

Request for Reconsideration of Library Materials

The Board of Trustees of The Jones Library of Amherst, Massachusetts, has delegated the responsibility for selection and evaluation of Library materials and resources to the Library Director and Library Department Heads under the *Collection Development Policy*. The *Policy* includes reconsideration procedures to address concerns about those materials. Completion of this form is the first step in those procedures. If you wish to request reconsideration of Library materials, please return the completed form to the Library Director, Jones Library, 43 Amity Street, Amherst, MA, 01002.

Date 12/23/2013	
Name	Jeannette Wicks-Lim
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Do you represent:

Self	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Along with: Ali Wicks-Lim, Melissa Giraud, Greta Shultz, and Andrew Grant-Thomas
Organization		
Family Member		

Format of item on which you are commenting:

Book	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	X (book series)
Magazine		
Newspaper		
Audio Recording		
Video		
Textbook		

Electronic Information or Network (please specify)
Library Program
Display
Other

Title	<i>Tintin</i> graphic novel series
Author/Producer	Georges "Herge" Remi

What brought this item to your attention?	Please see attached statement for this and remaining entries.

Have you examined the entire item?
If not, which parts have you examined?

Statement for Reconsideration of Library Material

December 23, 2013

Submitted by Jeannette Wicks-Lim, Ali Wicks-Lim, Greta Shultz, Melissa Giraud, and Andrew Grant-Thomas

We are requesting that the Jones Library move the *Tintin* comic series to the young adult or adult section of the library because its overtly racist images and storylines are inappropriate for young children. Our request is **not** for the library to ban or remove the *Tintin* series from the library. It is important to note that moving the *Tintin* series out of the children's section would **not** oblige that the library remove all potentially controversial books from the children's section. We believe a principled middle ground exists between removing **all** books that provoke controversy and being unwilling to consider moving **any** books from the children's section. This principled middle ground includes the practice of placing material that uses derisive portrayals of a racial group that has been historically discriminated against purely to entertain the reader, as is the case in the *Tintin* comics, to areas for older readers.

We recognize that racism has been, and continues to be, a deeply embedded social practice in the U.S. and elsewhere. Consequently, public library collections will hold and circulate material that expresses racist views. Again, we respectfully request only that the Jones library apply discretion about placing such material in the children's area. Some of the most egregious examples of the racist material found in the *Tintin* series can be found here: <http://top10buzz.com/top-10-racist-moments-in-tintin-comics/> but many more examples appear, both subtle and overt, within most of the books. We have attached samples at the end of this statement.

Relocating the *Tintin* series to the young adult or adult section would be consistent with the Jones library's current practices to provide parents of young children guidance about its collections. These practices include organizing library material by age-appropriateness, with sections separately targeted for various ages of children, young adults and adults. The library also takes the additional step of providing warning labels to alert parents about the high level of violence in movies, for example. This is an added level of vigilance above the ratings the movies have already been given. We are left wondering why the library is willing to screen for violent material, but not for racist material.

We want to restate clearly that our request is **not** for the library to ban or remove the *Tintin* series from the library. We understand the dangers of censorship and banning books. We support the American Library Association's (ALA) policy position against such practices. However, the ALA also advises, "Actions and programs to raise the awareness of library users to any problem or condition would not be in conflict with the Library Bill of Rights when they are free of any element of advocacy [ALA Policy Manual Section B.3.3 Combating Prejudice, Stereotyping, and Discrimination]." Moving material that uses derisive portrayals of a racial group that has been historically discriminated against purely to entertain the reader out of the young children's area to the

young adult or adult section would help raise awareness of library users to the problem of racist material in books *without* banning the material.

Again, we are proposing that the material in the *Tintin* comic series is inappropriate for *young* children. We believe that the *Tintin* series would be more appropriately placed in the young adult or adult section of the library for the following reasons:

(1) The *Tintin* series stands out as exceptionally offensive, because they are comic books that use racist imagery and stereotypes as a vehicle for humor.

