

The Ultimate Book Ban - Burying Books Reflecting Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

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When senior Florida officials first launched war against academic freedom targeting the liberal, creative New College as the low-lying fruit to set an example for Florida's public colleges, there were eerie similarities to the fascist takeover of the liberal, intellectual Frankfurt University in 1933. That coup would rapidly expand to control all of Germany's institutions of higher learning.

At Frankfurt University, the takeover happened at one faculty meeting when the newly appointed Nazi commissar took charge, making swift programmatic changes and purges of Jewish faculty amid threats. At New College it happened with the behind the scenes ousting of existing Trustees and appointing of extremist replacements followed by the January 31, 2023, Board of Trustees meeting during which President Patricia Okker was replaced by Richard Corcoran as interim, and then permanent, President.

Shortly after Hitler took power, there were infamous public book burnings followed by a rapid cultural descent into fascism. It's well known that books by Jewish authors were destroyed. What many aren't familiar with were the other books targeted for burning — research on sexuality. The library of Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Research in Berlin was destroyed. It was the pioneer institute for gender affirming care and all its books of research were burned and lost for all time.

And now this at New College. Thousands of volumes of books were thrown in dumpsters that were trucked away including books by many black authors like Alice Walker. One discarded ethnology recorded the little-known history of Florida's Black Seminoles. Erasing black history and gender studies has been a culture war priority for State officials, Corcoran,

and New College's Board of Trustees. Many of the removed books were from the axed Gender Studies program, a key part of the State's war against Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Other to-be-landfilled books included a discarded Hebrew volume, and Catherine Whitney's *Nine and Counting: The Women of the Senate*.

New College's Board of Trustees includes a representative of the Claremont Institute (CI) who is on the Project 2025 Advisory board. His CI associates certainly don't want women in the Senate, nor in positions of authority, nor virtually anywhere in the workforce. In a piece that reads like a manifesto, last year entitled "Education: How to Destroy and Reconquer" the Executive Director of the CI Center for the American Way of Life, along with another CI colleague, made it clear they want women home having babies and while in school "every female" should learn "to milk a cow."

But perhaps the starkest reminder of the moral bankruptcy and pernicious disregard for justice and academic freedom by senior Florida officials' hand-picked Board of Trustees, was emblemized by the disposal of the volume entitled *Encyclopedia of Ethics* edited by Lawrence C. and Charlotte B. Becker.

Caught exposed by the mass book dumping, an official-sounding alibi was needed. New College's Board is now attributing the multi-thousand volume book purge to "weeding" of damaged and other materials. While there is normal weeding of books from a library college, the size and scope of this disposal were not normal. There was a euphemistic characterization that "books associated with the discontinued Gender Studies program were removed" because the room housing them was being "repurposed." This was sanitizing the complete purge of a whole area of study that didn't fit New College's new ultra-conservative agenda. Many of the books in that repository were donated and not paid for with public funds. Other books were part of the library's collection and New College claimed they were not allowed to donate or transfer them because their purchase involved

state funds. That proved erroneous; Florida statute Title XVIII Chapter 273.055 (3) reads: “Custodians may dispose of property certified as surplus by... (b) Selling or donating the property to any private nonprofit agency.”

Despite the New College cover story, senior Florida spokespeople on social media gave the lie when gleeful over the mass book trashing. In fact, one New College Trustee brazenly boasted “We abolished the gender studies program. Now we’re throwing out the trash.”

A full independent investigation and release of all related public records is immediately warranted.

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