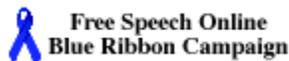


Links to Full Text of 25,000 Books Online, That Have Been Banned At One Time Or Another  
Category: [News and Politics](#)

## BANNED BOOKS ONLINE

Welcome to this special exhibit of books that have been the objects of censorship or censorship attempts. The books featured here, ranging from *Ulysses* to *Little Red Riding Hood*, have been selected from the indexes of [The Online Books Page](#). (See [that page](#) for over 25,000 more online books!)

This page is a work in progress, and more works may be added to this page over time. Please inform [onlinebooks@pobox.upenn.edu](mailto:onlinebooks@pobox.upenn.edu) of any new material that can be included here. Note that the listings are meant to be representative rather than exhaustive. Also, many recent books that have been banned or challenged have not been included here, because they have not been made available online. (But see [below](#)).



**Read a banned book today!**

### Books Suppressed or Censored by Legal Authorities

*Ulysses* by James Joyce was selected by the Modern Library as the best novel of the 20th century, and has received wide praise from other literature scholars, including those who have defended online censorship. (Carnegie Mellon English professor and vice-provost Erwin Steinberg, who praised the book in 1994, also defended CMU's declaration that year to delete alt.sex and some 80 other newsgroups, claiming they were legally obligated to do so.) *Ulysses* was barred from the United States as obscene for 15 years, and was seized by U.S. Postal Authorities in 1918 and 1930. The lifting of the ban in 1933 came only after advocates fought for the right to publish the book.

In 1930, U.S. Customs seized Harvard-bound copies of *Candide*, Voltaire's critically hailed satire, claiming obscenity. Two Harvard professors defended the work, and it was later admitted in a different edition. In 1944, the US Post Office demanded the omission of *Candide* from a mailed Concord Books catalog.

John Cleland's *Fanny Hill* (also known as *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*) has been frequently suppressed since its initial publication in 1749. This story of a prostitute is known both for its frank sexual descriptions and its parodies of contemporary literature, such as Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders*. The U.S. Supreme Court finally cleared it from obscenity charges in 1966. (Copies exist on [the English Server](#) and on [Wiretap](#); if one server is inaccessible, try the other, or wait until later.)

Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, and various editions of *The Arabian Nights* were all banned for decades from the U.S.

mails under the .. find another link to the Comstock law -->Comstock Law of 1873. Officially known as the Federal Anti-Obscenity Act, this law banned the mailing of "lewd", "indecent", "filthy", or "obscene" materials. The Comstock laws, while now unenforced, remain for the most part on the books today; the Telecommunications Reform Bill of 1996 even specifically applied some of them to computer networks. The anti-war *Lysistrata* was banned again in 1967 in Greece, which was then controlled by a military junta.

The Comstock law also forbade distribution of birth control information. In 1915, [Margaret Sanger](#)'s husband was jailed for distributing her [Family Limitation](#), which described and advocated various methods of contraception. Sanger herself had fled the country to avoid prosecution, but would return in 1916 to start the American Birth Control League, which eventually merged with other groups to form Planned Parenthood.

[Leaves of Grass](#), Walt Whitman's famous collection of poetry, was withdrawn in Boston in 1881, after the District Attorney threatened criminal prosecution for the use of explicit language in some poems. The work was later published in Philadelphia.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's autobiography [Confessions](#) was banned by U.S. Customs in 1929 as injurious to public morality. His philosophical works were also banned in the USSR in 1935, and some were placed on the Catholic Church's Index of Prohibited Books in the 18th century. (The Index was a primarily a matter of church law, but in some areas before the mid-19th century, it also had the force of secular law. A summary of the contents of the [last edition](#), published in 1949, is available from the Internet Archive. The Index was finally abolished in 1966.)

Thomas Paine, best known for his writings supporting American independence, was indicted for treason in England in 1792 for his work [The Rights of Man](#), defending the French Revolution. More than one English publisher was also prosecuted for printing [The Age of Reason](#), where Paine argues for Deism and against Christianity and Atheism.

Blaise Pascal's [The Provincial Letters](#), a defense of the Jansenist Antoine Arnauld, was ordered shredded and burned by King Louis XIV of France in 1660. France also banned Tasso's [Jerusalem Delivered](#) in the 16th century for containing ideas subversive to the authority of kings.

