

The *Floatplane* Controversy  
Proscription, Procedure, and Protection in Carroll County, Virginia, 1992

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ABSTRACT

In March of 1992, Marion Goldwasser, a teacher at Carroll County High School in Virginia, came under fire for her use of the book, *The Floatplane Notebooks*, in her classroom. A local preacher and several parents objected to six pages which contained sexual content. Over the next three months, residents throughout Southwest Virginia entered into a debate over the merits of the book, and more broadly the purpose of education. This debate roughly divided into three camps with different perspectives not just on how to proceed, but on the very nature of the controversy itself. These camps were those who felt the controversy was primarily about the censoring of books, those who were primarily concerned with the proper procedure by which the book should be reviewed, and those who saw the book as a moral affront to religious, Christian values. These disputes remained intractable throughout the controversy reflecting underlying disagreements about the ethical role of state power, the public nature of public schools, and the connection between power and knowledge. By understanding these underlying intellectual causes for the intractability of censorship disputes, historians can engage other academics and the public on this important issue. Engagement can take multiple forms, including writing in handbooks designed to help educators deal with such controversies, writing *amici curiae* briefs on relevant First Amendment cases, and encouraging a broader and more lucid public discussion on censorship and free speech.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

Marion Goldwasser was a high school teacher in Carroll County, Virginia in 1992. That year, she taught a book called *The Floatplane Notebooks* in her classroom. A parent and a local preacher objected to her use of the book because they did not like its sexual references. They demanded that the book never be used again and that the school board fire Goldwasser. The teacher, the preacher, the school board, and the community debated what to do for four months. Finally, Superintendent Oliver McBride ended the controversy by compromising and allowing the book to be used for advanced senior classes but not junior classes.

This controversy matters because it tells us something about censorship controversies in general. They have been going on for a long time and are likely to continue. People disagree about when the government should get involved. They disagree about why we have public schools. They disagree on who should make decisions for the classroom and how the media talks about censorship. Historians need to understand this. When they do, they can help the public become more informed on the issue of censorship.

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## Introduction

March 13, 1992 began as a normal Virginia school day. Marion Goldwasser, Carroll County Teacher of the Year in 1992, prepared her lesson plans to teach her eleventh graders about American literature. Just before 10 a.m., one of her students entered her classroom and asked if the class could listen to a radio broadcast directed against her. Surprised, Goldwasser allowed the students to huddle around the CB radio in their shop class. They tuned the dial to WHHV, a radio station that regularly featured the sermons of Junior B. Lineberry, a local evangelist. In the broadcast, Lineberry accused Goldwasser of “teaching children to be sex maniacs” and being possessed by the devil.<sup>1</sup> She had done this by having her students read a book — *The Floatplane Notebooks*. The only solution was to fire Goldwasser and anyone in the school administration who had approved the book’s use.

These demands were the first salvo in a four-month long controversy around the use of *The Floatplane Notebooks* at Carroll County High School (CCHS). The controversy pulled in teachers, students, administrators, reporters, newspapers, and organizations throughout Southwest Virginia. It received attention from national groups and national media. It provoked intense public interest locally and outside the county on the otherwise mundane actions of the school board. For months, scathing op-eds glossed the pages of the local papers, *The Carroll News*, *The Galax Gazette*, and *The Roanoke Times*. Arguments arrived from multiple sides as everyone voiced their opinions on the book, the teacher, the preacher, and the state of education in the country. Petitions were signed and protests were prepared. Dozens of residents packed the school board meetings in April and May to voice their complaints. Finally, in June of 1992, the

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<sup>1</sup> Marion McAdoo Goldwasser, “Censorship: It Happened to Me in Southwest Virginia — It Could Happen to You Too,” *The English Journal* 86, no. 2 (1997): 35.

school board formally ended the controversy by approving a compromise position. They removed the book from eleventh grade classes, but retained it for Advanced Placement (AP) twelfth grade classes.

At the center of this controversy was the book. *The Floatplane Notebooks* was written by North Carolinian author Clyde Edgerton in 1989. According to Edgerton, the book was based on an earlier short story he had written about a boy falling through a well in his kitchen.<sup>2</sup> After completing his first two novels, *Rainey* and *Walking Across Egypt*, Edgerton returned to this story and completed it. He wanted it to capture the authentic experience of a family in rural North Carolina based on his own experiences growing up there. For that reason, the book is told in dialect from the first-person perspective of several different people, including a wisteria vine growing in the family graveyard that remembers the family's forgotten past. The book follows the fictional story of the Copeland family living in rural North Carolina from 1956-1971.<sup>3</sup> It focuses on the fourth generation of Copeland children as they mature, marry, and start families of their own. Thatcher, the eldest, marries Bliss, who comes from a well-to-do family. She works to understand and participate in the life of her husband and his family despite the distance in wealth and upbringing between them. Meredith, the next oldest, is a troublemaker who joins the Marines to fight in Vietnam. There, he loses several limbs and becomes almost entirely paralyzed. Albert, their father, is a World War II veteran who in his spare time builds a floatplane from a kit. The floatplane becomes a family tradition. The kids play in it when they are young and its construction remains a consistent focal point for the family throughout the book. Albert keeps records of test runs of the floatplane, which he says is always successful

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<sup>2</sup> Clyde Edgerton, interviewed by Ryan Wesdock.

<sup>3</sup> Clyde Edgerton, *The Floatplane Notebooks* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 1988).

despite it never taking off, in several notebooks. He begins to add family trees, stories, and news clippings to these notebooks as well, making them a history of the family as it goes through good times and bad. The book ends with Meredith, now quadriplegic, taking off in the first successful flight of the floatplane.

During the *Floatplane* controversy, three camps took varying positions not just on what to do with the book, but more fundamentally on what the controversy was really about. The proscription camp wanted the book to remain in the classroom and viewed the controversy primarily as ignorant forces attempting to censor a qualified teacher. The opposite viewpoint came from the protection camp. They wanted the book to be pulled from the classroom and saw the controversy foremost as about protecting children and Christian morality. Between these groups, a procedural camp cared less about whether the book would be used, but more about the proper procedure for how controversial books should be reviewed and by whom.

This thesis focuses on the intellectual position that each camp made, the context which inspired their arguments, and the effect that they had on the development of the controversy. In doing so, it explains how and why the controversy developed as it did. The proscription camp demonstrates the efficacy, and the limits, of backlash to censorship attempts. Considerations made by the proceduralist camp show that local concerns, neither judicial precedent nor state or federal educational policy, were the dominant factors in the development of the controversy. Finally, the protection camp's arguments regarding religion and education, both in the ways that they reflected Religious Right ideology and in the ways they did not, showed as well a concern with local affairs. Together these insights explain the intellectual course that the controversy took.



However, this explanation fails to solve a key problem that scholars of censorship have long noted about such cases, that censorship disputes are intractable. This thesis argues that a key reason for the intractability of modern American censorship disputes in education are fundamental intellectual disagreements regarding the use of state power, the public nature of education, and the relationship between power and knowledge. Ideas about communication and censorship from John Stuart Mill, Jürgen Habermas, and Michel Foucault help explain the nature of these disagreements. They explain why censorship disputes are not just disputes over whether or not to ban something, but why participants so often disagree over whether or not something *is*, in fact, a ban. Using this insight, this thesis proposes ways that historians can engage one another, teachers, and the public on the important issue of censorship in education. In this way, the *Floatplane* controversy carries relevance far beyond the borders of Carroll County.

