

THE LIBRARIANS



Produced and Directed by **KIM A. SNYDER**

Produced by **JANIQUE L. ROBILLARD MARIA CUOMO COLE JANA EDELBAUM**

Executive Produced by SARAH JESSICA PARKER, ALISON BENSON, HALLEE ADELMAN, AMBER ALONSO, KATE GARWOOD, MARNI GROSSMAN, GERALYN DREYFOUS, TEGAN ACTON, EMMA POMPETTI, THOMAS CAMPBELL JACKSON, PENNY B. JACKSON, MELONY & ADAM LEWIS, REGINA K. SCULLY, PETER RESNICK, CHRISTIAN CAMARGO, COLLEEN DEVEER, RACHEL COHEN, P.G.A., HEIDI STOLTE, CHRIS STOLTE, RUTH ANN HARNISCH, LOIS VOSSEN, CARRIE LOZANO

Co-Executive Produced by JAMIE WOLF, NATHALIE SEAVER, DEEPEN SHAH, TAYLOR VILA, BEESHAM A. SEECHARAN, CLAIRE DEMERE

Once upon a now, in today's America, political polarization finds librarians under siege as an unprecedented wave of book banning is sparked in Texas, Florida, and beyond. As the crisis escalates, they join forces as unlikely defenders on the frontlines of democracy.

In October 2021, Texas House Representative Matt Krause issued a list of 850 books for schools to review for obscene and race-related content, urging officials to develop standards to ensure "pornography" and anything that may make students feel "discomfort, guilt or anguish" be removed. The majority of content flagged had racial or LGBTQia+ themes. Parental Rights groups like Moms for Liberty dug in nationwide and book challenges escalated exponentially and became more coordinated. Vulnerable librarians were, and continue to be, targeted.

With unique access to a new movement in the making, librarians take us on an odyssey across America to tell their story to resist censorship efforts. We meet a US Army veteran who was fired for refusing to remove books with racial content — and whose County Commissioners, in the wake of a lawsuit filed by local community members alleging First and Fourteenth Amendment Rights infringements, attempted to close the public library itself. A librarian in New Jersey investigates coordinated efforts between Parental Rights organizations and a national effort to undermine public education that landed in her own school district with direct attacks, calling her a “pornographer, pedophile, and groomer of children”. A nationally lauded librarian is besieged with death threats in her native Louisiana parish where she lost 12 students to suicide because to feeling “othered.” Tensions escalate as legislation spreads proposing to criminalize librarians for distributing alleged pornographic materials to minors.

In a dystopian saga akin to a real-life *Fahrenheit 451* sequel, director KIM A. SNYDER’s gripping documentary THE LIBRARIANS traverses small-town U.S.A. with riveting interviews and troves of archival material to reveal the story of the country’s heroic librarians, everyday Americans who have become unlikely defenders of democracy, risking everything to uphold our most fundamental of rights.

Runtime: 88 min.

Media contact: Frank Publicity

Name: Clare Anne Darragh

Agency: FrankPR

Phone: 646.861.0843

Email: TheLibrarians@gmail.com, clareanne@frankpublicity.com

INTRODUCTION

*“I never imagined what’s happening now would ever happen.
It never dawned on us that we could come under attack.”*

“If you control the library... you control the community.”

America in 2025 is facing multiple threats. One, however, is playing out in places that historically have been safe havens for learning, understanding, and education: libraries. And the people who work there, who have devoted their careers to freedom of speech and advancement of thought — nonpolitical devotees of knowledge — have become targeted by a movement that seems to take its cues from terrifying dystopian novels. As Peabody Award-winning filmmaker KIM A. SNYDER (director of *Newtown*; *Us Kids*; *Welcome to Shelbyville*; as well as award-winning shorts including Netflix Original *Lessons From a School Shooting: Notes From Dunblane* and others) shows in *THE LIBRARIANS*, the United States is at a point when book banning, take-no-prisoners disruption, Fascistic intentions, and violent rhetoric threaten one of our most beloved and important institutions.

In the film, Snyder shows how in 2021, Texas House Representative Matt Krause — at the time a candidate for Texas State Attorney General — requested answers from Texas public school district superintendents as to whether classrooms or libraries had any of 850 books. As Chair of the Texas House Committee on General Investigating, Krause noted that the 850 titles in question could “make students uncomfortable” regarding race or sexuality, in his words.

Krause’s inquiry — used to zero in on “pornography and race-based teaching,” in official terms — hoped to uncover if school libraries had the books, as well as how many and how much money was spent on them, and exactly *where* in the library they were located.

