

# A 101-Year-Old's Fight Against Book Banning

Inspiring young 92-year-olds like me

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## Inspiration

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I'm often inspired by those younger than I who work tirelessly to help our country survive and thrive. But at 92, it's not every day I find someone *older* who is such an inspiration. Grace Linn is a spry 101-year-old with strong opinions about what's happening where she lives in Martin County, Florida. The school board there has been at the forefront of book bans in the state, removing more than 80 titles from county classrooms.

I recently came upon a remarkable and inspirational [interview](#) with Linn. Her husband died in 1944 fighting the Nazis, who were notorious book burners. Linn was so disgusted by the book bans in her Florida school district that she made a quilt depicting 84 banned books and displayed it while testifying before the school board. "Banning books and burning books are the same. Both are done for the same reason: **fear of knowledge,**" Linn said. "**Fear is not freedom. Fear is not liberty. Fear is control.**"

Linn's dedicated activism got me thinking about the [surge in book bans](#) specifically and the [culture war](#) being waged more broadly. The idea of a culture war is not something new in America.

## **Book Banning Resurgence**

One could argue it goes back to the founding of the country when some of the first colonists left England because of how they were treated on religious and moral grounds. Fast-forward to the late 20th century and the culture wars were still raging. In the 1960s and '70s, the counterculture movement of free love and anti-war sentiments mobilized the conservative right. In the '80s, the Moral Majority helped to establish the self-described “**Religious Right**” as a force in American politics, taking aim at **civil, women's, and gay rights**. *In today's upsidedown political climate, the culture wars have taken on a petty self-righteous fever, with the slogan “Make America Great Again.”*

Author and political commentator E.J. Dionne believes that the culture war has morphed into an “**electoral technique**” rather than a moral imperative. Solutions looking for a problem are disguised as important issues being exploited for votes. The recent preponderance of book bans is a potent example.

According to PEN America, a nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting freedom of expression here and around the world, there was a 33% increase in U.S. public school book bans in one academic year, from 2021-22 to 2022-23. This big jump is not a coincidence. In 2021, the right-wing political advocacy group “Moms for Liberty” was founded by three conservative activists and former Florida school board members. Its website claims it is just a “resource for parents,” but the Southern Poverty Law Center lists it as “a far-right organization that engages in anti-student inclusion activities and self-identifies as part of the modern parental rights movement. The group grew out of opposition to public health regulations for COVID-19, opposes LGBTQ+ and racially inclusive school curriculums, and has advocated book bans.” In March 2022, a member of Moms for Liberty left the organization to start BookLooks.info, which reviews and rates children's and young adult books. Almost every book that deals with **racism** and **LGBTQ+** issues gets a bad rating. A significant majority of the books being banned deal with these subjects. BookLooks has become the go-to resource for those wanting to ban books across the country. It is no coincidence that Moms for Liberty and BookLooks link to each other's websites.

*The Washington Post* [investigated](#) the new push to ban books and found that 11 individuals filed a majority of book challenges around the country in 2022. “In some cases, these serial filers relied on a network of volunteers gathered together under the aegis of conservative parent groups such as Moms for Liberty.” So this is not some massive movement of concerned parents but rather an orchestrated effort by a handful of like-minded hard-right activists who have found a flashy way to get the base riled up.

Be careful what you wish for. The Left is getting motivated, too.

## **Hope and Action**

Three congressional Democrats recently introduced legislation that would provide money to school districts fighting book bans. Legislatures in blue states like Oregon, Illinois, and California have proposed, or have already passed, what are effectively bans on book bans. Last fall, Karen Smith unseated a book ban proponent in her local Pennsylvania county school board election. When she was sworn in, Smith put her hand on a stack of banned books rather than a Bible.

We were not the only ones moved by Grace Linn. Sheila Nevins, the award-winning former head of HBO’s documentary unit, who has overseen the creation of more than 1,000 documentaries, has directed her first film, “[The ABC’s of Book Banning](#),” which was recently nominated for an Academy Award. It was Linn’s testimony before the Martin County school board that piqued Nevins’ interest in the topic. ***You are truly never too old to make a difference.*** It is worth reminding ourselves of this in this critical presidential election year.