Unlike books *about* racism or books set in a time period where acts of racism are part of a storyline, the *Tintin* books are designed to make people laugh, and in many of the jokes, the punch-line depends on indulging racist stereotypes. Throughout the books African, Indian, Middle Eastern, Asian and Latin American characters are portrayed with their ethnic features grossly exaggerated. Take, for example, the *Tintin au Congo* book. The author initially draws dark-skinned characters with exaggerated features but by the end of the book, these characters more closely resemble monkeys than humans. The storyline then uses these characters to act subservient, stupid, and conniving, and also to worship the white character Tintin, even as he derides them. Colonialism is a theme throughout many of the books and one native culture after another is portrayed as backward and inferior.

As parents we are surprised that these books are finding their way into the hands of young children. These books feed children racist ideas--ideas that are destructive to both the white children who may find them so funny and the children of color who stand to be hurt by them at an age when they do not have the maturity to understand sufficiently their social origins or consequences. The *Tintin* books are not about racism. They are racist. While a teenager conceivably could read these comics and understand their historical and political context and learn about the power of propaganda, a small child cannot. While small children have been drawn to the slapstick humor and colorful illustrations for years, we are living in a time and place where our community standards have shifted and our tolerance for cruelty based on racism is much lower.

We want our local library to reflect that shift by placing these books in a place where parents can see them for what they are: perhaps a learning tool for young adults but not a form of entertainment for young children. In continuing to offer racist material that young children cannot possibly process and understand we are building walls in what could be healthy relationships across race. In indulging children's curiosity about these books we are hurting their ability to connect with their peers.

(2) Placing the *Tintin* books in the children's area misinforms parents.

While it is ultimately up to parents to screen what their children read, many parents feel that a book coming from the children's room in a public library is screened for age-appropriateness. This is because the library clearly differentiates material for age

levels.

We ask that the Library consider this form of racism at least as potentially disturbing as violent material, and that it be treated accordingly. Moving these racist books to an area meant for teenagers would send parents the same message without making the material inaccessible. A parent who wants to allow their child to read them or a young adult who wants to learn about racist propaganda still can, but all parents won't assume that their content is appropriate for young children.

(3) The *Tintin* series' placement in the children's area creates a cultural barrier by fostering an unwelcoming environment in a public space.

With the exception of the *Tintin au Congo* book which is shelved among other children's books in the Foreign Languages section, the *Tintin* books are shelved in the "Graphic Novels/Comic Books" section—the first section a patron approaches when entering the children's room. The books in this area are well-spaced, and many have their brightly-colored covers facing outward. Children often spend time in the graphic novels area reading independently. For children who stand to be hurt by the *Tintin* books, this creates an unwelcoming environment. It feels uncomfortable to join a space where children are laughing at racist images in the entryway. It is wrong for the Amherst Public Library to be a space where some children feel unwelcome.

Indeed, the ALA's own policy points to the importance of paying attention to the problem of cultural barriers and, racism specifically. The ALA's Policy Manual includes the following statements:

1. The ALA recognizes the critical need for access to library and information resources, services and technologies by all people, especially those who may experience language or literacy-related barriers; economic distress; cultural or social isolation; physical or attitudinal barriers; racism; discrimination on the basis of appearance, ethnicity, immigrant status, religious background, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression; or barriers to equal education, employment and housing. [ALA Policy Manual Section B.3 "Diversity"];
2. Efforts to identify and eliminate cultural, economic, literacy-related, linguistic, physical, technological, or perceptual barriers that limit access to library and information resources must be prioritized and ongoing. [ALA Policy Manual Section B.3.5. "Goals for Inclusive and Culturally Competent Library and Information Services."] and;
3. The ALA also recognizes that institutionalized inequalities based on race are embedded into our society and are reinforced through social institutions and further perpetuated by policies, practices, behaviors, traditions and structures. And, since libraries are a microcosm of the larger society and play an important and unique role in the communities they serve, they must seek to provide an

environment free of racism, where all are treated with respect and dignity. [ALA Policy Manual Section B.3.2 “Combating Racism,” emphasis added]

Placing the *Tintin* books in the entranceway to the children’s room runs directly counter to the ALA’s policy statements.

We also want to directly respond to the concerns that Director Sharry expressed to us (October 28, 2013) about applying discretion over the placement of library material. Our understanding from this meeting is that the Library gives highest priority to two criteria: (1) the material’s intended audience (e.g., the age of the main character) and (2) the level of demand (i.e., the books’ circulation rate).

