



COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES Denton, Texas

The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) asked the University of North Texas' (UNT) College of Music to stop investigating Professor Timothy Jackson, but its request was ignored.

On August 6, 2020, the Philadelphia-based foundation, which promotes and protects the free speech rights of college and university students and instructors, appealed to UNT to drop its investigation into Jackson and the publication he edits, the *Journal of Schenkerian Studies*. The foundation asked the college to respond to its letter by August 13.

"We don't let an ignored letter put an end to our efforts to defend student and faculty rights," said Daniel Burnett, the foundation's assistant director of communications, who said that UNT had not responded.

In late July, the university announced that it was investigating "the conception and production of the twelfth volume of the *Journal of Schenkerian Studies*, which is published by the Center for Schenkerian Studies and UNT Press." The investigation began after graduate students in the UNT Division of Music History, Theory, and Ethnomusicology posted about their distress over the way Jackson and the journal refuted a presentation by music theorist Philip Ewell at a 2019 Society for Music Theory meeting.

Ewell, a Hunter College professor who is Black, presented a plenary talk arguing that Schenkerian analysis promotes "a White racial frame" for music theory. According to Ewell, racism informed the work of Heinrich Schenker, an Austrian composer and theorist who died in 1935. In the latest issue of the journal, Jackson and about a dozen of his peers refuted

Ewell's presentation. Ewell said he was never notified about the publication and was not given a chance to respond.

A petition by the UNT graduate students was posted to Twitter, asking the College of Music to investigate and potentially discipline any faculty member involved in the journal issue. Among the grievances were accusations that the journal undermined its own editorial processes to rebut Ewell and that some of the scholarship in selected rebuttals was less than suitable for the publication. Students also said some of the rebuttals fostered racist stereotypes in their criticism of Ewell.

The petition, which garnered support from some music faculty, asserted that the college has a reputation for being racist and sexist. The Society for Music Theory stated that some of the published submissions violated the society's harassment and ethics policies. FIRE stated that Jackson and the journal are protected by the First Amendment and academic freedom and that the best way to counter speech that some deem offensive is scholarly criticism in the classroom and in publication.

Reported in: *Denton Record-Chronicle*, August 17, 2020.

Syracuse, New York

Syracuse University's decision to put a professor on administrative leave while it investigates his use of what the school called "derogatory language" has left some students disgruntled.

Student groups spoke out after Jon Zubieta, a chemistry professor, was reported to have written "Wuhan Flu" and "Chinese Communist Party Flu" on his syllabus. He was removed from the classroom and the school issued a statement.

"The derogatory language used by a professor on his course syllabus

is damaging to the learning environment for our students and offensive to Chinese, international, and Asian-Americans everywhere who have experienced hate speech, rhetoric, and actions since the pandemic began," said a joint statement from Karin Ruhlandt, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and John Liu, the university's interim vice chancellor and provost. Some said it's not enough.

"A lot of students are uncomfortable with the decision to place Zubieta on administrative leave. We expected him to be fired," said a sophomore who is an organizer for #NotAgainSU and asked not to be identified. Zubieta declined to comment.

The controversy began when Taylor Krzeminski, a graduate student, shared a screenshot, which featured an excerpt of the syllabus, on Instagram. She saw it on The Tab Syracuse, which documents student and campus life through memes and decided to call him out.

"It's not safe for students to be in a classroom with a professor who thinks their ethnicity should be blamed for a pandemic," she said. "I agree he should be on leave, but the investigation better be quick because to me it's incredibly straight-forward. He used political and racist language in a chemistry class."

Undergraduate Zoe Selesi shared Krzeminski's post on Twitter along with a screenshot of an email, which Zubieta sent to students stating that he calls the coronavirus "CCP Virus."

In 2019, racial slurs against Black and Asian people were written on two floors in a Syracuse University dorm building. The university didn't release an official statement for at least five days, according to the student newspaper, *The Daily Orange*. It led to the



creation of the student-led movement #NotAgainSU.

While the #NotAgainSU organizer was encouraged by the swifter response this time, she was astonished by the decision. “There is no need for an investigation if there is proof. It went viral, so the evidence is there,” she said. “These stereotypes and biases that are incorporated in the class by faculty will allow for unsafe spaces for students.”

Reported in: *The Daily Orange*, August 25, 2020.

GOVERNMENT Portland, Oregon

On July 20, 2020, then-president Donald Trump announced plans to deploy Department of Homeland Security (DHS) agents in Chicago, as well as cities where protests against police brutality continued. Philadelphia; New York; Portland, Oregon; and Oakland, California, all are cities that Trump characterized as run by “the radical left.” Trump called the situation in these cities “anarchic” and asserted that federal agents needed to be on the streets to restore order. The acting head of DHS argued that this granted federal officials wide-ranging authority to deploy in cities against the local officials’ wishes.

These actions raise many political and legal questions. Among these are questions about freedom of speech and use of the streets, or whether protesters have a right to occupy those streets. The federal government appears to believe they do not, moving to forcibly remove them in the name of public order. This is, in many ways, a clash over the meaning and extent of the public forum.

Threatened with the suppression of free speech by local officials misusing their power, the Supreme Court formed the public forum 80-plus years ago, designating city streets and parks

as venues for citizen expression. Now, when the question of who has the authority to occupy the streets is again disputed, it is worth reexamining how and why the courts felt the need to define city streets and parks as the people’s podium. Revisiting this history highlights the unfavorable differences between the political and legal commitments to freedom of speech in the late 1930s and 1940s and today.

Today, we understand the streets to be public forums, venues that citizens can use for free expression, with some limitations on the time, place, and manner. But this was not always true. In fact, the courts did not recognize the right of citizens to assemble and speak in public parks and streets until the late 1930s. Before, it was local officials that claimed broad authority to act as censors, barring assemblies and individual speech that they felt might disrupt public order or that they simply considered too radical. Many of these officials barred socialists, anarchists, and unions from holding public meetings, distributing literature, or displaying red flags.

In the 1910s and 1920s, organizations like the International Workers of the World (IWW) operated to expose the injustices of the economic and political directives of the day. They, as well as other labor and socialist organizations, pointed to the inequalities shaped by industrialization and policies that favored the consolidation of wealth in the hands of a few and punished the poor, immigrants, and Black Americans. But when they assembled in the streets for such work, they were often jailed.

The IWW attempted to use these confrontations to attract even more attention and sympathy to their cause. However, in most cities and courts, public order continued to eclipse the civil liberties of these dissenters.

In 1939, a more comprehensive interpretation of the First Amendment, one that prioritized civil liberties, was adopted by the Supreme Court. One of the landmark cases in this transformation was *Hague v. CIO*. To entice business owners, the mayor of Jersey City, Frank “Boss” Hague, attempted to purge his city of unions. In 1937, when Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) organizers arrived to distribute literature and hold a public meeting to organize Jersey City workers, they were arrested or forcibly escorted out of town. The CIO took the city to court. Eventually, the Supreme Court declared the city streets and parks as venues for the advocacy and assembly of the people, though permitting that such assemblies could be controlled or restricted in the name of public convenience or safety. A consciousness of the legal public forum was born, recognized as a space akin to the proverbial town halls of early America, open to public debate, dialogue, and advocacy.

