

Youth activists who have risen to prominence on social media websites have fostered spaces for youth discourse. Aided by digital media, young people have demonstrated our capacity for political organization, education, and activation.

In recent years, young people have utilized social media to transcend institutional barriers to youth organizing. Rather than filter through the older generations' hold on traditional media, students above the age of 13 have democratized the primary source of information. Fundraising occurs via crowdfunding platforms, protest dates are finalized through Snapchat, and informational graphics are shared on Instagram stories. Greta Thunberg, who first gained global attention with her #FridaysForFuture hashtag, implored students to protest insufficient climate change legislation. Through organizing on social media, "Greta Thunberg has succeeded in creating a global attitudinal shift, transforming millions of vague anxieties into a worldwide movement calling for urgent change," say the editors of Time Magazine. In fact, when four million young people protested across 150 countries in September of 2019, much of the grassroots organizing occurred via Instagram (New York Times). In 2018, youth organizers, sharing #MarchForOurLives on Twitter and Instagram, catalyzed eight hundred thousand protesters to march together at the nation's capital, making the "student-led protest one of the largest in Washington *to date*" (USA Today). This new organizing mechanism has created a more engaged, aware, and active citizenry.

It is clear that young people have the capacity and willingness to participate in tough conversations and to learn about the social landscape. Efforts to regulate what can be said and taught in the classroom, which have surged in 2021, discredits young people's ability to understand nuanced arguments. These book bannings, which disproportionately target authors sharing stories about the LGBTQIA+ community and communities of color, silence voices that many young people wish to hear.

In fact, the recent efforts to hinder young people's access to stories about marginalized communities is an unfettered attack on our democracy. Our country is built upon the ability for our citizens to share their experiences - free speech is a core value. Opinions and stories which may be considered "offensive" by the minorities have *always* progressed our society. Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, which is credited as one of the most influential rhetorical pamphlets of colonial America, fanned the first flames of the push for freedom from British tyranny. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Fredrick Douglass' autobiography galvanized the grassroots movement for abolitionism. *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson spurred national efforts to protect our environment. To censor voices which bring diverse perspectives to the mainstream is an unbridled attack on the very ideals that have progressed our country. By politicizing the classroom in an effort to infringe on students' right to media, opponents force their beliefs on the entire community. By removing books, we effectively ignore the obstacles faced by marginalized groups. We also remove challenges to the opinions of those banning books. Our country was founded and is powered by challenges to opinion; from our limited, republican government filled with checks and balances to the party system, healthily questioning arguments only serves to strengthen our country.

It is extremely problematic to legislate away other perspectives. The purpose of an education is to expand young people's understanding of the world and allow us to appreciate others' perspectives. To prohibit books which touch on topics such as racism and sexuality implies that these topics are not relevant to young people today. Reality, unfortunately, is not sterile or censored - and by restricting access to information, censors sanitize history. Our generation and the coming ones depend on the ability to understand, process, and learn from the full range of past experiences. Books that share these experiences allow students to think critically about our place in the world.

Moreover, the vast majority of complaints have been targeting educators who provide a healthy environment to analyze nuanced books. Educators, who undergo extensive training to facilitate difficult conversations in the classroom, are highly unlikely to misrepresent work that contains sensitive subjects as an endorsement of these experiences. Rather, educators simply provide young people a robust space to discuss various perspectives. For the parents of those who may disagree with these various perspectives, banning books for *all* students infringes on their own right to hold conversations about the social landscape. The opportunity for students to feel recognized and heard in school through literature is a right that cannot be encroached upon. Young people's ascent into the limelight have demonstrated our power to listen to and understand diverse experiences, and we deserve the right to access the literature that helps us do so.