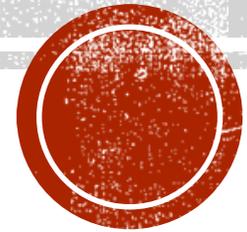


TWISTING FACTS TO SUIT THEORIES: BANNING SHERLOCK



Alicia DeFonzo, Old Dominion University, VA

***Urbinoir* 2018 Conference**

Nov. 23, 2018

PROPOSAL STATEMENT

For the last thirty years, challenges to intellectual freedom have increased dramatically in American classrooms and libraries. This presentation examines one of the most notorious cases of literary censorship against Sherlock Holmes on religious grounds. *What are the charges and what are the facts? What can Sherlock offer to secondary school curriculum? Can one adversarial reader defeat the greatest detective in fiction?*

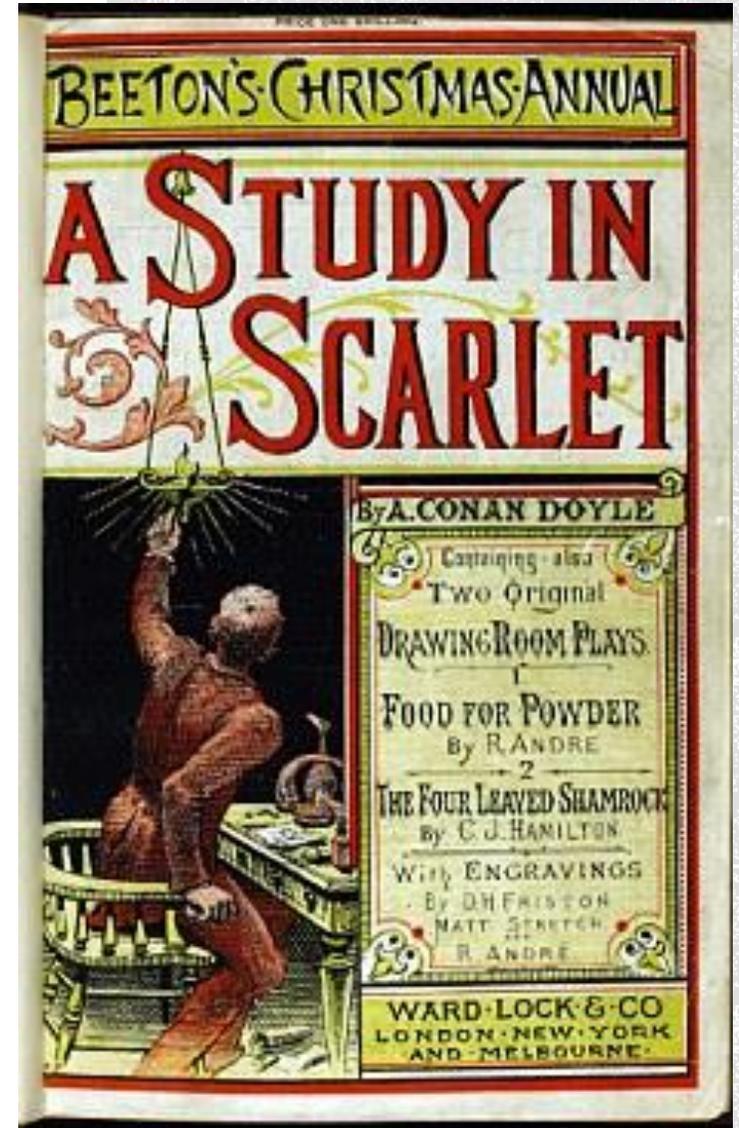
By collecting and analyzing the evidence, we can make proper deductions and separate facts from theories. After all, “The world is full of obvious things which nobody by any chance ever observes” (*Hound of the Baskervilles*).

Let us proceed to the crime.



