted by Holmes' conclusion. Charles Meigs gave Holmes a typical reply, "Doctors are gentlemen, and gentlemen's hands are clean."

In 1844, Ignaz Semmelweis realized that when medical students delivered babies, 18% of all women giving birth died of puerperal fever

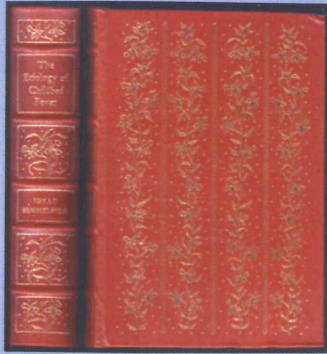


Puerperal Fever and Birth

while only 2% died when midwives or midwifery students performed the deliveries. Even stranger, puerperal fever was rare in women who gave birth before they arrived at the hospital. Semmelweis realized those medical students and doctors, but not the midwives, performed autopsies each morning on women who had died in the hospital the previous day, but he did not immediately appreciate the connection between the two observations.

In March 1847, Jakob Kollerschka, a friend of Semmelweis' and a professor of forensic pathology died of septicaemia after sustaining an accidental wound to the hand during an autopsy.

On reading the report of Kolletschka's autopsy, Semmelweis was struck by the similarity of the pathological findings to those of women who had died of puerperal fever. He later wrote, "Suddenly a thought crossed my mind: childbed fever and the death of Professor Kolletschka were one and the same. His sepsis and childbed fever must originate from the same source . . . the fingers and hands of students and doctors, soiled by recent dissections, carry those death-dealing cadavers' poisons into the genital organs of women in childbirth ...."



Semmelweis began experimenting with various sanitizing agents and then ordered that all doctors and medical students wash their hands in a chlorinated lime solution before delivering babies and performing vaginal exams. Instantly, the mortality rate from puerperal fever fell from 18% to less than 3%. In 1861, Semmelweis published his data and theory in *Etiology, Concept and Prophylaxis of Childbed Fever*. The medical establishment did not accept Semmelweis's claims and he was fired from his position. In 1865 he was committed to a psychiatric hospital because he couldn't take the way his research was either dismissed or ridiculed. He died of an infection from a cut on his finger two weeks later.

Between April 1 and May 10, 1856, 64 out of 347 women in the Paris Maternity Hospital died of puerperal fever. The hospital, nicknamed the House of Crime, was closed and the patients were transferred to a different hospital. Unfortunately, the disease followed these women and nearly all of them died. Louis Pasteur became increasingly aware that infection was spread by physicians and hospital attendants from sick to healthy patients. Pasteur stated, "This water, this sponge, this lint with which you wash or cover a wound, may deposit germs which have the power of multiplying rapidly within the tissue....If I had the honor of being a surgeon....not only would I use none but perfectly clean instruments, but I would clean my hands with the greatest care...I would use only lint, bandages and sponges previously exposed to a temperature of 1300 to 1500 degrees." Still doctors could not believe that puerperal fever was contagious and that they transmitted it. Even after Pasteur's identification of a bacterium in 1879 that was in the blood of a woman with puerperal fever, his teachings related to the "germ theory of disease" did not catch on.

Right from the beginning, Joseph Lister did consider the observations and theories of Pasteur that were at variance with current knowledge. Lister was familiar with Pasteur's work in which he suggested that there are three ways of getting rid of microbes: filter them out, heat them up, or treat them with a chemical solution. The first two were inappropriate for a human wound so Lister searched for a chemical that would be harmless to people but would kill bacteria.



Cleaning Wounds



*Sprayer*

Carbolic acid (phenol) had been used to deodorize sewage and Lister tried it as an antiseptic. Lister reduced infection when he used it to clean the patient's wounds, the dressings, the instruments, and his surgical hands. In 1867, Lister published "Antiseptic Principle of the Practice of Surgery" in the *Lancet*. But surgeons and physicians were set in their ways and ignored his writings. They probably saw Lister's excessive cleanliness and his carbolic acid (phenol) sprays during surgery as a waste of time and effort. In addition, the spray probably burnt their hands and eyes. Unfortunately, since

Lister's ideas were greeted with such skepticism, it took nearly 30 years for "Listerism" to be universally accepted by medical practitioners and from then on, the sterilization of surgical instruments caused a dramatic fall in post-operative deaths from infection.

The reticence of the scientific establishment to consider new experimental data and theories described above has influenced American history. For example, in 1881, President Garfield was a victim of an assassination attempt by Charles Guiteau. One bullet grazed Garfield's arm and the second bullet lodged in his back and could not be found. Garfield became increasingly ill over the next several weeks and was moved to a seaside community, in the vain hope that the fresh air might aid his recovery. Eighty days after he was shot, Garfield died of a ruptured spleen following pneumonia and blood poisoning.



*President Garfield*

Garfield probably would have survived his wound, had the doctors attending him considered germs more important than miasma. His doctors inserted their unsterilized fingers into the wound to probe for the bullet and turned a 3-inch wound into a 20-inch infected gash. Indeed, Guiteau's lawyers insisted that the incompetent medical care had really killed the president, but the court did not consider this a valid legal defense and Guiteau was found guilty and hanged. During an autopsy it was found that the bullet was lodged in a protective cyst far from where the doctors were looking. Still, the doctors who paid no attention to the writings of Gordon, Holmes, Semmelweis, Pasteur, and Lister billed the government for \$18,500 and the government paid them.



*Garfield on his death bed*

President Kennedy wrote *Profiles in Courage* about politicians who risked their careers for their beliefs. Each profession has its share of heroes who have risked their own careers in courageous fights for what they believed was right and good for the world, even if their ideas were at variance with the conventional wisdom of their fields. Fortunately authors have librarians, teachers, and other concerned readers to thank that today many materials do make it into libraries and into the curriculum.

ROBERT P. DOYLE



ROBERT P. DOYLE



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THE AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION



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