

Book Banning Negatively Affects Us and Should Be Stopped

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Banning books is like putting a muzzle on authors trying to express ideas. People have been prohibiting books for a long time; however, this practice is not beneficial or right for readers or books. Prohibiting access to books discourages authors from creating original written works, removes easy access to information, and violates freedom of speech. Because banning books is an infringement on human rights, governments and communities should stop the practice.

The practice of banning books has been around for a long time, with varying levels of intensity during different time periods. In the United States, people can “challenge” a book’s presence in a school or public library. Challenges are attempts to have materials removed from or restrict access to these books in public and school libraries (In ProCon.org (Ed.), 2018). If their challenge succeeds, these books are removed from the shelves of libraries. There appears to be an increase in banning and challenging books in the United States in recent years, since “[s]chool and public libraries across the United States have banned books at a blistering pace in the last year amid heated political debates about whether young people should have access to certain narratives” (Wu, 2023, para. 1). Many times books are banned because they have ways of thought that people do not want to spread.

Libraries are places of learning, and removing books from them is removing learning opportunities from people. “[L]ibraries are about freedom. Freedom to read, freedom of ideas, freedom of communication. They are about education..., about entertainment, about making safe spaces, and about access to information” (Gaiman, 2013, para. 27). Removing access to

information and reducing freedom is diminishing the purpose of libraries. Libraries are often important centers in communities, and without them, communities would suffer.

Throughout the history of banning books, the ones who ban them are trying to restrict the freedoms of the people who could be influenced by them. For many, “in times of war, revolution, and social change, books transcend their state of physical objects to become powerful symbols in a war of ideas and ideologies” (Merveldt, 2007, para. 1). If a government is trying to make people submit to its will, it usually will try to take away information that could make people question it. “Book bannings and burnings have long been part of authoritarian regimes, whether aristocratic, fascist, or communist” (Banned Books, 2015, para. 7). Whenever this happens, people rise up and seek to oppose it. When the Nazis were burning books in Berlin, in Paris they created the German Freedom Library, and in the United States, they created the American Library of Nazi-Banned Books (Merveldt, 2007). When people try to control others, they find ways to work around it; “[t]he establishment of the American Library of Nazi-Banned Books at the Brooklyn Jewish Center, he [Rabbi Dr. Levinthal] claimed, re-enacted this universal struggle of civilization” (Merveldt, 2007, para. 18). People will always stand up against the controlling of access to information.

Banning books is an infringement on our first amendment rights. According to the Supreme Court ruling in the case of Board of Education, Island Trees Union Free School District v. Pico, “[t]he First Amendment imposes limitations upon a local school board's exercise of its discretion to remove books from high school and junior high school libraries” (Legal Information Institute, para. 1). There are restrictions on banning books even in schools, to protect people’s

freedoms. In the United States we value freedom of expression, and banning books removes people's ability to express their opinions without censorship.

Banning books also discourages authors from showing new and unique perspectives and sharing ideas for fear of censorship. "There are no bad authors for children, that children like and want to read and seek out, because every child is different" (Gaiman, 2013, para. 12). Without authors writing books, we would not have many of the beloved classics we do now. If authors decide not to write a book because they fear it might be banned and they cannot afford to publish the book, then people all across the world will lose the chance to read about others like them or gain an understanding of others' experiences.

Taking action against the banning of books is important to help us gain back our freedom of information. Illinois State Senator Laura Murphy has championed House Bill 2789 to stop the banning of books in Illinois libraries (States News Service, 2023). This bill proposes that libraries must either "adopt the American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights or develop a written statement prohibiting the practice of banning books or materials in order to be eligible for state grants" (States News Service, 2023, para. 4). Legislation that helps protect books from being banned or challenged is important to stop the practice of removing books from the shelves of libraries.

Present-day book banning will negatively affect future generations. Oftentimes, "[w]ell-meaning adults can easily destroy a child's love of reading: stop them reading what they enjoy, or give them worthy-but-dull books that you like, the 21st-century equivalents of Victorian

“improving” literature” (Gaiman, 2013, para. 13). Banning books that are about topics that young people have an interest in will lessen their interest in developing reading skills. It is important to not just ban books because they mention LGBT topics, religion, sorcery, or politics; all of these are topics that may interest younger generations who want to learn more. If they cannot find books that are interesting to them, young people will not want to read and will lose the empathy and understanding that comes with reading more.

There are some things that we can do to stop and or get around banning books. Teaching students about censorship and how it affects authors and our freedoms is very useful, to create better thinkers out of students, and “[t]hinkers, regardless of their views, make an important contribution to the American way of life. And, thinkers are less likely to become censors” (Scales, 2000, p. 3). Teaching about the effects of banning books, helps prevent more banning of books in the future, and therefore making it so that future generations after that are better thinkers too.

It is oftentimes ineffective to ban books. Even when books are banned, people can find many ways to access them. Though book banning might remove books from public schools, there are many homeschooled children in the United States, who most likely do not feel the effects of this ban, and may even own banned books of their own. To help people get access to banned books, the RSF (Reporters Without Borders) has created a virtual Minecraft library called the Uncensored Library, in which people can access books and articles that have been banned (News+, 2022). This library has banned books from 180 countries, and almost anyone with an internet connection can access it (News+, 2022). While banning books is making access

to those books slightly more difficult, there are many ways around the ban making it less effective at actually achieving its goal.

While many would argue that parents should be able to choose what content their children have access to (In ProCon.org (Ed.), 2018), this does not mean that other kids should be banned from having access as well. A book that one parent does not want their kid to see, another may think is completely acceptable material. Therefore banning books for the whole community is not the right plan, and at a more individual level, people should be able to decide for themselves whether or not they want to read a book.

The opposing side may say that children should not be exposed to violent or inappropriate content in public and school libraries (In ProCon.org (Ed.), 2018). However, banning some of these books would cause children to lose access to many books that are historically and culturally important, just because of a specific detail in them. Modifications could be made to the reading of these books in schools to exclude inappropriate or disturbing content. Children would still be able to have access to important information, without their minds being affected by negative images presented in these books.

The complete banning of books is not necessary to help protect us; people should be able to choose what media they consume. Banning books is a needless removal of information that could otherwise be accessible to help people learn. The First Amendment states that “Congress shall make no law... abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press” (Penguin Books, 1995, p. 36). With this in mind, the banning of books should not be happening in the

United States. It violates our rights to freedom of speech and freedom of information. In the future, hopefully, books will be banned less and less until the practice ceases altogether.

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