The point about a book's intended audience is problematic. There is an assumption that these books are appropriate for young children but in actuality the comics were written as political cartoons, in adult newspapers and the main character is a teenager, not a child.

Our understanding is that one of the Library’s specific concerns is that moving the *Tintin* books to the young adult or adult section of the library would effectively put the staff on a "slippery slope" that would require moving any controversial children's material out of the children's section of the library. In our conversation, the Director drew a parallel between our complaints about the *Tintin* books and people being offended by the book *Heather Has Two Mommies*, a book with positive images about a family with same-sex parents. We would argue that there exists a middle ground between being unwilling to consider moving **any** books from the children's section and removing **all books** that provoke controversy.

In this case, that middle ground can be easily identified. There is a distinct difference between books like *Tintin* and a book like *Heather Has Two Mommies*. The messaging in *Heather Has Two Mommies* does not target a social group for derision and the language and storyline is age-appropriate. The messaging in *Tintin*, in contrast, singles out people based on their race that is then mocked and insulted. On top of that, the *Tintin* storylines are deeply politicized, based on complex historical issues that cannot possibly be understood by young children.

If *Heather Has Two Mommies* was a book that presented same-sex couples as superior to heterosexual couples--e.g., smarter, more kind, more *human*, if it was a book where heterosexual couples were drawn to look ridiculous and written to appear stupid and/or threatening, if it had frame after frame illustrations of homosexual superiority and violence against heterosexuals, then there would be a parallel to draw here and we would also agree that the book would be inappropriate for young children. In other words, Director Sharry's view that because both sets of books are targeted at young children they cannot be distinguished from one another for different treatment is misguided. Our main point here is that whether the intended audience for a book is or is not young children cannot be the sole criterion for where material is placed.

To drive this point home, consider the following example. Let's say that there was a high demand for the following book, *Simple Addition by a Little Nigger*. Here a couple sample pages:



Dis colored chile am done, dat sum;
"Five and five's ten,"---and now's gwine hum.

This book, clearly, was written for young children to teach them basic addition. At the same time, its images and language explicitly mock and insult a social group based on race. In this case, what criterion would the library use to place this book? Would the library still place the book in the children's area because the characters are young and the original audience for the book was young children? Or would the book's explicitly racist content cause the library to treat it differently? We hope we are right in assuming that this material would be not, in fact, be placed in the children's section.

In other words, it simply must be the case that the library applies other criteria aside from the presumed targeted audience for the placement of material in the library. We believe this is because the library staff appreciates the difference between denying adults access to information and screening material based on age-appropriateness. That is why books with adult themes and content are located outside of the children's room and not all material that would be interesting to young children is in the children's room.

Citing the circulation record of the *Tintin* books as a reason to keep them where they are is also problematic. It is no surprise that the colorful cartoon illustrations of these books, placed at eye level on a low shelf, grab the attention of your youngest visitors, and that that leads to high circulation. We would suggest that many books would experience higher circulation if given similar placement. While we recognize that library directors

have a vested interest in high circulation rates we would suggest that part of why *Tintin* has been so widely read is because of the real estate it has been given.

We would also argue that the library staff clearly must make decisions about the library's collection based on more than just circulation rates, such as “the individual merit of each title”—as noted in the “Selection Process” section of the Jones’ Collections Development policy. *Playboy*, for example, is a popular magazine that would get wide circulation at the library. It ranks 60 out of the top 100 magazines in the U.S. for paid subscriptions, beating out *The Economist*, *The New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Popular Mechanic*. Yet, *Playboy* is not on the periodicals list at the Jones, and these other periodicals are. Why? That decision must have been made based on “the merit” of the content and possibly on the environment it would create to have primarily men sitting around the library reading pornography. We can imagine in that scenario women would feel awkward and uncomfortable in the library, much the way that some children feel around the *Tintin* books.

