



LIBRARIES Inverness, Florida

After a public meeting where many of the residents in attendance reflected President Donald Trump's dislike and distrust of the *New York Times*, the Citrus County (Florida) Board of County Commissioners on November 19, 2019, voted 3-2 to stop the Citrus County Library from making a digital subscription to the newspaper available to its 70,000 cardholders. Even voluntary donations to pay the \$2,700 annual cost of the digital subscription were rejected.

However, the county libraries will continue to receive printed editions of the *New York Times*.

Earlier, the Library Advisory Board voted 7-0 in favor of adding the digital *New York Times* subscription and sent their recommendation to the county commissioners. The library board members are volunteers, appointed by the County Commission.

After the commissioners first expressed opposition to the digital subscription but prior to their final vote on it, several online GoFundMe fundraising campaigns raised a total of more than \$7,000 to allow the library to pay for electronic access to the *New York Times*.

Citrus Library Director Eric Head, speaking through a county spokeswoman Cynthia Oswald, said funding was not the only issue the library faced. The digital subscription would have required a contract agreement, which in Citrus County needs to be approved by the commission and signed by the commission chair.

"The money has to go back to the people that donated it," said Sandy Price, the chair of both the local Friends of the Library and the Library Advisory Board. GoFundMe guarantees that donations will go to the designated purpose. A GoFundMe

spokesperson said the money is being returned to the donors.

Donors who simply sent checks to the library will be asked if they want their money back or want to let it become a donation to the library. Reported in: *Citrus County Chronicle*, November 14, 2019; *Tampa Bay Times*, November 19, November 22.

Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

At the Coeur d'Alene Public Library, books are still being hidden from library patrons, as they have been for more than a year. [See *JIFP Fall-Winter 2018*, p.18.] The targets are books promoting LGBTQ rights, women's right to vote, and new releases critical of President Donald Trump, among other topics.

Someone—or possibly multiple someones, library staff believe—takes books dealing with issues generally associated with liberal political platforms and hides them in nooks and crannies throughout the building. Books are often recovered days later, most often in the fiction section, usually crammed into the Ws.

"Physically, it's the farthest spot away [from our vantage point]," library circulation manager Tyler McLane said. "Once a month or so, we'll have staff go through and poke their heads around to see what we can find."

They often find new releases from White House insiders or reporters detailing accounts and views critical of President Trump.

"The most notable one is *Fire and Fury* (2018) by Michael Wolff," Library Director Bette Ammon said. "That one has been moved I don't know how many times." Wolff, a journalist for *USA Today* who conducted more than 200 interviews with Trump and his West Wing campaign and transition staffs, wrote in the 2018 bestseller that "100 percent of the people around [Trump]" at the time

believed the President was unfit for office.

Other partisan books hidden from sight or intentionally removed from their correct place on the shelves include but (as Ammon emphasized) are not limited to:

- *Guns Down: How to Defeat the NRA and Build a Safer Future with Fewer Guns* (2019) by Igor Volkysy;
- *Enemies of the State: The Radical Right in America from FDR to Trump* (2018) by D.J. Mulloy;
- *It's Time to Fight Dirty: How Democrats Can Build a Lasting Majority in American Politics* (2019) by David Faris.

The list doesn't just include left-leaning titles, however. Also concealed were:

- *Impeachment: An American History* (2018) by Jon Meacham;
- *White Kids: Growing Up with Privilege in a Racially-Divided America* (2018) by Margaret A. Hagerman;
- *Punishment Without Crime: How Our Massive Misdemeanor System Traps the Innocent and Makes America More Unequal* (2018) by Alexandra Natapoff; and
- *Whose Boat Is This Boat?: Comments that Don't Help in the Aftermath of a Hurricane* (2018) by the Staff of the Late Show with Stephen Colbert.

Topics of other books gone missing revolve around LGBTQ rights, perspectives from California's political scene, and the history of the women's suffrage movement.

McLane said patrons are on waiting lists for many of the books, and the cost to replace one a patron wants that can't be found can exceed \$20 each. It also costs the library staff hours to search the shelves for wanted titles.



The culprit strikes from five times a week to ten times a month.

When asked if the misshelved books could be the result of accident or miscommunication, Ammon produced an anonymous patron's comment from August 2018.

"I noticed a large volume of books attacking our President," the comment card reads. "I am going to continue hiding these books in the most obscure places I can find to keep this propaganda out of the hands of young minds. Your liberal angst gives me great pleasure."