Concerns about the ability of a few people and organizations to control what could be said through these privately owned networks led some policymakers to seek to create alternative channels for marginalized voices (mainly labor). As legal historian Samantha Barba explained, the judges and justices deciding the early cases that established public forum law discussed the public parks and streets as alternate “platforms” for the speech of “the workingman.”

Thus, the right to use the streets was born in part out of a recognition that the privately owned channels of public address were not accessible to everyone. In cases such as *Hague v. CIO*, the courts sought to rectify what some judges saw as the systematic exclusion of certain left-leaning viewpoints and disputes from public debates by opening up new outlets for



citizen speech. They envisioned this push as an attempt to address the negative consequences of the rise of commercial mass media and to create auxiliary platforms for citizen advocacy and protest.

Workers and Jehovah's Witnesses took advantage of this new legal disposition. Workers found new legal support for strikes and picketing, with greater protections for marching and gathering in the streets. Jehovah's Witnesses now had legal support in their efforts to evangelize in the streets. These precedents also enabled many 1960s civil rights and antiwar demonstrations.

Today, people in the streets are expressing outrage over deadly violence and racial injustice that has allowed the taking of Black lives. But one of the reasons protesters have taken to the streets parallel those of labor in the 1930s: the stifling of long-standing complaints about unequal treatment by law enforcement and the inability to voice these complaints through a media controlled by relatively few players. The problem of systemic violence in Black communities has not been adequately amplified by media outlets—yet the rise of social media enabled activists to work around the media to bring videos of this violence and make it visible to many White Americans.

The use of the streets to publicize and protest police violence is exactly what the public forum was crafted for: a venue for the voices of those who are structurally denied access from the dominant media of the day. The attacks on and detention of these protesters are exactly the sort of government persecution that the First Amendment is designed to prevent.

Reported in: *The Washington Post*, July 22, 2020.

Washington, DC

The Trump administration indicated that it will not process new applications for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and that it will limit the renewal term for current recipients to one year instead of two. Critics said that the policy change is in deliberate defiance of a court directive restoring the program.

Established in 2012 under former president Barack Obama, the DACA program provides protection against deportation and work authorization to certain undocumented immigrants, known as Dreamers, who were brought to the United States as children. The Trump administration ordered the end of DACA in 2017, but colleges and other entities sued to stop the administration from ending the program.

In June 2020, the US Supreme Court ruled that the administration acted impulsively in ending the program, ruling that the repeal be vacated. Legal experts argued that the ruling meant the program had to be fully restored, meaning that in addition to processing DACA renewals, the administration had to accept new applications for the program. In light of the Supreme Court ruling, in early July, a Maryland federal judge ordered the restoration of DACA “to its pre-September 5, 2017 status.”

But on July 28, 2020, Chad F. Wolf, the acting secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), issued a memo saying he would make “certain immediate changes to the DACA policy to facilitate my thorough consideration of how to address DACA in light of the Supreme Court’s decision.”

These steps included directing DHS staff “to take all appropriate actions to reject all pending and future initial requests for DACA, to

reject all pending and future applications for advance parole absent exceptional circumstances”—advance parole is essentially advance permission for DACA recipients to leave the country and re-enter—“and to shorten DACA renewals.” Wolf wrote that shortening the term of DACA renewals will have the potential benefit of significantly lessening the lasting effects of the DACA policy “if I ultimately decide to rescind it.”

Reaction was immediate. “This is patently illegal,” the American Civil Liberties Union tweeted. “The Trump administration must accept new DACA applications AND extend legal protection for the full two years. Anything less is in defiance of the Supreme Court.”

The American Council on Education tweeted, “We are appalled by the @DHSgov decision to reject acceptance or processing of new DACA applications and to shorten renewal periods of current DACA recipients. This apparent defiance of U.S. Supreme Court is another reason why Congress must act now to permanently #protectDreamers.”

The Supreme Court left the door open for the Trump administration to end DACA but insinuated that it would need to provide a reasoned analysis for doing so and to demonstrate that it had considered the “reliance interests” of DACA beneficiaries and others who have come to depend on the program. In justifying his measures, Wolf wrote that new applicants for the program had fewer, if any, dependence interests on the continuation of DACA.

Wolf also argued that current DACA beneficiaries’ reliance on the program would not be “significantly affected by shortening the renewal periods from two years to one year.” However, he did acknowledge that shortening the renewal period will



increase the cost for DACA recipients. The fee for renewing DACA status is \$495.

Wolf wrote in the memo that “DHS personnel should consider whether it is possible to reduce renewal fees during this interim period of reconsideration. In my current view, however, even if renewal fees cannot be reduced, shortening the renewal period is still warranted by my strong desire to limit the scope of the policy during this interim period despite any additional fees incurred by DACA beneficiaries as a result.”

In a briefing call with reporters on July 28, a senior administration official described Wolf’s memo as “an intervening action” by the administration that changes its obligations in relation to the federal judge’s order directing restoration of DACA to the status it had before September 2017.

“Under the judge’s order, absent any intervening action from this administration, we would be back to a pre-2017 context,” the official said. “This memo is an intervening action that lays out how the administration will proceed both with the substantive review of the underlying conditions that led to the promulgation of those two earlier memos [establishing DACA] and what steps we’re going to take in ensuring the program is maintained as it’s currently constituted.”

Michael A. Olivas, an emeritus professor of law at the University of Houston, said it is “incontestable” the Trump administration is acting in defiance of the Supreme Court. “The Supreme Court said you can’t shut it down without going through the proper channels, which they have not yet done,” Olivas said. “[Wolf] says he’s going to look it over for the next year—that’s not enough. That’s how they got in trouble in the first place, by single-handedly trying to make

changes that require notice and comment at a minimum.”

College leaders and higher education groups had strongly advocated for keeping the DACA program in place, and several colleges, including the University of California and Princeton University, were among the institutions that filed lawsuits against the administration, seeking to block its efforts to end DACA.

Jose Magaña-Salgado, the director of policy and communications for the Presidents’ Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, an association of college presidents that advocates for the protection of DACA, said the policy change “represents a stealth rescission of DACA through administrative and bureaucratic policy changes.”

“The Presidents’ Alliance will, as it did in the previous litigation, rally institutions of higher education to support forthcoming legal challenges,” said Magaña-Salgado, a DACA recipient himself. “Immigrant youth courageously won this battle in the court of public opinion and the Supreme Court, and we will do so again.”

Reported by: *Inside Higher Ed*, July 28, 2020.

JOURNALISM AND MEDIA New York, New York

The foreword of *The View* co-host Sunny Hostin’s new book, *I am These Truths: A Memoir of Identity, Justice, and Living Between Worlds*, revealed that ABC News executives attempted to have passages expunged.

