

S1E1: Snuffing Out Censorship

South Texas Stories

Introduction and Opening Scenes

<<fire cackling noise>>¹

[Anastasia Cruz]: Librarians have tried to protect the freedom of speech by protesting book bans that limit what students are allowed to read. They are encouraging students to be unapologetically themselves by reading about whatever cultures, religions, sex, or languages they love. My name is Anastasia Cruz and in this episode of South Texas Stories, I will address why book bans shouldn't be permitted. I saw second-hand the loads of work librarians go through unnoticed by being raised by my mom, Nicole Cruz, the head librarian at Sharyland High School and Sharyland Advanced Academic Academy in Mission, Texas. Although I estimated how much my mom does at her school, it was nowhere close to all the different activities she listed to me. Librarians don't get enough credit for what they do to assist schools, yet lately due to banned books, librarians have been getting publicity from the media. The saying any publicity is good publicity is a key saying, but not when it's about getting fired for sticking up for freedom of speech. Certain librarians in the Texas region have been losing their jobs for not following orders to banning specific books. For us to understand why book bans limit students, we must dive deeper to where it all started and who is suffering the most by banning books. Let us go back into the past!

<<clock chiming crazy>>²

[Anastasia Cruz]: Book banning has been around since 1650 when Massachusetts Bay colonist William Pynchon wrote a pamphlet on the findings of a different type of religious teaching. The teaching stated that if you followed Christ's teachings and obeyed God, you would be let into heaven. At the time, this angered many due to the widely held belief that only a few were granted eternity in heaven. They denounced William as a heretic, burned his pamphlet and banned it.³

¹ Nazim, Abdullah. Burning Fire with Sound Effects Free to Use | No Copyright. YouTube. YouTube, August 3, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GdwhlKKw0Lc>.

² Nguyen, Danh Khoa. Every Cuckoo Clock Chiming. YouTube. YouTube. Accessed December 5, 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iSnMZnR4-8&ab_channel=DanhKhoaNguy%E1%BB%85n%28officialchannel%29.

³ Blakemore, Erin. "The History of Book Bans-and Their Changing Targets-in the U.S." Culture. National Geographic, September 6, 2022.

<<angry mob sounds around “angered many”>>⁴

[Anastasia Cruz]: Moving further into the 1850s, another event of book banning would occur when anti-slavery books such as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* written by Harriet Beecher Stowe was outlawed in not just one, but multiple states.⁵ In the 1930s, Nazis threw “un-German” books into a huge fire to get rid of anything that wasn’t German culture establishing one of the biggest genocides to come. After many years of different book banning and burnings, finally in 1982, the Supreme Court addressed school books during a case in New York where a school board removed books they deemed “anti-American, anti-Christian, anti-Semitic.”⁶ Well, you get the picture, anything that was anti-everything. The court ruled with the students citing the First Amendment rights. Even though they won, there is still modern censorship that happens with the books we love. My mom, the head librarian for the school district in Sharyland High School and Sharyland Advanced Academic Academy, rattles off some of her favorite books when she was a child,

[Nicole Cruz]: When I was in late elementary going into junior high, I really liked mystery uh detective stories like Nancy Drew, Trixie Belden, all those types of series.

[Anastasia Cruz]: Hearing those familiar sleuthing names like Nancy Drew, my curiosity got the better of me. Surely Nancy Drew could never appear as a banned book or get on the banned books list. Well, guess what!? Nancy Drew had been banned.

<<add in the duh duh duhhh sound>>⁷

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/history-of-book-bans-in-the-united-states>.

⁴ StockMedia. Crowd No Copyright Sound Effect. YouTube. YouTube, December 22, 2021.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aFQhQrdJEqQ>.

⁵ Blakemore, Erin. “The History of Book Bans-and Their Changing Targets-in the U.S.”

⁶ Blakemore, Erin. “The History of Book Bans-and Their Changing Targets-in the U.S.”

⁷No Copyright Sound Effects. Dun Dun Dun. YouTube. YouTube, October 26, 2021.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2dWMqOak8tk>.

[Anastasia Cruz]: Apparently, it was seen as crude and unsophisticated since it did not hold any educational or moral value.

[Anastasia Cruz]: Fast forward to today⁸ [sound effect], where are we with book banning?

<<protesting sounds>>⁹

[Anastasia Cruz]: Unfortunately, we are still fighting for our first amendment rights. Many have lost this fight. Due to the resistance that teachers and librarians have faced, some have been fired such as Librarian Suzette Baker from Llano County Public Library Kingsland Branch. Her boss asked her to not display a book on critical race theory, which she ignored. There was also another order that she was told she could not buy new books for the library. After patiently waiting on the local library board to approve the books, her boss would reveal that not even books donated to the library would be able to leave the shelves. On her paperwork that was filed, her boss wrote a statement saying, “This change is inevitable, and you are allowing your own personal biases, opinions, and preferences to unduly influence your actions and judgement.”¹⁰ Now, dear listeners, do you know what critical race theory is? I’ll give you a few seconds to think about the answer.