Ammon said, "It's censorship, plain and simple. The public library supports the city they serve. We have a lot of interests and diverse opinions. We try to have books that represent all of those interests and opinions."

McLane agreed and added, "I just wish they'd voice their feelings. If they feel a particular viewpoint isn't being represented, they can talk to us about it. I don't think stealing books is the answer. It's taking away the opportunity for someone else to read those materials." Reported in: *Bonner County Daily Bee*, October 16, 2019.

Buckhannon, West Virginia

Prince and Knight (2018) by David Haack, a picture book with a twist on traditional fairy tales where a prince marries a princess, was challenged for supporting LGBTQ views and was pulled from the shelves at Upshur County Public Library in West Virginia. Subsequently, the library board ducked public discussion of its decision.

In mid-November 2019, Upshur County Public Library Director Paul Norko told *Mountaineer Journal* that the issue would be discussed during the November 2019 library board meeting. Dozens of Upshur County residents and multiple news outlets

came and filled the boardroom, but the item was not found on the agenda.

The board meeting started with a discussion of the library's regular operations, and then Board President Dennis Xander attempted to enter into executive session to clear the room. He indicated that following the executive session, the meeting would be adjourned, with no chance for either opponents or supporters of LGBTQ-themed books to speak.

Both sides became enraged. "You're more than welcome to submit written comments," Xander responded. "We haven't had a single conversation about this. We're not going to sit here for hours . . . and hours . . . and hours and listen to people saying the same thing. We know pretty much what this is doing. This will be addressed at a future [meeting]."

Xander said, "I'm sorry, I'm going to ask everyone to leave now because we have to do the evaluation in executive session. Y'all need to leave."

Most of the people in attendance refused to leave.

Xander stormed out of the board meeting, making his way through the crowd.

Norko stated that *Prince and Knight* will remain off the shelves until the library board of directors has a chance to properly review it. Reported in: *Mountaineer Journal*, November 20, 2019.

SCHOOLS Gardendale, Alabama

Gardendale (Alabama) High School removed *The God of Small Things* (1998) by Arundhati Roy from a summer reading list for incoming freshmen after a parent complained. The school district then reviewed the book and agreed with the parent's judgment that it is inappropriate.

The novel, winner of the Mann Booker Prize, tells of a forbidden love that changes a family in India.

Darek Obitz of Gardendale, whose daughter was about to become a freshman at the school, complained to the principal that the book includes graphic and sexually explicit text that is inappropriate for students his daughter's age.

The high school is part of the Jefferson County School District. After the principal removed *The God of Small Things* from the school's website, a district review team decided the book should not be used in any Jefferson County schools. Gardendale High School will now require all reading lists to be shown to the principal before they are given to students. Reported in: wvtm13.com, August 16, 2019.

Phoenix, Arizona

It's Perfectly Normal: Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex, and Sexual Health, written by Robie Harris and illustrated by Michael Emberley and first published in 1994, has been challenged by Republican lawmakers, who want it removed from public libraries and public school classrooms.

The book is designed to be a definitive book on puberty, relationships, and sexual health for kids ages ten to fourteen. Harris spent seven years writing and editing the text, an exhaustive rundown on sex and related topics narrated by an inquisitive bird and prudish bee. Emberley spent five years working on its illustrations, from drawings of adults having sex to more interpretative pictures, like a magnet representing sexual attraction and a comic strip-style explainer on menstruation featuring an assembly line "ovary" and anthropomorphic "eggs." Doctors, psychologists, and educators vetted the



age-appropriateness and accuracy of the book.

The book has been published in more than thirty languages in thirty-five countries and has sold more than 1 million copies.

But some Arizona lawmakers call the book obscene and pornographic. They say it shows the dangers of how sex education is taught in Arizona public schools, despite little to no evidence that teachers are using *It's Perfectly Normal* in classrooms.

On December 12, 2019, Republican State Representative Kelly Townsend wrote a Facebook post calling for public school and county libraries to pull copies from their shelves. She claimed that the book contains “depictions of teenagers engaged in sexual intercourse.”

The *Phoenix New Times* called Townsend’s claim “questionable.” *It's Perfectly Normal* contains an illustration of adults having intercourse, but not teenagers. *New Times* wrote that Townsend was likely referring to drawings of teenagers masturbating. The book’s text says, “Many people masturbate. Many don’t. Whether you masturbate or not is your choice. Masturbating is perfectly normal.”

