

Debating Across Distance

Curating Constitutional Controversies
for Your Library

Edward Remus, Social Sciences Librarian, Northeastern Illinois University

Presentation goal

- Prepare you to begin organizing library events featuring speakers with differing viewpoints on controversial topics related to the U.S. Constitution
 - Demonstrate that libraries can organize successful events of this nature
 - Familiarize you with principles governing the selection of topics and speakers
 - Familiarize you with practices that help to ensure successful and well-attended events

Inspiration: Evanston Public Library, 2012

ISRAEL AND PALESTINE



Where Do We Go From Here?

Sunday, June 26th, 4:00 pm, Evanston Public Library

Is a two-state solution in Israel/Palestine still possible? Rabbi Brant Rosen of the Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation, and Professor Iymen Chehade of Columbia College will discuss options in the ongoing search for a just peace for all the inhabitants of this troubled land. Co-sponsored by Evanston Neighbors for Peace.



EVANSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY
847.448.8600

1703 ORRINGTON AVENUE
WWW.EPL.ORG

Inspiration: Browder/Shachtman, 1950

Earl Browder, C. Wright Mills & Max Shachtman

Is Russia a Socialist Community?

The Verbatim Text of a Debate

(March 1950)

Image credit: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/shachtma/1950/03/russia.htm>

Inspiration: Baldwin/Buckley, 1965

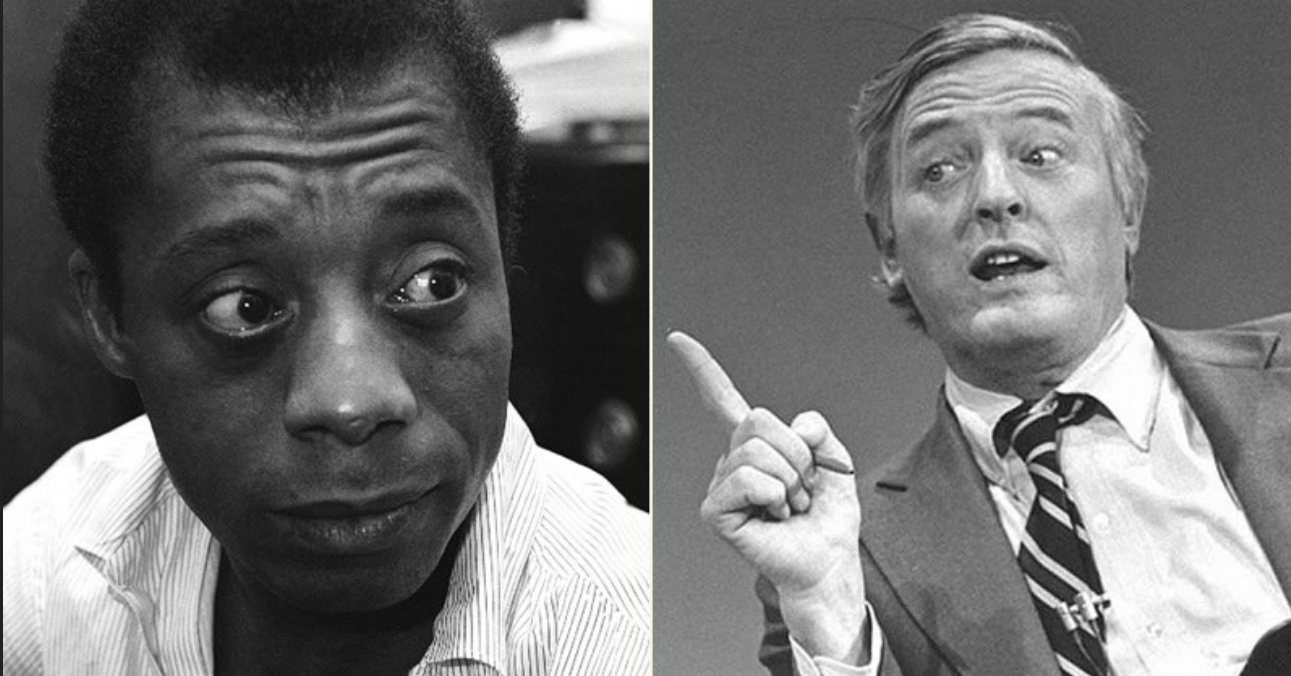


Image credit: <https://lithub.com/baldwin-vs-buckley-a-debate-we-shouldnt-need-as-important-as-ever/>