<<tik tok clock sounds>>¹¹

[Anastasia Cruz]: Critical Race Theory is about how laws, social and political movements, and media shape social structures like race and ethnicity. In an article of the Texas Tribune, it explained that in the summer of 2021, Greg Abbott signed into law a bill that restricts how current events and America’s history of racism can be taught in Texas schools. Conservatives have been proclaiming that critical race theory is teaching children that they are racist and that

⁸ ennASMR, Mama. Fast Forward Sound Effects No Copyright for YouTubers | FirstTimers. YouTube. YouTube, May 28, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EbmJpx5xHcY>.

⁹ No Copyright Sound Effects. Dun Dun Dun. YouTube.

¹⁰ Park, Brooke. “Texas Librarians Face Harassment as They Navigate Book Bans.” *The Texas Tribune*. The Texas Tribune, May 17, 2022. <https://www.texastribune.org/2022/05/17/librarians-texas-book-bans/>.

¹¹ Ahsan, Haseeb. Clock Ticking Sound Effects. No Copyright Sound Effects Pack. Free download https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUrBUd_95Mg&ab_channel=HaseebAhsan

the U.S is a racist country.¹² If any of you have taken a sociology class, you know the way that critical race theory centers is not on individuals, but social structures that have been created by society. By using the social structures like family, religion, law and class, educators have tried to find a way to connect others so we can diminish racism and hopefully one day, end it. This is important to remember because that is what the book that the boss told her not to display. Why not display a book like that? There are many races and ethnicities in the world. Many minorities as we have seen with the Black Lives Matter movement that started again in 2020 shows how certain minorities like African Americans and Hispanics have not been given equal representation or feel as if their voice is not heard. In my interview with Nicole Cruz, she explains why it is important to have books like critical race theory or other books that some might deem uncomfortable to read,

[Nicole Cruz]: I think it's much easier to also say well a lot of things in history are uncomfortable but that's why we study history. We study history to learn from it and hopefully to move forward and do better, so that future societies have better living conditions, have better acceptance and opportunities, whereas people in the past did not.

[Anastasia Cruz]: Book banning isn't only affecting teachers and librarians' careers, but also the environment that students can go and learn about any topics they want to read about. For instance, in Katy, Texas, a 17-year-old girl who was interviewed anonymously because her parents don't know about her identifying as queer was brought up to the media. Certain coming-of-age books that had LGBTQ characters and scenes about sex were removed. As she struggled to figure out her identity, those books gave her relief that she could see a different relationship, one that she was starting to identify with. The girl from Katy explained how her identity has been a struggle and how to other kids like her it's important to see representation. She told the reporters, "You should be able to see yourself reflected on the page."¹³ I asked my mom how she dealt with parents or students that feel uncomfortable and want to remove books. She describes how she tries to calm down and relax the students or adults by saying,

¹² Zou, Isabella. "What Is Critical Race Theory? Explaining the Discipline That Texas' Governor Wants to 'Abolish.'" *The Texas Tribune*. The Texas Tribune, June 22, 2021. <https://www.texastribune.org/2021/06/22/texas-critical-race-theory-explained/>.

¹³ Hixenbaugh, Mike. "Book Banning in Texas Schools: Titles Are Pulled off Library Shelves in Record Numbers." NBCNews.com. NBCUniversal News Group, February 1, 2022. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/texas-books-race-sexuality-schools-rcna13886>.

[Nicole Cruz]: I think that I try to tell my students that life is too short to suffer through a book that doesn't appeal to you. I tell the students that if you're starting to read a book and you've given the book a chance and you read the first chapter you, you know read in to the book several pages but it doesn't appeal to you then bring the book back by all means and find a book that does appeal to you, that you do like, that you do connect with the writing, the writer, the characters and setting, the topic. I feel that life is too short to read bad books and when I say bad books I don't really actually mean "bad" books, I'm just meaning books that are lacking interest to me.

[Anastasia Cruz]: To paraphrase what my mom said, although you might have your own beliefs towards what books are appropriate because of what you believe in, don't discriminate against a book that has no interest to you when it might be the story that someone else needs to read because they don't have anything or anybody to turn to.

