



## If US schools are censored, students will struggle to form their own opinions

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Schools serve as battlegrounds for young minds to thrive or be beaten down. Nowadays, many books reflecting our current political climate in the U.S. and the real hardships of our past have been banned. Since 2021, over 16,000 of these books have been banned, according to PENAmerica. Titles such as "The Handmaid's Tale" by Margaret Atwood, "Nineteen Minutes" by Jodi Picoult, and "Looking for Alaska" by John Green are among them. These stories serve as warnings of the future and lessons from past mistakes, yet they are being swept away by our state's elected officials. It is not only the government taking part in this censorship but also groups like Pender County Concerned Citizens and school boards in Catawba County.

Many communities in North Carolina consist of people of diverse races, genders and sexualities. When more conservative groups like these attempt to ban books that reflect true American history and stories that detail the freedom of self-expression, the question arises: Who are they trying to censor? Their children, their peers, or even themselves? Banning these books is not just censorship of thought; it is an attempt to suppress the reality of living in a world that is constantly evolving. Censorship determines whether schools can keep people educated and open to receiving new ideas and cultures.

Education is about developing critical thinking skills and learning that, even in the past, humans have made grave mistakes and learned from them. If U.S. schools are heavily censored, students will struggle to form their own opinions and will be unprepared to participate in diverse environments. This censorship fosters hatred toward marginalized groups and promotes the belief that diversity is something negative or shameful.

For example, PCCC member Mike Korn wrote a 28-page document stating that 42 books in his school district should be banned because they include transgender representation, which he claims goes against his beliefs.

"Transgender in general, my personal belief, I just don't like it. Okay,...there are only two sexes, male and female. And at one time, there used to be a thing where if somebody was having trouble with that, they'd coach them properly ... they will coach kids how to act like the gender that they are."

While Korn has the right to his personal beliefs, this does not entitle him to ban 42 books in a public school. Parents should have the right to guide their children's reading choices, but limiting their own children's views is different from restricting access for all children. Public schools exist for everyone, meaning all perspectives should have a place.

Limiting viewpoints hinders societal progress, actively moving us backward. It discourages citizens from learning from one another and embracing differences. This restriction is harmful, especially when people face discrimination, violence, and even death for simply being different in how they look, act or love.

Gary T. Marx from MIT, in his article "Censorship and Secrecy, Social and Legal Perspectives," explores how censorship is a means of controlling the narrative. He explains censorship not only affects how people perceive the world but also shapes the environment in which they live.

"Some censorship is largely symbolic, offering a way to enhance social solidarity by avoiding insults to shared values ... Or masquerading under high principles of protecting public welfare and morals, it may simply involve a desire to protect the interests of the politically, economically and religiously powerful by restricting alternative views, criticism, and delegitimizing information," he states.

Keeping only a select set of ideals in a country that prides itself on freedom and free speech is hypocritical. It stagnates progress and suggests there is only one way to live. It sends the message

that if someone thinks differently, their life is not only wrong but also meaningless. Schools have always been institutions where students should feel comfortable and absorb new knowledge. The ongoing debate over what schools should teach our future generations is crucial because it influences how students will shape the nation in years to come.

Schools must remain environments where students learn to become critical thinkers and embrace diverse opinions, beliefs and identities. It is essential not only to educate them on complex topics that have shaped the United States but also teach them how to learn from history. In doing so, we can foster a society that embraces diversity and makes a positive impact on marginalized communities that continue to face challenges.



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