To understand the intellectual arguments made by each camp, this thesis relies on recent trends in the historiography of intellectual history. Intellectual historians have tended to emphasize one particular subject — elite writers in America and Western Europe — and one particular source base — intricate essays and books.<sup>4</sup> A quintessential work of this style is Louis Menand's *The Metaphysical Club*.<sup>5</sup> Menand explores the intellectual output of four major figures in American history: Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.; Charles Sanders Peirce; William James; and John Dewey. By looking at their essays, books, and debates, Menand argues that these men developed a new idea about ideas themselves. This idea was that ideas are constructed socially and therefore could be, and should be, adapted to new circumstances. To Menand, this idea

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<sup>4</sup> Drew Faust, Hendrik Hartog, David A. Hollinger, Akira Iriye, Patricia Nelson Limerick, Nell Irvin Painter, David Roediger, Mary Ryan, and Alan Taylor, "Interchange: The Practice of History," *The Journal of American History* 90, no. 2 (2003): 580-81.

<sup>5</sup> Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001), 1-10.

typifies the modern American mind, laying the underlying assumption Americans have worked with since the turn of the twentieth century. For the intellectual history of the American South, this lens is further narrowed topically. The majority of Southern intellectual history focuses on white Southerners' defenses of slavery. This emphasis is unsurprising given the extent to which slavery occupied the minds of Southern whites, and the extent to which those arguments came to impact actual events. Southern intellectual history has been thus construed narrowly by subject, source base, and topic.

Newer histories, however, have begun to expand each of these narrow lenses. In a recent article for the *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, historian Jonathan Daniel Wells explores how the field of Southern intellectual history might evolve. He starts with Michael O'Brien, a leading voice in the field, who had defined intellectual history in part as a "close reading of intricate texts."<sup>6</sup> Wells argues that intellectual historians should expand their scope to "lost thinkers," like African-Americans and women, as well as new sources such as newspapers.<sup>7</sup> Several historians of Southern intellectual history have already begun to do exactly this. John Kvach, for instance, uses the monthly journal *De Bow's Review* to argue that J.D.B. De Bow's intellectual thought went beyond just defenses of slavery and southern sectionalism.<sup>8</sup> Kvach argues that De Bow sought to industrialize the South and thus acted as an intellectual link between the "Old South" and "New South" that historians often distinguish between. Elizabeth J. Clapp has written a biography of Anne Royall, an 18th and 19th century writer who wrote controversial texts on

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<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Daniel Wells, "The Future of Southern Intellectual History," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 101, no. 4 (2017): 352.

<sup>7</sup> Wells, "Southern Intellectual History," 355.

<sup>8</sup> John Kvach, *De Bow's Review: The Antebellum Vision of a New South* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 1-9. It is worth noting that Kvach does mention Antebellum forms of censorship.

politics and religion.<sup>9</sup> Her biography places Royall in Jacksonian America, both as a voice of American concerns at that time and as a challenge to developing gender roles on separate male and female spheres. Thus, these works have expanded Southern intellectual historiography to include new sources and new voices.

This thesis is not a Southern intellectual history. While the events of the *Floatplane* controversy certainly take place in the American South, Southern identities and attitudes are not at the core of its argument. They merely provide a portion of the context for the arguments made by each camp. In addition, historians have tended to use Southern intellectual history only when referring to the Antebellum period, while the events described here occur in the recent past. Nonetheless, this thesis does seek to expand intellectual history in precisely the way that Wells described and other Southern intellectual historians have written about, that is, by using new subjects and sources to explore new topics. While some of the participants in the debate over *The Floatplane Notebooks* were college-educated, most were not. None were wealthy or had the ears of influential policy makers or businessmen. Participants were therefore not elite, but rather ordinary. They consisted of small town doctors, teachers, lay people, tent revivalists, parents, and students.

This thesis does not look at intricate novels or complicated philosophical essays; no one engaged in this controversy felt the need to produce any. Instead, it analyzes newspaper editorials, oral interviews, and local government archival documents. It was through these media that the intellectual aspect of the controversy developed. This source base allows one to explore topics beyond the traditional intellectual historical scope of philosophy, politics, and organized

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<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth J. Clapp, *A Notorious Woman: Anne Royall in Jacksonian America* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2016), 1-4.

religion. Rather, the editorials, interviews, and archival documents emphasize free speech, censorship, education, and local religion and the local contexts and immediate concerns from which those topics emerged.

This thesis also relies on interdisciplinary scholarship on censorship that has developed new methodologies and insights to answer important questions, such as: What causes censorship disputes? How do censorship controversies develop? Why are censorship disputes intractable? Media historian Frank Couvares, for instance, looks at these questions in regards to the censorship campaign waged by the NAACP against the filming of *The Birth of A Nation*.<sup>10</sup> He identifies the cause of the dispute as fears by the NAACP and others that the film would spark violence against African-Americans. The controversy developed, in Massachusetts at least, with the development of a board of censorship that, ironically, approved the film with minor edits. He identifies disagreements over the meaning and significance of the harm caused by certain forms of speech as key to the underlying motivation for the controversy. Americanist Amanda Frisken argued that the controversy around the Comstock obscenity law in the 1870s stemmed from disagreements between early free speech advocates and the sexual politics of Comstock and others. Comstock's censoring of sexual content was racialized, as the editors of the "sporting" press decided to "erase or reconfigure white sexuality, which they replaced with highly stylized morality tales about the interracial rape of white women by black men."<sup>11</sup> Sexuality and race could not be separated, and thus explained the ways censorship was actually enforced. In her retelling of the Kanawha County textbook controversy, English and Gender Studies professor

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<sup>10</sup> Frank Couvares, "The Good Censor: Race, Sex, and Censorship in the Early Cinema," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 7, no. 2 (1994): 233.

<sup>11</sup> Amanda Frisken, "Obscenity, Free Speech, and 'Sporting News' in 1870s America," *Journal of American Studies* 42, no. 3 (2008): 537-38.

Carol Mason seeks to move the discussion of the causes of the controversy beyond the hillbilly stereotypes that dominated the media depictions, and later academic research, of it. She identifies racism, evangelism, and populism as causes but shows how these were not reflections of a primordial mountain culture. Rather, they represented new alliances that would come to forge the New Right. Underlying these, she sees disagreements over the power of education to “yield an altered sense of community with new social identities and different social relations.”<sup>12</sup> Each of these scholarly works provides answers to key questions around censorship disputes.

More recent and innovative scholarship in multiple disciplines provide additional ways of thinking about censorship that influence this thesis. Latin American historian Martin Nesvig presents a new scholarly attitude towards the Inquisition in *Ideology and Inquisition: The world of the Censors in Early Mexico*. Rather than a totalizing force, he looks at the Inquisition as a fractious affair in which local conditions both reflected and deflected the dictates of the Spanish empire. Local political, religious, and cultural practices in Latin America, influenced as much by local indigenous peoples as by the Spanish, complicated the goals of the censors in Salamanca. Using this framework, Nesvig is able to explore the “ideological or sociological development of the censors themselves.”<sup>13</sup> He thus uses a more complex understanding of the reality of censorship to explore a new group, the censors themselves. Legal scholars have written extensively on free speech, censorship, and the First Amendment, yet innovative work is still done on the topic. Political scientist Wayne Batchis has argued, for instance, that suburban sprawl has reduced the frequency with which people come incidentally into contact with

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<sup>12</sup> Carol Mason, *Reading Appalachia from Left to Right: Conservatives and the 1974 Kanawha County Textbook Controversy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 9.