Townsend’s call for censorship follows comments from two of her colleagues criticizing *It's Perfectly Normal*. Earlier in December, Republican State Representative Anthony Kern compared the book to videos on Pornhub, and falsely implied that the Democratic state superintendent of schools planned to distribute copies to kindergartners. In September 2019, Republican House Speaker Rusty Bowers promoted a conspiracy theory (without evidence) that the book and other sex ed encourages youth promiscuity with the goal of increasing abortions and STDs to the financial benefit of health care providers such as Planned Parenthood.

In Representative Townsend’s home county, the Maricopa County Library District will retain the book, spokesperson Andrew Tucker told *Phoenix New Times*. Tucker said *It's Perfectly Normal* meets the library system’s collection development policy, which states, “Responsibility for materials chosen and borrowed by children and adolescents rests with their parents or legal guardians. Selection decisions are not influenced by the possibility that materials may be accessible to minors.”

The introduction of *It's Perfectly Normal* to Arizona politics likely traces back to Family Watch International, a conservative nonprofit organization that has been labeled an anti-LGBTQ hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center. Family Watch International has recently focused on restricting sex ed in the United States.

After attending a Family Watch International talk, Republican State Senator Sylvia Allen confirmed to *New Times* that she plans to introduce bills during the forthcoming legislative session to restrict sex education.

Emberley and Harris are working on a twenty-fifth-anniversary edition of *It's Perfectly Normal*. Reported in: *Phoenix New Times*, December 17, 2019

Steamboat Springs, Colorado

A month after a review committee ruled to keep “Howl” (1956), a controversial poem by Allen Ginsberg, in the Steamboat Springs High School curriculum, a student’s family has recruited the help of a religious rights lawyer in an attempt to force changes in school policy.

The issue began in October 2019, when students in high school English teacher Ryan Ayala’s music literature class read and discussed parts of the

3,000-word poem. “Howl” is considered a literary canon of the Beat Generation, but has always been controversial. When it was published, the poem drew both praise and criticism. Its lewd language and graphic sexual references led to an obscenity trial in 1957. Judge Clayton W. Horn ruled that the book *Howl and Other Poems* was not obscene but contained “redeeming social importance.”

In Steamboat Springs, one student’s father, resident Brett Cason, lodged an official complaint over the poem, which prompted the school district’s review committee to evaluate the material.

In an 8–1 decision, the committee determined that “Howl” is “an influential part of our history” and, when taught in the context of the time period in which it was written, is an “important” piece of literature with widespread influence on poetry, art, jazz, and hip-hop.

Jay Hamric, director of teaching and learning for the Steamboat Springs School District, oversaw the review process. He said that Cason had an opportunity to appeal the committee’s decision, but he did not do so.

Instead, Cason hired Jeremy Dys, an attorney at First Liberty Institute, which on its website claims to be the largest legal organization in the country specializing in religious rights cases.

In a statement to Brad Meeks, superintendent of the school district, Dys claimed that Cason’s daughter, Skylar, was exposed to “offensive, lewd, and lascivious material” in Ayala’s class, referring to parts of the poem that made her feel “guilty” and “violated.”

Dys cites one line of the poem in particular, in which Ginsberg speaks of the best minds of his generation, “who let themselves be f*** in



the a** by saintly motorcyclists and scream with joy.”

According to Dys, this language is inappropriate, particularly in the wake of the #MeToo movement involving sexual assault. He said such language describes “sexual violence against women, and vivid literary depictions of heterosexually and homosexually erotic acts.”

Ginsberg identified as a homosexual and pacifist, spearheading anti-war demonstrations in the 1950s and '60s. “Howl” is seen by many literary experts as an expression of freedom and a rejection of conformism.

Dys—like the judge in 1957 who supported the protection and distribution of “Howl” under the First Amendment—also cites the First Amendment. His statement argues that Skylar Cason’s First Amendment religious rights were violated, referencing the 1992 Supreme Court case, *Lee v. Weisman*.

“The knowing presentation of material that violates the religious beliefs of Skylar and her parents to view, without adequate forewarning and the option to opt-out and provide an alternative assignment rises to the level of the unacceptable coercive pressure contemplated in *Lee* and deprives students of their First Amendment rights of conscience and religious liberty,” Dys said in the statement.

In the same statement, he demands a written apology from teacher Ayala be sent to all parents in the class. Dys also requests that all district staff be required to receive two hours of training on the use of controversial materials, two hours of sensitivity training on parental rights in public education, and two hours of sensitivity training on the protection of student religious liberty and the rights of conscience.

