



LIBRARIES

Park Ridge, Illinois

“Indians Cede the Land” by George Melville Smith, one of the historic Works Progress Administration (WPA) murals painted during the Great Depression, will stay inside the Park Ridge city library—but with some additional historical context, Heidi Smith, executive director of the library, announced in May 2019.

Other WPA murals have been removed from schools in nearby Oak Park, following complaints that they do not reflect the community’s diversity.

Smith’s oil on canvas mural depicts Native Americans and white government agents and was created in 1940 as part of a government program that commissioned art to be created for federal buildings. It hung for many years in the former Park Ridge Post Office and was restored in 2013 through a volunteer-led fundraising campaign.

Printed pamphlets describing the history and restoration of the “Indians Cede the Land” mural will be updated to include expanded historical context of the scene, based on information provided to the library last year by Julie Pelletier, an associate professor of indigenous studies at the University of Winnipeg. The additional information explains that when US government treaties were signed with Native American tribes, they often were not honored by the government, Smith said.

Pelletier’s information states:

The act of ceding land by Native Americans was involuntary and typically done under duress. In return for vast tracts of land, tribes might be promised goods, money, reserved lands (reservations) and protection from encroaching settlers . . . The Treaty of Chicago gained over a

million acres of land for the United States. In return, signatory tribes received \$100,000 in trade goods, \$280,000 in twenty annual payments of \$14,000 each, and \$150,000 for the erection of mills, houses, etc. The treaty does not list any land to be held for the tribes so one wonders where the houses and mills would be built. The United States government often did not honor its treaties with Native Americans and most tribes do not receive what they were promised as payment for land cessions.

Officials said they did not yet know when the library’s informational brochure on the mural would be updated to include the new language.

Smith said she reached out to Pelletier in summer 2018, around the time that a patron inquired if the mural was insulting to Native Americans and questioned whether it should continue to have a “place of honor” in the library.

Pelletier acknowledged that the portrayal of Native Americans in such a prominent piece of art was “unusual” for the time it was created, but it was not necessarily an accurate portrayal. It may also be viewed as offensive to native people, which is why it is important to “put the mural into perspective” by considering the heightened nationalism of the period when it was painted and the actual history of government treaties, Pelletier said. Reported in: *Chicago Tribune*, May 16, 2019.

Kalispell, Montana

Prince & Knight (2018) by Daniel Haack, a LGBTQ-friendly children’s book, will remain on the shelf at the Kalispell ImagineIF Library, despite suggestions to remove it.

After a storytime session for pre-schoolers on March 18 featured the illustrated fairytale, in which a

prince falls in love with a knight, a local teacher, Sherry Stockholm, objected in a letter to the editor to the *Daily Inter Lake*. Stockholm’s letter said she considers the topic of gay marriage to be “totally inappropriate for an audience of pre-schoolers,” and was disappointed the librarian did not provide notification that it would “introduce such a controversial subject to innocent children.” The newspaper printed the letter on April 4 along with the library’s policies for book selection when building its inventory.

Since the letter, library staff said they received about seventy public comments regarding the book and subsequent reading. Some commentary challenged the book as being part of the library’s collection in general, requesting it be removed from the shelf. Most of the comments offered words of support to ImagineIF for offering gay-friendly material and for choosing to read them aloud.

The Board of Trustees at a public meeting on May 1, 2019 voted to keep the book on the shelf. Board Chair Michael Morton said the library also will work on creating policies for various programs, including storytime sessions. When created, the policies will be made public on ImagineIF’s website, alongside the already-existing policies for considering which books should be added to their collection.

ImagineIF Library Director Connie Behe reiterated ways in which *Prince & Knight* meets ImagineIF’s guidelines for its collection development, which are available online. According to the library’s website, criteria includes customer demand and interest, the author’s reputation and significance as a writer, and critical reviews. Reported in: *Daily Inter Lake*, May 2, 2019.



Belleville, New Jersey

A rainbow flag in honor of LGBTQ Pride Month was temporarily taken down but restored to a flagpole outside the Belleville Public Library.