“Deleting those passages didn’t feel right to me—they were all true, and they were some of the battle scars of my experience,” Hostin wrote. “My television agent and my book agent emailed me to express confusion that a news organization would try to censor a Puerto Rican, African-American woman’s story while they were

covering global demonstrations demanding racial equity.”

Written with *USA Today* national correspondent Charisse Jones, Hostin chronicles her personal journey as a multiracial woman, including her reflections on the high-stakes cases and stories she worked on as a prosecutor and a journalist.

A native of the Bronx, Hostin, who once served as a federal prosecutor and a Department of Justice trial attorney, was the subject of a *Huffington Post* article about racism allegations within the Disney-owned media giant’s top ranks. The veteran legal journalist didn’t mince words about how she felt about ABC’s actions.

“I was surprised that what was asked of me was to change the truth, like to change my story,” she revealed to *Andy Cohen Live* on September 21. “I think it’s one thing if I got something wrong and to be clear, they caught things that were wrong, you know, like timing things, and direct quotes that should have been checked more closely. And I appreciate it, those things.”

“But then they wanted me to change, things like things that I experienced discriminatory things, you know, and I just felt that that wasn’t fair because the title of the book is *I Am These Truths*,” she continued. “And I think that we’re living in a society at this point where the president has lied over 30,000 times. You know, the media is considered fake news and people want the truth. Like we have to start telling the truth.”

Hostin said that as a successful woman of color, she should be able to share her experiences of discrimination as a cautionary tale.

Reported in: *The New York Daily News*, September 21, 2020.



NET NEUTRALITY Sacramento, California

The Sacramento Chamber of Commerce backed broadband providers and the United States Department of Justice in their attempt to block California's broad net neutrality law.

"Because there is no principled way to limit regulation of the Internet to a single state . . . California's new regulatory regime raises more questions than it answers," the Chamber of Commerce and several other business groups wrote in a friend-of-the-court brief filed in mid-August with US District Court Judge John A. Mendez in Sacramento.

The business organizations urged Mendez to issue an injunction that would prevent the state from enforcing its open internet law. California's law (SB 822) prohibits broadband providers from blocking or throttling traffic, charging higher fees for fast-lane service, and exempting their own video streams from consumers' data caps.

Those provisions largely mirror rules passed by the Obama-era Federal Communications Commission (FCC) but repealed in 2018 by the then-Republican-led agency. When the FCC repealed the Obama-era rules, the agency also attempted to prevent states from imposing net neutrality requirements on broadband providers. FCC Chair Ajit Pai, who shepherded the repeal, said the prior rules were "heavy handed" and claimed that they depressed investment.

But net neutrality advocates say the rules were necessary to prevent broadband providers from limiting consumers' ability to access streaming video, search engines, and other online services and content.

Some groups that examined the carriers' stock reports dispute Pai's assertion that the rules depressed investment. The pro-neutrality

advocacy group Free Press, which examined stock reports, said investment by 13 major broadband providers increased in the two years after the Obama-era FCC voted in favor of the regulations.

Despite the FCC's attempted ban on state laws, Governor Jerry Brown signed the California measure in late September of 2018. Within an hour, the Department of Justice sued to block the law from taking effect. Several days later, the four major broadband industry groups—the American Cable Association (ACA), the Wireless Association (CTIA), the Internet and Television Association (NCTA), and USTelecom (the Broadband Association)—also sued.

The lawsuit was stayed while the DC Circuit Court of Appeals considered a challenge to the FCC's repeal of the Obama-era regulations. In 2019, that court partially upheld the decision to revoke the regulations but vacated the part of the FCC's order that would have prevented states from passing or enforcing their own broadband laws.

In early August, the broadband groups restarted the litigation by amending their complaint and renewing their request to block the law. The Chamber of Commerce, which is siding with the carriers, argues it would be "profoundly inequitable to force Internet providers to come into near-immediate compliance" with rules the FCC found were "excessively burdensome and unnecessary."

"That is doubly true when the challenged rules cannot in any meaningful way be limited to California," the group adds. "The most prudent way forward is to freeze the status quo."

Reported by: Digital News Daily, August 21, 2020.

PRIVATE INDUSTRY Huntington, New Hampshire

It was "freedom of speech day" on August 30, 2020, at the Huntington Country Store, and owners Randy and Becky Butler were offering a deal: one scoop of ice cream at half price. But when a group of protesters tried to go into the store to get ice cream and deliver a letter taking issue with the store's use of the term "China coronavirus" on its website, four police officers stood between them and the door. Nearby, a woman in an American flag T-shirt shouted at them, saying they were not welcome.

No formal trespass orders had been served, said Aaren Hawley, an officer with the Huntington Police. But, he said, the store is private property and the store's owners told the police department they would issue trespass notices to the protesters if they came inside the shop.

About 40 people came to protest the store's use of the term "China coronavirus" multiple times on its website, on the grounds that it is racist and xenophobic. Organizer Ali Wicks-Lim said she and others contacted the store and left messages, but never heard back from the owners. "They would not take our calls," she said before the protest. "It just became clear they were unwilling to hear any of our concerns."

In reaction to "No Hate in Huntington," another protest, "Stand with the Huntington Country Store!," was planned; more than 50 people showed up. The person listed as the organizer on the Facebook event did not reply to a message, and she posted on the Facebook event saying she could not attend because she was going to Boston to rally against the mandatory flu vaccine for students.

At around noon on August 30, the two groups stood on a narrow strip



of sidewalk outside the store. “Don’t sell hate anymore,” yelled several dozen people, and nearly immediately, counter-protesters shouted over them, saying, “Free speech.” One man yelled “China virus.”

Those supporting the store held signs with messages like “censorship is fatal to our republic,” and some held American flags. Some wore face coverings, while others didn’t. They cheered when a van pulling a trailer with a Trump 2020 flag, a “Don’t Tread on Me” flag, and an American flag drove by the store several times. Protesters who wanted the store’s language changed wore face coverings and held signs like “Your words hurt my family,” “Make America brown again!” and “Hilltowners against hate.” Randy Butler stood at the store’s entrance letting in a limited number of customers at a time. He declined to answer questions and directed the media to a statement on the store’s website.

In a post titled “Rebutting the Gazette’s news article and defending Free Speech,” the store’s website says Randy and Becky Butler take issue with how the coronavirus was first handled by Chinese government. “It’s my way of saying NO to the China Communist Regime,” the statement concludes. “Could there be another reason why someone would call COVID-19 the China Coronavirus?” the statement asks. “I’ll give you [a] hint. Location on a map. I’ll repeat this again, location on a map!”

The pandemic has been a difficult period for the businesses, they wrote, and “being forced to deal with an anti-First Amendment group doesn’t help.” Protesters took issue with this line of argument.

