



LIBRARIES

Lincoln Parish, Louisiana

On December 9, 2020, following a lively debate, the board of the Lincoln Parish Public Library voted to return all previously removed lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) children's and young adult (YA) books to the shelves.

In the preceding weeks, the library board had received challenges from fifteen to twenty people regarding two LGBTQIA+ children's titles. The challenge was part of an organized effort, as most of the complaints were copied word-for-word.

The library had a board-approved selection policy in place affirming that "the existence of a particular viewpoint in the collection is an expression of the Library's policy of intellectual freedom, not an endorsement of that particular point of view. No material will be excluded because of the race, nationality, religion, gender, sexual orientation, political or social views of the author."

Despite this, a minority of the board met with the group opposing the two titles and opted to relocate the books to a "reserved" section so they would only be available on request.

After this initial success, the group requested that the library remove additional LGBTQIA+ titles from the children's and YA sections. The same minority of the board asked the library staff to remove the entire list. These are the books that were challenged:

- *My Two Dads* by Claudia Harrington
- *My Two Moms* by Claudia Harrington
- *Real Sisters Pretend* by Megan David Lambert
- *The Great Big Book of Families* by Mary Hoffman
- *A Tale of Two Daddies* by Vanita Oelschlager
- *Jazz Jennings: Voice for LGBTQ Youth* by Ellen Rodger
- *Snapdragon* by Kat Leyh
- *The Wings of Fire* series by Tui T. Sutherland
- *George* by Alex Gino
- *Rick* by Alex Gino
- *Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy* by Rey Terciero
- *Mommy, Mama, and Me* by Lesléa Newman and Carol Thompson

When it became known that the library board had restricted access to LGBTQIA+ books, community members were outraged. They inundated Library Director Vivian McCain with emails and letters indicating they would not support a library that endorses censorship.

McCain herself was outraged, as the board members didn't have the authority to ask that policy be changed without a full board vote. According to the *News Star*, "Removing the books goes against everything she stands for, and she's willing to put them back on the shelves even if it cost her job."

Everything came to a head at their December 9 board meeting. One attendee said, "We all have to learn about each other and accept each other. And all this community talks about being a Christian community, that's a joke. That is a living joke. Christian communities should love people and accept people."

Another community member stated, "As a gay man, as somebody who grew up with depression and anger having to deal with this, having LGBTQ books on the shelf will bring positivity to the children who are struggling."

McCain said, "We believe at the Lincoln Parish Library it is the parent's job to decide what a child reads, reviews, or looks at."

A parent in attendance agreed, "As a parent it is my job and my

responsibility to care for my children, to know what they are reading."

After the discussion, all board members came to agreement that the library would adhere to its policy and refrain from censoring any book due to race, gender, sexuality, religion, nationality, or political views. They also affirmed that every book inside the library was selected to be inclusive of all members of the diverse Lincoln Parish community.

Reported in: *News Star*, December 4, 2020; myarklamiss.com, December 9, 2020.

SCHOOLS

Colton, California

In February 2020, the Colton Joint Unified Board of Education removed Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* from its core and extended reading list. According to a staff report, Morrison's novel was taught in eleventh- and twelfth-grade Advanced Placement (AP) English Literature classes because "it is an important contemporary novel with timeless universal themes and rich literary and artistic merit." (See [Journal of Intellectual Freedom & Privacy 5, no. 1/2, p. 46](#), for initial report.)

The book was challenged because of its depiction of incestuous sexual violence perpetrated against the character Pecola Breedlove. The title refers to Pecola's belief that she would be free from abuse and racism if she had blue eyes.

Morrison won the 1993 Nobel Prize for Literature, and *The Bluest Eye* was part of the reason she received this accolade. Morrison also won a Pulitzer in 1988 for her novel *Beloved*.

Four of the seven board members, including President Patt Haro, voted to remove the book; two opposed the motion, including Vice President Dan Flores; one abstained.



Flores said, “There are dozens of books on the list that deal with controversial issues, yet the only one being removed is by Toni Morrison, one of the most prominent Black female authors of recent time. Her literature speaks to the African American experience in America and I could not personally support removing one of her books from our reading list.”

This is in keeping both with current censorship trends focused on books dealing with race and racism and with past efforts to ban Morrison’s works.

PEN America’s Research Director James Tager said, “We’ve seen other examples around the country where Morrison’s books have been singled out for banning in ways that raised the obvious inference that it was selected,

in part, because it grapples with the uncomfortable realities of race and racism in America.”

On August 20, 2020, a regular meeting of the school board was consumed by debate over the book. One student at the meeting stated that books by and about people of color offer Black students representation, yet only thirteen out of three hundred books on Colton’s approved list for English classes are written by Black authors.

A representative of Colton’s African American Parent Advisory Committee argued, “We continue to tell our Black community that they matter, but our actions show otherwise. How can we support a marginalized community and build trusting relationships with them when

actions represented from the school board go against the words of support echoed for the African American community?”

Board members listened to nearly an hour of public comments before voting to reinstate the novel. Five members supported its return to the reading list, including two who had previously voted for its removal and the member who had previously abstained. Two board members remained opposed to the novel’s being taught in the school district.

Flores said, “Unless we’re lifting everybody up and providing an opportunity and voice and space [and] representation for everyone, then we’re not really doing a great service to our students.”

INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM ROUND TABLE

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Library Bill of Rights



While news media did not report on the book's return to the curriculum initially, PEN America discovered the book had been reinstated in response to a letter they sent to the school district on September 27, 2020. PEN's letter read in part that, "There is no educational or constitutional justification for allowing members of the community to dictate reading lists for students who are not their own children."

Upon learning that the book was returned to the core and extended reading list and could once again be taught, Tager said, "We're very pleased that the school board reversed their decision. It shows that it's never too late to reverse a book ban. . . . It's a demonstration that these concerns are taken seriously and that there is utility to raising your voice. I hope it sends a message to convince parents, teachers, librarians across the country that there's a point and a purpose to expressing opposition to book bans anywhere they happen."

Reported in: *San Bernardino Sun*, February 11, 2020; *Los*

***Angeles Times*, October 1, 2020; *Daily Bulletin*, October 6, 2020.**

Vail, Arizona

A parent of a Cienega High School student challenged the teaching of Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* as part of the Advanced Placement English curriculum, complaining about the book's language and references to sex.

Vonnegut's novel has frequently been banned from literature classes, removed from school libraries, and struck from literary curricula, and was burned at a school in North Dakota. It is forty-sixth on the American Library Association's list of the "Top 100 Banned/Challenged Books: 2000–2009" and sixty-seventh on their list of the "100 Most Frequently Challenged Books: 1990–1999."

In an earlier case regarding *Slaughterhouse-Five*'s removal from public school libraries, the Supreme Court found that "local school boards may not remove books from school library shelves simply because they dislike the ideas contained in those books and

seek by their removal to 'prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion'" (*Island Trees School District v. Pico*, 457 U.S. 853).

Vonnegut himself staunchly opposed censorship throughout his life.

When the National Coalition Against Censorship learned of this new challenge in Vail, they sent a letter offering guidance and support as well as their "Guidelines for Administrators" to the school district's board members.

The district followed its policy and convened a committee to review the book and make a recommendation to the superintendent and board. The committee determined that the book belonged on the approved student reading list and *Slaughterhouse-Five* was retained. The district offers alternate titles when parents are concerned about the content of an assigned book.

Reported in: *National Coalition Against Censorship*, December 18, 2020; *Intellectual Freedom Blog*, March 10, 2021.