A “Drag Queen Story Time” event scheduled to take place at the library on Saturday, June 22, 2019, along with the raising of the rainbow flag inspired a flurry of comments from the Belleville community. Some comments have been in opposition, but many more in support, library staff reported.

Mia Torres, head of circulation, said that the rainbow flag was temporarily taken down while staff figured out a way for it to be properly displayed in conjunction with a US flag, which is also on display outside the library.

It was soon put back up with another addition, a banner bearing a message of peace that will hang at the front of the building “well beyond Pride Month,” Torres said.

“While we did in fact receive a handful of calls wanting the Pride flag removed and storytime cancelled, we also received many calls wondering why we had taken it down, with testimonies as to why we need it flown here in Belleville,” Torres explained. “We followed up with a Facebook post letting all know that it was back up.”

According to Torres, the Belleville Public Library exists to serve the community . . . and that includes everyone in it. Reported in: *Belleville-Nutley Patch*, June 12, 2019.

Highland Park, New Jersey

P Is for Palestine (2017), a self-published book by Golbarg Bashi, Ph.D., was returned to the schedule of author talks at the Highland Park Public Library, after vocal protests.

Jewish Voice for Peace sponsored the event featuring Bashi, a Middle East studies instructor at nearby Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Bashi was scheduled to read to children on May 19, 2019. A large swath of Highland Park’s Jewish community objected, primarily because of language in the book that whitewashed the word “Intifada,” casting the term as a peaceful term meaning “to stand up for what’s right.” Even more concerning, said members of the community who read the book, it was written with no mention of the existence of Israel or the Jewish people, though many of the locations included in the book appear in both the Israel of the Bible and, subsequently, modern-day Israel.

After the reading was postponed, the Council of American-Islamic Relations, the Jewish Voice for Peace, Palestine Legal, the Center for Constitutional Rights and the ACLU of New Jersey all insisted that the event be rescheduled. The American Library Association’s Office for Intellectual Freedom informed Library Director Jane Stanley that it was ALA’s advice to move forward with the event, citing free speech concerns and potential threats of legal action if the event were to be permanently canceled.

A public meeting of the library’s board of trustees in Highland Park to discuss the issue on June 5 drew so much interest that the meeting was cancelled to due to crowd control and security concerns.

On the advice of counsel, trustee president Bruce Walker decided that the library would simply reschedule the *P Is for Palestine* author talk, and “the library will schedule a program around the book *I Is for Israel* by Gili Bar-Hillel and Prodepta Das as soon as possible.”

The Vaad Harabonim of Raritan Valley, an Orthodox rabbinical council, made a statement in support of the decision. “We prefer this compromise for the sake of public safety and to avoid potentially toxic confrontations between opposing sides,” the council said.

Not every Jewish community member or even every rabbi in the Highland Park area was in favor of the compromise.

“Imagine that people wrote a book called T Is for Tiananmen Square, and didn’t talk about the massacre that occurred there,” said Rabbi Eliot Melomet, rabbi of the Highland Park Conservative Temple/Congregation Anshe Emeth, in an interview. “It provides legitimacy to this book and makes the children’s reading room a battleground for ideology and propaganda. We need to unmask the lies that are being presented here. That book is being presented as an exercise in tolerance and understanding, but that is a lie, by renowned provocateurs.”

He added, “I realize it [the compromise] is for the sake of *shalom bayit* (‘peace’), but it kicks the issue down the road.” Reported in: *Jewish News Syndicate*, June 5, 2019.

Montclair, New Jersey

An anti-Trump painting entitled *Hello Shitty, Available in a White House Near You! (Grab Him by His Pussy)* by Gwenn Seemel was reinstalled at an exhibition called “Fear and Love” at the Montclair Public Library in Montclair, New Jersey.

The satirical painting featured President Trump with his signature “Make America Great Again” cap changed to “Make America White Again,” and a mock-up of the Hello Kitty brand, with the “Kitty” changed to “Shitty.” It was part of



an exhibit featuring the works of six artists.