Jack London's writing was censored in several European dictatorships in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1929, Italy banned all cheap editions of his [Call of the Wild](#), and that same year Yugoslavia banned all [his works](#) as being "too radical". The Nazis also burned some of his socialist-friendly books like [The Iron Heel](#) along with the works of [many other authors](#).

South Africa's apartheid regime banned a number of classic books; in 1955, for instance, the New York Times reported that Mary Shelley's [Frankenstein](#) was banned there as "indecent, objectionable, or obscene". At one time, the regime also reportedly banned Anna Sewell's [Black Beauty](#), a story about a horse.

In 2003, Cuba jailed 75 dissidents, many of whom were involved in the US-backed "independent library" movement, which distributes literature to interested citizens outside the state-funded library system. In the court hearing that followed, many of these dissidents were then sentenced

to jail for distributing "subversive content", which was then ordered destroyed. Among the content was the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) and the [US Constitution](#) (both cited in the [sentencing document for Pedro Argfuelles Moran and Pablo Pacheco Avila](#)). According to [Amnesty International reports](#), most of the dissidents remain in jail today.

In nervous times, politically motivated censorship has occurred in the United States as well. In 1954, the Providence, RI, post office attempted to block delivery of Lenin's [State and Revolution](#) to Brown University, citing it as "subversive". In 1918, the US War Department told the American Library Association to remove a number of pacifist and "disturbing" books, including Ambrose Bierce's [Can Such Things Be?](#) from camp libraries, a directive which was taken to also apply to the homefront. (Censorship in libraries run by the federal government continued afterwards as well. In the 1950s, according to Walter Harding, Senator Joseph McCarthy had overseas libraries run by the United States Information Service pull an anthology of American literature from the shelves because it included Thoreau's [Civil Disobedience](#).)

During World War I, the US government jailed those who were distributing anti-draft pamphlets like [this one](#). Schenck, the publisher of the pamphlet, was convicted, and his conviction was [upheld by the Supreme Court](#) in 1919. (This decision was the source of the well-known "fire in a theatre" quote.)

[The Bible](#) and [The Quran](#) were both removed from numerous libraries and banned from import in the Soviet Union from 1926 to 1956. Many editions of the Bible have also been banned and burned by civil and religious authorities throughout history. Some recent examples: On July 1, 1996, Singapore convicted a woman for possessing the Jehovah's Witness translation of the Bible. A [2000 US government report](#) reported that Burma (also known as Myanmar) bans all Bible translations into local indigenous languages. (The military dictatorship of that country also required modems to be licensed, so residents of Burma, like NetNanny users, are not likely to see this page.) Distributing Bibles, along with other forms of proselytizing by non-Muslims, is also banned in Saudi Arabia, according to [this State Department report](#). (An email correspondent told me a few years ago that a sign at a Saudi Arabian airport customs stated that arriving travelers should surrender their non-approved religious books to officials before entering the country. A more recent correspondent tells me that the Saudis generally allow western families to bring in their own Bibles, if they do not bring in more copies than expected for personal use.)

Some governments still tightly control religious organizations and their publications. In 1999, the government of China banned the Falun Gong sect and confiscated and destroyed [books by their founder](#) and other Falun Gong books. As you can see, the books live on over the Internet-- at least in places that don't censor incoming Net data. .. wait until confirmation received Similarly, the Pakistani government censors literature from the Ahmadiyya movement, which is considered heretic by many mainstream Muslims. A recent target, Ahmadis claim, is [Revelation, Rationality, Knowledge, and Truth](#), which they report was banned by the Punjab government in 2000.-->

D. H. Lawrence's [Lady Chatterley's Lover](#) was the object of numerous obscenity trials in both the UK and the United States up into the 1960s.

[E for Ecstasy](#), a book on the drug MDMA, was seized by Australian customs in 1994, and at last check (May 2000), the official ban on the book was still in force in that country. (An Australian government site has a PDF document on [what kinds of books are banned or restricted in Australia](#). You can also [search the database of banned or restricted materials](#) yourself.) In the 1999-2000 session, the US Congress quietly slipped similar bans for "dangerous" information on drugs and explosives into various bills. The [Methamphetamine Anti-Proliferation Act of 1999 \(S. 1428\)](#) had a section 9 outlawing certain dissemination of information on drug use, patterned after a law [outlawing certain dissemination on information on explosives](#) that was signed in 1999. Given that conspiracy or solicitation to commit federal crimes was already illegal, it's hard to see what practical effect is intended by these bills other than to censor the open dissemination of information deemed too dangerous for the public to learn. The anti-drug-information bill has not yet made it to a full vote in Congress, as far as I'm aware, so *E For Ecstasy* is still legal in the US, for now.