Inspiration: Friedan/Schlafly, 1976



Image credit: <https://youtu.be/WncN6PWEMGo>

Inspiration: Friedman/Piven/Sowell, 1980



Image credit: <https://youtu.be/YRLAKD-Vuvk>

Inspiration: The McLaughlin Group, 1990s



Image credit: <https://i2.wp.com/buchanan.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/mclaughlin-group-1.jpg?w=1280&ssl=1>

Inspiration: S-USIH, 2015



1. Opening Plenary: “Little Magazines: Past, Present, Future”

Moderator: Natalia Mehlman Petrzela, *The New School*

Jackson Lears, *Raritan*

Dan McCarthy, *The American Conservative*

David Marcus, *Dissent*

Rachel Rosenfelt, *The New Inquiry*

Bhaskar Sunkara, *Jacobin*

Image credit: <https://s-usih.org/conference/2015-s-usih-conference/2015-usih-conference-program/>

Inspiration: Heterodox Academy



great minds don't
always think alike

“Heterodox Academy (HxA) is a nonpartisan nonprofit that works to improve the quality of research and education by promoting open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement in institutions of higher learning.”

-HxA Mission Statement

Viewpoint-diverse events: opportunities

- Society seeks intellectual clarification of controversial issues
- Libraries are recognized hosts of differing viewpoints
- Librarians are skilled curators of differing viewpoints
- Scholars with differing viewpoints skillfully interpret controversial issues
- Universities maintain viewpoint diversity amidst political polarization
- Students learn by engaging differing viewpoints on controversial issues

My work organizing viewpoint-diverse events

- As a public librarian:

- Adult Services Librarian, Chicago Public Library, 2013-2015

- Two one-off political debates

- Health care reform (Obamacare, single-payer, or the free market?)
- Chicago's minimum wage (None, a moderate increase, or \$15/hour?)

- Additional panel discussions featuring scholars with differing viewpoints

- As a university librarian:

- History/Social Sciences Librarian, Northeastern Illinois University, 2015-present

- *Between Past & Future* panel discussions

- Topics: Reparations for Black Americans, the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election, the Russian Revolution, political realignment

- Ongoing *Perspectives on the Constitution* panel discussions

- Topics: Race and the Second Amendment, Congress and the Separation of Powers

Panel: Reparations, 2016

THE RONALD WILLIAMS LIBRARY AND THE ANGELINA PEDROSO CENTER FOR DIVERSITY & INTERCULTURAL AFFAIRS PRESENTS:

REPARATIONS FOR BLACK AMERICANS: THREE PERSPECTIVES

A BETWEEN PAST & FUTURE PANEL DISCUSSION WITH
MARTHA BIONDI, KANU IHEUKUMERE, AND TOURÉ REED

HOW SHOULD HISTORY BE WRITTEN AND HOW SHOULD THE WORLD BE CHANGED? THE NEIU LIBRARY'S BETWEEN PAST & FUTURE EVENT SERIES HOSTS SPEAKERS WITH DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES ON A BROAD RANGE OF TOPICS AT THE INTERSECTION OF THESE TWO QUESTIONS. THOSE WHO WOULD SHAPE THE FUTURE NEVER FAIL TO BRING HISTORY TO BEAR UPON THE PROBLEMS AND TASKS FACING US IN THE PRESENT, AND AT THE SAME TIME, ONGOING CHANGES IN OUR SOCIAL AND POLITICAL REALITY MOTIVATE SCHOLARS TO REINTERPRET THE PAST IN PROFOUND WAYS. BETWEEN PAST & FUTURE EVENTS PLACE STUDENTS AND FACULTY IN DIALOGUE WITH SCHOLARS, WRITERS, AND PUBLIC FIGURES FROM CHICAGO AND BEYOND TO GRAPPLE WITH CONTROVERSIAL QUESTIONS AT THE CROSSROADS OF HISTORY AND POLITICS—QUESTIONS THAT ADMIT OF NO EASY ANSWERS.

THURSDAY, APRIL 21, 7:00PM

NEIU'S LIBRARY

LOWER LEVEL, CLASSROOM, LIB 022

QUESTIONS? EMAIL ED REMUS, HISTORY LIBRARIAN, AT E-REMUS@NEIU.EDU.



