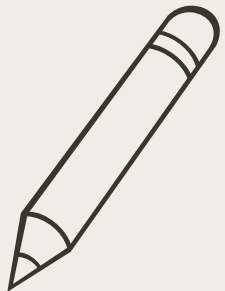


FACT OR FICTION OF AMERICAN CENSORSHIP

AGENDA

- Introduction to Censorship
- Literature's Reception Throughout History
- Fact or Fiction: Establishing Collective Memory in Literature
- Conclusion: Controlling History through American Censorship





INTRODUCTION TO BOOK BANNING & CENSORSHIP

A BRIEF HISTORY

**Chinese Emperor
Shih Huang Ti**

*Burned History
Books So History
Could Begin with
His Rule*

259 B.C.

35

**Roman Emperor
Caligula**

*Banned Books
Promoting Ideas of
Freedom from Rome*

**Roman Catholic
Church**

*Burned Contradictory
Bible Translations,
esp. Martin Luther's*

1624

1945

**Adolf Hitler &
Nazi Germany**

*Book Burnings
Focused on
"Degenerate" Works*

**Censorship in
Schools &
Libraries**

*Focused on
LGBTQIA+ and
BIPOC Narratives*

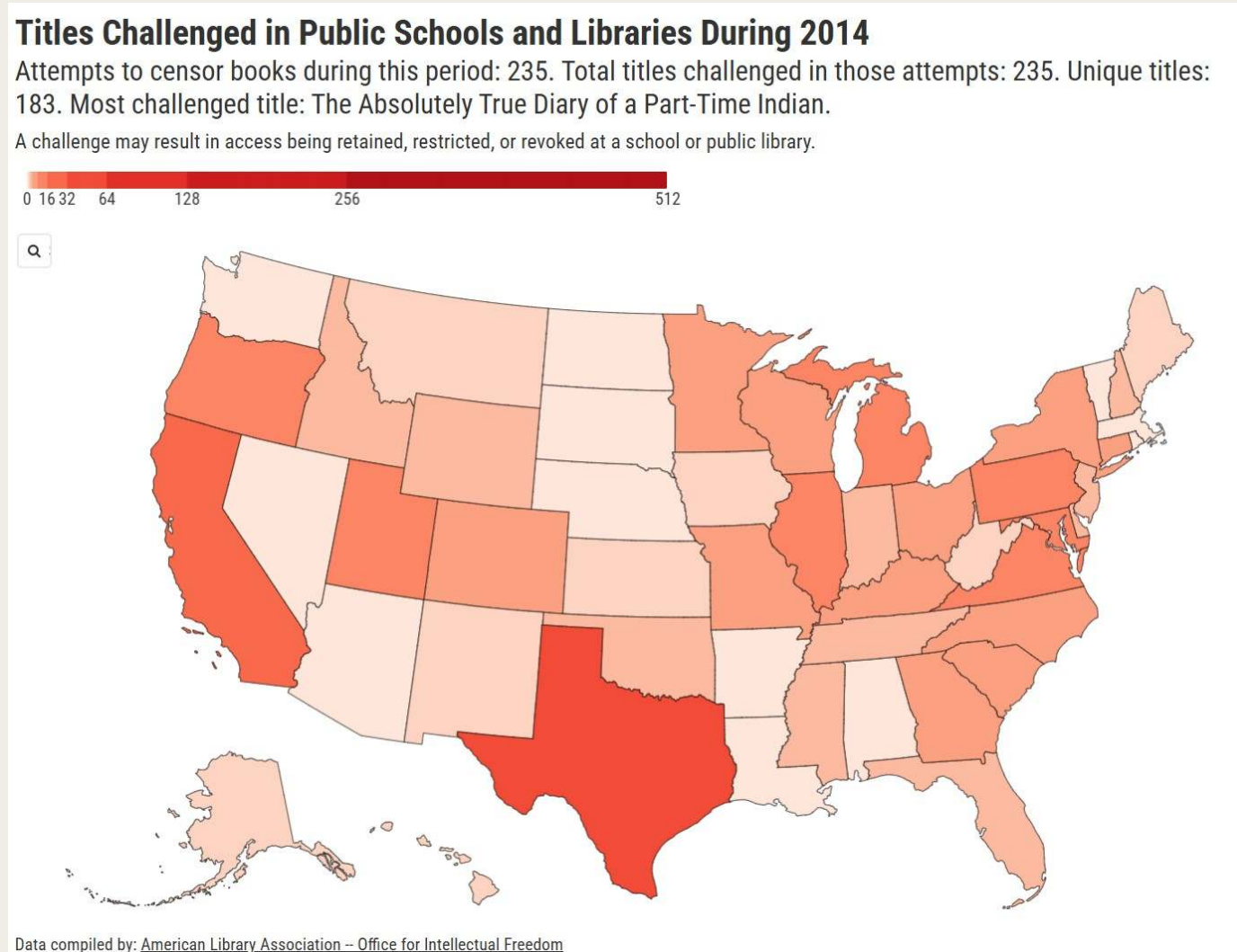
2020s

AMERICAN CENSORSHIP

(2014)

