



SCHOOLS Sacramento, California

Six books have been removed from California's 2019 edition of its *Health Education Curriculum Framework*, created under a 2016 state law that requires school districts to ensure that all students in grades seven through twelve receive comprehensive sexual health education and HIV prevention education. On May 8, 2019, the California Board of Education took action to remove these titles from the Framework's list of recommended resources:

- *My Princess Boy* (2009) by Cheryl Kilodavis, a story about a boy who sometimes wears dresses and sometimes wears jeans;
- *Who Are You?: The Kid's Guide to Gender Identity* (2017) by Brook Pessin-Whedbee, an illustrated introduction to gender for 5- to 8-year-olds;
- *Changing You!: A Guide to Body Changes and Sexuality* (2007) by Gail Saltz and Lynne Avril Cravath, an illustrated guide to puberty for elementary school children;
- *The What's Happening to My Body?: Book for Boys* (1983, 1988, 2000, 2007) by Lynda Madaras, Area Madaras, et al., a guide to puberty and health for boys age 10 and up;
- *The What's Happening to My Body?: Book for Girls* (1983, 1988, 2000, 2007) by Lynda Madaras, Area Madaras, et al., written for preteen and teen girls, and
- *S.E.X.: The All You Need to Know Sexuality Guide to Get You Through Your Teens and Twenties* (2016) by Heather Corinna, a sexual education guide for teens and young adults.

The state Board of Education removed the titles after two sixty-day periods when the public was invited

to comment on the draft framework. After the removals, some parents still considered the parts of the framework not age-appropriate. They said that topics such as masturbation and gender identity should be taught at home, not in school. Nothing in the framework is required. Rather, it suggests ways to add sex and health education to the curriculum.

A week after the board adopted the revised framework, protesters across the state kept their children out of school on May 17 and held rallies that day with slogans such as "NoSeXXX Ed," "No to Explicit Sex Ed," and "Too Much Too Soon." A group called the Informed Parents of California planned "sit-outs" at each county's department of education building.

Fighting to retain a more inclusive curriculum, the National Coalition Against Censorship argued, "This sort of attempt to censor educational materials stems from the misconception that sexual identity equals sex . . . [and] the continually reoccurring phenomenon of describing books, comics, and even lesson plans that mention the existence of LGBTQIA [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, and asexual] individuals as inherently inappropriate, conflating sexual-identity with sex." Reported in: cbdlf.org, May 14, 2019; [KTLA 5 TV](http://KTLA5TV.com), May 17; cde.ca.gov, May 31.

San Francisco, California

The "Life of Washington" mural at George Washington High School in San Francisco, painted in 1936 by Russian émigré artist Victor Arnautoff in a federal Depression-era art project, will be covered over to hide images of some African American slaves being sold and others picking cotton in the fields of President Washington's Mount Vernon home. The

San Francisco Board of Education voted unanimously in mid-June 2019 to remove the entire thirteen-panel mural from view, not just the portions that had been criticized as culturally and historically offensive.

Yet while some viewers today are offended when people of color are shown as victims or in subservient or demeaning positions, others say that in 1936 it was rare for their place in history to be acknowledged at all, and that the mural is an important piece of art that is actually critical of oppression and imperialism, and for those reasons it should be saved.

A community advisory committee created by the board to consider whether the mural should be removed began meeting in December [see *JIFP Spring 2019*, page 50]. The committee, with members of the local Native American community, students, school and district representatives, local artists, and historians, wanted to both preserve the legacy of the artist and address the feelings of students, such as one who said, "We don't need to see ourselves portrayed as dead Indians every single time we see ourselves portrayed in any type of art or in any books." The committee's recommendation: digitally archive the mural, but paint over it.

The decision is not final. Some groups, including the school's alumni association, have said they will file a lawsuit to keep the mural on display. And the school board has not decided how to cover the mural. Since it was painted as a fresco on wet plaster, it is an integral part of the wall. Covering it with custom panels could cost up to \$875,000, while painting over it could cost \$600,000 and might be delayed by the legal steps needed for permission to destroy public property.

The controversy has gained national attention, with several organizations, including the National



Coalition Against Censorship, urging the district to save the mural. “NCAC strongly urges the district to consider the serious ramifications of the irreversible act of destroying an artwork, as well as the precedent it would set for other works installed in San Francisco public schools that could spark strong emotions in the future,” according to a May 6 letter sent to Superintendent Vince Matthews. “We ask the district to leave the murals in place and provide additional context and programming around them.” Reported in: *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 17, 2019; *Los Angeles Times*, June 28.

Collier County, Florida

Blood Will Tell (2015) by April Henry and *Only the Good Spy Young* (2010) by Ally Carter drew complaints from some parents after Laurel Oak Elementary School in Collier County, Florida, sold them at a school book fair. The mother of a fourth grader posted on Facebook that she was upset over such passages in the books as:

- “When he kissed me it was hungrier somehow as if this moment was all we had.”
- “The kiss was real, the kiss was safe. I kissed him again.”
- “Their beers hadn’t even been touched. They had probably been too busy kissing.”

The books are listed as being at the sixth grade level, but the book fair did not restrict students by age nor grade level. The mom, who didn’t want to be identified, said her daughter will be returning the books to the school. She said those books don’t belong in an elementary school. Some other parents agreed.