THE CASE OF THE INFLAMMATORY DETECTIVE

- A challenge was filed against Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* by the parent of a Henley Middle School in August 2011. The parent, Brette Stevenson, wanted the book removed from the sixth-grade curriculum based on its alleged anti-Mormon sentiments (Kindelan).
- Henley Middle school is located in the affluent area outside Charlottesville, VA. Approx. 8.5 million people live in Virginia ("Quickfacts"), less than 100k of them identify Mormon ("Facts and Statistics").
- *A Study in Scarlet* had been on the sixth grade reading list for several years prior (Strauss).
- The official challenge went to the school board made up of seven members: citizens, administrators, and teachers (Seghal).
- More than 20 former Henley students turned out to oppose the book's removal. Eight grader Quinn Legallo-Malone spoke during public comment to oppose banning the book. *A Study in Scarlet* was "the best book I have read so far... I was capable of reading it in sixth grade. I think it was a good challenge..." (qtd. In Kindelan).



WHERE DO CHALLENGES COME FROM?

91 CHALLENGES are listed in the Field Report 2017

PUBLIC CHALLENGES

Verified by a third party, often a local news source

354 CHALLENGES

were reported to the American Library Association in 2017

REPORTED CHALLENGES

Includes non-books: databases, displays, disinvited speakers, programs and social media

(Some are confidential because librarians fear losing their jobs.)

The Top 10 list is calculated from Reported Challenges

SILENT CHALLENGES

82-97% of challenges remain unreported

There may be as many as **10,766** challenges every year

THE PROCESS

“A **challenge** is an attempt to remove or restrict materials, based upon the objections of a person or group” from a public institution.

“A **banning** is the removal of those materials. Challenges do not simply involve a person expressing a point of view; rather, they are an attempt to remove the material from [the institution]” (ALA.org).



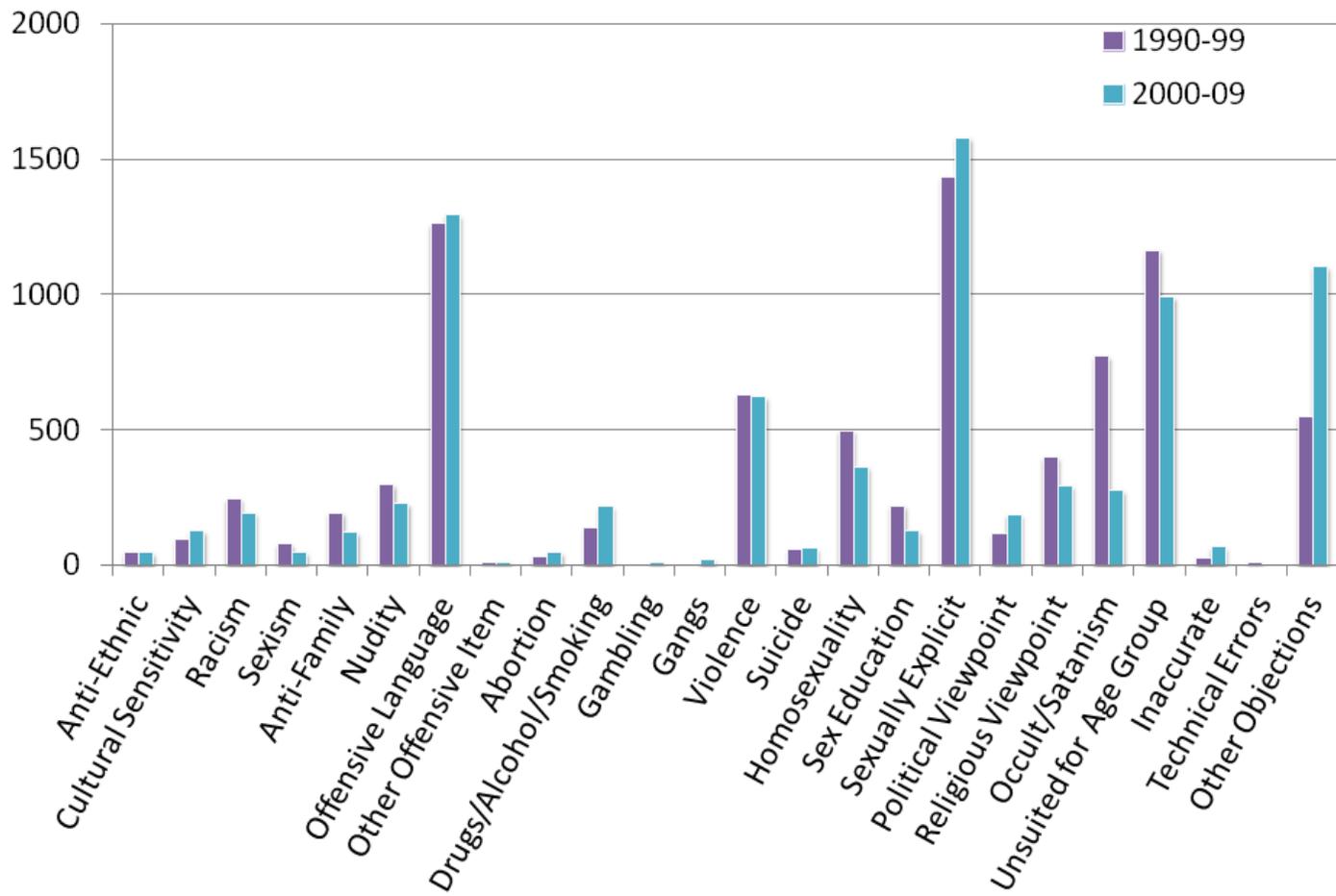
INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM IN THE US