5

183
UNIQUE TITLES
CHALLENGED



AMERICAN CENSORSHIP

(2023)

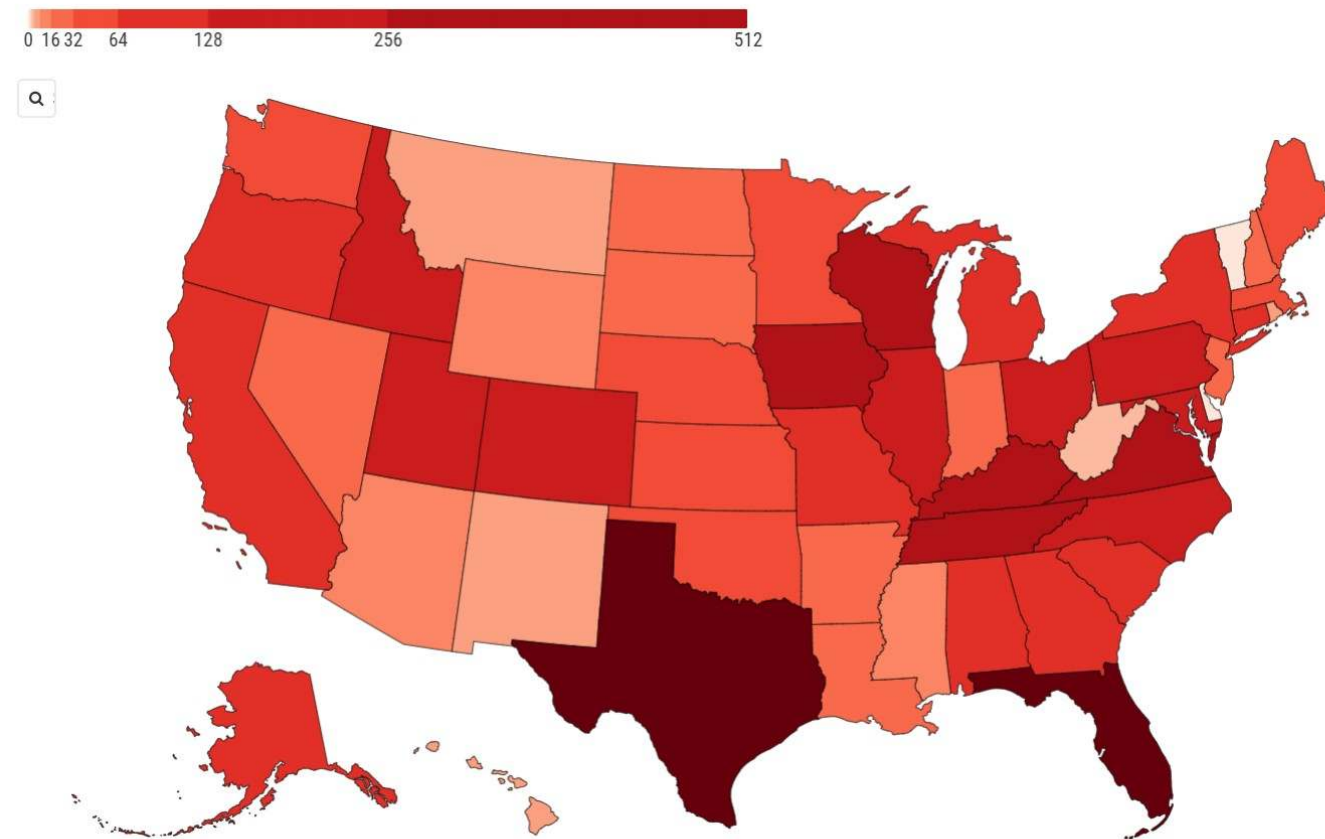
6

4,240
UNIQUE TITLES
CHALLENGED

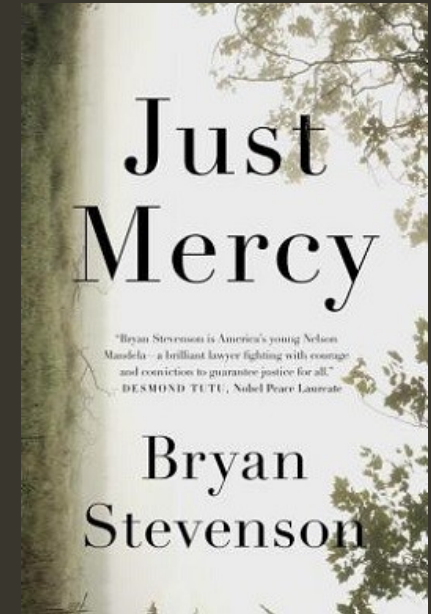
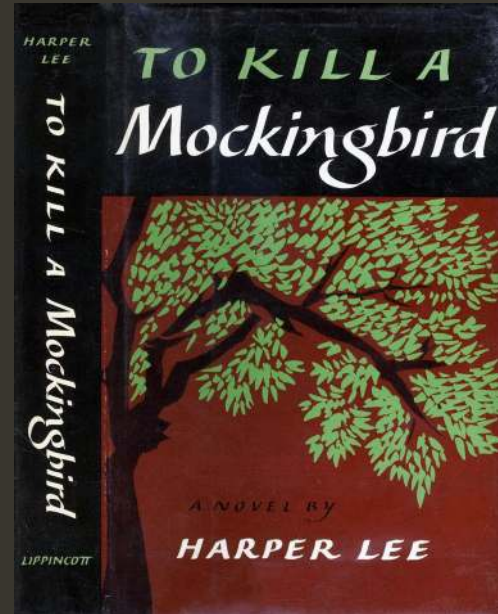
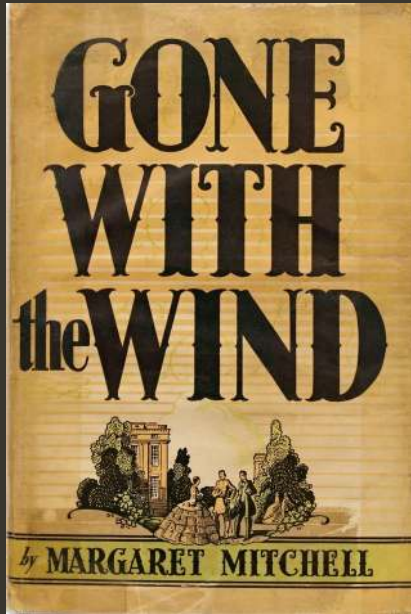
Titles Challenged in Public Schools and Libraries During 2023

Attempts to censor books during this period: 938. Total titles challenged in those attempts: 9,021. Unique titles: 4,240.

A challenge may result in access being retained, restricted, or revoked at a school or public library.



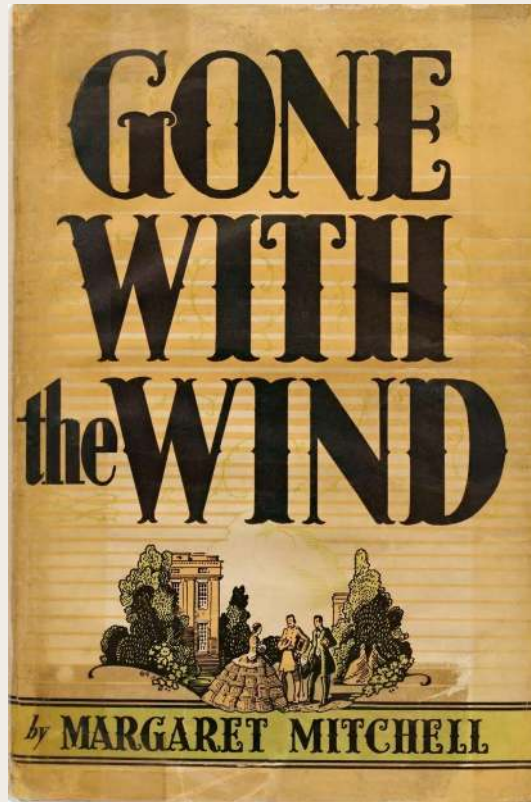
Data compiled by: [American Library Association -- Office for Intellectual Freedom](#)



THE BOOKS' RECEPTION THROUGH HISTORY

MARGARET MITCHELL'S *GONE WITH THE WIND* (1936) THEN

8



- Cements the Lost Cause of the Confederacy
- Roughly set in 1861–1875
- Historical Context:
 - *Great Depression*
 - *Hitler's Germany*
 - *Jesse Owens*
 - *Beginnings of Civil Rights Movement*
- Film released in 1939
- Sold over 30 million copies

MARGARET MITCHELL'S *GONE WITH THE WIND* (1936) TODAY

9

- Sanitized version of the Civil War and the South
- Nostalgic “Lost Cause” mythology
- “Tough little patch of history”
- “Utopia of tranquil living, and the northern forces as interlopers trying to disrupt that way of life.”