“There is not a single reason that they need to be worried about kissing and touching and drinking and any of that stuff at 10 and 7 and however

old the kids are,” Collier County mom Ashley Stalling said. “Elementary school is not that time.” She was among dozens of people to comment on the post.

“We continually seek ways to provide engaging, challenging books to students that are appropriate to the developmental age of the reader,” a Collier County Schools spokesperson has said in the past. “If an issue arises with a selection, educators work closely with the parent to resolve the situation.” Reported in: WBBH/WZVN ABC-7, May 22, 2019.

Ocala, Florida

Nine books challenged in the Marion County Public Schools in Ocala, Florida, will remain on high school library shelves, but some of them are being removed from middle school libraries, pending a final decision by the school board. A group called It’s Your Tea Party, Florida and a group called Florida Citizens’ Alliance had charged that the books contain material that is “obscene and/or pornographic” under Florida law and that they do not have any educational value.

Upon receiving the complaint in February, County Schools Superintendent Heidi Maier immediately had the books removed if they were in a middle school library, but retained them in high school libraries. Then, in accordance with school board policy, she created a committee to hear parent objections. After receiving the committee’s recommendations, she made these decisions about the books:

- *Almost Perfect* (2009) by Brian Katcher: Allow in high school libraries.
- *Angela’s Ashes* (1996) by Frank McCourt: Allow in middle and high libraries.
- *The Awakening* (2015) by Kate

Chopin: Allow in high school libraries.

- *Beloved* (1987) by Toni Morrison: Allow in high school libraries.
- *The Bluest Eye* (1970) by Toni Morrison: Allow in high school libraries.
- *A Clockwork Orange* (1962) by Anthony Burgess: Allow in high school libraries.
- *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992) by Cristina Garcia: Allow high school libraries.
- *Killing Mr. Griffin* (1978) by Lois Duncan: Allow in high school libraries, except for Dunnellon High School.
- *The Women of Brewster’s Place* (1980) by Gloria Naylor: Allow in high school libraries.

A tenth book on the Tea Party’s original list, *The Truth about Alice* (2014) by Jennifer Mathieu, was not reviewed by the committee. Maier said the Tea Party did not fill out an official complaint form for that book to be reviewed. The group had originally raised questions about fourteen books, but four of them are not in any Marion County school library.

In most instances, the superintendent accepted the recommendations of the committee, but she was more restrictive in judging some titles inappropriate for middle school.

Superintendent Maier announced her decisions in June 2019 and forwarded them to the school board, which will make final decisions.

The review committee included three parents, one of whom was a School Advisory Council president. The committee also featured a secondary school librarian, a high school principal, a district curriculum administrator, and three high school staff members. It found educational value in all nine books, and



recommended that five of them be allowed in middle school libraries.

Ed Wilson, chairman of the local It's Your Tea Party, Florida and a committee member of the statewide Florida Citizens' Alliance, a grassroots conservative group, said early this year that he was pleased the books were removed from the middle school shelves. He had hoped the committee would find the books had no "place in any school." Reported in: *Ocala Star-Banner*, February 26, 2019, June 18.

Wallace, Idaho

Books in *The Walking Dead* series of graphic novels (2003–2019) written by Robert Kirkman were challenged at Wallace Jr./Sr. High School in Idaho's Wallace School District. The books were retained, then banned, and subsequently may lead to a change in the rules for minors who use the Wallace Public Library outside of school.

Though later adapted into a TV show with a TV-14 rating, the books are rated for an older audience and contain graphic language, violence, and sexually explicit content. This concerned a teacher who saw a student reading one of the books toward the end of the 2018–2019 school year. Since some of the books in the series were available in the high school library, he brought his concern to WHS Principal Chris Lund.

Lund consulted the school district's policy on selection of library materials, which "reaffirms the principles of intellectual freedom inherent in the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States and expressed in the School Library Bill of Rights."

Lund then formed a committee of eleven people, composed of students, staff, and parents, to discuss and review the books. Afterward, they voted on whether to keep them in the school or remove them. The final vote

resulted in a 7–4 decision in favor of keeping the books in the library.

Some parents objected to the vote, however, and WSD Superintendent Dr. Bob Ranells made an executive decision to remove the books from the shelves, as he judged them to contain material inappropriate for a scholastic environment.

The books were taken from the school library and given to the Wallace Public Library. This has brought up another potential issue for officials to monitor. The Wallace School District is a part of the Interlibrary Loan Network—which offers access to roughly 500,000 books, as opposed to 1,200 books in the WHS library.

"For a rural school to have access to this is such a benefit," Lund said. However, access to the network does allow kids to select from materials that may be outside of the school's guidelines—including *The Walking Dead*.

"How do we prevent these types of issues in the future?" Superintendent Ranells asked. "We have discussed the idea of implementing a two-library card system where one card may only allow students access to books in the WHS library and the other allows them to use the interlibrary loan service. I think that would be a pretty good compromise."

That concept will need to pass the Wallace School Board before it becomes actual policy.

Ranells ultimately believes that the decision should remain with the parents to determine what content their children consume.

And no matter where student might obtain the books, the school will be requesting that *The Walking Dead* not be brought onto school grounds. Reported in: *Shoshone News-Press*, June 22, 2019.