“Intellectual freedom is the freedom to *access* information and *express* ideas, even if the information and ideas might be considered unorthodox or unpopular...”

The US Supreme Court rules, “If a work contains serious literary, artistic, political or scientific value, [children] have a right to see it as long as their parents do not object” (qtd. in American Library Association).



Challenges by Reasons



ALA DATA:

Parents are the #1 challengers followed by library patrons

Over 75% of challengers have admitted to NEVER reading the book in question.



THEORIES TO BAN SHERLOCK

“The book was used...to look at deduction and reasoning...there are other books just as capable,” said board vice chair Harley Miles (qtd. in Kindelan).

“The second half of the book deals with very negative representations of the Mormon faith,” Miles continued (qtd. in Kindelan).

Conan Doyle “apologized” to the Mormons on his visit to Salt Lake City in 1923; thereby, the author knows the book is inaccurate (Young qtd. in Schindler).

“This is our young students’ first inaccurate introduction to an American religion,” said parent Brett Stevenson (qtd. In Kindelan).



**“THE DIFFICULTY IS TO DETACH
THE FRAMEWORK OF FACT—OF
ABSOLUTE UNDENIABLE FACT—
FROM THE EMBELLISHMENTS
OF THEORISTS AND REPORTERS.”
-*MEMOIRS OF SHERLOCK HOLMES***



SHERLOCK AND STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES



The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are considered “the most effective models from states across the US and have been reviewed and tested by thousands of teachers around the world. The goal of these standards is to allow consistency in student skill expectations country wide, regardless of where students live, the 6– 12 history/social studies, science, and technical subjects section focuses on reading and writing.” The CCSS for English Language Arts requires students to “read like a detective and write like an investigative reporter” (“Sherlock Holmes Reading”).