MARTHA BIONDI

PROFESSOR/CHAIR, AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES & HISTORY, NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY; AUTHOR, *THE BLACK REVOLUTION ON CAMPUS (2012)* AMONG OTHERS



KANU IHEUKUMERE

CHIEF POLICY/RESEARCH OFFICER AT BETHEL NEW LIFE, INC. HIS PUBLICATIONS INCLUDE 2016 CHAIN'S CHICAGO BUSINESS ARTICLE, "YOU SEE A TRADE AGREEMENT, I SEE A PATH TO JOBS ON THE IMPROVERISHED WEST SIDE" AMONG MANY OTHERS



TOURÉ F. REED

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF UNITED STATES /AFRO-AMERICAN HISTORY, ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY. AUTHOR, *NOT ALMS BUT OPPORTUNITY: THE URBAN LEAGUE AND THE POLITICS OF RACIAL UPLIFT (1910-1950)* AMONG MANY OTHERS



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Speaker lineup:

- Dr. Martha Biondi, identity-based, social-movementist approach
- Dr. Toure Reed, social-democratic, labor-oriented approach
- Kanu Iheukumere, economic uplift, business-oriented approach

Panel: Political Realignment, 2018



Speaker lineup:

- Dr. Ellie Shermer, progressive
- Dan McCarthy, paleoconservative
- Dr. Deirdre McCloskey, libertarian
- Marco Torres, Marxist

Image credit: <https://youtu.be/T13Nt8gNVQI>

Panel: Race & the 2nd Amendment, 2021



Whose Right to Bear Arms?

Race and the Second Amendment

Join the NEIU Libraries on Monday, November 15 at 4:00PM (Central Time) for a Zoom panel discussion featuring Charles E. Cobb Jr., Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, Joyce Lee Malcolm, and Jack Rakove —four leading scholars with differing interpretations of the Second Amendment and its relationship to race and racism in U.S. history.

Speaker lineup:

- Dr. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz: 2A is racist in origin and application
- Charles E. Cobb, Jr.: the CRM used guns to defend against racists
- Dr. Jack Rakove: 2A applies to militias only, not to individuals
- Dr. Joyce Lee Malcolm: 2A isn't racist in origin or application, protects individual self-defense

Perspectives on the Constitution, 2022

- \$10,000 grant distributed by the ALA and the NEH
- Funds five Zoom panels; each speaker receives \$500
- 2021 Race and the Second Amendment panel served as proof-of-concept
- Proposed topics:
 - Congress and the Separation of Powers (March 2022)
 - Free speech/First Amendment (August 2022)
 - Abortion and federalism (September 2022)
 - Mass incarceration and the 14th Amendment (October 2022)
 - Is the U.S. Constitution obsolete? (October 2022)
- Latest development: History Club students as curators and moderators
 - High-impact practice: students join a planning committee with librarian and faculty experts
 - Students help choose topics & speakers, organize the event, moderate the event

Perspectives on the Constitution, 2022

Upcoming events:

- “What is Free Speech Good For?” (August 2022) lineup:
 - Eric Heinze: free speech is a fundamental human right; state censorship should be opposed
 - Nadine Strossen: digital platform censorship violates free speech and should be opposed
 - Katherine Cross: digital platform censorship makes free speech possible for the marginalized
 - Jamal Greene: rights are not absolute and should be checked by majority/state censorship
- “Mass Incarceration & the 14th Amendment” proposed (Oct. 2022) lineup:
 - Michelle Alexander: mass incarceration represents a new form of Jim Crow racial segregation
 - James Forman, Jr.: unlike Jim Crow, a new black political class gave us mass incarceration
 - Jill Leovy: today the real continuity with Jim Crow is the under-policing of urban violence
 - John Pfaff: mass incarceration happened because of rising crime and prosecutorial discretion

Framing viewpoint-diverse library events

- Place diverse and differing viewpoints in conversation
- Avoid win-or-lose debates between “two sides”
- Seek triangulation (or quadrangulation) of perspectives
- Clarify sites of divergent and convergent interpretations
- Capture the contours of the contemporary discussion of a given topic
- Learn not only about the topic, but also about respective viewpoints

Use this language consistently across:

- Communication with library administration and campus partners
- Email invitations to speakers
- Public-facing promotional materials and event descriptions
- Moderator’s introduction to the event