Alexandria, Minnesota

Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda (2015) by Becky Albertalli and *Sold* (2006) by Patricia McCormick have been removed as choices for eighth graders to read in a language arts unit, Assistant Superintendent Rick Sansted announced at the Alexandria School Board meeting on May 20, 2019. In addition, four other books in the unit remain under review, and parents will be part of a committee to review book selections in the future.

A group of parents had raised objections to the six books, citing passages of a sexual or violent nature, foul language, and references to drinking and drugs. The books were among eighteen that students could choose from in a unit on "social issues." This is the first year where students were given a choice of "social issues" titles.

The district's actions should not be construed as banning books, said Angie Krebs, a school board member. "We're certainly not censoring these books. We're just not going to use them for our book study club," she said. "These are issues kids need to hear about. Could we use better texts? Yes, we could."

Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda is a coming-of-age story with a sixteen-year-old boy struggling with whether to come out of the closet about his sexuality. *Sold* deals with the issue of human trafficking, as the novel tells of a girl from Nepal sold into prostitution in India.

David Wegner, the main spokesman for the parents group that objected to the books, said, "It's one thing to check out these fictional books from a library for your own personal reading. It's another thing as part of an education curriculum for thirteen- and fourteen-year-olds."

He added, "We are not saying that hard issues that eighth graders face



shouldn't come up in the classrooms." However, the group believes content addressing social issues should be done through non-fiction, fact-based, evidence-based materials.

Another parent at the school board meeting disagreed. Christine Reilly said, "I feel it necessary to say that not everyone shares the same opinion. When I hear about books being removed, that scares me a lot. I feel strongly that another side needs to be heard." While she appreciates non-fiction books, Reilly also said that fiction has real value, starting with the fiction books parents read to their children. Reported in: *Alexandria Echo Press*, May 23, 2019.

Annandale, New Jersey

Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic (2006) by Alison Bechdel was removed from general circulation in high school libraries in New Jersey's North Hunterdon-Voorhees district in late February 2019, then was restored in the first week of March—and on March 19 was put at risk again. In fact, access to all controversial books in those high school libraries was put at risk. The school district removed all language in support of intellectual freedom from its library policy.

Bechdel's graphic autobiographical, illustrated novel tells her story of growing up in the funeral home her family ran, while coming to terms with her realization that she is a lesbian. The book has won awards, but also has been challenged frequently. Reportedly, administrators at the two North Hunterdon-Voorhees high schools specifically objected to images on one page out of the 233 pages in *Fun Home*.

The school district first limited the book's circulation to only those with "explicit parental permission."

Protesting that decision, the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund (CBLDF) wrote:

they are taking the memoir away from those too uncomfortable to ask their parents for permission. They are taking *Fun Home* away from students afraid that mentioning the desire to borrow an LGBTQIA book might alert their parents to questions they aren't ready to share. Administrators are taking this important work from those teenagers whose parents have different values from themselves, or parents who are more concerned with optics than content. While any parent can direct their individual child's reading, putting undue restrictions on all students' reading access is an erosion of their rights.

CBDLF and others also pointed out that the way the restriction was implemented violated the district's own policy on how to handle challenges to library materials. Approximately one week later, all restrictions on *Fun Home* were lifted.

Yet less than three weeks later, the district officially changed its procedure for handling challenges, known as Policy 2530. Among other changes, the new version of the policy removed these sentences:

- "North Hunterdon-Voorhees Regional High School District Board of Education supports principles of intellectual freedom inherent [in] the First Amendment" and
- "In the event that materials are questioned, the principles of intellectual freedom, the right to access of materials and the integrity of the certified library/media personnel must be defended."

Also removed were criteria for retaining books that are "relevant to

today's world" and "provide a stimulus to creativity."

In a new protest, the Kids' Right to Read Project (which combines the forces of the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom, CBDLF, and other groups representing authors, illustrators, publishers, booksellers, and teachers) wrote that "with the language as it stands now, if a comic or novel were challenged today the chance of the school district being able to retain it seems minuscule."

Another letter protesting the policy change came from the National Coalition Against Censorship, which wrote:

The original policy 2530 played a significant role in safeguarding NHV students' right to a broad and censorship-free education by entrusting trained librarians with book selection. This delegation of responsibility assured book selections were credibly rooted in sound pedagogical reasoning, rather than subjective opinion.

As worded, the current policy vests absolute authority in the sole person of the Superintendent to select and remove books without a review of their educational merits. . . . We strongly recommend that you restore credibility to the book selection process by delegating responsibility to librarians and teachers.

Reported in: cblfd.org, February 20, 2019; April 26; *Bleeding Cool*, April 27.

Irving, Texas

Six graphic novels were removed from an English I unit on social justice at Irving High School in Texas:

- *March* (2013) by Congressman John Lewis of Georgia, a first-hand account of his struggle for civil rights;



- *Speak* (2018) by Laurie Halse Anderson, a graphic novel version of her 1999 novel about a high school girl finding her voice after suffering trauma at a party;
- *Monster* (2015) by Walter Dean Myers, a graphic novel version of his 1999 story about a high school boy on trial for murder;
- *Love Is Love* (2016) by Marc Andreyko, an anthology of comics about LGBT-related relationships and discrimination, in honor those who were killed at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando;
- *In Real Life* (2014) by Cory Doctorow and Jen Wang, a look at adolescence, gaming, poverty, and culture-clash; and
- *Hidden: A Child's Story of the Holocaust* (2012) by Loic Dauvillier, Greg Salsedo, et al., where a grandmother tells how she was hidden from the Nazis when she was a little girl.

