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SCHOOL BOOK BANS

Failing history: the public education system is erasing identities

Public schools are restricting discussion on social and political topics.

BY MARA DUMITRU
Reporter

Editor's Note:

The current laws and policies regarding critical race theory are changing frequently and are often different depending on the state. The information in this column is accurate at the time of publishing. At the time of publication, this bill has passed the Florida House of Representatives and is headed to the State Senate.

There's no better time than 2022 to undo all the progress human rights activists have achieved so far. Across the U.S., more and more public schools and libraries face uproar from parents over the selection of 'inappropriate' books they offer.

The inappropriate books in question range from George, a children's book about a transgender fourth grader written by American author Alex Gino, to young adult novel All American Boys by Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely, which features themes of racism and police brutality. Common trends found in banned books include characters who identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community, characters who face racism and ones who question the ongoing police brutality and social issues in the U.S.

The American public school education system is censoring injustices as much as possible, preventing school children from being exposed to the true dark history of systemic racism in U.S. Schools. The system believe they are creating safe environments for children by ignoring important conversations about topics such as race and the Holocaust. There is only one sort of person who would be opposed to teaching children about Nazis and racists, and it's the Nazis and racists themselves.

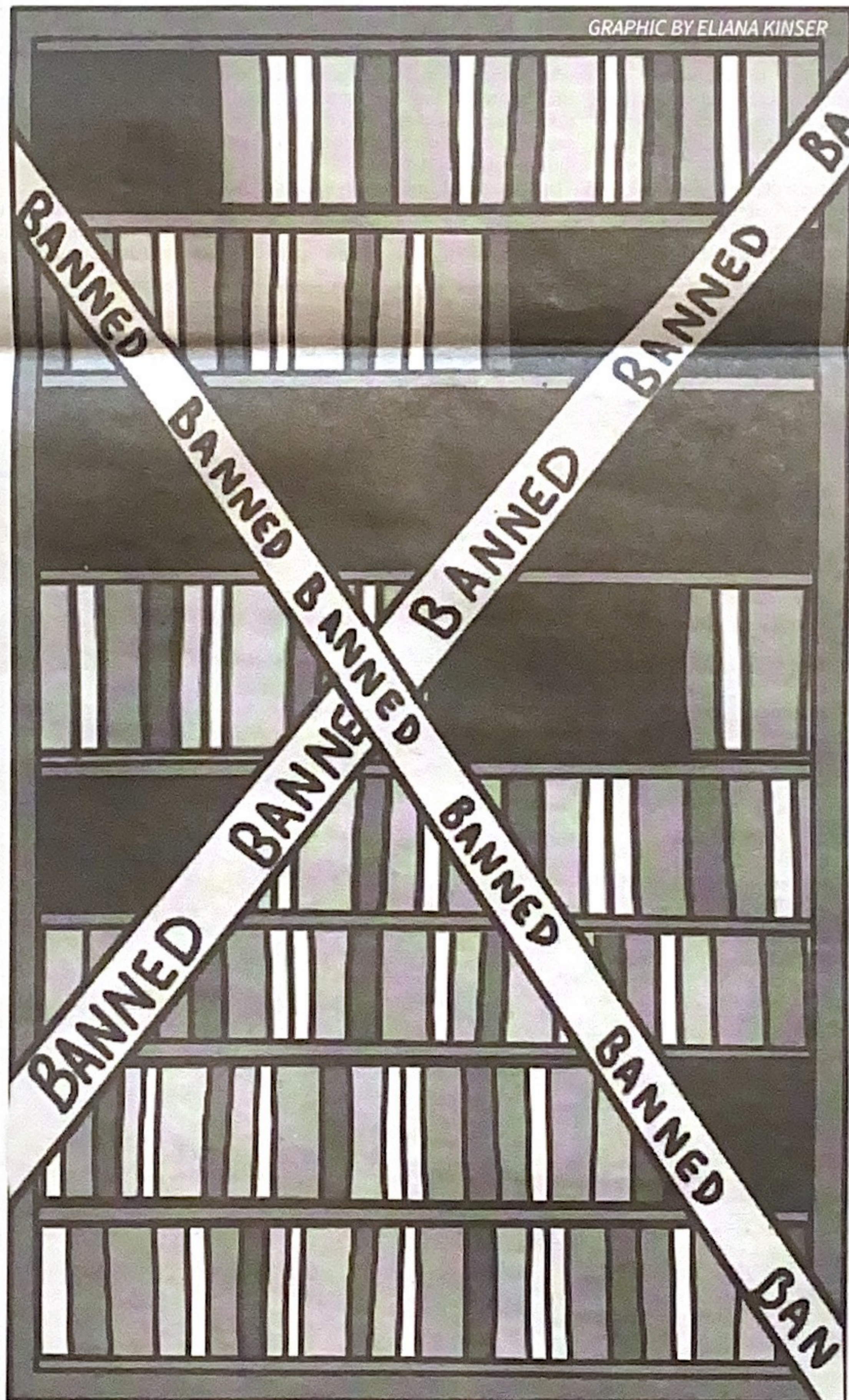
Earlier this month, school boards across Tennessee chose to ban Pulitzer prize-winning Holocaust graphic novel Maus: A Survivor's Tale by Art Spiegelman. Ironically, this decision was put in effect only days after the International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Instead of honoring and remembering the victims of a massive genocide, lawmakers chose to forget. Their reasoning? Nude drawings and foul language. These are common themes in most works of litera-

ture and shouldn't be deemed as inappropriate.

Hand in hand with so-called critical race theory, which teaches patterns of injustice found in our legal and political systems. It doesn't incite violence or call to dismantle the government. It

simply implies to generations of Americans in the education system the mistakes that were made in the past and those that are still made to this day. The first step of solving a problem is to acknowledge there is a problem to begin with. If lawmakers choose

to ignore said problems, then they invalidate the feelings and experiences of over 40 million Americans. By banning younger generations from learning about critical race theory, they only allow for the same mistakes to be made in the future.



It's essential to have these conversations sooner rather than later. Social progress creates a paradox; the more advancements we make, the more opposition we find. Oppressors are losing their power and are afraid they'll become the oppressed ones. But social equality is just that: equality for all sides.

These aren't new issues. Look back on your high school reading lists and note how many books were written from a non-male, non-white perspective. Julia Spande with Insider Magazine wrote that out of the 43 books she read during her high school career, only five were written by women of color. This is a common theme among American public schools, and it's becoming more obvious. Politicians preach about inclusivity and justice, and yet they fail to make the smallest, but most important changes.

Florida lawmakers don't seem to share the same opinion. Nicknamed the 'Don't Say Gay Bill,' this controversial bill limits educational discussions on sexual orientation and gender identity. How will queer students feel when their sexual identity is deemed improper and not up for discussion? Invalidating one person's experience and emotion just so someone else feels more comfortable is not just. Queer children will feel seen and validated when they find books about LGBTQ+ people on their school library shelves, and they'll have the same privilege to read about relationships that apply to them. Hate and love can both be taught, and it's up to our education system to pick which one they choose to spread.

How can we help? For silent protestors, both the St. Louis Public Library and Barnes and Noble have curated lists of banned books readers can enjoy. Even if you don't publicly speak up, the simple act of buying a book shows your support to the author and proves to lawmakers that people are going to keep reading the books. Spreading awareness on the issues is just as easy. Tell everyone you know that Missouri is in the process of banning so-called critical race theory in schools. Unified support against this bill might just sway lawmakers' opinion.

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