A number of democratic countries, including Austria, France, Germany, and Canada, have criminalized various forms of "hate speech", including books judged to disparage minority groups. In the 1980s, Ernst Zündel was convicted twice under Canada's "false news" laws for publishing [Did Six Million Really Die?](#), a 1974 book denying the Holocaust. On appeal, the [Canadian Supreme Court found the "false news" law unconstitutional in 1992](#), but Zündel is now being prosecuted under Canada's "Human Rights Act" for publishing this book and other material on his [Zundel site](#). Even so, Deborah Lipstadt and some other prominent critics of Holocaust deniers have gone on record as opposing laws that would censor such speech. On the other hand, Zündel is quite happy to call for bans for works he doesn't like, though, as seen in [this leaflet calling for a ban of Schindler's List](#). And denier David Irving's attempt to stop publication of Lipstadt's book on Holocaust denial failed when a [UK court ruled](#) that Lipstadt's statements about Irving were, in fact, justified. With courts upholding both the decision and the bankruptcy of Irving that followed, the fight continues on the Web, with sites from both [Irving](#) and [Lipstadt](#) providing commentary, transcripts, and exhibits from the trial.

## Unfit for Schools and Minors?

The Savannah Morning News reported in November 1999 that a teacher at the Windsor Forest High School required seniors to obtain permission slips before they could read [Hamlet](#), [Macbeth](#), or [King Lear](#). The teacher's school board had pulled the books from class reading lists, citing "adult language" and references to sex and violence. Many students and parents protested the school's board's policy, which also included the outright banning of three other books. Shakespeare is no stranger to censorship: the Associated Press reported in March 1996 that Merrimack, NH schools had pulled Shakespeare's [Twelfth Night](#) from the curriculum after the school board passed a "prohibition of alternative lifestyle instruction" act. (Twelfth Night includes a number of romantic entanglements including a young woman who disguises herself as a boy.) Readers from Merrimack informed me in 1999 that school board members who had passed the act had been voted out, after the uproar resulting from the act's passage, and that the play is now used again in Merrimack classrooms. [Govind](#) has a page with more information about the censorship of Shakespeare through history.

John T. Scopes was convicted in 1925 of teaching evolutionary theory (best known at the time via Darwin's [\*Origin of Species\*](#)) in his high school class. (For more about this famous trial, including excerpts from the *Civic Biology* textbook Scopes actually used in class, see [this site](#) by Doug Linder.) The Tennessee law prohibiting teaching evolution theory, more specifically that "man has descended from a lower order of animals", was finally repealed in 1967, but further laws intended to stifle the teaching of evolution in science classes have been proposed in the Tennessee legislature as recently as 1996.

An illustrated edition of "Little Red Riding Hood" was banned in two California school districts in 1989. Following the [Little Red-Cap](#) story from [\*Grimm's Fairy Tales\*](#), the book shows the heroine taking food and wine to her grandmother. The school districts cited concerns about the use of alcohol in the story.

In Mark Twain's lifetime, his books [\*Tom Sawyer\*](#) and [\*Huckleberry Finn\*](#) were excluded from the juvenile sections of the Brooklyn Public library (among other libraries), and banned from the library in Concord, MA, home of Henry Thoreau. In recent years, some high schools have dropped *Huckleberry Finn* from their reading lists, or have been sued by parents who want the book dropped. In Tempe, Arizona, a parent's lawsuit that attempted to get the local high school to remove the book from a required reading list [went as far as a federal appeals court](#) in 1998. (The court's [decision in the case](#), which affirmed Tempe High's right to teach the book, has some interesting comments about education and racial tensions.) .. go back and look for full story on this. A New Haven correspondent reports it has been removed from one public school program there as well.-->The Tempe suit, and other recent incidents, have often been concerned with the use of the word "nigger", a word that also got [\*Uncle Tom's Cabin\*](#) challenged in Waukegan, Illinois. For a comprehensive web site describing attempts to ban *Huckleberry Finn* and other Twain works, see the site [Huckleberry Finn Debated](#), by Jim Zwick.

