**Banning Books**

**A public library in Alabama flagged a children's book for removal because the author's last name is "Gay." Read Me a Story, Stella by Marie-Louise Gay is about a brother and sister who read books together and contains no sexual or LGBTQ content. Library director Cindy Hewitt concedes Gay's book was pulled in error, because her last name appeared on a list of sensitive "keyboards," but denies any ill intent. "We wanted to be proactive," says Hewitt. *(The Week magazine, October 20, 2023)***

**Ban my book? Go right ahead: "Today's self-appointed moral gatekeepers" want to ban my novel The Handmaid's Tale from school libraries, said Margaret Atwood. "Go ahead. It'll only make them want to read it more." The school board in Madison County, Virginia, just deemed the book "unacceptable" and removed it under legislation signed by Gov. Glenn Youngkin last year enabling parents to cencor reading materials they found sexually explicit. Focus on the Family, a conservative Christian group, put The Handmaid's Tale on its list of books to be banned. The banning helps answer one of the books central questions: "What kind of a totalitarianism might the United States become?" The novel portrays a future, dystopian society ruled by a patriarchal religious cult based on heretical interpretations of the Old Testament, with women and their bodies under the "total control" of the state. Are high school students really too young "to explore such questions?" Book banners will soon discover that in this digital era, it's even harder "to control what young people get their hands on"; in TikTok's book recommendation subcommunity, The Handmaid's Tale has 400 million mentions. Declaring the book forbidden will make it even more popular, so thanks, censors! *(The Week magazine, February 24, 2023)***

***\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\****[**The Davis County, Utah, school district is reviewing the Bible to see if it violates a new state law banning “inappropriate content” from school libraries. An anonymous parent complained that the Bible is “one of the most sex-ridden books around,” containing references to “incest, onanism, bestiality, prostitution, genital mutilation, fellatio, dildos, rape, and even infanticide.” A district spokesman said, “We don’t differentiate between one request and another.” *(The Week magazine, April 14, 2023)***](http://www.bbc.co.uk/)

**Good week for: Consistency, after a Utah school district banned the Bible in response to a parent's complaint that it discusses fornication and other "sensitive material." State Sen. Todd Weiler called the ban "a fair trade" so schools could censor "X-rated content" in other books. *(The Week magazine, June 16, 2023)***

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**Some 3,360 book bans were implemented in U.S. public-school classrooms and libraries in the 2022-23 school year, up 33 percent on the previous year, according to freedom-of-speech organization PEN America. More than 40 percent of the book restrictions – which limited access to 1,557 titles by more than 1,480 authors – took place in Florida. *(Los Angeles Times, as it appeared in The Week magazine, October 6, 2023)***

**There is more than one way to burn a book. And the world is full of people running about with lit matches. *(Ray Bradbury, in The Atlantic)***

**Where they burn books, they will ultimately burn people. *(Heinrich Heine, in The Florida Star)***

**Let's be honest with ourselves: A censor lurks in all of us. When we encounter ideas and arguments that we believe are morally and factually wrong, we instinctively want them banned. When a speaker triggers our visceral disgust, we want him or her silenced, fired, ruined, and perhapsw drawn and quartered. These impulses have been given free rein through most of human history, until that radical document, the Constitution, enshrined free speech as a fundamental right. But it's a right that's in constant conflict with our passions, and is thus always in danger – never more so than now. With the culture war at a boil, the clamoring for censurship has risen to a din. Books that discuss racism, homosexuality, and even the Holocaust are being banned from schools, and history lessons scrubbed of anything that might cause (white) students "discomfort" or "psychological distress." *(The Week magazine, Ferbruary 11, 2022)***

**When eighth-grader Joslyn Diffenbaugh saw the books being banned from school curricula, she noticed that many of the books in question were ones that had given her valuable insight into subjects like radism and police brutality. So, the Pennsylvania 14-year-old teaned up with her local bookstore to host a Banned Book Club, where she and other teams meet to discuss titles such as George Orwell’s Animal Farm. It’s one of many teen-run banned book clubs that are popping up across the country. “The reason these books are being banned are the reasons why they should probably be read,” Joslyn said. “If we can read them now, we have that knowledge for the future.” *(The Week magazine, April 29, 2022)***

**A Florida school district has removed dictionaries from its libraries’ shelves to comply with a state law that restricts students’ access to books that mention “sexual conduct.” Among the 1,600 books removed by the Escambia County district were five dictionaries, which contain definitions of the word “sex.” A district spokesperson said the reference books hadn’t been banned, “they have simply been pulled for further review.” *(The Week magazine, January 19, 2024)***