School administrators banned the books from the curriculum in the spring of 2018, but it took more than a year for some of the details to emerge about the reasons for the book banning. In July 2019, one of the teachers who had created the curriculum, Anna Waugh, reported on what she and a fellow teacher uncovered.

According to her article in the *Dallas Voice*, all six novels were removed two days before she and her colleagues planned to start teaching the unit “because of one LGBT-themed text. This was followed by silence from leadership, an eventual cover-up by the district, and a new policy gate-keeping teacher-selected materials.”

She added, “It is only recently, as my former coworker, Carol Revelle, and I compiled some research on the story for a book about LGBT curriculums, that we fully recognized how bigoted the process had been.”

The Irving Schools Foundation had provided a grant to purchase the graphic novels. The principal told the teachers to pack up the books because a complaint had reached the superintendent.

Then, Waugh recalled, “Our team lead, Revelle—who has a doctorate in curriculum and instruction and more than two decades of teaching experience—emailed a letter the next day, requesting an immediate return of the novels and that the district follow its policy for challenged materials. No response ever came.”

Waugh and Revelle learned that *Love Is Love*—the book with LGBT themes—was banned in a meeting in the superintendent’s conference room.

The district later created a new policy that requires six-weeks’ notice for non-approved texts. Waugh surmises that the ban “can only have been created to prevent future LGBT-inclusive texts.” Her *Dallas Voice* article adds,

Additionally, the district is concealing this ban by not listing any of the graphic novels as challenged or *Love Is Love* as banned in its records. In fact, the information obtained from the district is incomplete, as these events, as well as at least two emails, are known to be missing from records requests.

Reported in: *Dallas Voice*, July 5, 2019.

Ashland, Virginia

A parent complained about *PRIDE: The Story of Harvey Milk and the Rainbow Flag* (2018) by Rob Sanders being read aloud in a second-grade classroom in Hanover County, Virginia. In response to the complaint, the school’s principal wrote to all parents to alert them of the incident and explain that the book had not been

pre-vetted as is required for material deemed potentially sensitive.

The National Coalition Against Censorship has written to the district in support of the teacher and the book, urging them to keep the book in classrooms and available to students who choose to read it.

The well-reviewed picture book was read aloud as part of a lesson on civil rights and fighting against bigotry, in support of the district’s anti-bullying curriculum.

The district’s sensitive material policy requires the school to alert parents to potentially controversial texts and allow them to request alternative assignments for their students. Since the challenge and the principal’s letter, many parents in the community have spoken out in support of the book and the teacher. The book’s supporters argue that the book, which does not contain references to sex or violence, is a civil rights story and does not merit being labeled sensitive or controversial. Reported in: ncac.org, May 14, 2019.

COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES Conway, Arkansas

A sign with a quotation from Lady Gaga, displayed in celebration of Gay Pride Month, was removed from outside the Torreyson Library at the University of Central Arkansas (UCA).

UCA President Houston Davis sent an email about the issue to students, faculty, and staff on June 18, 2019.

“Unlike our student groups or other organizations, the library is an official arm of UCA and when it ‘speaks’ on that sign which serves information regarding library hours, it speaks officially,” Davis wrote. “We do have to be very careful that we walk the fine line between individual freedom of speech and institutional voice.”



Davis said another problem was timing—an apparent reference to the summer band camps and other activities that attract many secondary students to the campus.

“We have to be very mindful of the hundreds of minors that are on campus during the summer which further complicates an environment that is normally programmed for adults and our very meaningful conversations about ourselves and our world,” he wrote. “One outgrowth of that perspective on minors has been a start of a good conversation about best practices how to present or represent issues when minors are on the campus.”

The sidewalk sign outside the school’s Torreyson Library was celebrating Gay Pride Month before it was removed during the second week of June. The black-and-white sign said, “Being gay is like glitter. It never goes away.—Lady Gaga.”

Senior Ashley Nicole Hunter of Conway said that the letter from the university president so upset her that she was withdrawing from classes.

“This is doubling down and further insulting us by suggesting we [members of the LGBTQ community] shouldn’t be exposed to minors,” she said. Reported in: *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, June 18, 2019.

New Brunswick, New Jersey

Rutgers University’s student newspaper, the award-winning *Daily Targum*, lost its funding despite winning the overall support of student voters in an April referendum. An analysis by the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) found that the Rutgers policy that defunded the newspaper is unconstitutional in at least four ways. FIRE on June 3, 2019, called on Rutgers to fund the *Daily*

Targum and reform its unconstitutional funding policy.

Though 68 percent of voting students supported continuing to fund the *Daily Targum*, it fell short of receiving the required thumbs-up from at least a quarter of the overall student population—because only about a quarter of Rutgers students voted on the ballot measure, which is held every three years.

Since 2017, the Rutgers University Conservative Union has led a #DefundTheTargum campaign. The group, which argues that it aimed “not to destroy the paper, but to give more freedom and more choice” to students, had run-ins with the *Targum* in recent years. Group leaders have complained that the newspaper printed “Fake News” after the *Targum* published an article revealing that a member of the group crafted flyers nearly identical to those created by American Vanguard, a white supremacist group.

