



Fox News pushes to ban LGBTQ books, lies that they “promote pedophilia”

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In just 13 days, Fox News aired six segments about local efforts in Fairfax County, Virginia, to take two LGBTQ young-adult books out of the public school system libraries and to remove a reading display featuring these books at a public library. During these segments, guests bolstered false claims that the books contained pedophilia.

Fox also brought on prominent critical race theory (CRT) opponents from the group Parents Defending Education — whose staff members have affiliations with conservative groups such as the Cato Institute and the Thomas B. Fordham Institute — to further defend the backlash against the books.

In September, a local parent, Stacy Langton, falsely claimed at a public school board meeting that two LGBTQ books — *Gender Queer: A Memoir* by Maia Kobabe and *Lawn Boy* by Jonathan Evison — available in the county’s public high school libraries contained pedophilia. In response, Fairfax County Public Schools removed the books from its libraries the next day, but they were returned in November after a review of the books’ contents. Langton made another outcry after a local public library put up a display featuring *Gender Queer* and *Lawn Boy* adjacent to the Bible and troll dolls, which also prompted the removal of the display early in December.

The uproar over *Gender Queer* and *Lawn Boy* stems from unfounded claims that the books depict sexual interactions between adults and children. Though *Gender Queer* and *Lawn Boy* do contain graphic depictions of sexual acts, reviews of the books by local LGBTQ activists of the advocacy group Fairfax Public Schools Pride concluded that neither include pedophilic content as claimed by opponents. According to GLAAD, censorship against LGBTQ books has dramatically increased since June 2021, especially as anti-CRT activism intensified, and led to coordinated pushes against teaching concepts related to race, sex, and gender. These combined efforts to lump together anti-LGBTQ and anti-CRT advocacy have also been used to specifically target trans individuals, as Media Matters has previously reported.

In line with its previous efforts to spread anti-CRT and anti-LGBTQ rhetoric, Fox is using this story to further incendiary narratives with the help of anti-CRT activists.

Fox’s segments on the books falsely claim the books are pedophilic and attack them as “disgusting”

A segment on the December 14 edition of *America’s Newsroom* included Fox News correspondent Mike Emanuel repeating the false claim that *Gender Queer* “includes graphic depictions of sexual acts between a boy and a man.”

The December 11 edition of *Justice with Judge Jeanine* featured Turning Point USA’s Charlie Kirk, who called the contents of books “pedophilia” and “disgusting” and said, “Any reasonable person would condemn these books.”

During a December 8 *Fox News Primetime* segment, host Tammy Bruce claimed that the public library, “which should be used to educate and enrich the community, is instead promoting leftist sexual ideology.” Bruce also echoed false claims that *Gender Queer* depicted “sex acts between a boy and a man.”

While some graphic sexual content is present in each book, Fox figures’ condemnation of both as simply pornographic dismisses the value of LGBTQ narratives being available for young people. As *Gender Queer*’s author Maia Kobabe noted, “Others simply called it pornography, a common accusation against work with themes of queer sexuality.”

Fox also invited anti-CRT activists to defend the censorship

On December 8 and 9, Fox News brought in two anti-CRT activists, Nicole Neily and Harry Jackson, respectively, to discuss why the removal of *Gender Queer* and *Lawn Boy* from library shelves and the display was justified. Neily is the president of the activist organization Parents Defending Education and Jackson is its “parent advocate.” According to Media Matters’ internal database, Fox News hosted Neily at least five times and Jackson at least four times in 2021 to discuss CRT. In at least two of those appearances, Fox obscured Jackson’s ties to the group, instead framing him as a concerned parent.

Previously, Fox gave a platform to the parent advocating for the books’ censorship

Stacy Langton, the parent who brought the pedophilia allegations to the Fairfax County public school system, appeared on Fox News on the September 26 edition of *Fox & Friends Weekend* and the October 27 edition of *Fox & Friends*. During her first interview, Langton spread false claims about the books containing pedophilia and co-host Rachel Campos-Duffy thanked her and called her “a hero.” Quotes from Langton also appear in at least three articles on the Fox News website.

As conservative forces continue to attack LGBTQ literature with the help of right-wing media, librarians will be faced with the challenge of promoting inclusive and diverse resources to their communities. Not only will librarians be burdened in the wake of widespread proposals to ban LGBTQ content, but LGBTQ youth seeking representation will also shoulder the social harms waged by conservative activists.

Methodology

Media Matters searched transcripts in the SnapStream video database for all original programming on Fox News Channel for any of the terms "Fairfax," or "Dolley Madison" within close proximity of any of the terms "book," or "library," or "Lawn Boy," or "Genderqueer" or any variation of the words pedophilia or porn from December 3 through December 16, 2021.

We included segments, which we defined as instances when the books were the stated topic of discussion or when we found significant discussion about the books in question. We defined significant discussion as instances when two or more speakers in a multitopic segment discussed the controversy with one another. We did not include mentions, which we defined as instances when a single speaker mentioned the controversy without another speaker engaging with the comment, or teasers, which we defined as instances when the anchor or host promoted a segment about the controversy scheduled to air later in the broadcast.