<sup>13</sup> Martin Nesvig, *Ideology and Inquisition: The World of the Censors in Early Mexico* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 1-6.

opposing views. He contrasts this with cities which have dense networks of houses and therefore make such contact nearly unavoidable. The physical space in which free speech occurs is integral to its effectiveness, and thus suburban physical arrangements, especially because they are often privatized, carry Constitutional implications. Batchis warns that “as formerly public spaces have been privatized one by one...the Supreme Court has withdrawn further and further from its initial commitment to the principles underlying the First Amendment.”<sup>14</sup> Law professor Timothy Zick has also done work on the relationship between space and free speech. He argues that increased governmental control over the places in which speech can occur has hindered the efficacy of the public forum in presenting people with opposing views. He refers to this control as “spatial tactics,” and presents, among other things, the treatment of Democratic protestors at the 2004 Democratic National Convention meeting as an example.<sup>15</sup> These works suggest both that studies of censorship should be localized and that censorship should be thought of more broadly than merely government restrictions.

Methodologically, this thesis pulls in these insights. It answers how the *Floatplane* controversy developed as it did, as well as explores the underlying disputes that made it so intractable. It emphasizes the local factors of the controversy and argues that they dominated the controversy instead of either rulings by the Supreme Court or federal or state educational policies. It also takes seriously the idea that censorship can come from more places than state houses and in more forms than the law. Proponents of each camp saw censorship as complicated, emerging not just from the actions of the school board, in different ways, but from the media as well. Yet, by focusing on intellectual arguments, local factors, and the complexities of

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<sup>14</sup> Wayne Batchis, “Free Speech in the Suburban and Exurban Frontier: Shopping Malls, Subdivisions, New Urbanism, and the First Amendment,” *Southern California Interdisciplinary Law Journal* 21, no. 2 (2012): 305.

<sup>15</sup> Timothy Zick, “Speech and Spatial Tactics,” *Texas Law Review* 84, no. 3 (2006): 581-82.

ensorship, this thesis cannot focus on other important angles of the controversy. Much could be said, for instance, on its social aspects. Despite the presentation of this thesis, these three conceptual camps came from one and the same social network. People in each camp were familiar with one another. They were teachers, doctors, family, and friends. Those relationships no doubt impacted the way the controversy developed. This thesis does not mention emotions either. Fear is a powerful motivating force, no less so in censorship disputes. Teachers who experience censorship have identified fear as a driving force behind it, as have scholars who study censorship disputes. Finally, race, gender, and sexuality do not receive much attention in the following pages. They are germane to the controversy, and this thesis mentions them when they directly impact the arguments that participants make. Yet, broader trends in American perceptions of each are not explored. This is primarily because, unlike the Kanawha County controversy, for instance, race and gender are almost never explicit rationales for opinions on the book.

In order to provide an accurate, local picture of the controversy, I conducted oral interviews with major participants in the Summer and Fall of 2018. The interviews occurred at a meeting place and time chosen by the interviewee. Contacting interviewees was simple. I imagined a network of participants extending outwards from the teachers and administrators involved in the controversy into the broader community and then into outside reporters and organizations. Rather than cold calling or emailing interviewees, I worked from the outside in, beginning with Paul Dellinger, the *Roanoke Times & World News* reporter who covered the controversy in detail. I then interviewed Clyde Edgerton, author of *Floatplane Notebooks*, then Marion Goldwasser, the teacher. On her recommendation, I talked to Shelby Puckett, the vice

principal of Carroll County High School in 1992. Finally, I spoke with Dr. Oliver McBride, the Superintendent at the time. For each interview, I had interviewees sign a consent form. In addition, three of the five interviewees signed a Creative Commons license that allowed me to publish their interviews online.

The Oral History Association (OHA) recommends a number of ethical “Principles and Best Practices” that I followed when conducting oral interviews.<sup>16</sup> First, OHA recommends that first time researchers seek some form of training prior to conducting interviews. I spoke with experts at Virginia Tech on oral interviewing and pursued mandatory training for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. Next, it suggests that oral interviewers should contact an appropriate repository in order to store oral interviews. Initially, I attempted to store the oral interviews with the Carroll County Historical Association, but they did not reply to my inquiries. Therefore, I decided to store the interviews at Virginia Tech Works, a university program that stores Master’s theses, dissertations, and accompanying materials online and accessible to the public. Third, oral interviewers need to select their interview subjects on the basis of relevant experience to their research project. Each of the individuals mentioned above are important figures in the *Floatplane Notebooks* controversy and provided invaluable information on their thinking. Fourth, the best practices note that historians should have done relevant primary and secondary research prior to conducting interviews. I familiarized himself with the most pertinent sources, in particular Marion Goldwasser’s personal account of the controversy. This proved invaluable in generating meaningful questions when conducting the interview with her. I prepared and used a recruitment letter, a consent form, and a permission form to use and store

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<sup>16</sup> Oral History Association, “Principles and Best Practices,” Oral History Association, accessed April 20, 2018. <http://www.oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices/>.



the interviews. The permission form is based on a Creative Commons license, as recommended by Mary Larson, the former President of the OAH.<sup>17</sup> Larson further suggests that oral historians consider the effects that interviews might have on their subjects, especially regarding victims of trauma. In this particular case, however, I had no indication that any of the events surrounding the controversy were traumatic for any of its participants. Indeed, the individual most negatively affected by the event, Ms. Goldwasser, has already openly discussed her experiences.

Nonetheless, the IRB recommended additional language in the form, which I incorporated, that included a disclaimer about possible reputational harm to interview participants.

These interviews were necessary to supplement written sources. The Carroll County school system maintains an archive of school board minutes, three of which explicitly mention the controversy. Records from the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) contained little relevant source material. They reveal, for the most part, that despite wide media attention paid to this controversy the VDOE paid it no attention. Frequent newspaper articles gave a clear sequence of events, but did not provide as substantive an exploration of the position of each of the three factions as the interviews did. It should be noted that I was only able to secure interviews with partisans of the first two camps. Despite my attempts, I could not gain an interview with Lineberry. The interviews I did acquire, however, made it possible to place each group in their intellectual context.

My positionality with the interviews impacted their content and therefore the conclusions of this thesis. As an outsider, born and raised in northern Virginia rather than Carroll County, I had no firsthand knowledge of the events, nor was I familiar with any of the participants prior to

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<sup>17</sup> Mary Larson, "Steering Clear of the Rocks: A Look at the Current State of Oral History Ethics in the Digital Age," *Oral History Review* 40, no. 1 (2013): 41-42.

beginning this thesis project. I was not, however, neutral on account of being an outsider. As a prospective teacher, I have certain pedagogical beliefs about teachers and their ability to select classroom materials. I have certain assumptions about censorship and free speech and an ideological inclination that encourages me to view this controversy in those terms. The questions I posed each interviewee came from this perspective. I have tried to provide a fair account of the intellectual position of each group regardless, yet viewing this controversy through my own particular lens is inevitable. In assuming that this narrative most benefits historians interested in talking about censorship in education, I am not assuming that this controversy was primarily about censorship. That is, I am not assuming that the first camp was correct and the other were somehow wrong. I merely believe it can provide lessons for those of us interested in the topic of censorship. A different perspective may have found lessons for historians engaged in other discussions.

Finally, as a methodological note, I did not take oral interviews at face value. Rather I corroborated them with written sources and additional interviews as much as possible. Some participants occasionally made comments that seemed plausible but for which I could not find additional verification. For instance, Goldwasser mentioned the possibility of involvement by Jerry Falwell, Jr. who may have had some role in the dialogue of certain individuals who had graduated from Liberty University. Being unable to find additional evidence about this, I declined to incorporate it into the narrative or arguments outlined below. However, the vast majority of claims made by participants not only had corroborating evidence, but were also remarkably similar to the claims each participant made during the controversy itself. Participants were honest when they had forgotten, or may have misremembered, a detail or two. Thus, while I

did not take these interviews at face value, I also did not reflexively provide additional, corroborating, written documentation for each quote I use merely for the purpose of corroboration.

