



LIBRARIES Oregon

Sombra by Ruven Afanador was removed after review by a public library director in Oregon. *Sombra*, published in 2004, is a collection of artistic photographs composed largely of male nudes.

The patron complaint stated, “I’m in favor of artistic nudes, but perhaps in an art appreciation class and not accessible to the impressionable minds of children.” The library director consulted reviews and circulation statistics (the book had never been checked out), and learned through online catalogs that only academic and research libraries owned it. The director decided that the book was a good candidate for weeding, according to the library’s usual criteria. [EDITOR’S NOTE: *The Oregon Intellectual Freedom Clearing House (OIFCH) project of the State Library of Oregon reported on intellectual freedom challenges that occurred from July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2018. It does not release names of people, organizations, libraries, nor towns.*] Reported in: OIFHC, February 15, 2019.

SCHOOLS Springdale, Arkansas

Har-ber Herald, the student newspaper of Har-ber High School in northwest Arkansas, was suspended by the Springdale School Board. The board ordered students to take down an article in November investigating the transfer of six football players to a rival high school. The district allowed the months-long investigation to be re-published on the newspaper’s website in December. The article alleged that the students transferred for athletic, not academic reasons, which would violate district policy.

Students have complained that heavy-handed oversight of their now-suspended northwest Arkansas school newspaper could result in

censorship and jeopardize their journalistic integrity.

Students representing the newspaper told the Springdale School Board on December 11 that they worry the district will require all future work to be reviewed by an administrator before publication, the *Northwest Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* reported.

Springdale School District Superintendent Jim Rollins said a committee of journalism teachers is creating a policy to address how student publications are handled. Rollins had previously called the article “intentionally negative, demeaning, hurtful and potentially harmful” to students, but has since said that he understands the young journalists’ perspective. Reported in: *Texarkana Gazette*, December 13, 2018.

San Francisco, California

The “Life of George Washington Mural” at George Washington High School in San Francisco is being challenged for being culturally and historically offensive. At a school board meeting in December, some educators and Native American parents renewed a decades-long call to remove the 1932 mural, and also called for an overhaul of the district’s history curriculum and textbooks to reflect the achievements of Native American communities and to give a more accurate picture of history.

Amy Andersen, a teacher at Paul Revere Elementary School, said at a school board hearing, “The mural depicts Native Americans as slaves, as merciless killers who attack, while whites stand with arms up and surrender.”

Chief Academic Officer Brett Stephens said the district is aware of the need for a new history curriculum that will more accurately portray indigenous cultures, and is looking at ways to draw “resources from

multiple historians who can accurately present the perspectives of many communities.”

But curriculum changes are unlikely to come in the next few years, as the district is focused on implementing the Next Generation Science Standards over the next two years, and only has “the capacity to really support one curriculum area at a time.”

However, movement on the “Life of George Washington Mural” may be underway, the San Francisco school commissioners indicated.

“I think it’s something that is overdue, and it’s actually embarrassing that you all have to come back each year to remind us that this is something we need to address,” said Commissioner Matt Haney, who will leave the school board to serve on the city’s Board of Supervisors next year.

Stephens said a committee to address the potential removal of the mural has been formed, and it met for the first time earlier in December. Stephens said that he is currently collaborating with the California Indian Museum and Cultural Center on “designing a sequence of learning activities” and gathering community perspectives to inform next steps in regard to the mural, with recommendations expected to be presented to the board by April. Reported in: *San Francisco Examiner*, December 16, 2018.

Ocala, Florida

The Facts Speak for Themselves by Cole Brock was pulled from the school library in early 2018 by the principal of Fort King Middle School in Marion County, Florida, after parents complained about its allegedly “pornographic” language. The parents also protested to the state board of education about this 1997 YA novel, told from the point of view of a 13-year-old who has witnessed a murder.



There is no record of a formal challenge being initiated. According to the district, the book has been retained. Reported in: News 13 Florida, January 24, 2018.

Staten Island, New York

Manga books in the *Assassination Classroom* series, written and illustrated by Yūsei Matsu in Japanese and translated into English, were removed from the school library at Markham Intermediate School (I.S. 51) in the Graniteville neighborhood of Staten Island. The comic science fiction series follows an octopus-like creature—who is a junior high homeroom teacher—and his students, who are tasked with assassinating him to prevent Earth from being destroyed.

After a parent, whose daughter had borrowed some of the books from the library, objected to references to classroom violence, the school removed the series from the shelves.

The school's library had several volumes of the series. There are 20 volumes total in the *Assassination Classroom* series.

"We have policies in place to ensure that our school libraries stock high-quality, age-appropriate books," said Danielle Filson, a spokeswoman for the Department of Education. "I.S. 51 leadership met with this parent after she raised her concern, and decided to remove the book from the library." Reported in: *Staten Island Advance*, January 31, 2019.