Many "classics" (and their authors) were regarded as scandalous when they were first published, but after the author was safely dead they were relegated to high school English classes and largely forgotten by most people. However, in 1978 the Anaheim (California) Union High School District woke up to the danger of George Eliot's [\*Silas Marner\*](#) and banned it. I would be gratified (and not at all surprised) if there was a sudden surge of interest in Eliot among Anaheim students afterwards. Also banned there, according to the Anaheim Secondary Teachers Association, and as reported in Dawn Soya's *Banned Books: Literature Suppressed on Social Grounds*, was Margaret Mitchell's [\*Gone With the Wind\*](#), for its depiction of the behavior of Scarlett O'Hara and the freed slaves in the novel. (While Mitchell may no longer be living, though, her copyright lives on in the US, so Americans will have to read a print copy instead of the online version.)

John Locke's philosophical [\*Essay Concerning Human Understanding\*](#) was expressly forbidden to be taught at Oxford University in 1701. The French translation was also placed on the Index.

Shakespeare's [\*The Merchant of Venice\*](#) was banned from classrooms in Midland, Michigan in 1980, due to its portrayal of the Jewish character Shylock. It has been similarly banned in the 1930s in schools in Buffalo and Manchester, NY. Shakespeare's plays have also often been

"cleansed" of crude words and phrases. Thomas Bowdler's efforts in his 1818 "Family Shakespeare" gave rise to the word "bowdlerize".

Bowdlerism still exists today, but nowadays cleaning up sexual references is waning in popularity, and cleaning up racial references is growing in popularity. Case in point: [This version of \*The Story of Dr. Dolittle\*](#), from the 1960s, was silently "cleaned up" from the 1920 original, in which Polynesian the parrot occasionally used some impolite terms to refer to blacks. In 1988, after the book had fallen from favor enough to have dropped out of print, the publishers issued a new edition that removed nearly all references to race from the book (and cut out a plotline involving Prince Bumpo's desire to become white). In contrast, the Newbery-winning [Voyages of Dr. Dolittle](#) was available in its original form (impolite words and all) for a long time, in part because until recently the Newbery awarders forbade their medal to be displayed on altered texts.

Similar concerns about the handling of race apparently caused [The Story of Little Black Sambo](#) to be banned from Toronto public schools in 1956, according to a book by Daniel Braithwaite. (Much of the fuss over Sambo has been over the illustrations rather than the text; some illustrations from various editions can be found [here](#).)

Is [The Bible](#) really banned in US public schools? Some claim it is, though most of the claims I've received in email have either not contained specifics or referred to cases that weren't bans, but instead cases where a state school had to stop advocacy or special treatment favoring the religious messages of the Bible. (Such preferential treatment by state-run schools conflicts with the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.) However, sometimes schools may err in the other direction, restricting student's individual speech or reading preferences because of their religious nature (in conflict with the Free Exercise clause of the First Amendment). In a 1996 New Jersey case, a student selected by his teacher to choose a story to read to the class was told that he could not read the story he chose, once he announced that he had chosen the Biblical story of Jacob and Esau. The school's policy was eventually [upheld in a split decision of a US Appeals Court](#) that the Supreme Court declined to review.

More recently, in a 2005 case pitting a Pennsylvania family against the Marple Newtown School District, accounts in the Philadelphia Inquirer and the Associated Press reported that the family was invited into a kindergartener's class to read from his favorite book, which in this case turned out to be the Bible. (Mark Sereni, who represents the school district, disputes this account, claiming that the choice was not the student's own, and that the invitation was not as broad as reported above. Lawyers from the Rutherford Institute, who represent the family, claim the assertions above are accurate.) After the school said the student's mother could not read from [Psalm 118](#), the child's mother sued. In an opinion article later published in the May 31 Inquirer, ("[Doing right by students, law](#)") Sereni cited the New Jersey decision from the previous paragraph, and claimed that disallowing the reading was required by Pennsylvania law. Section 1515 of Pennsylvania's Public School Code, also cited in the article, does allow the Bible to be taught in secondary grades as part of a literature class. Sereni's article interprets this permission as an implicit prohibition of other uses of the Bible in a class, effectively banning the Bible in Marple Newtown classes prior to the secondary grades, even in a student-initiated presentation.

Generally speaking, though, students should be free to read the Bible on their own initiative on the same terms as any other book they might bring to school. Bibles are also often found in school libraries along with other religious books, and biblical texts are sometimes included in literature anthologies or history or comparative religion courses. A useful legal guide to the Bible and religion in US public schools can be found in the 1995 booklet [\*Religion in the Public Schools: A Joint Statement of Current Law\*](#).