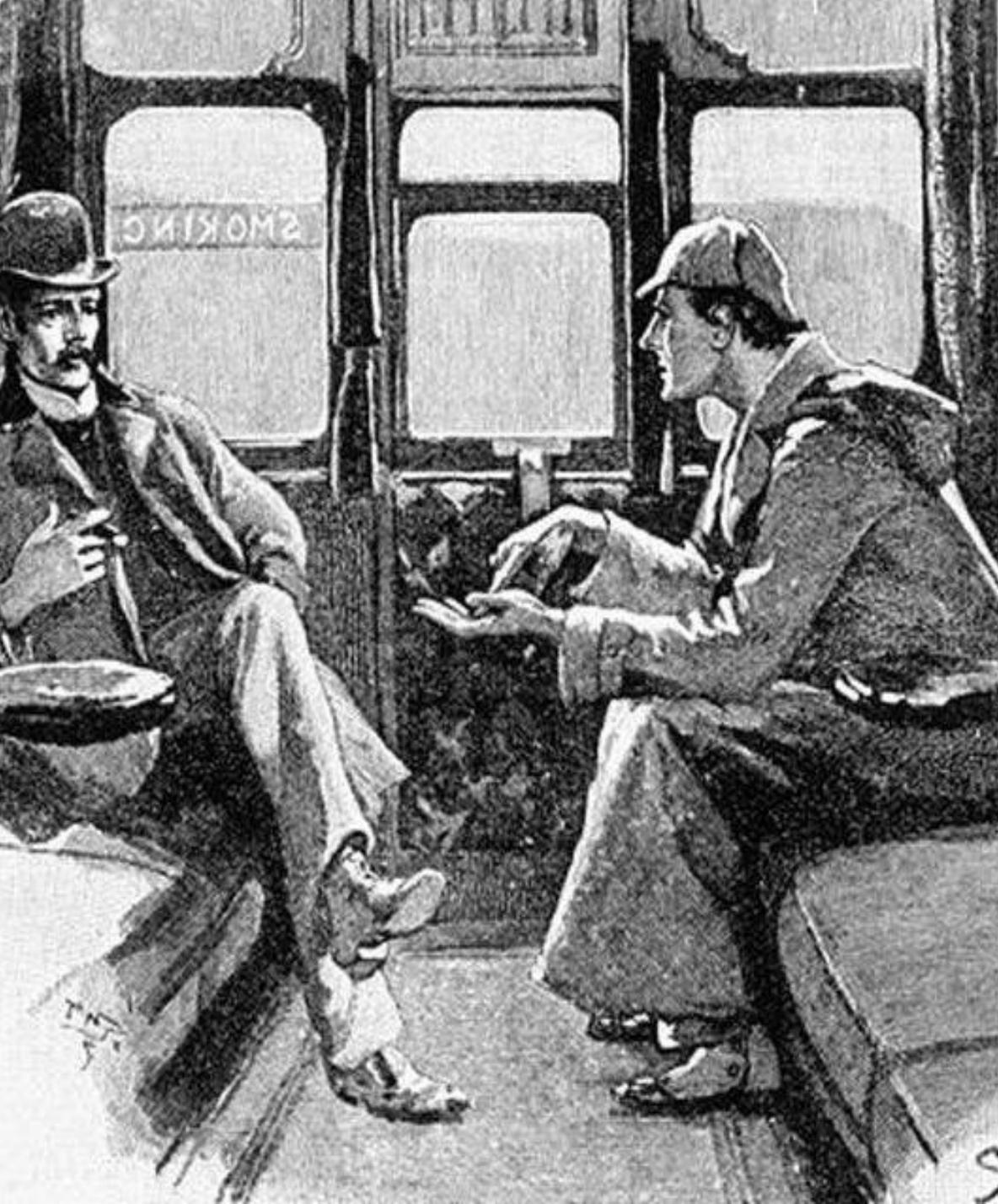
...As a chemistry and forensics expert ahead of his time, Sherlock uses seemingly trivial observations to solve the most complex crimes. His practices and techniques, created by doctor-turned-author Conan Doyle, profoundly influenced the way police work was conducted at the turn of the 19th century. Many of Sherlock’s methods still remain in practice today. Sherlock Holmes has inspired generations of thinkers to use deductive reasoning and apply it to modern sciences. Many forms of forensic sciences appeared in Conan Doyle’s work, including serology, fingerprinting, and firearm identification (*International Sherlock Holmes*).



Sherlock Holmes can “provoke rich classroom discussions relating to literature, history, science, technology, and psychology, making the series an ideal subject for multidisciplinary study” (*International Sherlock*). Some examples include:

- British history and the Victorian era
- Gender, race, and class conflict
- British stereotyping and the Other (Mormons, Andaman Islanders, Jews, etc.)
- Genre study: suspense, mystery, and crime
- Mental health and the opioid crisis
- Developmental disorders such as Asperger’s syndrome, anti-social/highly intellectual behavior
- PTSD and Dr. Watson, Afghan wars past and present

**INTERDISCIPLINARY
AND
MULTIDISCIPLINARY
POTENTIAL**



“A STUDY IN SCARLET” (1887)

“If we take you with us,” he said, in solemn words, “it can only be as believers in our own creed. We shall have no wolves in our fold. Better far that your bones should bleach in this wilderness than that you should prove to be that little speck of decay which in time corrupts the whole fruit. Will you come with us on these terms?”