Best Practices

- Attendance
 - Current events attract more attendees
 - Holding the event in place of a scheduled class session guarantees an audience
- Faculty and student partners
 - Find faculty who teach viewpoint-diverse texts and debates; partner with them, their students
- Curation and moderation
 - Curatorial control is key; viewpoint uniformity is the default when campus partners plan events
 - Viewpoint-diverse moderation is also important, especially short of viewpoint-diverse curation
 - State that questions from all viewpoints would be welcome during Q&A
 - Offer to pose questions anonymously; students can use this to question the consensus
- Intellectual/academic freedom challenges
 - Draft public-facing language with your dean/supervisor to anticipate this outcome
 - Secure explicit approval from your dean/supervisor before inviting controversial speakers

Principles: Cancellation and Disinvitation

“Programs should not be canceled because of the ideas or topics of the program or the views expressed by the participants or speakers... Library sponsorship of a program does not constitute an endorsement of the program content or the views expressed by the participants or speakers.”

Source:

American Library Association. (2019, June 24). *Library-Initiated Programs and Displays as a Resource: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights*. <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations/programsdisplays>

“[Library staff] should be prepared to explain the [program or speaker selection] policy, as well as the bedrock principles of intellectual freedom. . . It is not appropriate [to disinvite a speaker] when the topic is controversial or if there have been complaints about the speaker, program, or event.”

Source:

American Library Association. (2018, June). *Responding to and Preparing for Controversial Programs and Speakers Q&A*. <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/controversialprogramsga>

Principles: Speaker Selection

1. Viewpoint Diversity or Impartiality

- a. “Libraries have a responsibility to represent diverse views and avoid bias. Libraries should be proactive and present programs that provide multiple viewpoints.”

2. Quality/Substance of Information and Arguments

- a. “Library-sponsored speakers should have some expertise, credentials, or credibility on the topic they are discussing.”

Source:

American Library Association. (2018, June). *Responding to and Preparing for Controversial Programs and Speakers Q&A*. <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/controversialprogramsga>

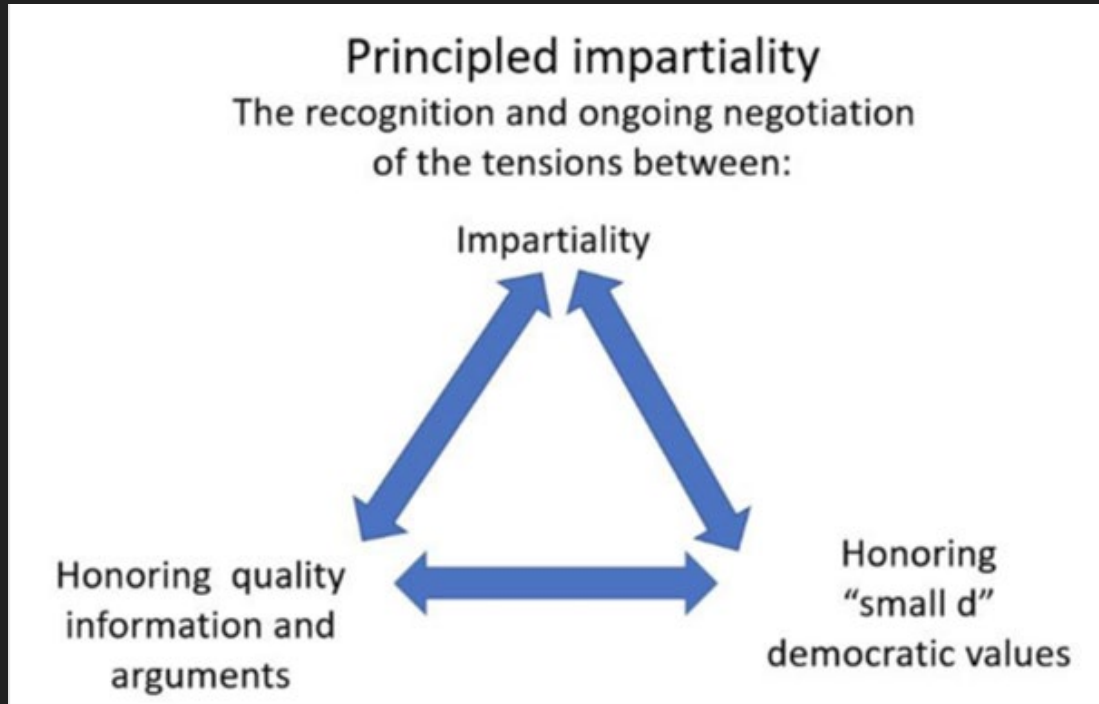
1. “Small d” Democratic (Community/Institutional) Values

- a. “Libraries should actively seek to include...a multitude of viewpoints and cultural perspectives that reflect the diversity in our communities.”