### **Chapter I: Proscription: The Controversy as Censorship**

The first position saw the controversy as primarily about censorship. Marion Goldwasser was an educational professional who had decades of experience teaching in a variety of contexts. Her choice of *The Floatplane Notebooks* reflected a pedagogy that valued students and their interests. Hardly a corrupter of morality, Goldwasser taught emotional maturity, critical thinking, and real world skills in a controlled environment. Lineberry, on the other hand, threatened the success of education in Carroll County by second-guessing her. Not only were students threatened by his antics, but his supporters also challenged a free and open society by foisting their misguided religious interpretations on the rest of the county. An unchallenged force of censorship was likely to spread. Though largely sticking to these positions, the members of this camp nonetheless felt compelled to respond to the criticisms raised against them. These responses included personal attacks against Lineberry in addition to substantive arguments against his position. Many in this camp would accept the compromise eventually offered by McBride, more to put the controversy behind them than because they were satisfied with it. Their experiences demonstrate the potential, and the limitations, of censorship backlash. They managed to have their voices heard, but ultimately convinced no one in the opposing camps to support the book.

The major proponent of this position was Marion Goldwasser herself. Goldwasser was raised in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where she attended Springside, a private girls' school.<sup>18</sup> She went to a community college in New York, before heading to University of North Carolina,

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<sup>18</sup> Jane Ridolfi, "From Peace Corps to High School English," *The Bear Growl*, December 1994. This is the school paper for Mt. Airy High School, the school to which Goldwasser would move after leaving Carroll County.

Chapel Hill in 1962. During her time there, she became involved in the Peace Corps. As part of the organization, she travelled to several countries in East Africa teaching students. The experience convinced her of the importance of cultural context when making pedagogical decisions. On one occasion, she had her students read *Huckleberry Finn*. The students did not find it humorous. Instead, “they thought, why would anyone, because they worked so hard to go to school and they had to pay (or they did then), so why would anybody turn down a nice house and nice shoes and nice clothes and a free education to just run away?”<sup>19</sup> The student’s cultural experience shaped their response to the text and Goldwasser had not considered that when choosing the book. Cultural context did not discourage her from using a book altogether, but “it does mean you have to be aware of it so that you introduce that book in such a way that it will be acceptable, hopefully.”<sup>20</sup> After her time in Africa, Goldwasser returned to America and got her Master’s degree from Stanford, in 1971.

Already living in Carroll County, Goldwasser decided to enter the public school system the following school year. At first, she was a home school counselor, a liaison between home school parents and students and the school district. In this position, she discovered the ambiguous views people in the county had towards education. On the one hand, teachers were highly-regarded. For one home visit, “One family actually redid their whole kitchen before I came. So you have the teacher in some ways up on a pedestal. The teacher’s coming to our house and she’s having dinner with us.”<sup>21</sup> She would go on to receive a number of awards for her teaching, including Carroll County Teacher of the Year in 1991. Yet, she also felt that teachers were regarded with suspicion. “Who do they think they are?” She told me describing the

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<sup>19</sup> Marion Goldwasser, interviewed by Ryan Wesdock, September 3, 2018, transcript, pg. 8.

<sup>20</sup> Marion Goldwasser, interviewed by Ryan Wesdock, September 3, 2018, transcript, pg. 8.

<sup>21</sup> Marion Goldwasser, interviewed by Ryan Wesdock, September 3, 2018, transcript, pg. 9.

attitudes, “Just because of their education they think they're better than us?”<sup>22</sup> Thus, Goldwasser felt that teachers could be both highly-regarded and looked at askance.

Goldwasser’s experiences in Africa and early in her teaching career would come to shape not just her teaching style, but also the way in which she approached the controversy over *Floatplane Notebooks*. Initially, however, the controversy might have been averted. Wade Humphrey, a parent whose son was in Goldwasser’s class, initiated the controversy by approaching Harold Golding, the principal, about the book. When she heard about this, Goldwasser was initially apologetic. She spoke with the Humphreys over the phone and wrote a letter to the school administration apologizing for the use of the book. Shelby Puckett, the vice-principal of the school, took the letter. After consulting with Marshall Leatch, a legal representative for teachers, however, Goldwasser changed her tone. He told her to defend her choices as a teacher.<sup>23</sup> An interview she saw between local reporters and Golding sharpened her resolve. After seeing it she recalled thinking, “I got to speak up because you can’t let that be the defining feature of your teaching that you didn’t know what you were choosing and that you chose something horrible.”<sup>24</sup> She wrote a second letter to the school that revised her initial position and demanded her initial letter back. An English professor at Radford who helped teachers address their concerns with administrators went to CCHS on Goldwasser’s behalf. She noticed that they still had the initial letter Goldwasser had written. At the meeting, she warned the administration that reporters were beginning to take interest in the story. Goldwasser’s resolve to stand behind her pedagogical choices made the controversy possible.

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<sup>22</sup> Marion Goldwasser, interviewed by Ryan Wesdock, September 3, 2018, transcript, pg. 5.

<sup>23</sup> Marion Goldwasser, interviewed by Ryan Wesdock, September 3, 2018, transcript, pg. 2.

<sup>24</sup> Marion Goldwasser, interviewed by Ryan Wesdock, September 3, 2018, transcript, pg. 2.

Having decided to defend the book, Goldwasser had to select the means by which she would do so. She decided to defend the book herself, discouraging the involvement of her students, most of whom were eager to defend their teacher.<sup>25</sup> She opted throughout the controversy to engage the media, engage her supporters, and engage the school board. The crux of her argument was that her selection of the book was a good pedagogical decision. She asked the school board to have the textbook screening committee review the book, and intended to defend its educational merits. She stated in March, when the controversy began, that “there were some good, sound educational reasons for doing this book.”<sup>26</sup> In a prepared statement, she laid out the argument she would stick to throughout the controversy:

The *Floatplane Notebooks* was approved for use and is appropriate to the age, maturity and ability of the two classes that bought it. It was an optional book, but functions integrally with the eleventh grade emphasis on American literature. The material was used in context, not dwelt on or ignored. The mature, discrete, and professional treatment of this material, which emphasized the higher level thinking skills that call for in-depth rather than superficial analysis, was as important as the ideas and words the novel contained.<sup>27</sup>

Every part of this argument responded to her contemporary context — local, historical, and intellectual.

The book made sense because it connected with students’ lived experiences in rural Virginia. In contemporary educational language, these experiences form part of a student’s prior

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<sup>25</sup> Marion Goldwasser, interviewed by Ryan Wesdock, September 3, 2018, transcript, pg. 4. Nonetheless, students did get involved as we shall see.

<sup>26</sup> Paul Dellinger, “Book Fight Heats up in Carroll: Teacher’s Firing Sought,” *The Roanoke Times*, March 21, 1992.