“There are moments in history in which a random event happens, and it just grows,” says Snyder. “Large things sometimes begin with a seemingly isolated moment or event — World War I, and the Arab Spring, to name two examples. That’s what happened here, in which

someone who's *not* a particularly significant person in history strikes a match that sets something off. That was this attack on librarians."

Krause's 16-page list of titles included books on LGBTQia+ and gender identity, Black History, sex education. Titles on the history of *Roe vs. Wade*, as well as William Styron's 1967 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, Ta-Nehisi Coates' 2015 memoir *Between the World and Me*, and non-fiction titles including a guide to teenage sexuality. With the support of Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, the movement singled out librarians — employees, often women, who in many cases had worked in their role for decades and whose expertise was part of a tradition in towns and schools enshrined in many memories as part of a hometown Americana. As one of the interviewees says in *THE LIBRARIANS*, "We are stewards of books and the resources in the library. We're not supposed to be seen."

Though book censorship and infringing on freedom of speech gathers speed every day, Snyder notes that, "This film is designed to focus very specifically on the siege on our librarians. It involves what is happening to these librarians and their plight, and what that says about where we're at right now in this country and what that forebodes. Historic precedents of Fascist regimes in the making have often been rooted in similar fashion. So the attack on librarians feels incredibly alarming."

While the events the film focuses on play out in the town of Granbury and Llano County in Texas; Clay County, Florida; Livingston Parish, Louisiana; and suburban New Jersey, *THE LIBRARIANS* encompasses the tapestry of terror facing ordinary Americans who have become targets of culture warriors equipped with a chilling national playbook. These librarians — who have dealt with violent threats yet still feel that bringing this issue into daylight is essential — tell their stories as the landscape around freedom of speech threatens the rest of us.

"It seems now like the issues we were capturing three years ago were like the canary in the coal mine," says Snyder. "I have found myself thinking a lot about the role of librarians in society and has always been — they're the curators of knowledge, stewards of information. When I started researching the 1950s and the scope of McCarthyism, I learned that Sen. Joe McCarthy

didn't just go after Hollywood screenwriters and the like, but he went after librarians as well. Other horrific examples like the Cambodian Khmer Rouge regime and the Chinese Cultural Revolution parallel attacks on intellectual freedom. It's just so shocking and unthinkable.”

THE ROAD TO NOW

Part of why these attacks on career professionals whose specialty — ironically — is freedom of information feels so upside-down is because of the space this community occupies in the popular imagination. In *THE LIBRARIANS*, Snyder juxtaposes the noble image we all have of the title profession with the violence and intensity they're facing.

“The way I've constructed the start of the film, with nostalgic archival images, is to evoke a classic Americana image of how we have long thought of librarians —like firemen, they are people who serve our towns and our counties, people you would never dream of attacking and criminalizing,” says Snyder.

Yet that's exactly what's happened. *THE LIBRARIANS* shows how Moms for Liberty, a group spawned in 2021 during the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic to protect school shutdowns and vaccination requirements, took it upon themselves to police books available in public schools. Focusing on titles they claim are “overtly sexual” and “inappropriate” for children, Moms for Liberty and other politically-backed organizations bombard school board meetings with intimidation. Footage in the film shows scenes that, sadly, are far too common in America today: Expletive-laden shouting, us-versus-them rhetoric, and confrontations tinged with not-at-all-veiled threats of violence.

“What we began filming over three years ago turned out to be quite prescient. Granbury, Texas, the first town we filmed in, was singled out by the ACLU and embroiled in a federal investigation by the Department of Education. One of the things I wanted to reveal is that this is bigger than some of what people think of when they hear of attacks on librarians and books: This is not just an issue in Texas or just about going after LGBTQia+ books, it's much broader than that,” says Snyder.

The multiple ways opponents of free speech try to restrict access to books, and the ramifications of that for communities and librarians alike, would be a lot for a documentary, Snyder notes. The flood-the-zone strategy and levels of politics involved can be, as Snyder says, “like fighting an octopus.”

“The biggest challenge to this film was the enormity of the subject,” says Snyder. “You can’t really talk about what’s happening with librarians without getting into other things we’re hearing a lot about — school board wars, and White Christian Nationalism and its intention to undermine public education, Moms for Liberty and their agenda. I wanted to connect the dots between all of those things and their specific ties to librarians under siege.”

“There’s also an undeniable misogyny involved, because while there certainly are men who are librarians, the ones being attacked are generally women,” adds Snyder. She also notes the added irony of trying to brazenly break existing protocol without being questioned or exposed. “These are people who literally study how to navigate media and information,” says Snyder. “These are experts in that field. *Of course* they’d know what was going on — and what was coming next.”