Studio Montclair, which organized the exhibition, had said it took down the painting because of the library's policy prohibiting profanity. In addition to the obscenity in its title, there are obscene words in the painting itself, although they are not easily noticed at first glance.

Yet, according to library director Peter Coyle, the library has no such policy about profanity.

After news reports, including a national story on Newsweek.com, covered the removal of the painting in early April 2019, Coyle and Seemel, along with Studio Montclair President RitaMarie Cimini and Studio Montclair Executive Director Susanna Baker, met to discuss the matter. "After clearing up the misunderstanding about the prohibition against vulgarity, we installed the piece," said Cimini, adding: "It is never Studio Montclair's intention to censor freedom of expression."

Explaining Studio Montclair's actions, Baker told Patch.com that in previous collaborations with the library, they had been asked not to display artwork with nudes or curse words. "The title of the piece on all our documentation was 'Hello Kitty . . .'" and the curse words were not obvious to us in the images we had seen of the work prior to the installation."

The painting was back on display in the library within a week of its removal, until the scheduled closing of the exhibit on April 29.

Seemel, in a Facebook video discussing the exhibit, said the painting grew from her feeling "that this man was not fit to be president."

She added, "I can't make him go away . . . but I can paint his portrait. I'm a professional portrait artist. I can paint his portrait and surround him

with his crimes. And in my small way I can make sure that he doesn't get away with everything."

The artist added: "For the record, I'd like to say that I don't think anyone in this situation did anything wrong." Reported in: *Patch Montclair*, April 11, 2019; *Newsweek*, April 12; NJarts.net, April 12.

SCHOOLS Los Angeles, California

A mural by artist Beau Stanton, honoring actress Ava Gardner, will be retained on the exterior wall of Robert F. Kennedy Community Schools' high school gym in Los Angeles, under a compromise in which the artist will oversee changes to the work.

Originally, the mural's background had rays behind the actress's head. Members of the surrounding community, which is ethnically Korean, complained that rays resembled the Rising Sun flag of Imperialist Japan. This complaint led the superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District to remove the mural in December 2018. The National Coalition Against Censorship and others pushed back against the superintendent's decision.

The mural was created as part of an arts initiative at the school, which involved workshops and seminars with students, with a grant from the Kennedy Foundation.

Stanton reflected on the outcome of the controversy: "Over the past several months I have had the opportunity to meet with a diverse cross section of stakeholders regarding my mural, including students, faculty, fellow artists, and members of the Koreatown Community. These interactions have allowed me to synthesize a solution that aims to rise above the original binary conversation of 'keep or remove the mural' in order to build upon the original work and

create something that speaks to the past, present, and future of the RFK campus."

The school district will re-allocate the funds earmarked for removal to fund the work of altering the mural.

Reported in: ncaac.org, December 7, 2018, December 17, May 30, 2019.

Stockton, California

The *Bruin Voice*, the student newspaper at Bear Creek High School Stockton, California, withstood threats from the Lodi Unified School District administration, and on April 26, 2019 published a profile of an eighteen-year-old student who works in the porn industry.

Administrators wanted to review the story ahead of time, and had threatened to dismiss the paper's adviser if she did not comply. The district backed down following an attorney's review of the article.

"Because we are charged with the education and care of our community's children, we will always be diligent in our efforts to provide a safe learning environment for all students, while complying with our obligations under the law," the district said in a press release.

Bruin Voice news editor Bailey Kirkeby wrote the article, titled "Risky business: starting a career in the adult entertainment industry."

Although student journalists are protected under the First Amendment, content that is obscene, libelous, slanderous, incites unlawful or dangerous acts, or may disrupt the school day can be censored. Student journalists have some protections against administrative censorship under California's "New Voices" legislation, passed in 1977.

Adviser Kathi Duffel originally refused to agree to any prior review, citing the students' rights to free speech. She told the Associated



Press that the article, “will help students think more critically about the choices they do make at this age in their lives.”

According to statements by the school district, the district and Duffel later agreed on an independent review of the article by a third-party lawyer before publication.