<sup>27</sup> Sharon Snow, “Carroll Group Seeks Dismissal of Teacher,” *The Galax Gazette*, March 23-24, 1992.

knowledge — the entirety of the experiences and understandings that students bring into each lecture. While not a new consideration, reaching out to students based on prior knowledge was becoming increasingly common in the early 1990s. From the 1950s onward, American pedagogical practices had been predominantly behaviorist, emphasizing rote memorization and a hierarchical arrangement of skills and facts.<sup>28</sup> Research had begun to appear, however, challenging the efficacy of this approach. Instead, teachers began emphasizing cognitive approaches that require them to grapple with how students make sense of the world. Part of this change involved teachers moving to a “student-centered” model of education. This implied that teachers should consider the lives of their students outside of the classroom when making pedagogical decisions — building on students’ prior knowledge. Goldwasser was no doubt aware of this literature, as well as her own experiences regarding cultural context in both Africa and Carroll County. In this case, Goldwasser was careful to select the book in part because it resonated with her students. She read passages from three different books and the students chose *Floatplane Notebooks* based on the passage that she read from it. The characters in the book came from rural North Carolina, which shares many similarities with Southwest Virginia. Further, it prominently featured the Vietnam War, which many students had heard about indirectly from their parents and grandparents who had themselves fought.<sup>29</sup> This position did not go uncontested. At least one resident concluded that “the person who said the use of the book was an effort to bring in the cultural heritage of the area does not know the cultural heritage of

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<sup>28</sup> Brian Rowan, “Research on Learning and Teaching in K–12 School: Implications for the Field of Educational Administration,” *Educational Administration Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (1995): 117-123.

<sup>29</sup> Marion Goldwasser, interviewed by Ryan Wesdock, September 3, 2018, transcript, pg. 2. Approximately 55,000 veterans had served in Vietnam lived outside metropolitan areas in Virginia in 1990. This is a lower percentage of the population than in urban areas of the state, but still included approximately 10% of Carroll County’s population. See: <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1990/cp-2/cp-2-48-1.pdf?#>



the area. And I am sure that heritage has not yet been destroyed in most people.”<sup>30</sup> Yet Goldwasser remained resolute that the book did indeed reflect that heritage.

Indeed, Goldwasser felt more vindicated in this pedagogical reasoning as the controversy developed. After having decided to stand her ground, Goldwasser continued to use the book as the class was nearly done with it anyhow. Golding walked into her class and asked students to return the book. Indeed, he would cover their costs for having bought it. According to Goldwasser, “Not one person was willing to sell their book. Now, to me that’s a very incredible fact. Because they’re not readers, they don’t particularly like the books. They wouldn’t have bought this book if not for class, but they refused to let him have it.”<sup>31</sup> Clearly, she had connected with her students through the book.

Building on students’ lived experiences, however, carries risk. The same emotional intensity which motivates students to engage more critically with a text can unnerve administrators and the public. Alyssa Niccolini provides an example in “Animate Affects: Censorship, Reckless Pedagogies, and Beautiful Feelings” of a student-teacher fired because she allowed her students to write poems about homophobia.<sup>32</sup> The principal was uncomfortable with this decision and became angry upon hearing about it. Likewise, despite having initially approved the use of the book, principal Harold Golding became angry with Goldwasser after parents and Lineberry complained to him about its content. After the controversy first broke, Golding called Goldwasser into his office. He then told her not to talk to reporters and slammed

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<sup>30</sup> “Better Books Available,” *The Galax Gazette*, May 25-26, 1992.

<sup>31</sup> Marion Goldwasser, interviewed by Ryan Wesdock, September 3, 2018, transcript, pg. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Alyssa Niccolini, “Animate Affects: Censorship, Reckless Pedagogies, and Beautiful Feelings,” *Gender and Education* 28, no. 2 (2016): 230-249.

an encyclopedia on his desk right next to her face.<sup>33</sup> His fears, and those of several parents, about how their kids might respond to the book, provoked an angry response.

Those opposed to the book believed that the students were not developmentally mature enough for such a supposedly provocative book. Goldwasser, however, was convinced not only of the maturity of her students, but that the classroom was an appropriate environment in which to broach important, even emotionally evocative, topics. In fact, she contended that her regular students were more capable of addressing the risqué aspects of the book than her advanced students. As she told me:

For me, I always found my regular students were much more grown-up in many ways than the advanced students who had toed the line for what their parents had wanted, were working towards college and I don't know if this makes sense but some of those girls had already had sex in the sixth grade when they were in my regular English class. But they knew about sex, they knew about children, they knew about all this kind of stuff.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, the content of the book most offensive to Lineberry was in fact old news to her students. Her current and former students agreed with her assessment of their maturity, denouncing Lineberry and his followers as the truly immature ones. Amy Higgins, a junior in Goldwasser's class, wrote, "If the reader of the novel has at least a morsel of maturity, he or she will be able to read and understand the novel without being offended."<sup>35</sup>

Goldwasser's emphasis on higher-order thinking skills and in-depth analysis echoed a shift back towards critical thinking that had begun in the mid 1980s.<sup>36</sup> In 1983, the national

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<sup>33</sup> Marion Goldwasser, interviewed by Ryan Wesdock, September 3, 2018, transcript, pg. 12.

<sup>34</sup> Marion Goldwasser, interviewed by Ryan Wesdock, September 3, 2018, transcript, pg. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Amy Higgins, "Real World is Beyond Carroll County," *The Carroll News*, March 25, 1992.

<sup>36</sup> D. Christopher Florence, "A History of Critical Thinking as an Educational Goal in Graduate Theological Schools," *Christian Higher Education* 13, no. 5 (2014): 356.

Commission on Excellence in Education published a well-known report called *A Nation at Risk* that decried the state of education in the country. The report noted that few students seemed to have the ability to perform various higher-order thinking skills — drawing inferences, writing persuasively, and performing multi step calculations to name a few.<sup>37</sup> It gained widespread national and media attention for its stunning conclusions and led to a renewed focus on educational quality. One of the results of this report was a greater focus on critical thinking among educators from across grade levels and institutions. Goldwasser taught these skills in her classroom. As one former student wrote, “There were countless days that we spent debating over our own individual interpretations of the literature we were studying.”<sup>38</sup>

The book was also supposed to teach worldly skills to students, something students felt was a recurring effect of Goldwasser’s teaching practices. Dozens of students, past and present, wrote op-eds in local papers praising their teacher for the positive effect she had on their life. Billie Jo Bays of Hillsville, then a student at Radford University, wrote that “Not once did I feel that she was threatening my ‘moral standards’ but opened doors for me to great literature that had before been very much closed.”<sup>39</sup> A teacher at Fort Chiswell High School who had been Goldwasser’s student in the 1970s, wrote that Goldwasser “was a most positive adult role-model, as she encouraged all of us to set high goals for our future.”<sup>40</sup> A graduate of CCHS in 1982 said, “She exposed us to a lot that has helped us. I feel like it really prepared me for college.”<sup>41</sup> Angela Funk, the news editor at *The Galax Gazette*, echoed a similar sentiment. If students are over-protected, she argued, “They won’t be able to cope with the competition of getting into a

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<sup>37</sup> D. Christopher Florence, “A History of Critical Thinking,” 356.

<sup>38</sup> Kristi Largen McCormick, “Goldwasser Demands Achievement,” *The Carroll News*, April 1, 1992.

<sup>39</sup> Billie Jo Bays, “Mrs. Goldwasser is Asset to CCHS,” *The Carroll News*, March 25, 1992.

<sup>40</sup> Alice Horton Collier, “Former Student Supports Goldwasser,” *The Carroll News*, March 25, 1992.

<sup>41</sup> Paul Dellinger, “Ex-Students Praise Teacher as Inspiring,” *The Roanoke Times*, March 29, 1992.

good college; they won't have the experience necessary to go to work; they'll have no idea how to develop a healthy relationship with a man or woman."<sup>42</sup> In this view, the book did not corrupt students. In the context of the classroom, it prepared them to develop emotional maturity, critical thinking, and real world skills that would prepare them for college and adulthood.