King City, Oregon

George by Alex Gino is under review in the Tigard-Tualatin School District in King City. Some parents objected to the fictional story of a 10-year-old transgender girl whom the world sees as a boy named George.

The school district considered requiring a parental permission slip before allowing elementary

school-aged students to read it. Later news reports said the school planned to hold a meeting with staff and parents to review the book, then decide what, if any, actions to take. Reported in: KATU, February 22, 2018.

Oregon

[EDITOR'S NOTE: *The State Library of Oregon, through its Oregon Intellectual Freedom Clearing House (OIFHC), collects information on challenges to intellectual freedom at libraries, schools, and academic institutions in Oregon. OIFHC's 2018 report, updated on February 15, 2019, covers challenges from July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2018. It does not release names of people, organizations, libraries, nor towns.*]

Splatoon 2, a Japanese language graphic novel by Sankichi Hinodeya, was challenged in an Oregon school. A parent complained that it promotes bullying. The patron offered to preview books in Japanese to determine their appropriateness for the school. Four Japanese language teachers did not share the parent's concerns, and the librarian communicated this to the parent. A formal challenge process was initiated. The status of the graphic novel is not known. Reported in: OIFHC, February 15, 2019.

Gun: A Visual History by Chris McNabb was removed from an Oregon elementary school library but retained in the district's upper-level school libraries. The schools' library staff reviewed this adult, but largely pictorial, book about the history of guns after a parent complained to a teacher about it. Reported in: OIFHC, February 15, 2019.

Tomah, Wisconsin

The Confederate flag can no longer be worn or displayed on school property in Tomah, Wisconsin. The Tomah School Board voted

unanimously to approve the ban during a special meeting January 21.

Tomah School Superintendent Cindy Zahrte said the issue was brought before the school board after several incidents at the high school, including someone letting the air out of a student's tires in connection with the flag. Because the incidents involved student records, school officials did not provide more details.

School board member Jerry Fushianes said he was happy with the outcome. "The responsibility of our school board and any school board is to ensure that we create an opportunity for students to learn uninhibited by any distractions," Fushianes said. "We were able to appreciate that there were multiple opinions (on the ban), but the students are what we have to care for and that's who we took care of tonight."

A community member and a student of Tomah High School spoke against the ban during the meeting, saying the move would limit students' right to free speech.

But Zahrte said she believes the school district does respect students' rights. "We have a delicate balance here of how do we promote student freedom of expression but also maintain a safe school environment," Zahrte said. "Those two things in this particular situation are coming into conflict and we have to side on ensuring that the school is a safe place for every child."

Zahrte said Tomah joins seven other schools in the Mississippi Valley (Wisconsin) Conference to have banned the Confederate flag. Reported in: Wisconsin Public Radio, January 23, 2019.

PRISONS

Jefferson City, Missouri

Author Carmen Maria Machado reported that she is fighting



ensorship of her book, *Her Body and Other Parties*. On her Twitter account, she wrote, “My publisher, Graywolf Press, has received a letter from the Missouri Department of Corrections (DOC) informing them that an incarcerated woman was denied access... because it ‘contains inappropriate sexual behaviors, sexually explicit materials & pictures.’”

The publisher describes the short stories in the book as falling “between psychological realism and science fiction, comedy and horror, fantasy and fabulism,” with “startling narratives that map the realities of women’s lives and the violence visited upon their bodies.”

When Machado described the censorship as “homophobic and utterly outrageous,” the Missouri DOC replied, “The DOC does not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation. Department policies regarding censorship apply generally to materials that include content found to be sexually explicit, regardless of the gender, gender expression or sexual orientation of the characters.”

Machado retweeted the DOC explanation, and said, “This makes no sense on its face. How else do you explain the designation ‘inappropriate sexual behaviors’? What else could that possibly mean?” She said that under DOC policy “materials depicting LGBTQ people & relationships without detailed descriptions of sex acts are allowed.”

She said Graywolf Press is appealing the decision. Reported in: carmen mariamachado.com, January 3, January 5, 2019; graywolfpress.org, n.d.

PUBLIC ART New York, New York

“Candy Nations,” a set of public sculptures by French artist Laurence Jenkell, was removed from a downtown Manhattan site near 1 World

Trade Center. Depicting the flags of each of the G20 countries as 9-foot-tall wrapped candies, it was installed in December next to one of the buildings that replaced the original World Trade Center destroyed in the 9/11 attack.

One of the G20 countries is Saudi Arabia, and some families of 9/11 victims are suing Saudi Arabia, claiming the country give support to the attackers. Saudi Arabia denies the charges, but some right-wing media expressed outrage in January that the Saudi flag was near the site.