Dys wants these conditions to be met by the end of the year and threatens legal action otherwise.

It is unclear whether the district will adopt these measures.

In a statement posted on the district’s website, Meeks apologized for not alerting parents prior to the start of the school year to give students a choice to opt out of this part of the curriculum. Meeks called the issue “simply an oversight.”

In a letter to Brett Cason, the teacher, Ayala, apologized for introducing a text in class that made students, namely Skylar, uncomfortable. Ayala said Ginsberg’s poem is the “most controversial” piece of literature the class covers, but he includes it to encourage students to take a critical look at what determines artistic merit and what justifies censorship.

Ayala said he does not personally endorse Ginsberg’s claims in the poem. He acknowledged he should have alerted parents about the controversial material before the semester started and said he has taken action to avoid further problems, such as making it an option for students to watch the movie version of the poem, which is included in the curriculum.

Hamric stands by his review committee’s decision to keep the poem in the school curriculum.

“I think it is an important piece of American culture, of American society,” he said. “It is something I would want our students, in a safe and supportive environment, to discuss and learn about.” Reported in: *craigdaily press.com*, November 30, 2019.

Columbia County, Georgia

Out of seventeen books recommended as supplemental reading for high school students by a district-wide faculty committee at the Columbia County (Georgia) School District,

three were rejected by Superintendent Sandra Carraway.

The three books will be excluded not only from suggested reading lists, but also from Columbia County curriculum and school libraries. The banned books are:

- *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2003) by Mark Haddon, which depicts an autistic fifteen-year-old investigating the death of a neighbor’s dog;
- *Dear Martin* (2017) by Nic Stone, a novel about an African American private school student who starts a journal of letters to Martin Luther King Jr. about his struggles in life, including a violent encounter between him, a friend, and a police officer; and
- *Regeneration* (1991) by Pat Barker, which is about a British World War I soldier who refuses to continue serving and is sent to a mental hospital.

The District Reading Resources Professional Learning Community (sometimes referred to as the Novel Committee), with representatives from all five high schools in the county, submitted this year’s recommendations in the spring of 2019. Each book is reviewed by two teachers, who are asked to provide the book’s reading level, and page numbers of any potential areas of concern, including profanity or sexual content. The list is reviewed by Carraway, and approved books are voted on by the school board.

Novel Committee members were specifically asked in an email August 6, 2019, the day before school began, to provide a list of page numbers of any sex or rape scenes, graphic depictions, or profanity other than “hell” or “damn.”



Carraway said that after reviewing the list of books, there were three she was not willing to bring to the board for approval. She does not recall having to do this in the past.

She said her reason was the three books' explicit content, but some parents who objected to her decision (plus the author of *Dear Martin*) suspect that another reason was racial content.

The Root (which describes itself as a journal of "Black News, Opinions, Politics and Culture") compared the rejected books to the books that won approval. "It was not clear why some books were banned and others were not," according to *The Root*. Like the rejected books, some of the approved ones also used profanity, including *Alas, Babylon*, a novel about the aftermath of nuclear fallout. The questionable language—deemed acceptable by the Novel Committee, as part of *Alas, Babylon's* realistic characterizations—includes the word "nigger" used by the white characters as a racial slur. By contrast, *Dear Martin* uses the n-word racially only once, and twice as slang ("niggah").

Carraway's book-banning didn't just anger black parents. Tara Wood, a parent whose children attend schools in the district, called the decision "embarrassing for those of us who are not white supremacist gatekeepers." She told *The Root*, "If this isn't some racially influenced bullshit, I don't know what is. She [Carraway] claims it's because of the use of the 'F-word,'" but at least three of the approved books use the word on multiple occasions.

Nic Stone, the author of *Dear Martin*, said "When it comes to things like this, banning tends to be a reactionary power move rather than something that's well thought out. . . . I think there's an overall discomfort with facing up to the fact that racism is still

a thing that we need to be talking about. But I don't think it's possible to talk about it without people being uncomfortable."

Carraway confirmed that a violent scene involving a black teenager and police officers was a factor that prompted her to take *Dear Martin* off the supplemental reading list. The scene involving police conflict was "a very sensitive situation across the nation," she said. The schools in her district recently hired campus safety officers, she said.

"You can imagine if it's that sensitive in the adult realm, in a class of fourteen- or fifteen-year-olds it can be more sensitive also," Carraway said. "I do not believe we need to bring that kind of unrest and potential for divisiveness into a classroom of young teenagers."