**The company behind Dr. Seuss' estate caved to the censorious left last week, and said it will stop publishing six of Seuss' lesser-known children's books from early in his career because they contain "hurtful racial stereotypes. Seuss' racist caricatures obviously are "offensive," said Kevin Williamson in the New York Post. "As it turns out, a man born in 1904 and writing during the Roosevelt administration did not have a racial sensibility or a conception of etiquette identical with our own today." Theodor Seuss Geisel, who died in 1991, evolved beyond his early racism. He was "a solid man of the Left from the 1940s until his death," with his books brimming with progressive messages: The Sneetches mocked the absurdity of racism and class, while Horton Hears a Who! contains the famous line "A person's a person, no matter how small." The Lorax, published in 1971, "overflows with its right-think about peace, brotherhood, and environmentalism." *(The Week magazine, March 19, 2021)***

[**Don’t join the book burners. Don’t think you’re going to conceal faults by concealing evidence that they ever existed. *(Dwight D. Eisenhower)***](http://www.bbc.co.uk/)

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**In Florida, new laws pushed by Gov. Ron DeSantis have tied educators in knots and emptied some school library shelves.** [***(The Week magazine, June 2***](http://www.bbc.co.uk/)***, 2023)***

**In Florida, a textbook publisher even had to completely remove a purely factual passage on George Floyd’s murder and the subsequent Black Lives Matter protests. In at least a half-dozen states, teachers and school libraries now face potential prison time for violating the bans. It isn’t just individual books anymore, said Kasey Meehan of the PEN America foundation. “It’s a set of ideas, it’s themes, it’s identities, it’s knowledge on the history of our country.” *(The Week magazine, June 2, 2023)***

**The head of the Martin County, Florida, chapter of Moms for Liberty, Julie Marshall, has succeeded in getting dozens of books banned from school libraries under a law signed by Gov. Ron DeSantis. Among them are 20 books by best-selling novelist Jodi Picoult, including The Storyteller, a story about a Holocaust survivor’s granddaughter that Marshall flagged for violent flashback scenes. *(The Washington Post, as it appeared in The Week magazine, March 24, 2023)***

**Two Florida counties have instructed schools to “remove or cover” all library books out of fear school officials will be charged with crimes under Gov. Ron DeSantis’ Stop WOKE Act.” Officials with Manatee and Duval counties say library books will be unavailable until a “formal review” of their content is made by a trained “media specialist.” *(The Week magazine, February 10, 2023)***

**Florida’s Duval County school district has removed a biography of Roberto Clemente from its shelves, because sections detailing the racism faced by the black Puerto Rican baseball legend may violate Gov. Ron DeSantis’ “Stop WOKE Act.” The act prohibits schools from exposing students to material that could cause racial “anguish,” and the district says “a certified media specialist” will formally review the book. *(The Week magazine, February 24, 2023)***

**What do Florida’s laws say? One law requires every book in a school’s possession to be posted on an online database and vetted by “media specialists” to ensure it’s “free of pornography.” State guidance urges schools to “err on the side of caution” on what they approve. In two large school districts, which contain the cities of Bradenton and Jacksonville, administrators ordered the removal or concealment of tens of thousands of books in their schools; students returned from their winter break to find bookshelves empty or covered with paper. Florida’s “Parental Rights in Education” law bans discussions of sexual orientation or gender identity from kindergarten to third grade, while its “Stop WOKE Act” outlaws books that could lead any student to feel race- or sex-related “guilt, anguish, or other forms of psychological distress.” In Florida, new laws pushed by Gov. Ron DeSantis have tied educators in knots and emptied some school library shelves. *(***[***The Week magazine, June 2***](http://www.bbc.co.uk/)***, 2023)***

***\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\****[**The futility of banning books: “Nothing boosts book sales like condemnation by a church,” said Ron Charles. Just ask Sister Margaret Farley, a Catholic theologian whose book Just Love was languishing at No. 142,982 on Amazon’s sales list when the Vatican censured it last week, saying it could cause “grave harm to the faithful.” Within days, Farley’s book – which makes the moral case for sexual pleasure within any kind of loving relationship – hit No. 16 on the best-seller list. Once again, we see what happens to sales when a religious authority “tells the faithful to look away.” But that’s a temptation religious authorities have not been able to resist ever since Gutenberg invented the printing press. Evangelical churches have tried, and failed, to ban books by Tolkien and Steinbeck; more recently, they condemned Harry Potter and Nikos Kazantzakis’s The Last Temptation of Christ. In every case, interest in these things grew. Similarly, Ayatollah Khomeini imposed a fatwa on Salman Rushdie after he published The Satanic Verses in 1988 – turning Rushdie into a literary superstar. Ayatollahs, ministers, and popes, it seems, will never accept a basic truth: “Trying to regulate what people read is counterproductive.” *(The Week magazine, June 22, 2012)***](http://www.bbc.co.uk/)