Much to our surprise, however, Director Sharry stated that if library patrons requested *Playboy* for the library, she would feel compelled to offer the periodical, based on the criterion that patrons have expressed a demand for it. Can it be true that the criterion of “wide circulation” can trump all other criteria for material selection? If not, in today’s day and age, “racist content” would seem to be a reasonable criterion to determine, at minimum, the placement of such material.

In sum, the Library’s position that the *Tintin* series cannot be moved from the children's area because (1) its targeted audience is children and (2) it has a high circulation rate, is inconsistent with what appears to be current library practice. Library practice suggests that library staff, in fact, do appear to apply a certain level of discretion over the placement of material beyond the consideration of those two criteria. We think this is an entirely sound practice. The question therefore is not whether the library staff applies discretion over the placement of material. The real question is whether this more thoughtful level of discretion would guide the library staff to move the *Tintin* series out of the children’s area, and into the young adult or adult area, based on our reasoning above.

In the weeks that have lead up to this meeting we have begun what we hope will become a community-wide conversation about the intersections of parenting and race. We have connected with a local child psychologist who agrees that these books are not age-appropriate for grade-school-aged children. We have connected with a School Committee member who agrees that these books have no place in the hands of young children. A Professor in Afro-American studies at UMass wants to work with us on creating a forum on racism and how it affects children when books like this are accepted as children’s material.

We have also been in touch with renowned anti-racism activist and educator, Jane Elliot, who created the “Blue-eyes, Brown-eyes” workshops on racism. She fully supports our view that these books are not age-appropriate for children and that the harmful effects of

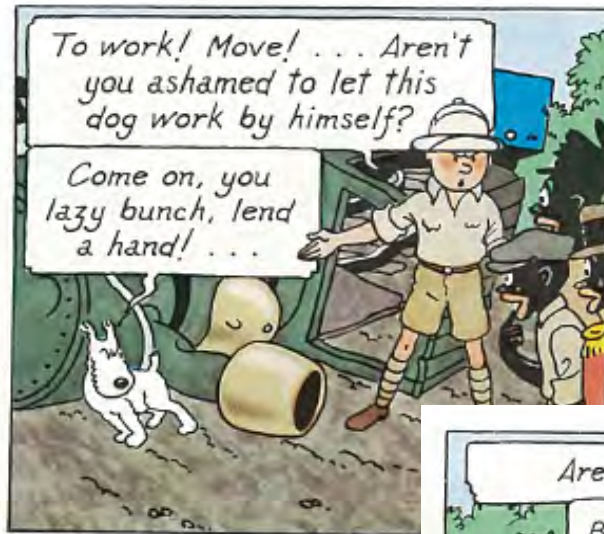
these books on children should be closely examined. As she put it in one message to us; “Getting the books removed from the library where they were not age-appropriate was a good idea. Do we let our children have driver's licenses before they are of the right age? How about alcohol, and voting rights? Do these little kids have access, in their homes to some of the more-specific 'adult' magazines?”

We will continue to convene parents who care about how race affects their children, and we plan to collaborate with the Amherst branch of the NAACP and the Human Rights Commission, to address the issues of white privilege and internalized racism that have surfaced during this painful process. We hope that the Amherst Public Library can be part of the solution by moving these books to an area where adults would still have free access to them but young children would not.