DOCUMENTING THE FIGHT

Snyder, whose works as a filmmaker has examined serious issues from numerous angles, says that the further along she got on *THE LIBRARIANS*, “The more I realized that it was more of an exposé, an investigative piece, than I had originally intended.”

“I started to understand how, like a lot of things, you’re not really aware until you look inside how intense something is,” says Snyder. “The librarians I spoke to were such different kinds of women. And like all my films, it takes time to build trust — and it took a while for them to understand that I was trying to do something other than just get quick news hits. I was trying to give them a lasting voice.”

“The other thing that struck me was the commitment these librarians have to their profession,” says Snyder. “They see it as their sworn duty to protect our freedom to information. It’s not unlike doctors who take a Hippocratic oath. These people live by, and study, First Amendment rights. And they have a commitment to kids, and many of them have a firsthand understanding of how books help marginalized young people, and many times are a life-saver for them.”

In the film, the librarians and students discuss the importance of books that address transgender and non-binary issues. One librarian notes that in her district, she knew a dozen teens who took their lives because of issues related to sexuality. “That was shocking,” says Snyder, “and because of those tragedies, that librarian says in the film that she’s not going to be complicit anymore — there are real life and death stakes.”

Students are seen in *THE LIBRARIANS* imploring school boards to do the right thing and “not be Fascist,” as others fight to end this new era of book-banning. “For a lot of young people, the library is a safe space. Making the film, I was surprised at the lengths to which young people sometimes go to to defend their freedom to read what they choose,” says Snyder. “I saw the librarians as a collective voice flanked by several upstanding Americans, people willing to stand up either on behalf of their librarians or who have their backs as good citizens. When they see First Amendment rights being taken away like this, these people say, ‘Nope, not on our watch.’ I tried to let each person have their scene, as this film is an odyssey depicting librarians trying to protect democracy.”

In addition to the students backing up the librarians, there’s the Rev. Jeffrey Dove of Clay County, Florida, as well as Courtney Gore, a Granbury, Tex., conservative school board member who comes to disavow the targeting of school libraries and book banning when she becomes a whistleblower exposing the larger political agenda at play in her town.

“We felt it was essential to include passages from notable books banned in the past century. There’s a Thomas Mann quote we use in the film, which is, ‘Tolerance becomes a crime when applied to evil.’ And some have made brave decisions,” says Snyder. “Courtney Gore is

fascinating. She's the Liz Cheney of Granbury, Texas. She's noble in that she is standing up. Courtney becomes another avenue of hope in righting the ship in this country."

Snyder notes that in making THE LIBRARIANS, the scope and challenge of the subject spurred her to try new things to tell the story the right way yet using new styles.

"With this documentary, I tried to stretch myself as a filmmaker," says Snyder. "I interwove cinema clips to illustrate the merging of art and reality so that we could move around in time and genre. I originally envisioned this story as a graphic novel, a 'Once Upon a Now' type of story about this dystopian moment we're in. So a lot of my choices were influenced by that."

"Another thing that was essential in making THE LIBRARIANS were the collaborations," Snyder continues, noting that composer NICO MUHLY's music has been important to her, including his operas as well as film and TV work including *The Reader*, *Margaret*, *Kill Your Darlings*, *The Humans* and Apple TV's *Pachinko*. "Nico is a composer I just adore. I revere so much of his work, and I was frankly shocked and lucky to have him do the score. I worked along with brilliant producers, cinematographers, and editors who all helped realize my vision."

"The particular librarians that we profile in this film are so unassailable," adds Snyder. "These are not stereotypical progressives or the types of people those who oppose them might expect. They're a devout Catholic, and an Army veteran who served her country, the daughter of a Baptist minister, to name three. That's the true heart of this film — hearing from these very earnest, humble, and very brave women that I truly see as heroes."

###

CAST AND CREW

Kim A. Snyder | Director/Producer

Peabody Award-winning Kim A. Snyder's latest feature documentary, **The Librarians** will make its World Premiere at the 2025 Sundance Film Festival.

Her short documentary, **Death By Numbers** has been nominated in the Best Documentary Short category for the 2025 Academy Awards. **Death By Numbers** premiered at the 2024 Hamptons International Film Festival, immediately followed by the Woodstock Film Festival, Montclair Film Festival where it won Best Documentary Short, and received an Honorable Mention at Doc NYC.

Her documentary, **Us Kids** premiered in the U.S. Documentary Competition at the 2020 Sundance Film Festival, followed by SXSW, Sheffield, and Full Frame, where it received the Kathleen Edwards Bryan Human Rights Award and 14 subsequent festival awards. Prior she directed the Peabody award-winning documentary *Newtown*, which also premiered in the US Competition at Sundance 2016. *Newtown* screened at premiere festivals worldwide and was theatrically released followed by a national broadcast on PBS's Independent Lens and Netflix.

Her short film, *Lessons from a School Shooting: Notes from Dunblane*, premiered at the 2018 Tribeca Film Festival and was awarded Best Documentary Short followed by the DocDispatch Award at the 2018 Sheffield DocFest and a Grierson Award nomination. *Lessons...* is a Netflix Original.

Snyder's other works include the feature documentary, *Welcome to Shelbyville*, nationally broadcast on PBS's Independent Lens in 2011, and over a dozen short documentaries. Kim's award-winning directorial debut feature documentary, *I Remember Me* was theatrically distributed by Zeitgeist Films. In 1994, she Associate Produced the Academy Award-winning short film *Trevor*, which spawned The Trevor Project, a leading national not-for-profit addressing LGBTQ teen suicide.

Kim graduated with a Masters in International Affairs from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and resides in New York City.

AUDREY WILSON-YOUNGBLOOD | Cast

Audrey Wilson-Youngblood is an educator with over two decades of experience in K-12 and higher education. Throughout her career as a teacher, librarian, and leader, she's been an advocate for student writers and readers, promoting literacy and the free and open exchange of ideas in library spaces. With experience in both school and academic libraries, Audrey is pursuing her PhD in Information Science with the goal of becoming a library educator to prepare and mentor the next generation of librarians.

AMANDA JONES | Cast

Amanda is a 24 year teacher-librarian and grassroots organizer in Louisiana on the frontlines fighting against censorship in libraries. She is the 2021 Librarian of the Year as presented by School Library

Journal , a 2021 Library Journal Mover and Shaker, and the 2020 Louisiana School Librarian of the Year. She is the Louisiana Chapter Councilor, and on the Intellectual Freedom Committee, for the American Library Association. Amanda has won numerous intellectual freedom awards, is a founding member of Louisiana Citizens Against Censorship, and is the author of “That Librarian: The Fight Against Book Banning in America.”

BECKY CALZADA | Cast

Becky Calzada is a District Library Coordinator in Leander, Texas and is a co-founding member of Texas #FReadom Fighters, a grass-roots led group of librarians launched back in October of 2021 in support of intellectual freedom and to highlight the positive work of school librarians. She is a member of the ALA Policy Corp and actively participates on the Proactive Advocacy on Book Banning cadre and is a past member of the ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee. She is the recipient of several intellectual freedom awards and was honored by People Magazine in their 2023 Women Changing the World portfolio. Becky is the 24/25 American Association of School Librarians President and is the co-author of Prepared Libraries, Empowered Teams: A Workbook for Navigating Intellectual Freedom Challenges Together which was published by ALA Editions in June 2024.

CAROLYN FOOTE | Cast

Carolyn Foote is a rewired/retired 29 year Texas school librarian and a co-founder of the Texas FReadom Fighters, a Texas grassroots group advocating for the freedom to read. She advocates for student voices and for the right to read, and has been recognized by the White House as a Champion of Change and with the AASL Library Collaboration Award and the ALA Robert Downs Intellectual Freedom Award. She believes that students deserve to see their stories on the shelves of libraries.

MARTHA HICKSON

Martha Hickson recently retired after 20 years as a high school librarian. Her work has been featured in School Library Journal, Booklist, and CNN Online. Her defense of intellectual freedom has been recognized with awards from the NJ Association of School Librarians, the NJ Library Association, the American Association of School Librarians, and the National Council of Teachers of English. In 2022, the National Coalition Against Censorship presented Martha with the Judith Krug Outstanding Librarian Award. And the American Library Association awarded Martha with the Lemony Snicket Prize for Noble Librarians Faced with Adversity in recognition of her "energy and bravery in the face of ... persistent and ongoing hostility," while advocating for students' First Amendment right to read.

SUZETTE BAKER

Suzette Baker is the former head librarian of the Kingsland Library Branch of the Llano County Library System who was terminated for not censoring books and speaking out against the hostile take over of the library. With 12+ years of volunteer and employment in a library, she has had the joy of watching books change lives and build strong communities and people. As an Army veteran, her belief in the protection of the Constitution is paramount to protecting the freedom we all deserve. She currently still resides in Llano county while pursuing legal action against the County.