**Bad week for: Ernest Hemingway, after Scotland’s University of the Highlands slapped a trigger warning on his 1953 Pulitzer-winning novella The Old Man and the Sea, alerting delicate readers to the presence of “graphic fishing scenes.” *(The Week magazine, July 28, 2023)***

**Is censorship growing? Yes. Recently passed state and local legislation is dictating what schools may or may not teach and what students may or may not read. A record 2,571 different titles were banned or censured by school districts, states, and other government entities in 2022, according to the American Library Association – a 38 percent increase from the previous year. *(The Week magazine, June 2, 2023)***

**The mere presence of LGBTQ people in a book can be enough to merit the label “obscene.’ In Florida and several other states, all books must be screened by official censors before they are deemed acceptable, with wholesale bans on referencesto sex, race, and gender identity, regardless to context. *(The Week magazine, June 2, 2023)***

**In Missouri, a new law banning books containing “explicit sexual material” led school districts to junk art history textbooks and nonfiction accounts of the Holocaust. *(The Week magazine, June 2, 2023)***

***\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\**Do most parents support this? No. A Fox News poll released in April revealed that 77 percent of parents were “extremely” or “very” worried about book bans. Other polls found that about 80 percent of both Republicans and Democrats saybooks should never be banned for discussing race, slavery, or critical views of *U.S. history. (The Week magazine, June 2, 2023)***

**Democratic pollster Guy Molyneux said a majority of parents say they are “uncomfortable with some of this (gender) transitional treatment kids are getting, and ‘I don’t know how I feel about pronouns, but I do not want them banning books.’” *(The Week magazine, June 2, 2023)***

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**Going after publishers: Starting July 1, publishers who sell or distribute books with “sexually explicit” material to Tennessee schools face felony charges and fines of up to $100,000 per violation. Lawmakers in Texas and Oklahoma are considering new age-based restrictions on publishers who want access to their public schools. Some companies already are letting state laws influence editorial decisions. Maggie Tokuda-Hall’s grade-school picture book Love in the Library, first published by a small press last year, recounts how her grandparents met in a Japanese internment camp during World War II. When children’s-book giant Scholastic offered to license it, it asked her to remove references to anti-Japanese racism from her author’s note, arguing that teachers might be dissuaded from using the book in this “potentially sensitive” moment. The author flatly refused. “I’m typically a very compromising person, she said. “But when you omit the word “racism” from a story about the mass incarceration of a single group of people based on their race, there’s no compromise to be had.” *(The Week magazine, June 2, 2023)***

**In reaction to Fox News' proclamation that all of Seuss was being "canceled," consumers sent dozens of his other books to the top of Amazon's charts. *(The Week magazine, March 19, 2021)***

***\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\**How have teachers responded? Many Florida teachers are “scared to death” to tell students anything about America’s racial history, said Charles White, executive director of the Social Science Education Consortium. To pass muster, onr textbook publisher even eliminated any mention of race in telling the story of Rosa Parks refusing to change her seat on a public bus. DeSantis insists it’s “a nasty hoax” that state laws require broad book bans, and that he is simply fighting “woke” leftists who are “trying to pollute and sexualize our children.” *(The Week magazine, June 2, 2023)***

**What is the impact of these laws? They’ve made teachers paranoid and deeply fearful about losing their licenses and being charged with crimes. In some states, “tip lines” now exist for reporting teachers who discuss “inappropriate” topics. Arizona, now requires parental approval before teachers can include books containing any references to sex. Some educators, such as Stuart, Florida, middle school science teacher Arian Dineen, say the rules are forcing teachers to consider leaving the profession. “It feels like you can be reported by anyone at any time,” she said. “It feels very much like 1984 or the McCarthy era.” *(The Week magazine, June 2, 2023)***

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**In Texas, which had more book bannings than any other state last year, a bill currently under consideration would ban textbooks that portray U.S. history in anything but a “positive” light. *(The Week magazine, June 2, 2023)***

**Where is this happening? Most of the restrictions enacted this school year have been passed by Republican-controlled legislatures in Texas, Florida, Missouri, Utah, and South Carolina. Spurred by conservative groups such as Moms for Liberty, a two-year-old organization that has helped propel hundreds of like-minded candidates onto school boards, these legislatures have passed laws with broad restrictions on topics they deem inappropriate. *(The Week magazine, June 2, 2023)***

**There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all. The books that the world calls immoral are books that show the world its own shame. (Oscar Wilde)**

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