The student who is profiled in the story said that she supports publication of the article to dispel rumors. “I’m 18, what I’m doing is legal, and I don’t see why everyone is making such a big deal out of it,” Caitlin Fink told the AP.

This is not the district’s first attempt to censor the newspaper. According to the publication’s “About” page, the *Bruin Voice*’s motto, “The *Voice* shall not be silenced” was coined after early attempts of censorship following the paper’s establishment in 1991. Reported in: *Education Week* blog, April 30, 2019.

Hyattsville, Maryland

The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee (2005), a play by William Finn, was performed at Hyattsville Middle School on May 17 and 18, 2019, after an outcry from some parents and LGBTQ advocates when the show was abruptly cancelled by Prince George’s County Public Schools (PGCPS) officials the previous month.

The school principal said the decision to cancel was not based on the presence of gay characters in the musical comedy. Instead, he said, it was because “concerns arose over the production’s use of profane language, racial jokes, and sexual innuendo/content and its appropriateness for our young performers and even younger children in the audience.”

But in response to community concerns, the school district ultimately

decided to reverse its decision and let the show go on.

In a letter sent to students and parents, the principal apologized “for not being more diligent in selecting the play at the beginning” and said he understood the anger, confusion, and frustration that the sudden cancellation had caused.

Jamie McGonnigal, an LGBTQ advocate who has a child who will one day attend Hyattsville Middle School, said “I think the problem that needs to be addressed is the homophobia that was part of the decision-making process to cancel it in the first place,” McGonnigal has a background in theater and spent years producing Broadway concerts in New York.

As part of the school district’s decision to bring back the play, it was designated PG-13, and feeder elementary schools were not invited to the play. A sign posted at the school said “Disclaimer: Parental guidance suggested. Some material may not be suitable for children.”

In addition, all cast and crew members had to get signed permission forms from their parents/guardians.

WJLA Channel 7, the ABC television news affiliate in the Washington, D.C. area, reported that two parents are now playing the roles of the two gay dads who are featured in the play. It is unclear whether students were originally cast in those roles, prior to the controversy over the play’s content. A spokesperson for Prince George’s County Public Schools said the parents volunteered for those roles—but she could not yet say why or when that change was made.

Several community members told ABC7 they were disappointed to hear that update. McGonnigal agreed. “If there are only adults playing the gay characters, it sends a message that there’s something wrong with those roles, that they’re not suitable for kids

to play,” he said. “And I think that’s so incredibly the wrong message to be sending to kids.”

Some parents said they’re just relieved the kids got the chance to perform, after being crushed by the sudden cancellation in April. They had been rehearsing for months.

PGCPS has already said that its Department of Creative and Performing Arts will be reviewing its guidelines for age- and grade-level appropriate theater productions, in hopes of avoiding a similar situation in the future.

Music Theatre International, the New York-based licensing agency for play, and said that the play is very popular in high schools, but has also been performed by middle schools in the past. Reported in: WJLA ABC7, May 15, 2019.

Johnston, Pennsylvania

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time (2003) by Mark Haddon, a mystery novel about a teenager with an autism-like disorder, will remain on the list of books students may opt to read as part of the summer reading program at the Westmont Hilltop School District in Johnstown, Pennsylvania.

The district’s board of directors on May 16, 2019, voted 6–2 (with one member absent) to retain the book, in a meeting that drew one of the biggest crowds in its history.

Jeffrey Masterson, the president of the school board, said that the “many” complaints he received about the book fell into one or more of three categories—complaints about the foul language it contains, complaints that its profane use of God’s name offends Christian sensibilities, and complaints that it includes a negative portrayal of a character with autism or a similar disorder.



Lisa Drennen, one of the board members who voted against leaving the book on the reading list, gave the report of the board's curriculum committee, and said that the committee did not recommend approval. She and urged her fellow board members to remove the book from the reading list, condemning what she described as the "vulgarity" and "blasphemies" within its pages.