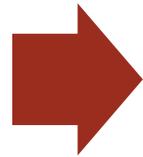
“Guess I’ll come with you on any terms,” said Ferrier. “You shall remain here,” he said. “In a few days you will have recovered from your fatigues. In the meantime, remember that now and forever you are of our religion. Brigham Young has said it, and he has spoken with the voice of Joseph Smith, which is the voice of God.”

“John Ferrier) had always determined, deep down in his resolute heart, that nothing would ever induce him to allow his daughter to wed a Mormon. Such marriage he regarded as no marriage at all, but as a shame and a disgrace. Whatever he might think of the Mormon doctrines, upon that one point he was inflexible. He had to seal his mouth on the subject, however, for to express an unorthodox opinion was a dangerous matter in those days in the Land of the Saints.

Yes, a dangerous matter—so dangerous that even the most saintly dared only whisper their religious opinions with bated breath, lest something which fell from their lips might be misconstrued, and bring down a swift retribution upon them. The victims of persecution had now turned persecutors on their own account, and persecutors of the most terrible description. It appeared to be omniscient and omnipotent, and yet was neither seen nor heard. The man who held out against the Church vanished away, and none knew whither he had gone or what had befallen him. His wife and his children awaited him at home, but no father ever returned to tell them how he had fared at the hands of his secret judges. A rash word
a hasty act was followed by annihilation

MORMONS IN THE VICTORIAN AGE

Portrayals of Mormons, stereotypical or not, were popular in Victorian writing. Nineteenth writers from Ambrose Bierce...to Jack London to Robert Louis Stevenson to Mark Twain, all made part of their living by writing about and, often, “by distorting the beliefs of the Latter-day Saints. That era's portrayals of LDS were often of a darkly secretive and violent people” (Williams). Doyle's sensationalistic portrait of the Mormons [forced marriage and violence] had drawn upon what was already an extensive body of commentary in the British press (Lecourt 86).



Smithsonian Magazine writer, Kat Eschner, references scholars which suggest “since the late 1830s, ...Mormons had begun to attract English converts...with its message of a new revelation and a restored biblical theocracy. British were both dismayed and fascinated by the Mormons for essentially creating a new religion versus a Christian sect; they had a “prophet, a text, persecution and exodus” – which provoked anti-establishment notions (Lecourt 89).



On the one hand, polygamy was a bad fit with Victorian values; but on the other...some English commentators “started to identify with the Mormons, celebrating their establishment of a thriving colony on the Utah plateau as a great vanguard movement of Anglo-Saxon settler colonialism” (Lecourt qtd. in Eschner).



MORMONS AND *A STUDY IN SCARLET*

- For Conan Doyle, Mormons were at once sort of English–Christian, white, and descended from English people or from England themselves—and profoundly Exotic. His choice to put Mormonism at the center of his story would have attracted the attention of the reading public (Eschner).
- Sebastian Lecourt claims: “By juxtaposing these two very different images of Mormonism, Doyle’s novel suggested that the Mormons’ success as settlers somehow depended upon what seemed most backward about them. If Greater Britain was the fantasy that one could have settler expansion without a serious clash of differences, then Doyle’s Mormons, in a sort of return of the repressed, came to suggest that there were already strangely foreign elements within Anglo-Saxon tenacity itself” (97).
- “The novel actually presents it as an exemplary settler colony, “an expansive power” (Lecourt 103):
Maps were drawn and charts prepared, in which the future city was sketched out. . . . In the town, streets and squares sprang up, as if by magic. In the country, there was draining and hedging, planting and clearing, until the next summer saw the whole country golden with the wheat crop (A Study).
- Alyssa Rosenberg, political and cultural columnist claims, “even if the details are sensationalistic, it is true that plural marriage and defense of faith by force are part of early Mormon history” (qtd. In Kain).



"MOUNTAIN MEADOW MASSACRE" (1857)

An interview with Richard Turley, assistant historian of the LDS Church and co-author of *Massacre at Mountain Meadows*, explains the sordid history of the Mormon church and its "religiously motivated acts of violence." On Sept. 11, 1857, a Mormon militia in southern Utah seized a wagon train from Arkansas and brutally murdered 120 people. Soon after, records of the event were destroyed, and Mormon leaders attempted a cover-up:

- A Mormon militia from Cedar City, Utah, attacked a wagon train from Arkansas in a grassy valley known as Mountain Meadows. The two groups of settlers fired on each other for four days. Then, on Sept. 11, the Mormon group tricked the besieged, thirsty and terrorized Arkansans into leaving their circle of wagons.
- Others from the militia chased, clubbed, knifed and shot the women and children.
- Earlier versions of the story also blamed the victims and characterized the Arkansas settlers as belligerent and profane. They were said to have bragged about participation in the murder of Mormon founder Joseph Smith in Illinois and to have taunted Mormon settlers about their expulsion from Missouri (Turley qtd. in Berkes).

Will Bagley, historian and author of *Blood of the Prophets: Brigham Young and the Massacre at Mountain Meadows*, claims: "Attackers said they did what they were told by religious superiors, who demanded strict obedience in 1857 and who were believed to have divine authority."

- Mormon leaders also delivered stern, sometimes violent, talks condemning the non-Mormons who were then considered threats. Some of those talks were given in and around Cedar City, Utah, just before the massacre.
- Bagley also firmly believes that Mormon prophet Brigham Young ordered the massacre (qtd. in Berkes).





HOTEL UTAH

"THE HOTEL BEAUTIFUL"

GEO. O. RELF,
MANAGER

SALT LAKE CITY



3049
#2

Dear Sir

I shall draw the Mormons as I find them when I write of my present experiences. All I said of the Danite Band and the murders is historical so I cannot withdraw that, tho' it is likely that in a work of fiction it is stated more luridly than in a work of history. It's best to let the matter rest, I think, and draw the Mormons as they now are

Yours sincerely

A Conan Doyle

May 10.

CONAN DOYLE'S "APOLOGY"

- Before Doyle visited Utah in 1923, he was asked (via letter) about his depiction of the Latter Day Saints' organization as being "steeped in the assassination of apostates, and that polygamy was white slavery" and so forth (qtd. in Sehgal).
- Sir Arthur responded that in the future he would write of the Latter-day Saints as he found them on his visit. But, he insisted, "all I said about the Danite Band and the murders is historical, so I cannot withdraw that tho[sic] it is likely that in a work of fiction it is stated more luridly than in a work of history. It's best to let the matter rest" (qtd. In Sehgal).
- Conan Doyle gave a lecture in May 1923 at the Univ. of Utah on the subject of spiritualism and psychic phenomena. He was well-received and grateful (Williams).
- After the lecture, the presiding bishop of the LDS Church, in a letter, blasted Conan Doyle for accepting his speaking fee, "I think he had a lot of gall to take Mormon money when he attacked us so bitterly in his book." Conan Doyle responded insisting he had never taken a dime (Schindler).

"Nothing clears up a case so much as stating it to another person" (Silver Blaze).





The Utah-based Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the fourth-largest religious denomination in the United States and claims more than 14 million members worldwide (Kindelan).



The 2017 Gallup poll claims the most populated religions in the US are Protestants(49%) Catholicism (23%), Judaism (2%), and Mormonism (1.8%).



The top three religions begin introducing faith-based practices to their children beginning between infancy and age two (Gallup).

MORMONISM TODAY



UPON FURTHER INVESTIGATION

- *Children's Internet Protection Act, S. 97, (1999)*: The purpose of the bill is to protect America's children from exposure to obscene material, child pornography, or other material deemed inappropriate for minors while accessing the Internet from a school or library receiving Federal Universal Service assistance for provisions of Internet access, Internet service, or internal connection.
- Internet Filtering: "Blocking content coming into and going out to the Internet. Accomplished by firewall software residing in a stand-alone device, router or user's machine or in a filtering program in each user's machine, content can be blocked based on website address or Internet service" (PCMAG).
- The American Library Association and National Coalition Against Censorship have actively opposed internet filtering in public schools and libraries. "The problem with filters is that many block access to content of legitimate interest to users, but which touches upon disfavored or controversial viewpoints on issues ranging from sexuality to marijuana to paganism. This means that users are often only able to access one side of important policy and ethical debates" (NCAC).
- "Utah's experience with internet filters in **schools and libraries** is typical," according to a newly-released study by the *Censorware Project*. Among the documents **banned** by Utah's internet filtering in public school and libraries are: *the Holy Bible, The Book of Mormon [play], the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, all of Shakespeare's plays, and The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* ("Senate Internet Bill").



- In a unanimous vote, Albemarle County school board chose to remove the novel, claiming *A Study in Scarlet* as age-inappropriate. "It certainly can be used in older grades, but there's lots of other books that could be used for sixth grade," claimed board vice chair Miles (Kindelan). "...[L]earning goals could be met using another Sherlock Holmes book or another book...but [remove] the issue of inaccurate information about the Mormon religion and broaching topics that would be sensitive at age 11," Maury Brown, school district spokeswoman told *ABC News*.
- "The MDL [Mormon Defense League] is never in favor of banning books from libraries or public access, but we are pleased that Albemarle has looked at what's appropriate for a sixth-grade curriculum and considered removing a book that might promote bigotry," Scott Gordon, president of the Foundation for Apologetic Information & Research (FAIR), a non-profit focused on addressing misconceptions of the Mormon faith (Kindelan).
- The middle school of about 120 sixth-graders will now effect the entire school system's 1,000 sixth-graders (Kindelan). Though the parent who initiated the challenged suggested *The Hound of the Baskervilles* to take *Scarlet's* place, no such switch was ever made. Since 2011, no work of Sherlock has since been taught in any middle-school grade level in Albemarle County (Thomas), effecting upward of 21,000 sixth-graders at present.
- One student interviewed about the verdict said: "I feel like they weren't really listening to student input on this issue, and this is who it is going to effect, the students and the teachers," (Kindelan).

THE VERDICT

**“HOW OFTEN HAVE I
SAID THAT WHEN YOU
HAVE EXCLUDED
THE IMPOSSIBLE
WHATEVER
REMAINS, HOWEVER
IMPROBABLE, MUST
BE THE TRUTH.”
-THE SIGN OF FOUR**



Narrowed view of the world, lack of empathy

Journal of Applied Social Psychology: a study of three age groups (elementary, high school, and college) of roughly 100 students in Italy read the *Harry Potter* series (the most banned book in America). The results: students demonstrated that reading *HP* significantly improved the perception of stigmatized groups and reduced prejudices towards immigrants, homosexuals, and refugees (McKay).

Lack of intellectual growth, educational stagnation

Mike Rose, author of *Lives on the Boundary*...argued that many schools, in spite of good intentions, actually deny students the opportunity to develop intellectually: "Our approaches to language and literacy as often as not keep us from deep understanding of differences and problems—and possibilities" (qtd. In Agee).

Sterilization of curriculum, Self-censorship from teachers

English Journal study by Jane Agee found: "Teachers who participated...said choosing such [banned] texts could jeopardize their careers. Those teachers whose goals for teaching included reading diverse, contemporary literature took a number of risks to do so...The more experienced teachers all practiced self-censorship to some degree."

LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF CENSORSHIP



FINAL DEDUCTIONS

Despite separating fact from fiction, truth from theories, like Sherlock, we cannot always free the innocent nor bring criminals to justice.

- The truth is ironic: the Mormon parent who censored a county against “anti-Mormon” sentiments, carried out the same censorship by Mormons referenced in *A Study in Scarlet*. Mormons, excuse me “Latter Day Saints,” continue to police their good name and go after anti-Mormon messages and stereotypes.
- Intellectual freedom is *technically* still upheld in Albemarle with access to *Sherlock* works in public school libraries.
- In many cases such as this, school administration does not typically side with students or teachers in cases of book challenges out of fear of political backlash and personal interest.

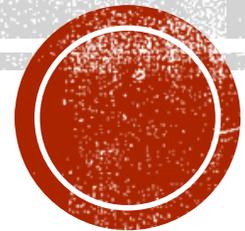
But, there is hope...