Source:

American Library Association. (2019, June 24). *Library-Initiated Programs and Displays as a Resource: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights*. <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations/programsdisplays>

Which views on this topic are held throughout society?



Source:

Carcasson, M. (2022). The Case for Principled Impartiality in a Hyper-Partisan World. *National Civic Review*, 110(4).

<https://www.nationalcivicleague.org/ncr-article/the-case-for-principled-impartiality-in-a-hyper-partisan-world/>

Which views on this topic are held by one or more scholars?

Which views on this topic are considered acceptable at my institution?

Campus Partner(s) & Audience(s)

Brainstorming tips

- For campus partners:
 - Academic departments
 - Student organizations
 - Individual faculty who teach controversy, debate
 - Other campus units (e.g. Marketing, Alumni Relations, Development)
- For audiences:
 - A specific for-credit class
 - A specific department
 - All students
 - The general public
 - High school students
 - Alumni

Topics & Viewpoints

Brainstorming tips

- For topics
 - Current events that raise constitutional questions
 - Local/campus issues, controversies related to the law
 - Anniversaries of major legal/political events, heritage month tie-ins
 - New Constitution-related books, faculty publications
 - Your own personal interests and curiosities
- For viewpoints
 - Democratic Party vs. Republican Party interpretations of key issues
 - Anti-establishment Democrat/Republican vs. establishment Democrat/Republican
 - Libertarian, conservative, centrist, liberal, progressive, socialist
 - Differing approaches within religious traditions, vocations/professions, activist communities
 - Feel free to represent your own view on the topic— alongside differing/contrasting viewpoints!

Speakers

Brainstorming tips

- For speakers
 - Consider various types of keywords when searching Google:
 - Scholarly keywords: professor, university, academic
 - Political keywords: libertarian, conservative, liberal, progressive, socialist
 - Related terms: e.g. “Second Amendment”, “gun control”, “right to bear arms”
 - Look for journalistic articles on your topic that cite or interview leading scholars
 - Find recent/popular scholarly books on your topic and identify their authors
 - Search for your topic on the websites of politically partisan organizations and websites (e.g. the conservative Federalist Society, the progressive American Constitution Society)
 - Most importantly: if you feel stuck, think about who you will ask for help brainstorming potential speakers! (This can include subject faculty at your institution, other librarians, friends, etc.)

Planning ahead: other issues to consider

- Honoraria

- Many scholars are willing to share their views with wider audiences for free
 - Tenure-track faculty receive professional credit for doing so
- Scholars are more likely to accept if the event seems interesting, responsibly curated

- Format

- Traditional academic panel, moderated dialogue, structured debate, one-off lecture series
- Zoom event (participants can ask questions aloud) vs. Zoom webinar (prohibits interruptions)

- Moderator

- You, another librarian, a subject faculty member, a student, etc.
 - Subject faculty moderators may steer away from sites of disagreement
 - Familiarity with the speakers' views enables stronger moderation
 - Students gain professional development by serving as moderator

Planning ahead: other issues to consider

- **Scheduling**
 - Holding the event in place of a scheduled class session guarantees an audience
 - Use a Doodle Poll to determine speakers' availability
- **Promotion**
 - Faculty can offer class/extra credit to students; some students need civic engagement credit
 - Email blasts, Facebook, etc.
- **Recording**
 - Secure release waiver from speakers to post the recording on YouTube
 - Consider livestreaming
- **Assessment**
 - Use Google Forms to generate a quick and easy post-event survey
 - Consider: how will you use the data (grant applications, future event topics)?

Thank you for watching!

Seeking a community of practice? Join the
Heterodox Academy Libraries community!

<https://heterodoxacademy.org/hxcommunities/>

Questions? Contact me at e-remus@neiu.edu