Melissa Hayes, an alumni member of the *Daily Targum*’s Board of Trustees, told NJ.com that the vote means a loss for the newspaper of around \$540,000 a year.

“The university must immediately reverse course and implement a funding process that doesn’t subject student newspapers, or any other student organization, to layer upon layer of impermissible viewpoint discrimination,” said FIRE’s Adam Goldstein.

According to FIRE, the referendum itself, and the system that determines a student group’s eligibility for a funding referendum, are unconstitutional in four ways:

1. Court precedents forbid public colleges from distributing student activity fees by referenda. The Supreme Court has said, under the First Amendment, the power to impose a

mandatory student activity fee is tied to the obligation to distribute that fee in a viewpoint-neutral way. A referendum cannot be viewpoint-neutral because, as the Supreme Court has held in another student fee funding case, “access to a public forum . . . does not depend upon majoritarian consent.”

2. The referendum procedure is apparently unavailable to belief-based groups, such as political and religious organizations.
3. Under the policy, a committee of the University Senate is charged with determining whether the “educational value of the organization justifies the proposed investment.” While an inquiry into “educational value”—which the Rutgers policy leaves undefined—may be a lawful component of a viewpoint-neutral standard, it does not, standing alone, provide adequate guidance to decision-makers and thus allows for biased funding determinations.
4. The university president has unfettered power to unilaterally approve or deny a student group’s request for a referendum, including for viewpoint-discriminatory reasons.

“Whether the conservative group’s campaign changed a single vote is irrelevant, as the mere establishment of the voting system is unconstitutional even if the *Targum* won every vote,” Goldstein said. “If a popular vote was a lawful method of defunding a student group, many voices—almost assuredly conservative ones included—would be silenced. Rutgers cannot permit any student group to lose funding because someone didn’t like what they published, and that’s all a referendum is: a heckler’s veto with



extra steps.” Reported in: fire.org, June 3, 2019.

PRISONS Phoenix, Arizona

Chokehold: Policing Black Men (2017) by Paul Butler has been banned in Arizona prisons. The book, by a former federal prosecutor, examines law enforcement and mass incarceration through its treatment of black men.

Butler, who now is a criminal law professor at Georgetown University, said his publisher was notified by email in March 2019 that his book had “unauthorized content.” The notice did not specify what led to the decision, but stated that some aspect of the book was “detrimental to the safe, secure, and orderly operation of the facility.”

Butler said he is mystified as to what raised alarm bells. “Chokehold,” the word he used for his title, is a maneuver police have used to restrain a suspect by the neck. Butler uses it throughout the book as a metaphor for how society and law subjugate black men. Nowhere does Butler advocate violent or retaliatory behavior.

“I disavow violence because first, I think it’s immoral, and second, because it wouldn’t work,” Butler said. “I’ve received letters from several inmates who have read *Chokehold* while they are serving time. No one has indicated that reading *Chokehold* has caused any problems in prison.”

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) on May 21 called on the Arizona Department of Corrections to rescind the ban. “In order for them to ban a book, they have to show the restriction is related to a legitimate prison interest,” said Emerson Sykes, an ACLU attorney. “There’s no interest to keep inmates from learning about the criminal justice system and policing.”

Arizona’s corrections department prohibits inmates from receiving publications that contain any depictions or descriptions that would incite or facilitate a riot, resistance, or stopping work. The publications also can’t contain pictures, illustrations, or text that encourage “unacceptable sexual or hostile behaviors.” Any publications with sexually explicit material or sexual representations of inmates and law enforcement also are not permitted.

The Arizona Department of Corrections is in a court battle over a similar case involving a different publication. *Prison Legal News*, a monthly journal, sued corrections officials in 2015 for refusing to deliver four issues in 2014. The case is set for trial later this year.

Supporters say access to books for the more than 2 million people incarcerated in the US can make all the difference for life outside the prison walls. About half the adult prison population doesn’t have a high school degree, said Christia Mercer, a philosophy professor at Columbia University who has taught classes in New York prisons. Reading books can be transformative and help them feel like they are using their time to make something of themselves.

“One in nineteen black men are in prison in Arizona right now,” Butler said. “Rather than acknowledge it’s a good thing that inmates want to read about and debate important public policy, Arizona pushes back against rehabilitation, against literacy, against the Constitution.”

Sykes said the ACLU is prepared to sue if corrections officials fail to respond to its written request to end the book’s exclusion. He believes the ban was made based on content, which would be unconstitutional. Reported in: *Associated Press*, May 21, 2019; National Public Radio/npr.org, June 21.

Topeka, Kansas

Thousands of books have been banned from entering Kansas’ state prisons over the last two decades, with hundreds added to the list of censored literature over the last two years.

Books to Prisoners, an organization that facilitates book donations to prisons, shared the Kansas Department of Correction’s banned book list on Twitter. Books on the list include:

- *A Clockwork Orange* (1962) by Anthony Burgess
- *A Game of Thrones* (1996) by George R.R. Martin
- *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (2003) by Angela Y. Davis
- *Black Klansman* (2014), Ron Stallworth’s memoir which inspired Spike Lee’s 2018 *BlacKKKlansman* film
- *Twelve Years a Slave* (2015) by Solomon Northup
- *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2011) by E.L. James
- *American Gods* (2011) by Neil Gaiman

At least sixty “how-to” books also made the ban list, including *How to Make Small Talk: Conversation Starters, Exercises, and Scenarios* (2017) by Melissa Wadsworth, *How To Paint & Draw* (2002) by Hazel Harrison, *How to Analyze People: An Ideal Book for Understanding Different Personalities* (2015) by Aiden McCoy, *How to Disappear: Erase Your Digital Footprint, Leave False Trails, and Disappear without a Trace* (2010) by Frank M. Ahearn and Eileen C. Horan, and *How to Survive Anything, Anywhere* (2004) by Chris McNab.

