

“Want to halt Fascism? Get librarians involved.”:  
The Representation of the Librarian as Revolutionary Hero

Libraries are refuges—for people and ideas. Thus libraries are also, at their core, political spaces; and librarians, when they aren't penetrating the very soul of the young patron through thick glasses, are often represented as superheroes in the service of free speech and the human right of knowledge. In a 2017 BookRiot post, a former librarian invited descriptions of the ways libraries were speaking out about “social justice, tolerance, or resistance” and promoting the library as a safe and welcoming space for all. Dozens of librarians posted pictures and descriptions of recent displays on subjects from “Black stories matter” to “social activism and protest” to the library as a “hate free zone.” In one poster uploaded by its creator, a librarian with black rimmed glasses and bright red lipstick is captured in the act of throwing a book – her pose is that of the revolutionary preparing to launch a Molotov cocktail. The caption underneath reads “Want to halt Fascism? Get librarians involved.”

The presentation will look at the representation of the librarian as revolutionary hero in works like Hiro Arikawa's *\*Library War\**, among others. In Arikawa's novel and spin-off manga series, paramilitary librarians protect the library from armed incursions by a federal agency that seeks to remove unsuitable reading. The presentation will argue that in periods of perceived threat to intellectual freedom or the library itself, the librarian emerges as a figure of heroic proportions, battling censorship and defending access to knowledge. This revolutionary librarian, the presentation will also argue, collapses two other stereotypical representations of the librarian: that of the librarian as scary guardian and the librarian as sympathetic guide.