"If we, as a board, vote to pass this book, then we are condoning the book as a good choice for our students," she said. "We, as a board, should not be labeling vulgarity and religious blasphemies as good. . . . If, in the [student] handbook, a student's responsibility is to avoid indecent, obscene or inappropriate language . . . then why are we considering going directly against what we, as a school board, tell our students not to do?"

The other board member who voted against keeping the book on the list said before the vote that that the district would not be "banning" the book by removing it from its summer reading list, and added that parents who feel that their children should read the book can have them read it outside of school.

Another board member said before the vote that schools "need to teach our students to grow and think critically, not to shelter them from what is different. . . . I think that the value gained from understanding differences for this individual in particular far outweighs the language used." Reported in: *Johnston Tribune-Democrat*, May 17, 2019.

PRISONS Savannah, Georgia

Books and magazines can once again be given to inmates at the Chatham County Detention Center in Savannah. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) says a Georgia

sheriff's office in early June 2019 revised a policy that had prohibited inmates from receiving publications by mail or from visitors.

In April, the ACLU accused the Chatham County Sheriff's Office of violating the rights of inmates at the county jail in Savannah, saying authorities had enacted one of the "most egregious book bans" in US prisons or jails. Under the previous policy, which went into effect on March 4, 2019, inmates could only select reading materials from book carts managed by jail staff.

The ACLU protested that blocking reading material from friends, family, and nonprofit organizations infringes on prisoners' First Amendment rights.

When the policy was first announced, Sheriff John T. Wilcher claimed it was necessary to reduce the amount of flammable material in prison cells, as well as reduce the chance that contraband could be smuggled in through books and magazines. The contraband excuse was recently used by Washington State Department of Corrections in a similar, short-lived, policy, but the Washington policy was lax compared to this, the ACLU wrote. In a letter to Wilcher and Chatham County Attorney, R. Jonathan Hart, the ACLU declared, "We have never before encountered a policy that so completely restricts detained persons' access to books and publications."

In a statement on June 6, the ACLU said the new policy allows incarcerated people to order books and publications directly from publishers and vendors. Reported in: acluga.org, April 10, 2019; cblfd.org, April 16; Associated Press, June 8.

Danville, Illinois

More than 220 books were removed from the library at the Danville Correctional Center, most of them related

to African American history, race, and social change, between November 2018 and January 2019—but they were returned in July 2019.

The library was established by the Education Justice Project (EJP), a college in prison program at the University of Illinois. Members of the EJP took action to see that the titles were returned, including testifying at a hearing in the Illinois House of Representatives.

Among the materials that had been removed:

- *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) by Harriet Beecher Stowe;
- *Up from Slavery* (1901), Booker T. Washington's autobiography;
- *Race Matters* (1994) by Harvard scholar Cornell West;
- *Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America* (2017) by James Forman Jr., winner of the 2018 Pulitzer Prize for general nonfiction;
- *Mapping Your Future: A Guide to Successful Reentry 2017-2018* by the EJP, and
- Other materials that were carefully curated to help students make a successful transition from the medium-security prison back to their community after their release.

Prior to the return of materials, the prison issued a statement to the *News-Gazette* of Champaign, Illinois:

Education is a critical component of rehabilitation for those who are incarcerated and [the department] values our partnership with the University of Illinois and the Education Justice Project. Per [department] policy, all publications must be reviewed for admittance into Department facilities. When it was discovered that books had entered Danville Correctional Center without being



appropriately reviewed, they were removed from the facility.

We aim to review the books and return them to the facility, and while we have not yet received them back from the Education Justice Project, we remain hopeful this will occur.

Under state law, the corrections department can restrict books determined to be obscene or “detrimental to security, good order, rehabilitation or discipline or if it might facilitate criminal activity or be detrimental to mental health needs of an offender as determined by a mental health

professional,” said Brian Dolinar, of the Freedom to Learn Campaign.

While the state has an official list of books banned from prisons, Dolinar pointed out that none that were removed or denied in Danville were on the list. Reported in: *News-Gazette* (Champaign, Illinois), June 9, 2019; smilepolitely.com, July 9.