“A lot is being said on their side about their First Amendment rights,” Wicks-Lim said. “My position is that just because you can say something

doesn’t mean you should say something that’s going to harm other people.” Many there in support of the store declined to speak to the *Gazette*, but those who did emphasized freedom of speech.

“It’s just a freedom of speech thing,” said Ed Parr, of Easthampton, who was wearing a pro-Trump hat. He said he likes the store. “I’d like to stand with them.”

The language is harmful, said “No Hate in Huntington” organizers. “The rise of racist attacks, verbal and physical assaults on Asians and Asian Americans and the rise of racist rhetoric describing our current pandemic is not a coincidence,” Vira Douangmany Cage, one of the event’s organizers who also serves as chair of the state’s Asian American Commission, said in a statement.

“As an Asian American, I know what it’s like to be attacked,” said Jeannette Wicks-Lim. She’s been called slurs and told to go back to China—though she’s actually Korean-American. “It’s one thing to see all this hatred through a screen,” said protester and Amherst-Regional High School student Monica Cage. In person, she said, it was different. “It’s heartbreaking.”

Huntington resident Amanda Reynolds was unable to attend the protest on August 30, but said she is disappointed with the store’s reaction and won’t be going there anymore. “I think instead of ignoring those that wanted the language changed on the website, there could have been more of an understanding and listening and conversation as opposed to reacting in an aggressive way,” she said. “This could have been a moment for them to gather more community to create the store to be a safe place for all.”

Reported in: *The Daily Hampshire Gazette*, August 30, 2020.

SCHOOLS Evanston, Illinois

On August 2, 2020, an Illinois lawmaker and community leaders called for the immediate removal of history books and the suspension of history lessons in their school districts because they said that current materials and lesson plans “lead to White privilege and a racist society.”

State Representative LaShawn K. Ford joined a group of Evanston leaders to ask the state to cease its current history lessons, saying current history books and curriculum practices “unfairly communicate our history” and “overlook the contributions by women and members of the Black, Jewish, LGBTQ communities and other groups,” in a statement to CNN.

“Until a suitable alternative is developed, we should instead devote greater attention toward civics and ensuring students understand our democratic processes and how they can be involved,” he said. “I’m also alarmed that people continue to display symbols of hate, such as the recent display of the Confederate flag in Evanston.”

The call to action is not new for Ford and community leaders. It’s an ongoing initiative that started in February 2020 when Ford helped introduce HB 4954, which calls for amending the school code to include commemorative holidays to observe the principles of nonviolence and human and civil rights.

Meleika Gardner, a board member at We Will, an organization fighting for women and children’s rights in local legislation, created an amendment to Ford’s bill to add a school code making the study of the American civil rights movement, pre-enslavement history, and additional areas of study to the Black history



portion of the curriculum mandatory rather than an elective, she told CNN.

“It’s just very damaging,” she said of the current curriculum. “It feeds into systemic racism if you’re fed that information.”

Gardner testified before the house committee in March for the bill. The August 2 news conference was the third time the group has gathered to talk about the importance of the bill and change in curriculum.

“We want to keep it fresh in people’s minds,” Gardner said. “With everything going on in the climate, with George Floyd, this is the perfect time now because people are starting to wake up.”

Evanston Mayor Steve Hagerty said he isn’t comfortable speaking about education, curriculum, and whether history lessons should be suspended, but he does support HB 4954, according to a statement.

“I am interested in learning more and believe the history of Black people should be taught to all children and include all groups, women, LatinX, and Native Indians who helped to build America.”

Reported by: CNN, August 3, 2020.

Livingston, Tennessee

A pastor threatened to sue a public high school in Tennessee after his daughter was sent home for wearing an anti-gay t-shirt.

Rich Penkoski, leader of extremist anti-LGBTQ hate group Warriors for Christ, told the *Christian Post* that his daughter’s First Amendment rights were violated after she was told to leave Livingston Academy in Livingston, Tennessee.

His daughter Brielle wore a t-shirt with “homosexuality is a sin” written on the front, as well as “1 Corinthians 6:9-10,” which is a Biblical passage interpreted by many Christians

as outlawing homosexuality; the exact translation is still subject to debate.

“My 15-year-old was thrown out of school for the day for wearing this shirt,” Penkoski tweeted in August. “#lgbt wants to trample on your #freespeech rights while they cry for special rights.”

Speaking to the *Christian Post*, Penkoski said that Brielle was sent to the school’s principal, Richard Melton, who asked her to remove the shirt because of its “sexual connotation.” When she refused, she was sent home, he said.

Penkoski complained that one of the school’s teachers had an LGBTQ Pride sticker in their classroom featuring the words, “Diverse, Inclusive, Accepting, Welcoming Safe Space for Everyone.” He seemed perplexed as to why Melton would allow the sticker, but not his daughter’s t-shirt, and said that Brielle wanted to “express her values.”

“She wanted to do this on her own. She wanted to go there to . . . express her values like all the other kids do,” he said. “They’ve got kids walking around with the pride symbol on their sneakers and pride clothing and nobody bats an eye.” Penkoski continued, “She was basically censored. It’s not fair . . . that she’s told that she can’t wear that shirt and other people can wear the stuff that they wear.”

He also complained that his daughter was punished for being a Christian and repeating “what the Bible says,” even though her shirt was not a direct quotation. “Simply saying ‘homosexuality is a sin’ is not hate speech,” he said. “That’s what the Bible says. And we need to start preaching truthfully.” He is now reportedly “contemplating legal action,” according to the *Christian Post*.

Penkoski has a history of anti-LGBTQ statements, and has publicly

opposed Drag Queen Story Hours, where drag queens read books to children. In 2019, his YouTube page for Warriors for Christ was demonetized after repeatedly posting anti-LGBTQ content, including opposition to gay and transgender people.

He has tweeted accusations that LGBTQ people “prey” on children, including accusing gay people of “always targeting children” and saying they want to “take children from Christian homes to indoctrinate” and branding them pedophiles.

Reported in: Metro Weekly, September 14, 2020.

INTERNATIONAL Paris, France

With his in-depth critique of Western capitalism, detailed in a 700-page book that enjoyed record sales in 2014, France’s rock-star economist Thomas Piketty was well regarded by Chinese leaders, until he turned his attention to China.

Piketty said on August 31, 2020, that his follow-up book, *Capital and Ideology*, which broadens his study of the rise of economic inequality to non-Western countries such as China and India, is unlikely to be published in mainland China because he refused requests from Chinese publishers to cut parts of it.

“For the time being, there will be no book in China,” said Piketty, one of the most high-profile academics to stand up to China, calling the requests “ridiculous” and equating them with censorship. “They shouldn’t be afraid of a book like that, it’s a sign of weakness,” Piketty said in a phone interview.

Publishing foreign books in China has long been a contentious process, with Chinese publishers often cutting or changing sexual or political content to gain government approval. In recent years, the environment has



grown even more challenging, with the Chinese Communist Party's publicity department unveiling new rules favoring domestic authors and titles that promote the country's political and economic model.

