

Books in Trouble: SLATE Fights Censorship Attempts

Since the fall semester SLATE has responded to some fifty calls about teaching materials and methods under attack in our school. NCTE Deputy Executive Director Charles Suhor, who handles censorship calls for SLATE at NCTE Headquarters, reports that assistance was given in dozens of cases through letters to superintendents, school boards, or review committees; rationales for the books under attack; strategic advice and materials on fighting censorship; contacts with local newspapers; and joint action with affiliate leaders and cooperating groups such as ACLU, AFR, ALA, and NEA.

"We generally have good luck in fighting protests when SLATE's help from Headquarters is bolstered by parents and teachers in the community and aided by NCTE affiliate leaders," Suhor says. "In one case, an Illinois affiliate leader addressed a local school board on behalf of the state affiliate in the Council, and the board retained an elective Science Fiction course. We also entered an amicus brief in a Louisiana law suit in which the court's ruling specifically cited the Pico principle that a school board's removal of a library book may not be based on disagreement with the ideas in the work. We sent a letter in the widely publicized Colorado case in which a teacher was fired after showing the Berolucci film 1900 to a class of seniors who were studying logic and debate. We have been invited also to testify in the infamous St. Louis case in which Cissy Lacks was fired for doing her job-teaching creatively from early student drafts that happened to contain profanities."

Among the books challenged since January of this year are *Native Son*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, *Summer of My German Soldier*, *Go Ask Alice*, *The Drowning of Stephen Jones*, *Maurice*, *The Education of Harriet Hatfield*, *The Color Purple*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *The Outsiders*, *The Bible* (as literature), *A Day No Pigs Would Die*, *Julie of the Wolves*, and *Bridge to Terabithia*.

"SLATE donations make this support of the right to teach and learn possible," Suhor adds. "Please encourage your school and your colleagues to join NCTE's chief intellectual freedom network."

Teaching Jane and Johnny to Read "The Right Stuff"

In an effort to counter the "too liberal" policies of most libraries, the American Family Friendly Libraries wants to replace the "bill of rights" of the American Library Association (ALA). Contrary to ALA's policy that only a child's parents or guardians have the responsibility for guidance in selecting "appropriate reading materials," AFFL's policy requires librarians "to seek out materials that support traditional family values, to follow local community standards and laws in selecting materials, to ban displays of explicit sexual materials, and to encourage residents' participation in setting library policies." Also under the AFFL policy, children could not be issued a library card or allowed to look at adult library materials without parental permission, and to keep the librarians honest, parents could check their children's library records.

AFFL Temporary President Karen Jo Gounaud, a resident of Fairfax County, Virginia, says, "I don't want people conjuring up demons that aren't there. This is not a First Amendment threat or censorship."

Focus on the Family, the American Family Association, and Concerned Women for America are supporting the group behind the scenes. Karen Diegmüller, "Library Group Seeks To Encourage A More 'Family Friendly' Focus," *Education Week*, 6 December 1995, p. 7.

"Brain Cleansing"

The American Family Association of Arkansas has accused the Governor's School of Arkansas of being "anti-Christian" and a "tool for political brainwashing." Ann Biggers, Arkansas director of gifted programs, says, "there are critics out there who are determined this is horrible and want to close it down, and they are making it their life's work. It's a fantastic program. We're not brainwashing anyone." *Education Week*, 22 November 1995, p. 12.

Teachers/Criminals

Idaho State Superintendent Anne Fox wants to fingerprint and criminally investigate all teachers seeking certification. Gary Schroeder, education chairman of the State Senate, calls it "an intrusion on individual freedom." *Education Week*, 31 January 1996, p. 12.

Details Do Make a Difference

Alabama governor Fob James' "innovative" school reform program last year turned out to be *truly* innovative. The plan would reduce class size by adding 1600 teachers, *all without a tax increase*. The plan was well received until this past fall, when districts found that their classes were actually larger and that they had fewer teachers than last year. What happened? The state didn't have to raise taxes because the plan drew an "equal amount of local funds into the state treasury to pay for the program, leaving no net gain." *Education Week*, 22 November 1995, p. 10.