

Censorship Letter: Luis J. Rodriguez's *Always Running* (1993)

Cura, Yago
Queens College/C.U.N.Y.
GSLIS 711: Collection Development
Prof. Mary K. Chelton
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Dr. Ronald Epps
Rockford School District
201 S. Madison Street
Rockford, IL. 61104

Yago Cura, Director of Acquisitions
Cook Memorial Public Library District
Cook Park Library
413 N. Milwaukee Ave.
Libertyville, IL. 60048
1-847-362-2330

Dear Mr. Epps,

Thank you for your letter regarding Luis J. Rodriguez's biography *Always Running* (1993). Your letter requests that we remove *Always Running* from the shelves of the Cook Memorial Public Library District as a gesture of solidarity with the decision reached by Rockland School Board to restrict student access to Rodriguez's biography.

Dr. Epps, even though Cook Memorial Public Library District librarians work in concert with many high school teachers in the Rockland School Board, this does not mean that the Cook Memorial Public Library District condones the actions taken by the Rockland School Board. Censorship is antithetical to the very nature of Cook Memorial Public Library's endeavors. Our main interaction with the public involves providing information and facilitating access to information. We are not in the "restricting" business; we are in the "enabling" business, as long as what we are enabling is access to information. This is why the Cook Memorial Public Library can not join you as you choose to censure *Always Running*.

I understand that members of the Rockford School Board have found much of the content in *Always Running* objectionable. Specifically, I understand that members have been quite vociferous in their objections to the violent nature of Rodriguez's book, and the predilection of many characters in this book to abuse drugs and sex. Their objections imply that reading about sex, drugs and violence make readers want to resort to sex, drugs, and violence. But, the Cook Memorial Public Library does not share that belief. In addition, our core belief system, embodied by the American Library Association's *Library Bill of Rights* (1996, 1948), carries specific provisions that forbid us to exclude materials because of the "origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation". It especially forbids libraries to "proscribe or remove [materials] because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval".

By the author's own account, *Always Running* is a brutal, violent book. In the Introduction to *Always Running*, the author writes "Yes, *Always Running* is hard-core. Yes it's graphic. It's meant to be this way. You can't tell this true story about real gang life without the graphic details." However, he also writes that, "I've been told countless times that this is one of the few books nonreaders love to read. And that it is often the most stolen book in libraries and classrooms." Dr. Epps, I can attest to that fact because we have the hardest time keeping tabs on this specific title. In fact, this title happens to be so unwieldy that we have had to keep several copies on hand, a practice which is reserved for items which circulate repeatedly. *Always Running* is a title that circulates a lot because young people like to read it. And part of our job is lining up readers with the books of their choice, so that little by little we can make them avid readers and enthusiasts of Literacy.

Therefore, I hope you understand that it is our professional duty not to restrict access to materials. However, we would be more than happy to schedule a time for consultation wherein the Rockland School Board can suggest materials of equal aesthetic stature and recognition which document the milieu of Los Angeles in the early 1980's. At your earliest convenience, could you please provide our offices with a bibliography of alternative titles that the Rockland School Board believes document the milieu of Los Angeles in the early 1980's? Keeping a copy of this document on file might assist us when it comes time to purchase new resources. A large portion of our clientele is high school students; as always, we will continue to assist them to better comprehend the curriculum being taught at their high schools. However, we can not involve ourselves in silencing a book nor take actions that to us would be unethical and unconscionable and impede students' ability to freely access any book they choose to read.

Pardon my request if it seems a little bold; but, the 2nd amendment in the Library Bill of Rights (1996, 1948) states that "Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues". Dr.Epps, I respect your right to disagree with the way that Luis Rodriguez recounts the milieu of Los Angeles in the early 1980's and would like to invite you to help me diversify Cook Memorial Public Library's corps of knowledge on this subject. And I would like to remind you that Luis J. Rodriguez is an accomplished poet, essayist, and publisher of Latino fiction and poetry. I firmly believe that the exchange of ideas is central to what Cook Memorial Public Library does as an institute and what you do as director of the Rockland School Board. Please help me to present the most accurate picture of Los Angeles in the early 1980's to our patrons, our students, and the future readers we might engender.

Thank You,

Yago Cura