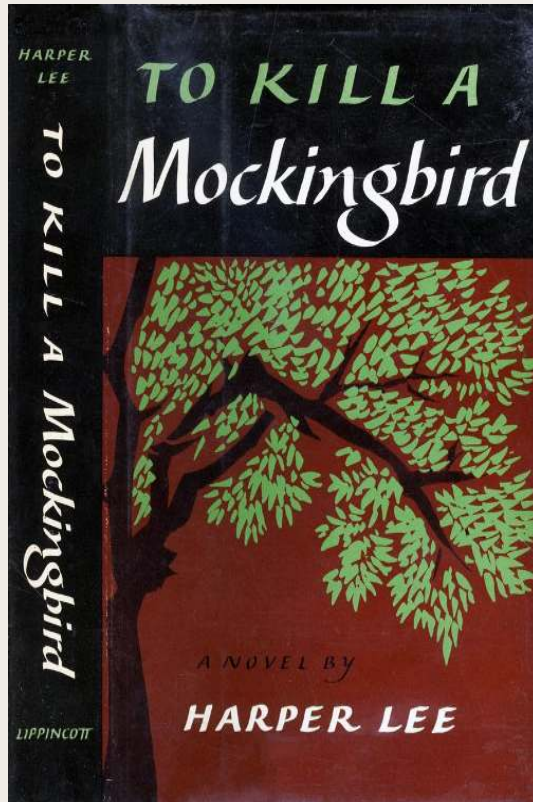


HARPER LEE'S

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

(1960) THEN

10



- Fight begins for equal representation in criminal courts in the wake of CRM
- Roughly set in 1933–1935
- Historical Context:
 - *Brown v. Board*
 - *Cold War*
 - *Height of Civil Rights Movement*
- Film released in 1962
- Sold over 40 million copies

HARPER LEE'S

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

(1960) TODAY

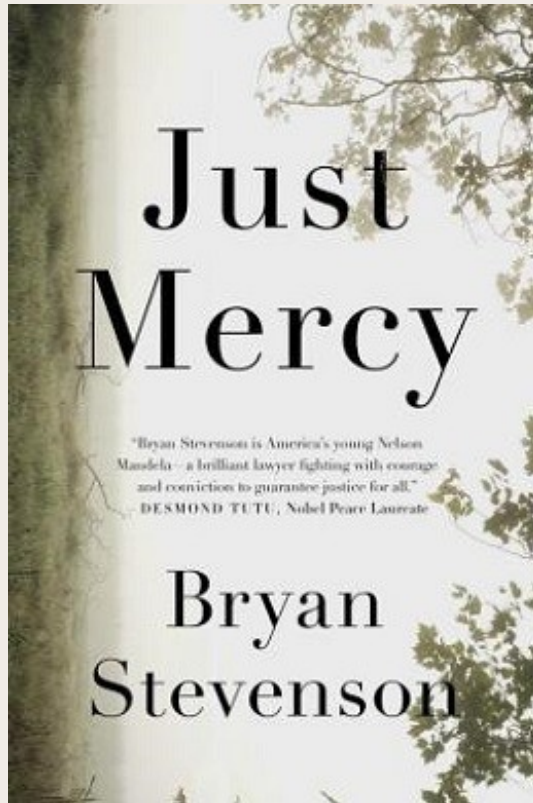
- Among the most challenged books of all time in schools and libraries alike
- Use of racial slurs, misrepresentation, and depiction of white saviorism*
- Atticus Finch as an aspirational character, particularly to lawyers and law students

*Note: Tom is convicted by the all-white jury even though Atticus proves Tom's innocence



BRYAN STEVENSON'S *JUST MERCY* (2014) THEN

12



- Racism in criminal justice system today
- Roughly covers 1986-1993
- Historical context:
 - *Barack Obama*
 - *Murders of innocent Black men:*
 - *Treyvon Martin*
 - *Eric Garner*
 - *Michael Brown*
- Film released 2019

BRYAN STEVENSON'S

JUST MERCY

(2014) TODAY

- Challenged for promoting Critical Race Theory (clearly defined as the embedded racism in *social institutions*, like the criminal justice system)
- Photo: Walter McMillian (left) celebrating with Bryan Stevenson (right) after his release





ESTABLISHING COLLECTIVE MEMORY: A BLACK PERSON'S INTERACTION WITH CRIMINAL LAW

MARGARET MITCHELL'S GONE WITH THE WIND (1936) AND SLAVERY

15



Fully obedient to owner's family or severely punished

Slavery as a brutal, very subservient practice

"There had always been... the competent hands of willing slaves"



No families of their own and content to serve their owners

Vicious overseer known for exploiting slaves

But....