Fearful of being barred from China's vast market, some Western authors and academic publishers have bowed to Chinese censorship. Piketty, who attained worldwide celebrity in 2014 with his book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, appears unfazed. "Asking me to cut all this and publishing the rest would make no sense." He added that "to agree to this would amount to be compromised [*sic*] with the regime and to accept to be instrumentalized in their propaganda enterprise."

Mr. Piketty's new book, *Capital and Ideology*, which was published in France in 2019 and in the United States in March 2019, is an attempt to describe what he calls "inequality regimes" across the ages and around the world. Unlike *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, which was published in 2013 and focused on Europe and the United States, the new book widens the scope and gives an important place to China and its capitalism-infused version of socialism.

"There is a constructive criticism in this book, and, frankly, it does not blame the Chinese model more than other models in the United States, Europe, India, Brazil," Piketty said.

But starting in June, Piketty said, Citic Press sent his French publisher, Les Editions du Seuil, two 10-page lists of requested cuts from the French and English editions of his book. Other Chinese publishers interested in the book sent similar requests, Piketty said. Citic Press and Les Editions du Seuil did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The requested cuts include parts that point out the "extremely rapid

rise of inequality" in China, to levels comparable to those seen in the United States. Others highlight issues like China's lack of an inheritance tax, which Piketty says results in a significant concentration of wealth.

"It is truly paradoxical that a country led by a Communist Party, which proclaims its adherence to 'socialism with Chinese characteristics,' could make such a choice," Piketty wrote in a paragraph that he said Citic Press asked to be cut. The Chinese government has long sought to defend its economic model as best suited to a country of 1.4 billion inhabitants. Writing its own playbook, China has gradually asserted itself as an economic superpower capable of challenging the United States.

Chinese leaders cited Piketty's 2013 book on rising inequality in the United States and Europe as proof of the superiority of their economic model. Several million copies of Piketty's book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* have been sold worldwide, including tens of thousands in China. Among the requested cuts were sections critical of the Chinese government, which Mr. Piketty wrote, "has yet to demonstrate its superiority over Western electoral democracy."

The appearance of Piketty's book comes as China has been confronted with an unprecedented economic slowdown. A trade war with the United States and the effects of the coronavirus crisis have brought China's nearly half-century-long run of growth to an end.

Piketty said that censoring his book "seems to illustrate the growing nervousness of the Chinese regime and their refusal of an open debate on the different economic and political systems." The book, he said, will be published in Taiwan and, he hopes, Hong Kong, which has come under

increasing pressure from the Chinese government in recent months with the introduction of a wide-ranging national security law following large government protests.

"If they're afraid of a book like this, what are they going to do with the demonstrators in Hong Kong or one day in Beijing or Shanghai, as it will eventually happen?" Piketty asked.

Reported in: *The New York Times*, August 31, 2020.

Dhaka, Bangladesh

The Bangladesh government has banned a novel about the sexual abuse of an orphan boy in a residential Islamic school because it could offend religious teachers and may be a threat to public security, officials said.

Saiful Baten Tito, author of the novel *Bishfora*, told *BenarNews* that his work, which details abuse at such schools, was based on interviews of students and teachers at qawmi madrasas. Qawmi madrasas are unregulated, traditional Islamic schools that provide religious education for free. The novel is not against Islam or qawmi madrasa education, Tito added.

The government did not give him a chance to present his case, he said, and on August 24, it published a government notice banning the book, which was launched at the annual Ekushey Book Fair in Dhaka in February 2020.

"The content of the novel *Bishfora* is against peace and quiet in the country. The book is prohibited as [it] has been considered to be a threat to public security," said the notice.

Abu Bakr Siddique, an assistant secretary at the ministry of home affairs, told *BenarNews* the government was informed about the book by security agencies. "Intelligence officials alerted us that the book could hurt the sentiment of madrasa



teachers,” Siddique said. “We have gone through the book, and it seemed to us the alert has some justification.”

The ban comes even as the number of cases of sexual abuse of boys at madrasas is rising, said Mahmuda Akhther, a prosecutor at the Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal in Dhaka. She did not immediately provide numbers to support her claim. “The number of cases relating to abuse of boys has been on the rise, and a significant number of such incidents has been taking place at the qawmi madrasas. Most of the victims are either boys from poor families, or orphans,” Akhther told *BenarNews*. “Child abuse is a criminal offense. In the past, the guardian kept mum on child abuse. Now, they have been filing cases.”

About 1.5 million students study at qawmi madrasas, Nurul Islam Nahid, former education minister, told parliament in September 2018. Sexual assault cases are widespread at such schools, according to an August 2019 report by the French news agency AFP. “For years these crimes eluded the spotlight due to sensitivity of the subject,” AFP quoted Abdus Shahid, the head of child rights group Bangladesh Shishu Odhikar Forum, as saying. “Devout Muslims send children to madrasas, but they don’t speak up about these crimes as they feel it would harm these key religious institutions.”

Manusher Jonno Foundation, a Dhaka-based NGO working with poor and marginalized communities, documented at least 433 cases of sexual violence against children in 2018, reported AsiaNews in 2019. Most of the victims were aged 7 to 12, it said. The data was not linked to religious schools. The government, for its part, said it dealt alike with all complaints about the abuse of children.

“The law is for everyone. If the police get formal complaints about abuse of children, they arrest people, no matter whether the abusers are from madrasa or [nonreligious] schools,” Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal told *BenarNews*. Mosharraf Matubbar, the publisher of the novel, said he would contest the ban.

“The book highlights the injustice done to madrasa students,” Matubbar told *BenarNews*. “We will appeal to the courts to vacate the government ban on the book.” Author Tito likewise said the book contained “nothing malicious” and didn’t warrant prohibition. “The novel is about fanaticism, backwardness and inconsistencies inside the madrasa education,” he said. “This book is neither against Islam nor qawmi madrasa education.”

Matubbar, the publisher, said that when the book was launched at the Dhaka book fair, police checked its contents and had no objections. “They did not oppose selling the book after concluding that it contained nothing sensitive,” said the publisher. “But some people launched a smear campaign against the book.”

Civil society group Ekattorer Ghatk Dalal Nirmul Committee has alleged that the ban was a move to appease religious fundamentalists. The group issued a statement demanding the ban be immediately lifted.

“The book has been prohibited to appease the fundamentalist forces,” the group said. “In the past, writings of many famous authors were dropped from textbooks. . . . Thus, the fundamentalist forces have been indulged.”

Over the last 30 years, Bangladesh has banned at least five books saying they defamed Islam. Police have also arrested publishers and shut book stalls for publishing and selling books they claim criticized Islam. In 1988, Bangladesh banned the sale and

circulation of British author Salman Rushdie’s novel *The Satanic Verses*.

Novelist Humayun Azad’s collection of feminist essays “Nari” (“Women”) and a novel on Islamist militancy, named after Pakistan’s national anthem “Pak Sar Zamin Saad Baad,” were prohibited by the Bangladesh government in 1992.