A number of editorialists attacked Lineberry's use of religion as a justification to ban the book. An editorial in *The Roanoke Times & World News* cleverly began, "as a parent, you might be disturbed to learn that a teacher had assigned your child a story about a couple, living together without benefit of clergy, who did nothing all day but frolic about naked."<sup>43</sup> However, rather than describing a lascivious book, the editorialists reveal they were describing the Bible. Of course, in context, both literary and historical, these passages make sense. The same attitude one takes toward one, one should take towards the other, they argued. David M. Bernard of Blacksburg wrote that "Our country's founders knew the damage that religious zealots could do."<sup>44</sup> Anonymous readers hot line posts were usually more explicit. "Thank God we got religion out of our schools before we got people like J.B. Lineberry in to (affect) our kids' minds," wrote one caller.<sup>45</sup> A former student of Goldwasser rejected Lineberry's religious views, stating, "Maybe Mr. Lineberry should re-evaluate himself and leave the passing of judgement to a higher force."<sup>46</sup> The editorialists who wrote these passages appear to have been quite religious themselves, or at least raised in religious households. They were not attacking religion, or Christianity in particular, but rather going after Lineberry's supposed misuse of Christian works.

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<sup>42</sup> Angela Funk, "Censoring Book is Step Toward Overprotection," *The Galax Gazette*, March 30-31, 1992.

<sup>43</sup> "The Corruption in Carroll County," *The Roanoke Times*, March 24, 1992.

<sup>44</sup> David M. Bernard, "A Biblical Tale in Carroll County," *The Roanoke Times*, March 28, 1992.

<sup>45</sup> Reader's Hot Line, *The Galax Gazette*, May 11-12, 1992.

<sup>46</sup> Keith Allen Jackson, "Don't Pass Judgement," *The Carroll News*, March 25, 1992.

An attempt to ban this particular book would open the door to further censorship, many in this camp warned. Sally Harris in Christiansburg wrote to the *Roanoke Times*, “Now that the Carroll County School Board and the high-school principal have given control of the academic content of the school’s courses to a totally unqualified judge, do they really think he will stop at one book? A taste of power is hardly ever enough. What books are next?”<sup>47</sup> Indeed, residents had good reason to think this. In their editorial highlighting the course of the controversy, the Humphreys argued that, “If a school system in Florida can ban *Snow White* because it felt it had violent overtones then surely we as citizens can ban *The Floatplane Notebooks* and all other books that contain obscene and illicit language.”<sup>48</sup> At least one editorialist took them at their word. “Could [the administration] not see how they have opened themselves up to future banishment of literature?” Billie Robinette of Hillsville wrote quoting the Humphreys.<sup>49</sup> The *Responding* series dispute, discussed in Chapter II, also created a precedent for these concerns, though not one that was mentioned. In short, the anti-censorship crowd felt convinced that protests against *The Floatplane Notebooks* would spread with bad results from education in Carroll County.

Many editorials were struck by the personal nature of Lineberry’s attacks against Goldwasser. Some explanation for why these attacks were so personal might be found in earlier experiences that Lineberry and Goldwasser had shared and in longstanding cultural attitudes towards teachers. Early in her career, Lineberry invited Goldwasser to a tent revival. At the

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<sup>47</sup> Sally Harris, “School Officials Set Scary Precedent,” *The Roanoke Times*, April 17, 1992.

<sup>48</sup> Mr. and Mrs. Wade Humphrey, “Parents Give Account of Events Transpiring in Book Controversy,” *The Carroll News*, March 25, 1992.

<sup>49</sup> Billie B. Robinette, “Side Show Going on in Carroll,” *The Carroll News*, April 1, 1992.

event, which was sparsely attended, Lineberry denounced what he viewed as fashionable dress.

According to Goldwasser:

I was wearing a skirt that came down to my calves, you know, a midi-skirt with boots. And his daughters were both wearing skirts that were very, very high - very high....The idea in those kinds of situations is they keep directing at you and how bad you are and then, "Who wants to come forward and be saved?" I didn't go forward to be saved from my midi-skirt. That was a bust in his mind. He had the whole sermon directed right at me and I didn't come and get saved.<sup>50</sup>

Her refusal to be saved, she believes, stayed with Lineberry and may have contributed to his vitriolic approach to her later on. Gender likely played a role here as well. An editorial in the *Roanoke Times* quoted Lineberry attacking Goldwasser because she:

Believes she can "run over to the school superintendent and tell him what to do." in other words, she doesn't know her place. "The man is supposed to be the head of the household, but some of these little wimps run around and let their wife do anything when it comes to ungodliness, scared to speak up. We need to stand up against people, women like this."<sup>51</sup>

Gendered discourse like this was not new in educational history and goes some way towards explaining how *personal* the attacks that Lineberry raised against Goldwasser were. Throughout the development of the teaching profession, discourses of disability and gender have impacted how teachers have taught and their reception by the general public.<sup>52</sup> Teachers have been

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<sup>50</sup> Marion Goldwasser, interviewed by Ryan Wesdock, September 3, 2018, transcript, pg. 9.

<sup>51</sup> "Lineberry's Dark Crusade," *The Roanoke Times*, May 15, 1992.

<sup>52</sup> Kate Rousmaniere, "Those Who Can't, Teach: The Disabling History of American Educators," *History of Education Quarterly* 53 (2013): 96-102.

described as suffering from a number of physical and mental disabilities both as a result of their profession and as a function of the types of people the profession was supposed to attract. Often these disabilities have been gendered, presented as a unique failure of a predominantly female profession. Men, by contrast, were sought for administrative roles. Lineberry's gendered assumptions were therefore not new, and the responses he received reflected changing attitudes towards teaching.

Whatever the exact cause of the vitriol, the attacks irked many of Goldwasser's supporters. Erica Greer of Galax admonished Lineberry for "interfering with the teachers who are teaching us to think with open minds and decide for ourselves what is right or wrong."<sup>53</sup> Gregory O'Bryan from Stuart concurred that Lineberry was interfering. "Once again, the person best trained and educated to make the decision about the appropriateness of a literary work is the least heard by the cowards that be."<sup>54</sup> He also placed the controversy in the context of fears over international competition. He wrote, "the next time the Japanese remind us of our faltering approach to education, just bow a bit from the waist and mutter, 'Ah, so.'"<sup>55</sup> He was not alone in his sentiments. Around the nation, educators and policymakers expressed concerns about the growth of Japanese manufacturing and the supposed threat it presented American workers.<sup>56</sup> The Japanese economy had grown rapidly throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, while American manufacturing jobs were increasingly automated or moved overseas. Education would enable Americans to maintain a competitive international advantage. Censorship, for the local resident,

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<sup>53</sup> Erica Greer, "CCHS Student Sees Adult World as Immature," *The Carroll News*, March 25, 1992.

<sup>54</sup> Gregory O'Bryan, "Book Issue: Administrators Shun the Heat," *The Roanoke Times*, March 29, 1992.

<sup>55</sup> O'Bryan, Book Issue.

<sup>56</sup> Jurgen Herbst, *The Once and Future School: Three Hundred and Fifty Years of American Secondary Education* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

would threaten American education, and therefore challenge the ability of America to remain competitive. Lineberry was a threat to education in the county and to America more broadly.