Adventures of Tintin au Congo, p. 30



Adventures of Tintin au Congo, p. 20



Adventures of Tintin au Congo, p. 25



Adventures of Tintin: Land of Black Gold, pp. 52-53



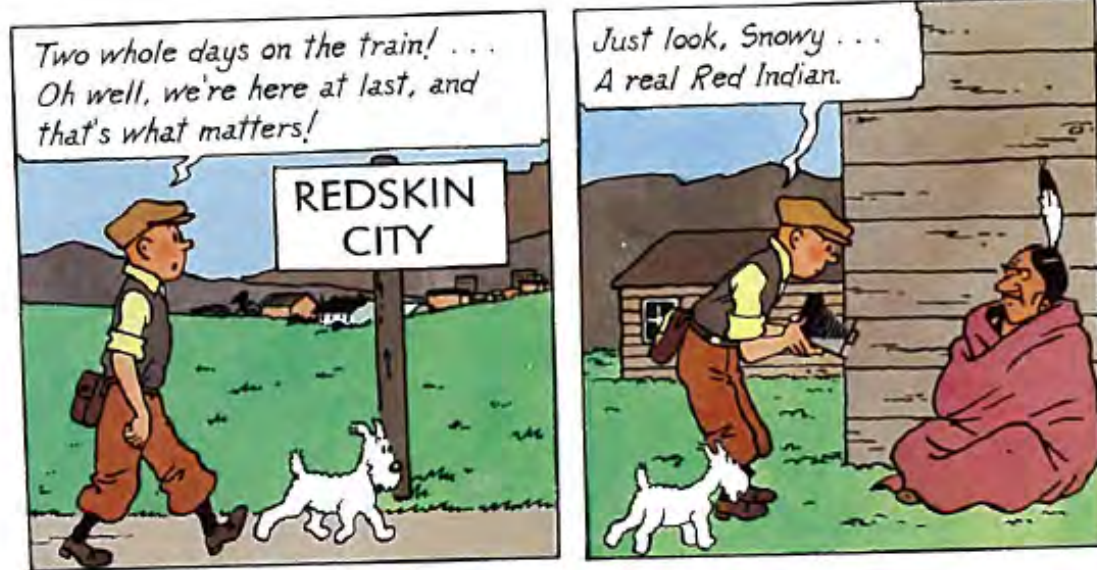
Cigars of the Pharoah, p. 14



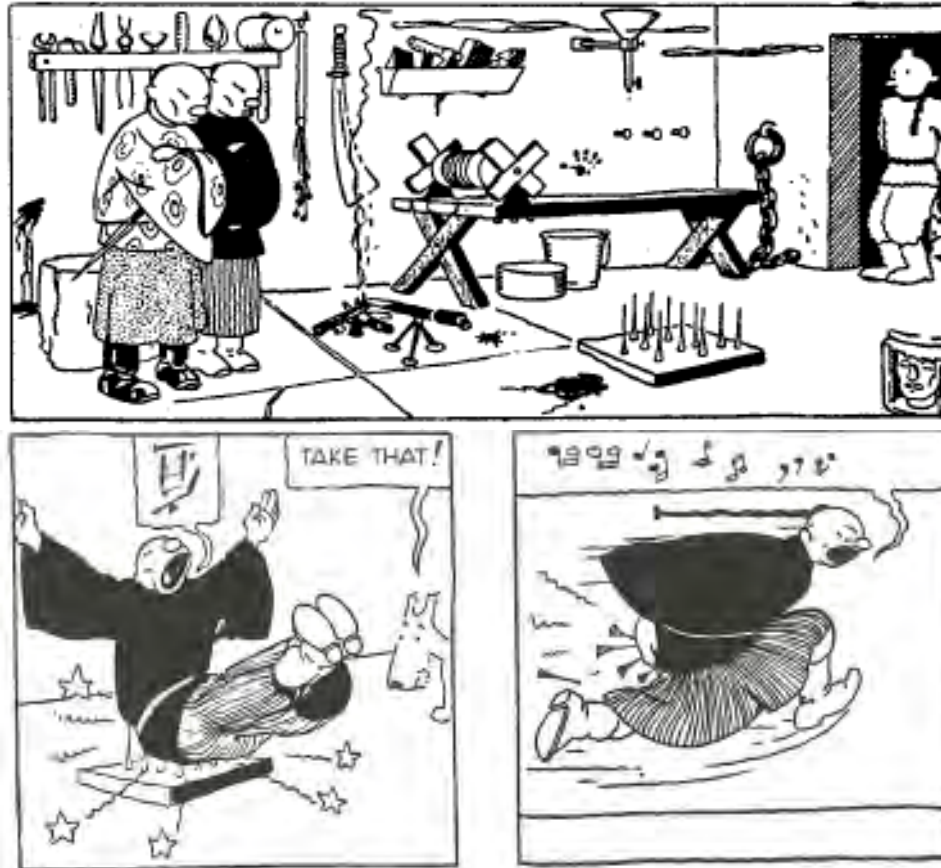
The Red Sea Sharks, p. 30



Tintin in America, p.18



Adventures of Tintin in the Land of the Soviets, pp. 66-67



The Blue Lotus, p. 179

