

THE ROOT

Rich Donors Support Conservative Groups in Campaign to Ban Books Addressing Race

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The Guardian found conservative groups across the country are linked to rich rightwing donors, waging a campaign to ban books from school libraries. Those books, of course, are about issues facing marginalized communities. Some southern states including Virginia and Texas have already succeeded in banning race-based literature from their schools.

According to The Guardian, Texas state representative Matt Kraus sent a list of 850 books to the school districts requesting a report of how many copies those districts have and how much money had been spent on them. Librarians and teachers see the trend expanding as it is backed by wealthy Republicans who convince school districts into removing certain books.

From The Guardian:

The Texas Tribune reported that the books included two by Ta-Nehisi Coates; LGBT Families by Leanne K Currie-McGhee; and ‘Pink is a Girl Color’ ... and Other Silly Things People Say, a children’s book by Stacy and Erik Drageset. Krause’s list sparked panic in schools, and by December a district in San Antonio said it was reviewing 414 titles in its libraries.

In Pennsylvania, the Central York school board banned a long list of books, almost entirely titles by, or about, people of color, including books by Jacqueline Woodson, Ijeoma Oluo and Ibram X Kendi, and children’s titles about Rosa Parks and Martin

Luther King Jr. “Let’s just call it what it is – every author on that list is a Black voice,” one teacher told the York Dispatch.

Four high schools in Utah’s Canyons school district removed copies of at least nine books, the Deseret News reported, including Gender Queer by Maia Kobabe; the Bluest Eye, a book by the Pulitzer winner Toni Morrison that addresses racial and gender oppression; and Out of Darkness by Ashley Hope Perez, a story about romance in a racially divided 1930s Texas.

Though there were local groups who petitioned against the book ban, the groups who were backed by the wealthy conservative donors were the ones with influence, reported the Guardian. Those groups present their support of (essentially) censorship, as a concern for age-appropriate content being taught to their children.

“We’ve noted that there are a number of groups like Moms for Liberty, Parents Defending Education, No Left Turn in Education that have particular views on what is appropriate for young people, and they’re trying to implement their agenda – particularly in schools, but also taking their concerns to public libraries as well,” said Deborah Caldwell-Stone, director of the American Library Association’s Office of Intellectual Freedom. The President of PDE previously worked at the Cato Institute, a rightwing think-tank founded by Republican donor Charles Koch.

From The Guardian:

Moms for Liberty groups are promoted on the website of Parents Defending Education (PDE), another conservative group, and in May Moms for Liberty joined with PDE to write a letter to Miguel Cardona, the US education secretary, expressing concerns over federal efforts to include teaching about the consequences of slavery and the contributions of Black Americans in US society.

Asra Nomani, PDE's vice-president for strategy and investigations, has appeared on Fox News to rail against some books, including *Woke Baby* and *Gender Queer*, being in Virginia libraries, and PDE carries a list of books it deems problematic on its website.

On the PDE website there are suggestions for how parents can get involved and expose 'liberal bias' within schools through social media. They encourage parents to 'look at social media pages of teachers and administrators' to weed out anything 'incriminating' which is pretty much anything referring to race and LGBTQ+ issues.

Executive Director of National Education Association Kim Anderson told *The Guardian* the banning of these books "withholds an honest and accurate truth of our history."

"If we're not willing to embrace the beauty of America, which is that our diversity is our strength, then we weaken the core idea of America. So it's offensive, certainly, to people of color and other Americans who have traditionally been marginalized, but ultimately we're short-changing every single student if we don't tell the truth," Anderson said via *The Guardian*.

We're edging closer to the plot of *Fahrenheit 451* every time a school district decides to withhold literature from its students. They know what they're doing.