[Anastasia Cruz]: An example of a book that would be like that is a book that recently got put on the Banned Books list, *And Tango Makes Three*. This children's book received negative remarks and was put on the Banned Books list because it is about two dad penguins raising a baby penguin. It is about a same-gender relationship and how they care for the baby penguin. It wasn't long ago that in 2015, the Supreme Court made same-sex marriage legal across the country. Five years ago, the Supreme Court ruled against required adoption papers to define parents by gender. This was a huge deal, and it is very much still a huge deal today. I asked my mom, if having little kids read this book at a younger age would be more beneficial to understand same-sex marriages.

[Nicole Cruz]: I think that we can show children that book and read it and talk about how loving the, the daddy penguins are to the baby penguin, how we may have classmates that have two mommies or daddies and that all families are different but as long as there's love and there's safety and there's acceptance in a family that's what makes a family great. Is it realistic to think that every child in an elementary school is being raised by a mother and a father living together? Absolutely not. We have blended families; where mom and dad had married and had children and now, they are married to each other and have children from previous marriages. We have families of divorce. We have single parent families. We have families where maybe a child was adopted. We have families where maybe, um, one parent is away serving in the military while the other parent you know is getting support from other family members to take care of the children. There is just so many types of families in our society and to say that one type of family is the correct or only or best way, I think that's such a selfish notion because I think that families are beautiful whether they're blended, whether they're single parent, whether they're you know lesbian or gay parents."

[Anastasia Cruz]: It's so strange to me how so many adults and teens don't realize how wonderful a library is. Growing up with my mom as a librarian, I grew a love for books. Books can take you wherever you want to go. You want to be a fierce warrior, fly a dragon, and save the kingdom?

<<cheering and applauding>>¹⁴

You're looking at fiction. You are into history but don't like reading non-fiction because you find facts boring?

<<snore sound>>¹⁵

[Anastasia Cruz]: Historical fiction. Any type of book that you can think of libraries are your go-to. They were the search engine before the search engine on Google. They wouldn't be able to run though without the aid of the librarian. Librarians aren't just sitting behind a desk; they do many other important tasks. For example, my mom helps with orientation and making sure students know their student email and password, assigning out Chromebooks, decorating the library to a certain theme based off an event or holiday. She also writes grants so they can host events that deal with seniors asking a panel of college students questions, so they won't be that nervous to go to whatever university they want to attend. I asked her what other events she has put on for her students and she told me about,

[Nicole Cruz]: So last year we had a virtual author visit last year was the first year we returned from having remote instruction with open and so I'm friends with lots of authors and social media since I have been a school librarian for such a long time and I do attend conferences regularly where I need we had an author by the name of Chris Fletcher and he came in and well virtually right like through zoom and we ask a previous to that meeting what I thought would be a good topic and at that time and still not today relevant with mental because during COVID and during remote instruction a lot of our students were suffering from isolation and depression and loneliness, and so a lot of Chris Fletcher's books are based on those topics, and they're for young adults so that worked really well. We've had a lot of family consumer science classes that came in, as well as our book club and our Battle of the Books teams. This past week I had a huge celebration at the library for students from both of my campuses and faculty. Last year we wanted to come together, and we wrote a book, and the title of that book is "*Navigating Life in the Pandemic*," things we worked around. So, we had a very special

¹⁴ Ultimate Free Sound Effects Channel. Free Sound Effect - Applause, Cheering Crowd No Copyright. YouTube. YouTube, August 17, 2018.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dutYERW1h4w>.

¹⁵ Sokor, Pool Young. Snoring Sound Effect No Copyright. YouTube. YouTube, February 24, 2022.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V6SOoMLt5og>.

celebration called a book unveiling. We had a program with the master of ceremonies uh we invited special guests from the community, we invited our Education Foundation which actually helped us to get the book published with a grant that was written and submitted and approved and so like the sky is the limit. I do weekly programming for my students and that's something new that I started this year. It's called Tuesday Things so every Tuesday I have a 20-minute session in the morning before school starts and a 20-minute session after school and just a wide variety of topics so some of the topics I've covered this school year already are e-mail 101 um Google Drive tips on how to organize and put things easily found in your Google Drive. Um every month we have a social emotional learning quality or trait so I did a lesson on empathy, and I believe that people who are readers develop that skill because by reading stories of other people we kind of understand what it is to walk in that person's shoes and we can see them, we can hear them, and we can understand them so just the sky is the limit. I'd like to invite speakers to come in."

[Anastasia Cruz]: Librarians, libraries, and books do so much for students. Banning books strips away the knowledge that everyone is entitled to have. Banning books is a critical issue in our society today which could lead to a weakened democracy. If you can't be able to read what you want to read, what other restrictions will be unleashed on the freedoms that we are supposed to have?

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