Local residents and students were not the only ones to demonstrate support for Goldwasser. Paul Dellinger of *The Roanoke Times* covered the story extensively throughout the Spring and Summer, ensuring it got attention beyond the local papers in Carroll County. He sometimes wrote multiple articles on the controversy in a single day. His attention was significant as it provoked many op-ed writers from beyond the county limits to notice and comment on the controversy. Residents of Radford and Blacksburg, unanimously in opposition to the ban, engaged a controversy that they likely would not have heard about otherwise. College students in Virginia planned protests, ones that seemingly did not come to fruition, against the banning of the book.<sup>57</sup> The controversy even got some national attention, when the National Coalition Against Censorship mentioned the ban in an op-ed in the *New York Times*.<sup>58</sup> The senior editor of the company, Algonquin Books, which published the novel, Robert A. Rubin, defended both Goldwasser and the book from Chapel Hill, North Carolina. After highlighting a number of positive reviews the book had received in respected publications, Rubin expressed his sadness that “anyone would want to ban the book or fire an honored and respected teacher for having 11th-graders read it.”<sup>59</sup> External forces to the country generally opposed the book’s ban.<sup>60</sup>

As the controversy gained steam through April and May, Goldwasser and her supporters began to respond to the arguments raised by those who wanted to take the book out of the classroom. The major rebuttal was that the book and its passages had been taken out of context

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<sup>57</sup> Marion Goldwasser, interviewed by Ryan Wesdock, September 3, 2018, transcript, pg. 1.

<sup>58</sup> Leanne Katz, “How Censorship Efforts by Religious Right Disrupt Education,” *New York Times*, Dec. 2, 1992.

<sup>59</sup> Robert A. Rubin, “Senior Editor of Algonquin Books Defends *The Floatplane Notebooks*,” *The Carroll News*, April 1, 1992.

<sup>60</sup> Though, as noted in the introduction, external forces may also have acted against the book.



by the censorship crowd. Goldwasser chose the book not randomly, but because of its pedagogical value. Even the opposition had to admit that Goldwasser made a compelling case in defense of the book's pedagogical use. After defending the book before the school board, Goldwasser recalled the reaction from Mrs. Humphrey:

But the interesting thing with her is after I had talked for an hour, she said, "She makes this book sound good!" which I thought was a real compliment. She didn't see that as complimenting me or saying, "we made a mistake." She said, "She's just twisting things to make it sound like a good book."<sup>61</sup>

While the censors viewed the passages toward the end of the book as lewd, not everyone felt that way. According to Goldwasser, "Most of my friends said, I cried when I read that. It's not stimulating in any way. It's horrible."<sup>62</sup> Kristi McCormick, a former student of Goldwasser's, wrote in *The Carroll News* along similar lines: "I am sure that the book *The Floatplane Notebooks* was not looked upon in class for its vulgarities," she wrote, "but it is the parents' interpretations that make it vulgar."<sup>63</sup> Larry Dalton, another resident of Hillsville, wrote that "I, too, have read the book, but unlike Mr. Lineberry, I read it in its entirety." The implication is that if Lineberry had read the entire book, in fact if any of the censors had done so, they would not have disapproved of it. The censorship group was intentionally ignoring the way these objectionable passage fit into the overall work and into a broader educational purpose.

Of course, as with any debate, personal attacks were not only on one side. Many editorialists wrote scathing personal attacks against Lineberry. A large number of editorialists attacked his lack of education. Lineberry was a sixth-grade dropout who often used incorrect

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<sup>61</sup> Marion Goldwasser, interviewed by Ryan Wesdock, September 3, 2018, transcript, pg. 5.

<sup>62</sup> Marion Goldwasser, interviewed by Ryan Wesdock, September 3, 2018, transcript, pg. 4.

<sup>63</sup> Kristi McCormick, "Goldwasser Demands Achievement," *The Carroll News*, April 1, 1992.

grammar in his interviews with the press and in his op-eds. An anonymous submission to the Readers' Hot Line in *The Gazette* wrote, "it seems to me that this man needs to work on his GED, not look for publicity by attacking a class that he does not even qualify to be in."<sup>64</sup> Amy Whitlow of Chatham, Virginia attacked the school board for taking Lineberry more seriously than Goldwasser, writing sarcastically that "we want to make sure them kids iz well edjееcated don't we [sic]?"<sup>65</sup> His lack of education meant that he lacked any qualification to talk about the book, let alone pass judgement on its continued use. As we shall see, Lineberry and his family did not fail to respond to these critiques.

The three school board meetings in April, May and June of 1992 gave Goldwasser and her supporters another forum to defend the book. The April meeting featured speakers mostly opposed to the book. Only Barabara Fowlett, who spoke on behalf of the English teachers at the school, argued that the book should remain in place and that English teachers should continue to be able to select class materials. Goldwasser did not speak at the meeting, but rather chose to hand in 200 signatures on a petition that supported her work. In response, the Carroll County School Board reiterated that teachers had the authority to choose supplemental books for their classroom. Board Chairman Robert Burnett stated that he had "utmost confidence" in the teachers in Carroll County to make that decision, also noting that parents could refuse to have their own child read any particular text.<sup>66</sup> In conjunction with the meeting, 67 faculty members at CCHS petitioned the school board to have the book reviewed by the textbook screening committee.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Anonymous, "Protest Leader Criticized," *The Galax Gazette*, March 30-31, 1992.

<sup>65</sup> Amy Whitlow, "Lineberry Quotations Were Revealing," *The Roanoke Times*, April 3, 1992.

<sup>66</sup> Paul Dellinger, "Board: Let Teachers Pick," *The Roanoke Times*, April 10, 1992.

<sup>67</sup> Paul Dellinger, "Faculty Appeals Book Ban," *The Roanoke Times*, April 10, 1992.

The following meeting on May 12th was far more supportive of Ms. Goldwasser than the first.<sup>68</sup> It drew attendees from across southwest Virginia. Alice Collier, from Wythe County, called out the administration for not supporting their faculty, while Dr. Linda Lastinger, a physician from nearby Galax, expressed approval that the book had finally been sent through a formal process of review. Support from outside of Carroll County also included support from formal organizations. Idella Dishner, President-elect of District M. Teachers of English, drove down from Blacksburg to read a resolution in support of Ms. Goldwasser. Kathy Adkins, of the National Council of Teachers of English and also a resident of Montgomery County, read a letter from the NCTE expressing support for Ms. Goldwasser. Of course, many local residents spoke as well, and this also featured organizational support. Lisa Driscoll, head of the local CEA and the science curriculum specialist for the county, read a third resolution in support of the book. Indeed, the greatest support that censorship forces received at this meeting was from Caroline Abbott, a Hillsville resident, who noted that parents did have a right to object to the book, but also that this should not prevent other students from reading the book. This meeting, then, was much more supportive of Ms. Goldwasser than the first had been. She herself was largely responsible for this turn of events. According to her written account of the events, “I called many and varied members of the community to speak at the May school board meeting against censorship. I wanted their comments to be on the minds of the board members when they made the final decision about the novel.”<sup>69</sup> She convinced the board to allow her to speak to the committee and to make its meetings open.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Carroll County School Board Minutes, Volume March 10, 1992 - January 10, 1995, May 12, 1992, pages 2240-2241.

<sup>69</sup> Marion McAdoo Goldwasser, “Censorship,” 40.

<sup>70</sup> There appears to be no record of this meeting in the Carroll County archives. I was told no such records existed when I asked for them. In addition, the school board minutes do not reflect that the board agreed to this.

At the final school board meeting in June, the anti-censorship camp did not speak. The textbook screening committee had met previously to review the book. After deliberating on the matter, they proposed that the board agree to ban the book for eleventh graders, while allowing advanced twelfth graders to continue to use it. Oliver McBride heard complaints from parents who had opposed the book from the beginning. He then provided his own commentary. After a motion to vote, the board voted 3-2 to uphold the committee's recommendation, effectively putting an end to the controversy.