The Columbia County School District's student population is 60 percent white, 20 percent black and 10 percent Hispanic, according to the Georgia Board of Education. The school board is 100 percent white.

After Carraway removed the three books from the list of suggested reading for students, she also decided they weren't appropriate for the district's educators to use in their English curriculum and shouldn't be available in the district's media centers.

"*Dear Martin* . . . is not a book that we would want sitting on a shelf," she said. "We're a public school district charged with educating children, and we have a certain level of responsibility for ensuring that the material that they have access to that's provided by us is appropriate."

Carraway said the district does not have a process to decide what books are allowed in the media centers, but will begin looking at a review procedure.

Sometimes, instead of banning books, the Columbia County school

has teachers redact profanity or other questionable content from all copies of those books. A notice will then go home to parents, giving the option to receive a redacted copy of the novel. "That's our way of being sensitive to different people's values and ideals and that when their children are in school with us they can count on the content of what they're studying or reading to be age appropriate," Carraway said.

When asked why the three books that were not recommended could not be redacted, Carraway said "the content was extreme."

After Carraway removed three "extreme" books from the recommended list, all of the remaining books were approved when she presented them to the board in September. The approved books are:

- *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (2007) by Ishmael Beah
- *The Alchemist: A Fable about Following Your Dreams* (1998) by Paulo Coelho
- *Jurassic Park* (1990) by Michael Crichton
- *All the Light We Cannot See* (2014) by Anthony Doerr
- *Alas, Babylon* (1959) by Pat Frank
- *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption* (2010) by Laura Hillenbrand
- *All But My Life* (1957) by Gerda Weissmann Klein
- *Into the Wild* (1996) by Jon Krakauer
- *Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold* (1956) by C. S. Lewis
- *The Road* (2006) by Cormac McCarthy
- *True Grit* (1968) by Charles Portis
- *The Hot Zone: A Terrifying True Story* (1994) by Richard Preston
- *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* (2010) by Rebecca Skloot
- *The Martian* (2011) by Mark Weir



Reported in: *Augusta Chronicle*, October 8, 2019; *The Root*, October 15; WJBF-TV, October 15; *Georgia Recorder*, October 22.

Nashville, Tennessee

A Tennessee priest who banned the Harry Potter books by J. K. Rowling from a Catholic school's library was accused by parents of causing their children psychological and spiritual harm. The censorship occurred in 2017, but was not widely known until the summer of 2019, when *The Tennessean* obtained a letter that fourteen St. Edward Catholic School parents had sent two years earlier. The parents urged the Nashville diocese to remove the Rev. Dan Reehil.

Their letter, with fifty bullet points, called Reehil a toxic narcissist who hates Pope Francis and views himself as “a soldier of God.” It said, “Our school, however, consists of children, not soldiers.”

Diocesan spokesman Rick Musacchio said Reehil's conservative views, like that of the retired, more liberal pastor he replaced, both have homes in the church.

Reehil didn't respond to the newspaper's interview requests. In an email, he said he removed J. K. Rowling's books because they contain “actual spells and curses.”

There is little legal ground for the parents to have the Harry Potter series reinstated, because St. Edward's is a private school, according to Deborah Caldwell-Stone, director of the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom. Harry Potter used to be the number one banned book in schools, according to Caldwell-Stone. These days, she said, books with LGBTQ themes are more common targets.

Rebecca Hammel, school superintendent for Nashville's Catholic diocese, said, “Each pastor has canonical authority to make such decisions for his parish school. He's well within his authority to act in that manner.” Reported in: *Forbes*, September 3, 2019, Associated Press, September 7.

PRISONS Tallahassee, Florida

The Florida Department of Corrections banned *How to Leave Prison Early: Florida Clemency, Parole and*

Work Release (2015) by Reggie Garcia, on the grounds that the book names two inmates specifically. Garcia says he has asked the Department of Corrections to reconsider the decision to ban his book.

Garcia said, “I would think we would want to provide information, if for nothing else they've got all the idle time to entertain inmates, inform them, let them know some things they can do when they get out and train them so they don't commit new crimes when they get out.”

The Florida Department of Corrections released a statement saying, “The Literature Review Committee, which meets every two weeks, works under guidelines outlined in *Florida Administrative Code 33-501.401—Admissible Reading Material*. It states inmates can ‘receive and possess publications . . . unless the publication is found to be detrimental to the security, order or disciplinary or rehabilitative interests of any institution of the department . . . or when it is determined that the publication might facilitate criminal activity.’” Reported in: WJHG-TV7, August 12, 2019.