The list also includes a number of banned coloring books, newsletters, and comic books, including a number of Marvel and DC comics, plus role-playing manuals for games such as *Dungeons and Dragons*



and Pathfinder, and also magazines, including *Cosmopolitan*, *Allure*, *Elle*, *Art in America*, *Hot Bike*, and *Hooters*.

While some of the books likely made the banned list due to references of violence, such as Vince Flynn's *Consent to Kill* (2005), social media users were quick to point out how innocuous many of the books, magazines, and graphic novels appear to be. These include Klaus Honnef's book on *Contemporary Art* (1994) and a "Step by Step" guide on how to use Microsoft Office Excel 2007.

Books to Prisoners (BTP) obtained the list with the Human Rights Defense Center (HRDC). BTP said "Kansas has fewer than 10,000 prisoners, yet more than 7,000 books are banned for them." Michelle Dillon, who is a BTP organizer and also is Public Records Manager at the HRDC, told *Newsweek* in a phone interview that in her seven years working with BTP, she had "never seen a list like this, except in Texas," where she said officials have banned as many as fifteen thousand books.

Dillon said prison book bans tend to vary from state to state, with more conservative states tending to see greater censorship.

In all states, she added, atlases are commonly rejected by prisons, including maps of imaginary places, like Westeros in *A Game of Thrones*. With George R.R. Martin's popular series, Dillon said, it may not even be the "violence or sexual content" that will get his novels banned from prisons, "but it's also because of the maps because, you know, somehow it could lead to a prisoner escaping to Westeros."

For organizations like BTP, the lack of clear guidelines makes determining what literature can and cannot be sent out to prisoners a difficult and time-consuming task.

Kansas Department of Corrections Secretary Roger Werholtz said in a statement sent to *Newsweek* that decisions on which books to censor are made based on pre-established criteria. "If one item within a publication meets the criteria, then the entire publication must be censored as we cannot redact that one item," Werholtz said.

The corrections secretary said that if facility staff do flag a publication for censoring, an appeal can be launched against the decision.

"The current censorship list is approximately fifteen years old. Within this time frame, 1,622 publications have been appealed with 141 appeals being overturned," Werholtz said.

"While this list reflects censorship activity during the past fifteen years, the standards by which items are placed on the list have evolved over time," he continued. "For instance, role playing publications were not allowed within the facility at one time. However, this is no longer a blanket practice. Also, at one time, depictions of guns in magazines were not allowed. However, this practice has changed and photographs of guns are now allowed. The censorship list does not reflect these changes because our practice is that each publication is reviewed as it enters a facility."

Werholtz added, "Censorship decisions have been made based on maintaining the safety and security of the facility and those decisions err on the side of caution." However, he said, the Kansas Department of Corrections was "planning to review the processes by which publications are placed on this list." Reported in: *Newsweek*, May 31, 2019.

New Hampshire

Books that are critical of the justice and prison systems are among the most frequently banned publications

in New Hampshire prisons, according to the Human Rights Defense Center (HRDC), a nonprofit which advocates on behalf of those held in correctional facilities throughout the United States.

HRDC in May 2019 obtained a list of specific titles and their associated violations for those incarcerated in New Hampshire under the state's Right-to-Know law. More than 120 titles were rejected by New Hampshire corrections officials between 2014 and the present.

Among the banned titles that take issue with the country's justice system and mass incarceration are:

- *Prison Nation: The Warehousing of America's Poor* (2003) by Tara Harivel and Paul Wright
- *Locked Up but Not Locked Down: A Guide to Surviving the American Prison System* (2011) by Ahmariah Jackson
- *The Factory: A Journey Through the Prison Industrial Complex* (2016) by Christopher Lordan and Robert Dellelo
- *Blood in the Water: The Attica Prison Uprising of 1971 and Its Legacy* (2017) by Heather Ann Thomas
- *Coming Out of Concrete Closets: A Report on Black & Pink's National LGBTQ Prisoner Survey* (2015) by Jason Lydon, et al.

Alex Friedmann, the associate director of the HRDC, said decisions about questionable books should be made by independent panels rather than prison employees.

New Hampshire Corrections Commissioner Helen Hanks said thousands of titles—41,000 books at the three state prison libraries—are available to prisoners. Electronic books are also available on prison-issued tablets.



The Department of Corrections disputed the notion the books are banned and noted that some decisions can be revisited and overturned. They provided the *Union Leader* with a list of books initially rejected but deemed acceptable by the Literary Review Committee. They include *Death Before Dishonor* (2007), a novel by hip hop artist 50 Cent, *Papillon* (1969) by Henri Charriere, books about narco kingpin Pablo Escobar, and books about witchcraft.

HRDC has sued to get some books in prison. It has won most cases of its cases nationwide, but lost in federal courts in Texas. Reported in: BookRiot.com, May 28, 2019; *New Hampshire Union Leader*, June 1.

Toledo, Ohio

All used books are banned; only new books are allowed in at least five prisons in Ohio. This limits the efforts of non-profit groups, family members, and friends to provide a wide range of reading material to incarcerated people, and the ability of prisoners with limited funds to buy books for themselves.

The latest such ban to come to light is at the Toledo Correctional Institution. On May 3, 2019, the non-profit Central Ohio Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee publicly shared a copy of a memo from officials at the Toledo institution, dated November 21, 2018, stating that used or damaged books had been deemed “a threat to the security of the institution and will no longer be permitted to be sent in” under any circumstances. “Books and other printed material must be ordered and received in new condition in order to be processed,” the memo said.

Previous reporting from public radio station WOUB in Athens, Ohio, indicates that at least four other prisons in Ohio have had this policy—or

more restrictive ones—in place since at least early 2018. In December 2017, Redbird Books-To-Prisoners received a letter from a prisoner at Grafton Correctional Institution about a new policy banning prisoners from receiving used books. WOUB reporters knew of three other prisons in Ohio with this particular policy: Chillicothe Correctional Institution, Lebanon Correctional Institution, and Ridgeland Correctional Institution.

The policy at Grafton not only banned used books, it also required the books to be bought from a list of approved vendors. After an internal complaint was filed, Grafton amended its policy to include Redbird as an approved vendor. But, the books still must be new.

Purchasing new books is costly. New books usually cost around \$20. But on average, inmates only have a monthly income of about \$24, according to data compiled by the Prison Policy Initiative. Buying a new book would mean inmates would potentially have to spend their entire monthly wages on one item. For prisoners who don’t have family that can send them items in prison, it would be a financial hardship to pay for new books on their own.

“Basically they’re saying you can’t read books if you’re poor,” Madeline Smith, one of the volunteer organizers of Redbird, told WOUB. Smith, a Ph.D. student at Ohio State University, said, “That’s another level of . . . discrimination that I think is just unconscionable.”

PEN America issued a statement saying, “The state of Ohio’s prison policies banning used books from its prisons represent a misguided effort, as well as a troubling sign of the erosion of the right to read in American prisons.”

In recent years, with the stated aim of blocking contraband from entering

prisons, various states as well as the federal prison system have attempted to dramatically restrict book deliveries to incarcerated people, or shut down such deliveries entirely. In the past two years alone, PEN America has joined others in decrying such policies in New York, Maryland, and around the country. After public outcry, some of these policies have been rescinded or amended. Reported in: WOUB Public Media, April 27, 2018; Central Ohio IOC, November 21; Pen America, May 14, 2019.

Seattle, Washington

Used books—an affordable way to get books into the hands of prisoners—were banned by Washington state’s Department of Corrections (WDOC) in March 2019, but a public outcry led to a partial lifting of the ban in mid-April.

WDOC officials said they see a lot of contraband coming in through books, and there’s not enough staff to check each package.

The non-profit Books to Prisoners (BTP) mails more than 10,000 books at no charge to prisoners in Washington each year. The group, based in Seattle and with branches in Portland, Olympia, and Spokane, started providing this service in 1973. BTP board member Michelle Dillon said the group has never had a problem, and banning services like this will cut off inmates’ access to information. A BTP statement called the policy “cruel and senseless.”

After partially rescinding the ban, the DOC is now allowing a select group of four nonprofits to send books: Books to Prisoners Seattle, Books Through Bars, Women’s Prison Book Project, and Prisoners Literature Project.

BTP called the adjusted policy “insufficient.” Representatives of BTP met with WDOC officials on April



12 to challenge and clarify the new book policy.

“We’re still working with the Washington DOC to clarify the terms of new acceptance policies, but are optimistic for resolution and improved lines of communication in the future,” Dillon told *Publishers Weekly*. She emphasized that “we still have many concerns” about the new policy.

Dillon said BTP’s goal is to “negotiate a policy which doesn’t just restore the limited access” prior to the universal ban, but a policy that offers “a much more just, comprehensive, consistent policy that ensures that all [nonprofit prison support] groups are treated equally.” The current “very short list of approved vendors,” she said “would exclude at least a dozen known organizations which have sent books to Washington prisoners in the past.”

Dillon said, “These book donations, which have been supplied by humanitarian organizations across the country since 1973, are lifelines for many of these prisoners, who face underfunded (or nonexistent) prison libraries.”

Following the initial ban, a report in the *Seattle Times* cast doubt on WDOC’s claims that illegal contraband sent to prisons was escalating “at a high rate.” The *Seattle Times* reported that most of the instances cited by the DOC either didn’t involve books at all or, in the remaining instances, it was unclear whether the contraband cited was actually smuggled using books. Reported in: Q13 Fox TV, April 1, 2019; *Publishers Weekly*, April 15; bookstoprisoner.net, n.d.

BOOKSTORES Washington, D.C.

A book talk to help launch *The Management of Savagery: How America’s Security State Fueled the Rise of Al*

Qaeda, ISIS, and Donald Trump (2019) by independent journalist Max Blumenthal, scheduled for April 3, 2019, was cancelled at a bookstore in the nation’s capital. The owners of the local bookstore chain Politics and Prose expressed concern after being targeted by a social media campaign that amounted to a heckler’s veto.

Days before the scheduled book talk at the bookstore’s location at The Wharf, the owners began hearing concerns about it. “We were caught off guard by a number of people who were reaching out to us and the passion of their comments,” said Bradley Graham, co-owner of the chain, which hosts more than seven hundred events a year.

A few hours before Blumenthal was scheduled to talk, the bookstore announced on Twitter that it was postponing the event.

The author said the bookstore was setting a disturbing precedent by caving to complaints, but the store owners said they wanted to find a way to move forward with the event.

A week later, rather than host a book launch at one of their stores, Politics and Prose instead supported Blumenthal’s event on April 10 at the Justice Center.

Blumenthal’s investigative journalism focuses on American militarism (he’s also the son of former Bill and Hillary Clinton aide Sidney Blumenthal). He describes his new book as an attempt to put “Trump and the European far right in a new context, and place blame on the warmakers who caused the refugee crisis.”

While Blumenthal has been a polarizing figure for his writing about Israel and US foreign intervention, he’s held three book launch events at Politics and Prose before without incident.

But on April 2, the Syrian American Council, which advocates for US

and United Nations intervention in Syria, tweeted that it was “dismayed that @politicsprose invited Max Blumenthal . . . to speak tomorrow.”

A subsequent tweet told the account’s followers to voice their concern, and included the phone number of the bookstore, along with Graham and co-owner Lissa Muscatine’s email addresses. Syrian American Council Executive Director Suzanne Meriden told DCist that she also privately emailed Graham and Muscatine asking them to reconsider their decision to host Blumenthal.

Graham said it wasn’t just the Syrian American Council that opposed Blumenthal’s event. “We were hearing from people who were customers of the store, not necessarily affiliated with the Syrian American Council,” he said. “But they are aware of Max or aware of events in the Middle East or in other subjects that Max has written and talked about.” He added that those who were writing were “very upset that we were holding this event for him. . . . It’s just a challenge now to deal with the extent of emotion and allegations and counter allegations being thrown back and forth.”

Blumenthal called the pressure campaign the “internet version of having a book burning.” He said that, while his new book isn’t focused on Syria, “the people who are trying to censor me and shut down my book tour—and they’re trying to shut it down everywhere—many of them are people who have been directly involved in trying to sell the war [in Syria] to the American public.”

Meriden countered that her organization is composed of “American citizens exercising our right to speak up when we feel something wrong is taking place. Max is free to speak anywhere he wants to, but it’s also our right to protest what kinds of platforms he’s getting to speak.”



The week before Blumenthal's scheduled book launch at Politics and Prose, the store hosted former Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano. Graham said that a protest that disrupted the Napolitano event played a part in the store's decision to postpone Blumenthal's talk. "We just didn't want to go through that again," he says. "We didn't know that there was going to be any protest with Napolitano; we didn't have any warning. With Max's event, we had some warning. We're actually trying to be more responsible in preparing for this event."

Graham said that this level of contention is highly unusual for the store. "We're trying to avoid disruption because we want people to be able to listen to the arguments, absorb them, question them if they want. But demonstrating in a way that shuts down a speaker and avoids open questioning seems to me to be counterproductive to what we're trying to achieve." Reported in: DCist.com, April 5, April 9 2019.

BROADCAST MEDIA Birmingham, Alabama

One episode of *Arthur*, a long-running children's series on PBS, was banned by Alabama Public Television (APT). APT refused to air the May 13, 2019 episode, "Mr. Ratburn and

the Special Someone," which features Arthur's third grade teacher Mr. Ratburn marrying another man. Instead, the broadcaster played a re-run of another *Arthur* episode.

In response, a church in Birmingham, Alabama, made plans to host a free screening of the banned episode. The First United Methodist Church is collaborating with the Sidewalk Film Festival and Shout LGBTQ Film Festival for the special event. WGBH, the production company behind the show, granted permission for the episode to be screened.

The church announced in a Facebook Event post that the screening would be held at 10 a.m. on June 15. The announcement said, "There will be wedding cake, sparkling apple juice and surprises. This all ages screening and celebration is free and open to all."

Rachel Morgan, the creative director for both festivals, explained to *Newsweek* why she wanted to screen the episode. "We wanted to help allow for anyone in the Birmingham area who wants to see the episode to have the opportunity to do so. We hope that the screening reflects the fact that there are many people in Alabama who disagree with censorship and believe that all lives are worthy of representation," she said.

Mike McKenzie, the director of programming at APT, has previously

stated the decision to cut the episode was so that children could watch *Arthur* without supervision. "Parents have trusted Alabama Public Television for more than fifty years to provide children's programs that entertain, educate and inspire," he said. "More importantly—although we strongly encourage parents to watch television with their children and talk about what they have learned afterwards—parents trust that their children can watch APT without their supervision.

"We also know that children who are younger than the 'target' audience for *Arthur* also watch the program," McKenzie added.

Arthur is a Canadian/American animated educational TV series about the life of an eight-year-old anthropomorphic aardvark, based on the *Arthur Adventure* book series written and illustrated by Marc Brown.

Speaking about the episode featuring same-sex marriage, Marc Brown told CBS, "You know, art reflects life, and life reflects art, and I think kids need to see what's happening in the world. I would hate to live in a world which is sanitized and censored, and that's really something I can't get behind." Reported in: *Newsweek*, June 6, 2019.