portal: Libraries and the Academy 2024 Johns Hopkins University Press Award for Best Article

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T he Editorial Board of *portal: Libraries and the Academy* has selected "Content Warnings and Censorship" as recipient of the 2024 Johns Hopkins University Press Award for the best article published in the journal during 2023. Authored by Kristin Antelman, it appears in volume 23, number 3, pages 461–84 and can be accessed at https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2023.a901564.

After an assessment of all articles in volume 23 and independent review of those nominated by Editorial Board members, the Best Article Award Committee chose this work as the 20th annual recipient of the award. The author will receive a commemorative item and a $500 cash prize from the Johns Hopkins University Press.

"Content Warnings and Censorship" by Kristin Antelman brings to the forefront the complexity of the professional ethics of librarianship, as expressed through the American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights, in an era of increasing use of content warnings by libraries in metadata and archival descriptions. Antelman's article underscores the library profession's commitment to intellectual freedom and anti-censorship in the face of ongoing library book challenges. The adoption of content warnings frequently concerns materials described as having "offensive" or "harmful" content. The distinction between "offensive" and "harmful" content is central to the debate over content warnings. Antelman notes that while offense is subjective and inherent to individual sensibilities, harm implies a more objective negative impact on the reader. Content warnings, often addressing outdated or insensitive language within the material, reflect a shift in how libraries perceive their responsibility to the content user. Antelman states that labeling content as "harmful" shifts responsibility from the reader to the library.

Utilizing historical documents and scenarios, Antelman methodically traces the evolution of content warnings as used in libraries, from origins in discussions over Indigenous collections to broader concerns about inclusion and social justice. Whatever intention inspires adding a content warning, the implementation raises questions

regarding censorship, power dynamics, morality, intention, and the subjective nature of language. While some may argue for the necessity of warnings to mitigate harm, others caution against infringing on intellectual freedom and the library's role as a neutral provider of information. Antelman suggests considerations as libraries seek to establish practices that proactively anchor their actions in professional values and uphold the profession's commitment to anti-censorship and the right of every individual to seek and receive information from all points of view without restriction.

Antelman's well-researched, timely, and articulate article was nominated this year for *portal*'s Best Article Award for its critical examination of applying content labels and warnings to library materials. Approaching this topic from a sound theoretical framework, this article contributes significantly to the scholarly understanding of content warnings in libraries and the implications for both the profession of librarianship and the academies they serve. Antelman's article provides insights and navigates questions on the complexity of addressing these issues within local and professional spheres as libraries seek manage sensitive content in a charged social and political environment. Board members noted the deep importance of the article's focus, both in terms of the recent climate for book censorship and challenges to intellectual freedom, as well as its value in providing insights for our collective professional ethics as librarians.

Thank you to the members of the 2024 Best Article Award Committee: Donna Ferullo (chair), Carmen Cole, Anne Krakow, and Wendy Pothier, who expertly guided the board's evaluation and selection process. Thank you, too, to Wendy for coauthoring this Best Article Award announcement and to the Johns Hopkins University Press for supporting *portal*'s annual Best Article Award.

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