In 1993, feminist author Taslima Nasrin’s book *Lajja (Shame)* was banned for allegedly defaming Islam. The book is about a riot in Bangladesh following the demolition of a 16th-century mosque, the Babri Masjid, in northern India. Nasrin had her literary work proscribed a second time, when the government banned her autobiographical novel *Amar Meyebela (My Girlhood)* in 1999, again on the grounds that it defamed Islam. The author has been in exile for more than 20 years.

In 2016, police shut the stall of a publishing house called Badwip and arrested its publisher Shamsuzzoha Manik and two others. A case was filed against them under the Information and Communication Technology Act for publishing a book that police said defamed Islam.

In February 2020, Bangladesh’s high court also ordered organizers of the Dhaka book fair to remove two books whose content it said was “harmful to the religious sentiment.”

Reported in: *BenarNews*, September 1, 2020.

Hong Kong, China

Beijing’s assault on Hong Kong is unfolding rapidly. July 2020 began with the imposition of draconian national security legislation enacted sight unseen, even by Hong Kong’s leader, Chief Executive Carrie Lam. It ended with the sacking of a tenured professor, the arrests of four students for social media posts, the electoral disqualification of 12 pro-democracy



politicians, the delay of legislative elections for a year, and the issuance of arrest warrants for pro-democracy activists overseas under the new legislation.

In normal times, each of these acts would spark outrage and protests, but this onslaught has been too fast and too overwhelming to fully report, let alone counter, especially during a pandemic when gatherings of more than two people have been banned. Put simply, within a single month, Beijing has dismantled a partially free society and is trying to use its new law to enforce global censorship on speech regarding Hong Kong.

In delaying Hong Kong's legislative elections, scheduled for September, the authorities are showing their disregard for external voices. The US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, had warned that any delay would prove that China's Communist party was turning Hong Kong into just another communist-run city. In Hong Kong, a democratic coalition cautioned that any postponement would mean the "complete collapse of our constitutional system." Parsing its actions, Beijing's intentions seem to be exactly that.

In the past year, millions of people have marched to protect those things that distinguish Hong Kong from China: the constitutional system that prizes an independent judiciary and the rule of law, competitive elections, and the freedoms of speech, thought, and assembly. The sacking of Benny Tai, a Hong Kong University law professor, for criminal convictions relating to the Occupy Central movement marks the end of academic freedom. The manner of his sacking, against the wishes of the university senate, highlights just how little autonomy academic institutions enjoy.

The late-night detentions in unmarked cars of four people,

including a 16-year-old, on suspicion of inciting secession in social media posts were the first moves by the police's new national security department. Although the four have been released on bail, the criminalization of certain political posts and slogans heralds the advent of thought crime to Hong Kong.

Every day, the rules of political life are being drastically rewritten and the contours that are emerging are of a system that brooks no dissent. On July 30, 12 pro-democracy politicians were disqualified from running for election, including four incumbent legislators generally seen as moderates. The reasons given show how far the authorities are willing to go to tame the legislature into compliance.

Activist Joshua Wong, who won the most votes in unofficial democratic primaries, says he was barred for using the #internationalbattlefront hashtag in Facebook posts. Some were excluded for actions taken before the national security legislation was even enacted. Others had applications invalidated for criticizing the legislation or, in the case of the lawmaker Dennis Kwok, for vowing to vote down the government's budget or other proposals. The new legislation even classifies "seriously interfering in, disrupting or undermining" the government's business as subversion, which means filibustering could theoretically earn an elected politician life in prison. The very act of practicing politics as normal could be a national security threat.

On July 31, Lam used colonial-era emergency regulations to delay the September elections for a year because of a recent COVID-19 rise. The suspicion is that she is trying to buy time to avoid a stinging defeat of pro-government forces, following the landslide opposition victory in November,

when pro-democratic forces won 17 out of 18 district councils.

The new normal is abnormal in the extreme, a city where library books have been pulled from the shelves and a protest song banned in schools. Beijing has lost patience both with Hongkongers and with the Hong Kong government's own inability to restore order after months of sometimes violent street demonstrations. Before the national security law was introduced, Lam promised it would target only "an extremely small minority of illegal and criminal acts," leaving the basic rights and freedoms of the overwhelming majority protected. The hollowness of these words reveals the ineffectiveness and insignificance of her administration.

On August 1, it emerged that Beijing is pursuing national security cases beyond China's borders. Six pro-democracy activists overseas, including US citizen Samuel Chu, are facing warrants for their arrest for allegedly inciting secession and collusion with foreign forces. The act of lobbying overseas has effectively been criminalized. With this application of the law, Beijing is making it clear there are no red lines when it comes to speech about Hong Kong.

The exiled politician Nathan Law, now in the UK, has announced that he will cut off ties with his family in Hong Kong to protect them. The extraterritorial aspect of Beijing's strategy echoes its actions targeting Uighurs in exile, and elements of the national security solution imposed on Xinjiang could foreshadow the government's next steps. The law mandates the introduction of national security education in Hong Kong's schools, as well as moves to strengthen the supervision and regulation of foreign media and the internet in Hong Kong.



One academic, Victoria Tin-bor Hui, has commented that writing about Hong Kong today is like writing obituaries one after the other. But Beijing might be overplaying its hand; the ferocity of its assault on Hong Kong's freedoms can only reenergize civil society at home and may just prompt reluctant governments overseas into action in the interests of defending global freedoms.

Reported in: *The Guardian*, August 2, 2020.

Taipei, Taiwan

On September 9, 2020, several civic groups gathered outside the Ministry of Education (MOE) in competing protests on the issue of a gay-themed children's book that the government provided to schools as part of an extracurricular reading program.

The book, *King & King* by Dutch authors Stern Nijland and Linda De Haan, tells the story of a young prince who faces pressure from his mother to marry a princess but eventually falls in love with a prince and weds him.

Under a government program to encourage extracurricular reading, the book was distributed to first-grade students in elementary schools, drawing praise and criticism from civic groups, parents, and teachers on both sides of an ongoing debate on LGBTQ education in Taiwan schools.

At the demonstrations in Taipei, LGBTQ advocacy groups noted that one of the arguments against *King & King* was that it was not appropriate reading for first-grade students. That argument, however, is "fake packaging for real homophobia," said the LGBTQ advocacy groups, which included Equal Love Taiwan. The book's translator, Lin Wei-yun, who was at the demonstrations, said it had helped to open conversations with her children about the discrimination

against LGBTQ people and how to create a more equal society in Taiwan.

Another supporter of the book's inclusion on the reading list, a New Taipei City elementary school teacher surnamed Chi, said the presentation of a nontraditional family in the story was in line with Taiwan's national curriculum guidelines, which emphasize the importance of teaching real-life experiences. As an elementary school teacher, Chi said, she knew students at that level who identified as gay. "To withdraw the book now would amount to negating the existence of those children," she said.