- I have recently filed a letter to the new Superintendent of the county, asking him to reintroduce Sherlock and consider the case.
- Some books grow more popular due to “banning” – and some students will continue to seek out the book under fire.
- TV or film can often help with literary popularity. The BBC series SHERLOCK aired in 2010. That year, sales of Sherlock Holmes books increased by 53 per cent – from around 57,000 copies to 88,000 – compared with 2009 (Jones).
- High schools and universities continue to teach Sherlock, recognizing his impact on learning. As educators, we must continue to share his stories, embody his methods, speak his name.



**“MY NAME IS SHERLOCK HOLMES. IT IS MY
BUSINESS TO KNOW WHAT OTHER PEOPLE DO
NOT KNOW.”**

- ADVENTURES OF THE BLUE CARBUNCLE



WORKS CITED

Agee, Jane. "The Effects of Censorship on Experienced High School English Teachers." *English Journal*. November 1999. Web. 10, Nov. 2018.

Berkes, Howard. "Mormon Historians Shed Light On Sept. 11, 1857," *NPR*. 11, Sept. 2008. Web. 6, Nov. 2018.

"Definition: Internet Filtering," *PCMag*. Web. 10, Nov. 2018.

Eschner, Kat. "The Creator of Sherlock Holmes Was, Like Many Victorians, Fascinated by Mormons," *Smithsonian Magazine*. 1, Nov. 2017. Web. 3, Nov. 2018

"Facts and Statistics: Virginia," Newsroom, The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints. Web. 11, Nov. 2018.

"The International Exhibition of Sherlock Holmes: Teacher's Guide," *Sherlockholmesexhibition.com*. Web. 3, Nov. 2018.

Lecourt, Sebastian. "The Mormons, the Victorians, and the Idea of Greater Britain," *Victorian Studies*. 56:1. 2013. Web. 3, Nov. 2018.

Kain, Erik. "Book Banning is Alive and Well in Virginia," *Forbes*. 15, Aug. 2011. Web. 1, Oct. 2018.

Kindelan, Kate. "Virginia School District Deletes Sherlock Holmes Novel From 6th Grade for 'Anti-Mormon' Portrayal," *ABCNews*. 12, Aug. 2011. Web. 1 Oct. 2018.

Jones, Paul. "Benedict Cumberbatch's Sherlock boosts Conan Doyle book sales," *RadioTimes*. Web. 10, Nov. 2018.



WORKS CITED (CONT'D)

McKay, Tom. "Psycholigists Find a Surprising Thing Happens to Kids That Read Harry Pottter," *Mic*. The Pacific Standard. 30, July 2014. Web. 1, Aug. 2015.

Newport, Frank. "2017 Update on Americans and Religion," *Gallup*. Newsgallup.com. 22, Dec. 2017. Web. 3, Nov. 2018.

"QuickFacts: Virginia," United States Census Bureau. 1, July 2017. Web. 1, Nov. 2018.

Schindler, Hal. "The Case of the Repentant Writer Sherlock Holmes' Creator Raises the Wrath of Mormons," *The Salt Lake Tribune*. 10, Apr. 1994. Web. 3, Nov. 2018.

Sehgal, Ujala. "Sherlock Holmes Banned from Reading Lists for Being Anti-Mormon," *The Atlantic*. 13, Aug. 2011. Web. 1, Oct. 2018.

"Senate Internet Bill Could Backfire," *NCAC Newsletter*. 73: 1999. Web. 3, Nov. 2018.

"Sherlock Holmes: Reading like a Detective an 8th grade English Language Arts unit aligned to the Common Core State Standards." *Achieve.org*. 16, Nov. 2018. Web.

"S. Rept. 106-141 - CHILDREN'S INTERNET PROTECTION ACT." *Congress*. Congress.gov. 1999-2000. Web. 3, Nov. 2018.

Strauss, Valerie. "Sherlock Holmes book removed from school reading list for being anti- Mormon," *Washington Post*. 16, Aug. 2011. Web. 1, Oct. 2018.

Williams, Lane. "Mormon Media Observer: Latter-day Saints and Sherlock Holmes," *Deseret News*. 19, Dec. 2011. Web. 3, Nov. 2018.