Scarlett is protective of her former slaves

Mr. O'Hara "could not bear to see a slave pouting under reprimand, no matter how well deserved"

Mammy "had her own method of letting her owners know exactly where she stood"

MARGARET MITCHELL'S GONE WITH THE WIND (1936) AND THE KKK

16



KKK as a terrorist organization led by prior Confederate generals

Committed an unknown number of violent attacks

Seldomly reported attacks and even more infrequently convicted

“Influence is everything, and guilt or innocence merely an academic question.”



Romanticizes the KKK as a “a tragic necessity” to protect white women from freed black men

“[L]ynching . . . seemed a sensible solution . . . in fact, the only decent solution possible.”

Described as a “political meeting” instead of a terrorist vigilante group

But...

“impulsive” “crack-brained young fools”

Police come after the Klan members

Yankees “mean to stamp out” KKK even if it means destroying Atlanta again

HARPER LEE'S
TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD
(1960) AND SEGREGATION

17



HARPER LEE'S

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

(1960) AND CRIMINAL LAW

18

- “The only thing we’ve got is a black man’s word against the [white] Ewells’. The evidence boils down to you-did–I-didn’t. The jury couldn’t possibly be expected to take Tom Robinson’s word against the Ewells’.”
- “My folks said your daddy was a disgrace and that [Tom] oughta hang from the water tank.”



HARPER LEE'S

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

(1960) AND CRIMINAL LAW

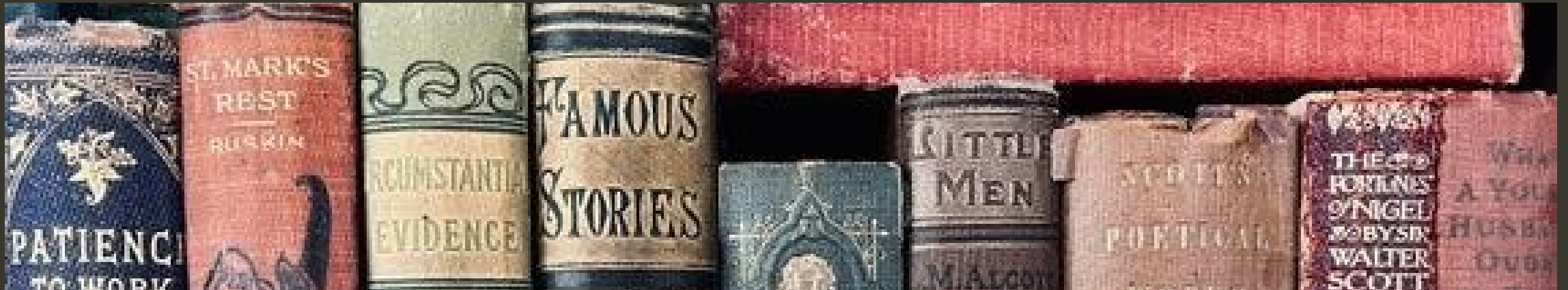
19



BRYAN STEVENSON'S *JUST MERCY*

20

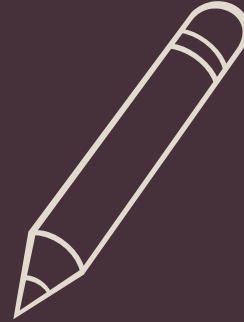




CONTROLLING FACT THROUGH FICTION

CONCLUSION & THESIS

- Based on the narratives promoted...
 - *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Just Mercy*
 - *Gone with the Wind*
- Appropriate contextualization and placement in history can help us see both the pervasive racism in these works AND their (subtle) advocacy/commentary
- Understanding literature's historical relevance and placement in time can help us better center each novel as advocacy, a warning from our past, and a focus on our common humanity to combat censorship today.
- Only through a careful analysis and comparison of history and fiction can we discover where fact becomes fiction and how fiction becomes advocacy.



THANK YOU