Meanwhile, on the opposite side of the issue, groups such as the Coalition for the Happiness of Our Next Generation and the National Alliance of Presidents of Parents Associations also rallied outside the MOE, calling on the government to withdraw the book. Tseng Hsien-ying, president of the Coalition for the Happiness of Our Next Generation, said *King & King* projects a false narrative that heterosexual marriages are coercive and unhappy.

He said the story was an attempt to "brainwash" children into abandoning their dreams of a traditional marriage and family. "What children need is a family-based education, not one centered on sexual identity," Tseng said. "Taiwan is indoctrinating children into this sexual diversity ideology, and parents have had enough."

The opposing groups called for the book to be withdrawn from the reading program, under which the MOE distributes 400,000 books per year to first-year students at elementary and junior high schools to foster a love of reading. According to the dissenting groups, the ministry should make its selection process more transparent, and the books should be approved by the parents' associations.

Commenting on the issue, a Ministry of Education official said the book selection committee is broadly representative of Taiwan society, as it comprises a scholar, a school principal, two elementary or junior high school teachers, a children's book author, and a critic or representative of a civic organization. In consideration of the public's concerns, however, the MOE will decide whether it is appropriate to include a representative of a parents' association on the committee.

Education Minister Pan Wen-chung said *King & King* would help to teach children about respecting each other's differences and resolving conflicts in relationships.

In May 2019, Taiwan became the first country in Asia to legalize same-sex marriage.

In a 2018 referendum, a majority of voters upheld the Civil Code's definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman and rejected a proposal to teach LGBTQ topics in Taiwan schools, though they voted in favor of protecting the rights of same-sex couples in ways other than those stated in the Civil Code.

Reported in: *Focus Taiwan*, September 9, 2020.

New Delhi, India

Bloomsbury India has pulled a book that claimed to tell the untold story of February 2020's Delhi riots after the publisher was accused of giving a platform to unsubstantiated allegations and strengthening an anti-Muslim agenda.

The book, titled *Delhi Riots 2020: The Untold Story*, claims that the riots were the result of a conspiracy by Muslim jihadists and so-called "urban naxals," a derogatory term used to describe left-wing activists, who had a role to play in the riots. The claim contravenes reports by organizations such as Amnesty International and



the Delhi Minorities Commission that Muslims bore the brunt of the violence.

The decision to withdraw the book has prompted many in India to accuse Bloomsbury India of censorship, and the book's author, Monika Arora, denounced the publisher for allegedly falling prey to "leftist fascists." *Delhi Riots 2020* will now be published by the Indian publishing house Garuda Prakashan.

The book began to draw controversy after it emerged that Kapil Mishra, a leader from the ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata party (BJP), would be the guest of honor at an online launch event. The BJP's national general secretary, Bhupendra Yadav, was to be the host. Mishra is accused of instigating the riots that ripped violently through northeast Delhi in February and left more than 50 people dead, after he made a fiery public speech calling on his followers to clear away Muslim protestors.

What followed was three days of the worst religious violence in the capital in decades, where Hindu mobs roamed the streets attacking Muslims and burning their homes. Muslims retaliated, but three quarters of those who were killed were Muslims, and thousands of Muslims lost their homes in their violence. The decision to have Mishra as a guest of honor at the launch provoked an outcry in India. Bloomsbury quickly issued a statement denying any involvement in the event, but a backlash began to grow against the book. Among those who voiced concerns was the prominent British writer and historian William Dalrymple, who is published by Bloomsbury.

"I alerted Bloomsbury to the growing online controversy over *Delhi Riots 2020*, as did several other Bloomsbury authors," Dalrymple

said. "I did not call for its banning or pulping and have never supported the banning of any book. It is now being published by another press."

Writing on Twitter, the poet Meena Kandasamy said "the literary world must take a stand" to stop Bloomsbury publishing the book. "This is not about cancel culture," she said. "This is about defending literature from fascism. This is about standing up against religious divide, hate speech, islamophobia and false history." Sudhanva Deshpande, a celebrated theatre director and author, was among those who condemned Bloomsbury and accused them of failing to carry out "elementary fact checking."

"Make no mistake about it, this book has nothing to do with the pursuit of knowledge . . . this book is part of a multi-pronged attack on India's secular fabric, on the idea of natural justice, on ethics, on rationality, on humanity," said Deshpande, adding, "The book has blood on its hands."

Bloomsbury India released a statement confirming that it was withdrawing publication of the book. "Bloomsbury India strongly supports freedom of speech but also has a deep sense of responsibility towards society," said the publisher. However, Bloomsbury's announcement was met with derision and accusations of censorship from some quarters.

Arora, the book's main author, claimed that Bloomsbury India had previously had no issues with the book, that it had been cleared by their legal team, and that the publisher had been well aware of the launch event with Mishra, despite its public denials. She accused Bloomsbury of bowing down to "digital fatwas by international leftist lobbies."

The writer and economist Sanjeev Sanyal said he would never publish with Bloomsbury again. Sanyal

described the withdrawal of the book as an act of "ideological censorship," which demonstrated "how a tiny cabal controls Indian publishing and constantly imposes ideological censorship. We have just witnessed one example of how this insidious control is wielded."

Another Bloomsbury India author, Anand Ranganathan, said, "This decision by Bloomsbury should be condemned by ALL writers and readers. If Bloomsbury does not retract its decision, my co-author and I have decided that we will return the substantial advance paid to us by Bloomsbury for our forthcoming book."

The Indian publisher Garuda Prakashan announced it would step in and publish *Delhi Riots 2020*. The controversy around the book has proved lucrative. Garuda Prakashan confirmed it had received more than 15,000 orders for the book in less than 24 hours.

Reported in: *The Guardian*, August 24, 2020.

Meath County, Ireland

Meath Councillor Alan Lawes is calling on Norma Foley, Ireland's Minister for Education, to review the place of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Of Mice and Men* within the Irish school system, citing their racist language and themes.

Lawes said that some students have become targets of racial abuse after children's classes have read the famous books.

"You have certain racial slurs that are repeated in these books and their classmates all of a sudden started to use these racial slurs to call them names," Lawes told the *Irish Examiner*. Lawes has filed a motion with the Meath County Council calling for the books to be removed.

"Meath Co Council calls on the Department of Education to remove



all literature from the school curriculum that casually and repeatedly uses offensive racial language, such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Of Mice and Men* which have no place in today's curriculum," the motion says. Other councilors argue that the material should be reviewed rather than removed. Irish author and columnist Eamon Delaney, however, believes that removing the books completely misses the point.

"The motion seems to miss the point of these books which are a powerful indictment of racism. The offensive language depicted in them is used to illustrate racism and damn it—the very opposite of the impression formed here," he wrote in a column in the *Irish Independent*.

Both *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee and *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck are prescribed texts in the Junior Cert Cycle in Ireland and both are among the most commonly studied books at Junior Cert level.

