American Library Association registers a near doubling of efforts to censor, ban books in 2022

David Walsh
14 April 2023

The right-wing rampage to censor and ban library books and materials in the US continues. The desperate aim is to suppress independent and critical thought among young people, in particular, who are instinctively at odds with the status quo. The developing political and social crisis makes it all the more imperative for these social forces to block access to anything that does not uphold the official lies and mystifications.

The Associated Press reported April 10 that a graphic novel based on the diary of Holocaust victim Anne Frank was removed from the library at Vero Beach High School in Florida after a complaint from one parent. The latter individual, the head of the ultra-right Moms for Liberty in Indian River County, an organization spearheading book banning nationwide, raised an objection. The school's principal abjectly submitted, and the book was removed last month.

The work, *Anne Frank's Diary: The Graphic Adaptation*, is a 2018 reworking or editing of the original diary by Israeli filmmaker and writer Ari Folman (*Waltz with Bashir*, 2008), with illustrations by David Polonsky. Folman also directed *Where Is Anne Frank*, an animated film and a freer adaptation of the diary in 2021.

The book has been praised widely for its psychological sensitivity and artistry. The *New York Times Book Review* described it as a "stunning, haunting work of art." The reviewer for the *Christian Science Monitor* asserted that in "the handling that Folman and Polonsky give" the diary, "what happens is nothing short of a revelation . . . nothing has ever quite captured the strange, stubborn delicacy, the forlorn wistfulness, of the diary like this before . . . a genuine work of art." Nonetheless, one phone call from a right-wing Vandal, and the book disappears.

What are the objections? Moms for Liberty leader Jennifer Pippin, reports the Associated Press, claimed that "the Anne Frank graphic novel violated state standards to teach the Holocaust accurately." What was inaccurate? Pippin didn't explain directly, but we can deduce something about the objections from her comments: "Even her version featured the editing out of the entries about sex," Pippin said, referring to the original diary. "Even the publisher of the book calls it a 'biography,' meaning, it writes its own interpretive spin. It's not the actual work. It quotes the work, but it's not the diary in full. It chooses to offer a different view on the subject."

Apparently to indicate the character of the objection, the AP comments that the book "at one point shows the protagonist walking in a park, enchanted by female nude statues, and later proposing to a friend that they show each other their breasts."

Ignorance goes hand in hand with social reaction. Moms for Liberty, as noted, is a far-right organization, with ties to fascist elements in and around the Republican Party. Considering those political surroundings, its claim to be concerned with an accurate depiction of the Holocaust needs to be taken with a very large grain of salt. The outfit has particularly close ties to the administration of Florida Governor Ron DeSantis. Media Matters for America has correctly pointed out that Moms for Liberty uses "parental rights" as a cover for harassing public schools and libraries. They are opposed to "indoctrinating" children—except with chauvinism, militarism, anti-communism and religious bigotry.

The right-wing commissioners in Llano County, Texas, northwest of Austin, are so determined to censor books they disapprove of that they are willing to shut down the public libraries in the county on that account.

According to CNN, the county commissioners "kicked out the members of the library board in 2021 and replaced them with a new board that demanded review of the content of all its books. That led to several books being removed from its catalog [and] access being cut off to an e-book service that included some of the disputed titles."

In April 2022, seven residents of the county sued officials

© World Socialist Web Site

claiming that the action violated their First and 14th Amendment rights. The lawsuit alleged that county officials removed books from the shelves of the public library system "because they disagree with the ideas within them" and terminated access to thousands of digital books because they could not ban two specific titles.

Remarkably, the suit charged that the county suspended access to e-books because officials were unable to remove two books on a list circulated by a far-right Texas state politician, dissolved the existing library board and replaced them with individuals who promoted book removals and closed the advisory board meetings to the public.

On March 30, 2023, a federal judge ordered the Llano County library system to return 12 children's books "to its shelves that had been removed, many because of their LGBTQ and racial content." (CNN)

US District Judge Robert Pitman commented in his order that although "libraries are afforded great discretion for their selection and acquisition decisions, the First Amendment prohibits the removal of books from libraries based on either viewpoint or content discrimination."

These are simply two examples of the censorship campaign, organized by a network of well-financed, extreme right organizations. The proliferation of such cases could provide the basis for a daily column.

The American Library Association (ALA) released data in late March revealing that there were 1,269 demands to censor library books and resources in 2022, the highest number of such efforts since the ALA began keeping records more than two decades ago. The book challenges last year nearly doubled the 729 registered in 2021.

A record 2,571 unique titles were "targeted for censorship" in 2022, writes the ALA, a 38 percent increase from the 1,858 unique titles subjected to attack the previous year. The vast majority of the controversial books "were written by or about members of the LGBTQIA+ community and people of color."

The systematic character of the campaign, with local groups making use of lists compiled by right-wing groups, "contributed significantly to the skyrocketing number of challenges and the frequency with which each title was challenged." Of the overall number of books challenged, reports the library association, "90 percent were part of attempts to censor multiple titles. Of the books challenged, 40 percent were in cases involving 100 or more books. Prior to 2021, the vast majority of challenges to library resources only sought to remove or restrict access to a single book."

According to Deborah Caldwell-Stone, director of the ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom, "Overwhelmingly, we're seeing these challenges come from organized censorship groups that target local library board meetings to demand removal of a long list of books they share on social media."

In remarks delivered in New York April 4, renowned author of children's, young adult and adult fiction, Judy Blume (*Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*; *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*, *Deenie* and *Blubber*) denounced the DeSantis administration in Florida for its vicious censorship efforts.

Blume, reports *Variety*, described DeSantis as a "governor who wants to control everything, starting with what kids can think, what they can know, what they can question, what they can learn, and now even what they can talk about. We have a legislator who's trying to put through a bill preventing girls in elementary school from talking about periods. … Good luck there."

She referred to the censorship campaigns of the 1980s and the attacks on her work because of its treatment of sexuality, "and, specifically, puberty—which to some people was a very dirty word. It wasn't something the censors wanted to talk about with their kids. You know—if they don't read about it, they won't know about it, and if they don't know about it, it will never happen to them … guess what."

Blume remarked that the present situation was like "the '80s, except it's the '80s on steroids. … This time it's not the Moral Majority or only the Religious Right. This time it is coming from our government." She went on, "Lawmakers, drunk with power, with a need to control everything. Sure it's still sexuality, but it's gender, it's LGBTQ+, it's racism, it's history itself that's under fire.

"Teachers are under fire, librarians are threatened," Blume added. "They are criminalizing teachers and librarians. It's not just that they're threatening their jobs, they're threatening them. They could go to jail, all because they stand up for the rights of the students they teach. All because they refuse to give in to fear. I've known librarians who have saved lives by handing the right book to the right child at the right time. And for that one kid, finding themselves in a book can be a lifesaver."

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site