Intellectual Freedom For All?

The role of libraries in America today is shaped by our constitutional legacy. The importance of intellectual freedom as a part of that legacy can be traced to the circumstances surrounding the founding of our country. Most, if not all, other nations in the world were founded based on a defined territory, a religious authority, a common culture or ethnicity. Unlike these nations, the United States was invented from an idea—and that idea was liberty.

A desire for liberty motivated individuals to take great risks to colonize the New World. The meanings of “liberty” to the colonists were myriad, including:

- freedom to worship as one wishes
- freedom to express ideas without government sanction
- freedom to make individual choices about how to live one’s life
- freedom from intrusions into one’s private life by the government or other people
- opportunity to improve one’s quality of life without regard to one’s religion, politics, economic status, or other arbitrary distinctions
- living in a participatory democracy based on majority, rather than authoritarian, rule.

The First and Fourth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution are integral to American librarianship. They are the basis of the concept librarians call intellectual freedom.

*Intellectual freedom accords to all library users the right to seek and receive information on all subjects from all points of view without restriction and without having the subject of one’s interest examined or scrutinized by others.*

Source: