

Orgy of book banning, censorship continues in the US

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The right-wing rampage against culture, and particularly the cultural level of the young, continues unabated in the US. Those actively supporting censorship and book banning are a fraction of the population, but between the active connivance of the Republican Party and the abject cowardice and impotence of the Democrats, these forces are able to wield considerable power.

In Florida's Orange County (whose county seat is Orlando), for example, the works at least temporarily excluded from the county's classrooms include Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost*, E.M. Forster's *A Room With a View*, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*.

The *Orlando Sentinel* reports that the books have been temporarily rejected by Orange County Public Schools (OCPS) "for sexual content that educators fear runs afoul of a new Florida law," HB 1069-2023, passed by the Florida legislature and signed into law by the fascist governor, Ron DeSantis.

According to the ACLU, the bill allows anyone in a school district "to object to any material in the classroom or school library or on a reading list that depicts or describes any sexual conduct, even if it is not pornographic, if it is not for a health course. Such material would be removed pending investigation and subject to permanent removal."

Other works, among them four of Shakespeare's plays, including *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*, have been approved for 10th through 12th grades only.

An Orange County teacher noted that some "of the

books now on the rejected list are ones that are included in the state-approved language arts textbook OCPS teachers use or in district-provided curriculum plans that have been in place in recent years." One of the rejected works is excerpted in the textbook, while two others are in the curriculum plan.

Another Orange County teacher told the *Sentinel* "she was 'gobsmacked' when she saw *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was rejected initially and angry when novels she'd taught for Advanced Placement literature classes, including *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison and *A Prayer for Owen Meany* by John Irving, were nixed, too."

In late June, Louisiana's Democratic governor John Bel Edwards signed into law a measure restricting Louisiana minors' access to material it defines as sexually explicit. Earlier in June, Edwards had indicated he thought the bill was not "necessary." The law requires school libraries, according to the *Louisiana Illuminator*, "to create a card system so parents can prevent their children from checking out books deemed inappropriate. Libraries will also have to adopt policy language to limit minors' access to material that describes 'sexual conduct,' which the new law defines in five paragraphs."

The bill was supported by Louisiana attorney general Jeff Landry, the Republican Party-endorsed candidate for governor.

The far-right Landry made himself notorious and something of a laughing stock by setting up a "tip line" called "Protecting Minors," in November 2022, where would-be informers were encouraged to complain about librarians, teachers and other school and library personnel. The "snitch line" was a fiasco, as thousands of people sent protests, spam and denunciations of the very idea. According to the *Illuminator*, "Hundreds of

users complained about The Bible, pointing to passages that describe explicit sexual activity, rape, incest and abortion.”

Others angrily pointed out that Landry had refused in 2018 to set up a tip line about a genuine social problem, clergy abuse. One user commented, “Clearly the Church has an established history of child sexual abuse, but you have decided to waste funds on a dead-ended search for that abuse in libraries rather than where it really exists.”

The *Illuminator* added, “Out of the thousands of pages of complaints, only a small handful appeared to be made with serious intent. Upon closer inspection, some comments that initially appeared to be serious were actually against schools, libraries and books that do not exist.”

In Mississippi, right-wing efforts have resulted in the passage of a law that would effectively eliminate the ability of minors to access e-books or audiobooks through public libraries. Purportedly aimed at pornographic websites, as one commentator noted, “lawmakers then saw the opportunity to target books through the bill.” It stipulates that public libraries and state agencies cannot provide minors access to any digital resources or databases unless the latter verifies that all of their content complies with the law’s provisions.

“Many libraries utilize resources like OverDrive and Hoopla to allow library cardholders instant access to a wide array of e-books and audiobooks. This means that libraries can’t offer these resources unless they can verify that *all* the content on these platforms complies with Mississippi’s bill or have a system in place to prevent minors from accessing content that isn’t in compliance with the bill.” (The MarySue) These resources do not have systems in place to restrict access to certain content for certain age groups.

Numerous polls indicates widespread opposition to book banning and censorship in general. An average of 70 to 75 percent of respondents across the various polls oppose banning books and an equally sizable percentage think highly of librarians. In one poll, conducted by Embold Research, voters rated librarians twice as favorably “as their governors, the Democratic Party, the GOP, Donald Trump, and Joe Biden.” The same survey reported that more than 90 percent “of voters are against banning the hundreds of classic

novels and children's books that extremist groups have targeted for banning.”

The attack on the youth by the extreme right is tremendously significant. It shows their terror of the radicalization developing rapidly among young people in particular. The aim is to stop thinking and criticism, as well as to consolidate the most backward social elements around the program of the ultra-right.

The ineffectual hand-wringing at the behest of various Democratic politicians will have no impact on the fascistic forces and, in fact, is not intended to have any impact. The Democrats and their “left” orbit are incapable of organizing mass opposition to the extreme right, as their response to the January 6 coup and the anti-“Marxist” threats and ravings of Trump has revealed. To arouse the working class against the fascist threat would inevitably set in motion a movement against Wall Street, the corporate elite and the institutions of the capitalist state. The Democrats are far more frightened of such a movement than they are of a thousand fascist conspiracies.



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