The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which controls the site, announced on January 13 that in response to public comments it was moving the sculptures to JFK Airport, rather than leaving them at the World Trade Center through February 28 as originally planned. “We believe this solution respects the unique sensitivities of the site and preserves the artistic integrity of the exhibit,” the Port Authority said in a statement released to the *New York Daily News*. The statement said the Port Authority made the decision “in full collaboration with the artist.”

The artist told *Gothamist* by email, “I’ve been deeply disturbed and saddened by some of the reactions, especially given the reverence I have for this sacred site that embodies resilience even more than any other place in the world.”

In an earlier statement to the *Observer*, before the sculpture was moved, Jenkell said she had considered, but ultimately rejected pulling the Saudi flag from the site:

I first created flag candy sculptures to celebrate mankind on an international level and pay tribute to people of the entire world,” she told the *Observer*. “Given the unique and justified sensitivities surrounding

the World Trade Center, it came to my mind to propose to remove the sculpture showcasing the flag of Saudi Arabia, or relocate it to a less sensitive location.

But there is no way I can do such a thing as the flag of Saudi Arabia is entirely part of the G20 just like any other candy flag of this Candy Nations show.

The sculptures have been displayed around the world without arousing the level of controversy seen at the World Trade Center.

The National Coalition Against Censorship issued a statement opposing the move:

It is important for government agencies to be sensitive to their communities when they plan public events and displays. However, government cannot bend to the complaints of each and every member of the community. Aware from the outset that the sculpture’s location by the 9/11 Memorial might offend, the Port Authority still chose to display the work. Moving the installation to JFK Airport in response to complaints raises concerns about government censorship.

Ironically, the demand that the Port Authority remove or relocate this sculpture is at odds with the very American freedoms to which the rebuilding of the World Trade Center is dedicated.

Reported in www.jenkell.com, n.d.; *New York Daily News*, January 13; gothamist.com, January 16, 2019; ncac.org, January 17, 2019.

INTERNATIONAL Melbourne, Australia

An Australian newspaper, the *Herald Sun* in Melbourne, on December 12 published a front page that featured the word “CENSORED” in large



print on a black background, to draw attention to a gag order preventing news outlets in the country from publishing details of the trial of a former Vatican official accused of sexual abuse.

The censored story covered the case of Cardinal George Pell, a high-ranking Vatican official who was accused of sexual abuse and forced to stand trial in Australia. He has denied the allegations, but according to multiple reports was found guilty by a jury on December 10. The court said it imposed the gag order to maintain impartiality. The order remained in effect after the verdict because another case against Pell was pending in the court system, according to the *Washington Post*. Reported in: *The Hill*, December 12, 2018.

Mirimichi, New Brunswick, Canada

A Canadian school district has removed an illustrated children's book, *Bouh les amoureux!* by Genevieve Noël and Catherine Proteaux from classrooms after a First Nation student and her mother complained of derogatory content that perpetuates stereotypes about Indian peoples.

New Brunswick's education minister apologized to an Elsipogtog First Nation mother after her 10-year-old child brought home a book from an elementary school that included an illustration with a caption in French that says: "I am an Indian and I will scalp you!"

Sharona Levi said her daughter, Emma Ward-Levi, came home with the book *Bouh les amoureux!* on February 6 and showed her a page with an illustration showing one child pulling the braids of the other and the offending caption. Emma, who attends Rexton Elementary School, said she wanted to show her mom because she didn't think it was nice.

Lynn Levi said she felt the book, aimed at children six to seven years of age, perpetuates stereotypes about Indigenous people. She posted a photo of the passage on Facebook, which garnered hundreds of shares and comments.

Levi contacted the school and soon people reached out from the Anglophone North School District, the New Brunswick Department of Education, and the Minister of Education. Levi said she received a personal apology from Dominic Cardy, the

education minister, as well as from the principal of the school.

Cardy also apologized to Elispogtog First Nation Chief Arren Sock. In an interview, he said the department will try to do better and use the incident to talk about racism.

Anglophone North School District said staff at all district schools were alerted to the problematic book. Meredith Cassie, a spokesperson for the district, said the book was in a basket of books in a classroom and wasn't part of the curriculum. It's not clear if there are other copies of the books at other schools.

"Staff will be going through the remainder of the books that they have in their libraries and in their classrooms to see what's in their inventories and to vet and to remove anything that would be offensive in any way," Cassie said.

The school district posted on their website a statement a zero tolerance for racism. "Racist literature is unacceptable, and the book has been removed," said the statement. Reported in CBC News, February 8, 2019; APTN News, February 11, 2019.