To Kill a Mockingbird, in particular, is favored by teachers all over Ireland.

Both books, however, have frequently appeared on the American Library Association's list of most challenged books due to their use of racist language and their use of themes considered inappropriate for young people.

Reported by: IrishCentral, July 27, 2020.

Queensland, Australia

Two drag performers have taken an Australian Conservatives political activist to the Queensland Human Rights Commission (QHRC) under the Anti-Discrimination Act over a blog he wrote about why "drag queens are not for kids."

Lyle Shelton, former head of the Australian Christian Lobby, appeared before the QHRC on August 13, 2020, for the compulsory conciliation

proceedings. According to the QHRC, "conciliation is a private and informal opportunity for all parties to discuss what occurred, listen to each other's views and come to an agreement about how the complaint can be resolved." The proceedings look for a way to resolve the issue through conciliation in the hopes of avoiding time and money spent pursuing the case before a tribunal.

The ways one could resolve a complaint, the QHRC said, are to apologize, change the organization's policies, organize training in the workplace, or pay compensation for the hurt feelings. In this case, the hearing did not lead to a conciliation.

"The complaint did not resolve and I now have an anxious wait to see if I am to be taken to the Queensland Civil And Administrative Tribunal (QCAT) for the matter to be heard before a judge," Shelton posted on his website. Shelton calls himself a "long-time campaigner against gender queer ideology" and "leader of the campaign to preserve the definition of marriage during the 2017 same-sex marriage plebiscite."

The complainants, Queeny and Diamond Good-rim, now have 28 days to decide if they want to take their case of discrimination before the QCAT for a public hearing. In an email to his supporters, Shelton, who has tried to frame the issue as one dealing with "free speech," claimed that the legal proceedings before the QCAT could cost him between \$60,000 and \$100,000.

The blog that is at the center of the complaint was written by Shelton, following the death of Wilson Gavin, the president of the University of Queensland branch of the Liberal National Club, in January 2020. Gavin had died by suicide a day after he disrupted and protested a Drag

Queen Story Time event at the Brisbane Library.

Meanwhile, the Brisbane City Council has said that it will continue to offer its space for Drag Queen Story Time events. Its statement came in response to petitions that sought to end such events in the council's libraries and a rival petition to keep them.

"Drag Queen Storytime is one of hundreds of different events held in Council libraries each year that foster a diverse and inclusive city. Council remains committed to its values of inclusion, tolerance and diversity and will continue to offer Drag Queen Storytime in libraries as part of the range of events offered in response to community needs," the City Council said.

The Council said that the Drag Queen Story Time events were held in collaboration with Rainbow Families Queensland.

"Council's libraries are welcoming, inclusive community hubs that have a range of events that reflect and support Brisbane's diverse communities. Every family is different, and Council acknowledges this fact and celebrates our different cultures, race, sexuality, genders, and religions," added the Council.

Reported by: Star Observer, August 15, 2020

Cork, Ireland

A book about transgender teenagers has been removed from bookshelves in libraries in Cork, Ireland, following a far-right campaign that likened LGBTQ identities to pedophilia.

Beyond Magenta: Transgender Teens Speak Out by Susan Kuklin consists of six interviews with transgender teenagers about their lives and was published in 2014. Since then, the book has been assailed by anti-transgender activists who have called for it to be banned.



Cork City Libraries opted to remove *Beyond Magenta* from its shelves and have it re-processed for “adult/YA lending”—which requires adult consent—after they received a letter from a far-right activist. A woman named Kelly, who has kept her surname private, shared a copy of the letter she wrote to the library on AltFeed.org. In the letter, Kelly said she had “some concerns” about the book being available in the “child/teen section” of the library. “You may be aware that the book has sparked international outrage because of some very disturbing passages,” Kelly wrote.

She went on to lament that the book included one teenager’s sexual experiences and added, “Alarmingly there is no immediate clarification for young readers that this is illegal and damaging behavior.” In the letter, Kelly claimed that *Beyond Magenta* “normalizes abuse and even pedophilia.”

“I’m certain many parents would be quite upset if they knew the library is letting children borrow and read this book thinking it must be reviewed by the taxpayer funded library board and suitable for their children.” Kelly also labeled Drag Queen Story Time events in Ireland “inappropriate,” and suggested that LGBTQ people should be vetted by law enforcement authorities before being allowed to read to children.

“I personally know many people of the LGBT+ community and I have no issues with their life choices,” Kelly added. “My only concern is for the innocence of children and what they are being exposed to in the pursuit of acceptance and equality.” She went on to push harmful myths linking the LGBTQ community to child abuse,

saying that she believes people want to see pedophilia accepted as a sexual orientation. Kelly closed her letter: “I realize raising these issues are often perceived as homophobic which I reject completely.”

The library responded to Kelly and told her that “all executive librarians in Cork City Libraries were asked to take the book off the shelf” in response to her complaint. “I reviewed a copy of the book this morning and while I welcome publications that provide support for young transgender people, or indeed any marginalized group within society, I appreciate your concerns regarding the references to pedophilia and abuse in one particular section of the book,” the unnamed library official replied, according to a screenshot shared on Twitter by Kelly.

“Taking this into account and having had a discussion with members of the senior management team in Cork City Libraries this morning, *Beyond Magenta* will remain off the shelves in the Cork City Library network.” They closed their letter by thanking Kelly for bringing the matter to their attention. In a statement, Cork City Libraries told *PinkNews* that concerns were expressed that the book was available “without any guidance or warning to parents.”

“Taking this concern into account the book remains off the shelves in the children’s section of Cork City Libraries,” a spokesperson said. “It is being re-processed on our database for adult/YA lending, which requires adult consent on joining.”

The library service explained that parents or guardians must sign a membership form allowing teenagers to borrow from the young adult section. They added, “Cork City

Libraries support all marginalized groups throughout the city, including the LGBT+ community through programming, training and so on.” The decision to remove the book has sparked outrage among LGBTQ people and allies in Ireland, with many pointing out that the move will further strip transgender youth of vital resources.

LGBT Ireland, an Irish advocacy organization, criticized the decision to remove the book from Cork City Libraries. In a statement released to *PinkNews*, they said that “Censoring this book, containing stories that confront sexual abuse, will only act as a barrier to a deeper understanding of issues experienced by some in the transgender community.”

“The people of Ireland have experienced and witnessed the negative outcomes that can occur when difficult stories and truths are kept from the public. We must ensure these issues are kept in the open, where they can be discussed and awareness raised.”

The owner of independent bookstore Gutter Bookshop also lashed out at the decision on social media, saying *Beyond Magenta* does not promote pedophilia or underage sex. “Trans teens deserve books that show them they’re not alone. It should not be withdrawn.”

Beyond Magenta has been targeted by anti-LGBTQ activists across the world and was among the most banned and challenged books in libraries and schools in 2019 and 2015, according to the American Library Association.

Reported by: *PinkNews*, August 10, 2020.