

*2012 Robert Downs Intellectual Freedom Award given to the Librotraficante Movement. This acceptance speech was given by Tony Diaz, El Librotraficante, co-founder and leader of the movement at the American Library Association's Mid Winter Conference January 2013 in Seattle, Washington.*

It is a pleasure to convene with so many of my fellow books smugglers, carriers of the word. It's great to make our FBI files fatter together.

There are so many of us here at the American Library Association Mid Winter Conference in Seattle carrying out so many good book-deeds that tomorrow Arizona Governor Jan Brewer will wake up with a migraine.

I'm honored to receive the 2012 Robert Downs Award for Intellectual Freedom on behalf of the other founders of the Librotraficante Movement: Liana Lopez, Bryan Parras, Laura Acosta, and Lupe Mendez, as well as on behalf of the entire Librotraficante Movement which stretches across the nation.

I am also torn.

First, thank you for this recognition. This demonstrates that this cause does not simply touch the lives of Mexican Americans. Our people are defending Intellectual Freedom for all Americans.

On the other hand, it tears at my soul that Arizona House Bill 2281, which prohibits courses in American schools, is still a law on the books and is poised to prohibit other courses of studies, not just Mexican American Studies.

Books are still banned in Tucson, Arizona.

And Chican@ youths are suing the state of Arizona for their First Amendment rights. Every American's right to Freedom of Speech rides on their shoulders. And I hope, for all of our sake, that they win.

On the other hand, I am talking to you after the most Latino Presidential Inauguration in the history of the United States of America.

A Latino priest convened America.

Latino poet, Richard Blanco, thrilled the American Imagination.

Even the President spoke Spanish.

A frenzy to reach the Latino demographic has ensued. And that too is both good and bad.

The problem is our community is not thought of at first.

Then we are vilified.

Then we are thought of consumers.

We are hardly ever thought of as intellectuals.

I can't wait until the word "Librotraficante" makes it into the Oxford English Dictionary.

When our word makes it into that book, that means all of our people will be into books.

We look forward to working with you, protectors of the word, to make that happen.

In 2012, The Librotraficante Movement launched a 6-city Caravan to smuggle banned books back into Arizona to defy AZHB2281. In the process we started 6 Under Ground Libraries. Because we are among friends, I will draw for you a secret map to those read-easies. They are located in Houston, San Antonio, and El Paso, Texas; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Tucson and Phoenix, Arizona.

We are developing 6 more this year in Los Angeles, Santa Anna, and San Diego, California; The Rio Grande Valley in Texas, Louisville, Kentucky, and Milwaukee Wisconsin. Adriana McCleer is with us tonight, she is spearheading our Under Ground Library in Milwaukee and led activities in Milwaukee, Boston, and Kansas City during our 2012 Librotraficante 50 for Freedom of Speech event on September 21. We hope you will all join us again for that on September 21, 2013.

I want you to think of The Librotraficante Underground Libraries as Gateway Libraries.

These sites will help us all to more profoundly reach our community. On that note, I want to share one story with you to illustrate how disconnected our community can be from mainstream society.

As you know Arizona is the center of the Anti-immigrant movement and the Anti-intellectual movement.

Undocumented parents avoid visiting hospitals for treatment for fear that they might be delivered into the hands of Immigration officials who might deport them and tear their family apart. The Puente Movement defends the rights of our community and has also developed programs to teach family members how to practically become nurses instructing them on such basic health care ranging from how to draw blood to how to treat diabetes. This way our own can provide basic health assistance to each other and won't have to put their lives in the hands of a system that at best ignores them and at worst tries to obliterate us.

We teamed up with Alexis Aguirre and Carlos Garcia, Directors of the Puente Movement, to open our Phoenix, Arizona Librotraficante Under Ground Library at Puente with help from the Universalist Unitarian Humanists who donated over 300 of the banned texts.

At the launch party for the Under Ground Library, I spoke with the first person to take out one of the books. She was a Chicana mom who told me that she almost didn't attend because she thought the event was for college kids. But because she trusted Puente, she came.

She told me that she was thrilled and she could not wait to bring her children.

That day Puente loaned out 42 books.

I know that without all of our combined efforts that would not have happened.

Think about how much more we can engender now that we are all united.

Just today, the Graduate School of Library and Information Science, the iSchool at Illinois has committed to inspiring retired alums who Winter in Arizona to volunteer at our Phoenix and Tucson Under Ground Libraries.

Members of REFORMA and other librarians from around the nation have renewed their commitment to spreading the books that oppressors in Arizona tried to ban.

We are all married now to these banned books.

So, on that note, if you are within the sound of my voice, I deputize you Librotraficantes, carriers and protectors of the written word.

Thank you!