The anti-censorship camp got less than half of what it wanted. While teachers could still technically use the book, it could not actually be used in the classroom. The book is by an American author covering American themes, while 12th grade English courses in Virginia focus exclusively on British literature. Further, the decision to limit the book's use to advanced classes voided Goldwasser's rationale for having used the book in the first place. If the book was intended to appeal to students precisely because it contained content, such as war and sex, that administrators and others felt empowered to ban, then her flexibility in the classroom to select such materials was greatly reduced. Her initial pedagogical reasoning, that the book reflected the lived experiences of her students, was no longer applicable. In short, though the decision by the board appeared on its surface as a compromise, in effect it worked against the book and Goldwasser.

In the years since, no one has raised any further challenges of this scale against books used in Carroll County classrooms. The arguments the camp made, however, were largely irrelevant in the final decision that the school board made. This camp argued that the book

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Nonetheless, news reports and Goldwasser's own testimony show it did occur. Apparently, it was also filmed though I was unable to obtain a recording of it.

represented a good pedagogical choice and that censorship would have long-term negative consequences. They launched *ad hominem* attacks against Lineberry and appealed to the lessons of historical events both nationally and locally. They engaged in contemporary cultural discourses around education, religion, and cultural change. Yet, it appears no one was persuaded to join their camp and that no one was even compelled to change their reasoning on account of their arguments.

This is not to suggest their voices had no impact. While the eventual result of the controversy was a compromise between a total ban and free use of the book, nonetheless the public outcry over the attempted censorship clearly constituted a backlash against the school board and the administration of CCHS. Such backlash against attempted censorship is known as the “Streisand Effect.” Communications scholars Sue Curry Jansen and Brian Martin argue that the Streisand Effect is most likely to occur when the censoring force is able to do five things: cover up the action, devalue the target, reinterpret events by lying, use official channels to give the appearance of justice, and intimidate or reward involved individuals.<sup>71</sup> In this controversy, the school board attempted to do each of these things. When the controversy first appeared in the press on March 18th, Golding and McBride attempted to cover up that the book was continuing to be used in the classroom. Golding directed Goldwasser to disappear and avoid talking to the media. Those who supported censorship sought to devalue Goldwasser by insulting her, attacking her reputation, questioning her judgment, and manipulating her words. Originally, Golding tried to lie to the papers by saying that students had returned the books they had

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<sup>71</sup> Sue Curry Jansen and Brian Martin, “The Streisand Effect and Censorship Backfire,” *International Journal of Communication* 9 (2015):661-62. The terms “Streisand Effect” comes from an incident where Barbra Streisand threatened to sue a photographer for uploading a picture of her house to the internet. The result of her threat was that the picture became more widely seen and downloaded.

purchased. Golding, McBride, Lineberry, and the Humphreys gave interviews with the local press and wrote editorials in order to control the official narrative. Finally, they intimidated not just Goldwasser, but her supporters as well, with pickets, protests, slamming books, walking into her class, using threatening language, and more.

Yet, these tactics ultimately were only partially successful. As a well-known educator and Teacher of the Year, Goldwasser could not be easily devalued by the same people who had hired her and had rewarded her teaching style. Regional and national media coverage, thanks to Goldwasser's willingness to reach out and Paul Dellinger's diligence in covering the event, made hiding what had happened impossible. Op-eds from former students and community members flooded the *Gazette*, *The Carroll News*, and *The Roanoke Times*, challenging official narratives. Goldwasser resisted being intimidated, and resisted the potential reward of being offered the chance to rewrite the school board's policy on reviewing books. It was not just Goldwasser and her supporters who participated in the backlash, either. *Floatplane Notebooks* was on a long waiting list as soon as the controversy reached the local news.<sup>72</sup> This backlash against the censorship crowd prevented the book from being totally banned by using the same tactics the censorship crowd used. In the end, the partial success of the anti-censorship camp was due to their willingness to voice their concerns and mobilize supporters who agreed with them. Persuasion was nonexistent.

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<sup>72</sup> Paul Dellinger, "Book's Foes Call for Rally: Carroll Teacher's Case 'A Personnel Problem,'" *The Roanoke Times*, March 24, 1992.

## **Chapter II: Procedure: The Controversy as Process**

The proceduralist camp viewed the controversy in terms of the process by which the book should have been reviewed, rather than the question of the merits of the book or of Goldwasser. Oliver McBride, as Superintendent, was the most public face of this camp. He was joined by Harold Golding, principal of Carroll County High School, and Shelby Puckett, the assistant principal. For them, the question of procedure was not merely a formal one, but had significant pedagogical implications. They believed that schools, as the local institution with which parents, teachers, and students most regularly interact, should be the first places that disputes are brought. If the school board reviewed the book, he believed, then it would undermine the ability of teachers to select their own classroom materials in the future. From an administrative vantage point, they argued that they were obligated to balance a teacher's authority with the rights of parents to control their children's education. Some community members as well expressed their concerns as more about process than the book. In their op-eds and public comments, these members expressed a variety of opinions both on the book and the teacher, but each felt that the primary issue was whether the school board had followed its proper procedure. Administrators received pushback from the two other camps, requiring them to respond. Yet, throughout the four months of the controversy, the administrators made these arguments in almost completely local contexts. More distant organizations which might have played a role, such as courts or the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), were largely absent.

Dr. McBride had a long career in education. Born in Franklin County, Virginia, McBride and his family moved to Henry County when he was only three.<sup>73</sup> He grew up there and went to

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<sup>73</sup> Dr. Oliver McBride, interviewed by Ryan Wesdock, October 18, 2018, transcript, pg. 1.

the University of Richmond where he got an undergraduate degree in Sociology. After returning to the county to teach math and government, McBride got his Master's in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Virginia. He then worked as an assistant to the Superintendent in Henry County before becoming a high school principal for five years. Moving once again, this time to Halifax County, McBride became Assistant Superintendent. Finally, in 1989 the school board in Carroll County sought a new Superintendent and chose McBride. He would continue to serve as superintendent through the *Floatplane* controversy, all the way through 2007. After leaving the public school system, McBride has remained involved in local education as the Executive Director of the Crossroads Institute in Galax.

McBride insisted throughout the controversy that his goal was a balance between parental rights to control their child's education and teachers' professional practice. He felt that the school needed to be responsive to parental concerns, even if that meant pulling a book from the classroom. In a statement designed to prevent protests by Lineberry and others, McBride argued: "The Carroll County Public Schools acknowledges its responsibility to be responsive to the concerns of the community with respect to the materials to be used in the classroom of the school system."<sup>74</sup> He further promised "in the future, we will be certain to let our families know, be sure they know, what the process is" for how to remove a book from a classroom.<sup>75</sup> In his final comment at the June School Board meeting, he would once again reiterate the need to be responsive to parental rights. He was not alone in his assessment. Salem Superintendent Wayne Tripp concurred. "I think we have to respect a parent's right to provide a sheltered upbringing to their child if they choose to," he said in an interview with *The Roanoke Times*.<sup>76</sup> However, "I

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<sup>74</sup> "Book Protest Headed Off: but Dispute Continues," *The Carroll News*, April 1, 1992.

<sup>75</sup> "Protest Cancelled: Concerns Over Books Remain," *The Galax Gazette*, March 27-29, 1992.

<sup>76</sup> Paul Dellinger, "Book Ban a Sticky Situation, Schools Chiefs Say," *The Roanoke Times*, March 28, 1992.



don't think you jump out there and get rid of the book necessarily." Thus, for McBride, the controversy mattered procedurally, both because the proper procedure would ensure the greatest flexibility to each school, but also because it would be the best way to ensure the balance between community and teacher control.

Another major figure in this camp was Shelby Inscore Puckett, the assistant principal at Carroll County High School. Puckett had grown up in neighboring Patrick County and had moved to Carroll County in 1964 to begin teaching.<sup>77</sup> After working for many years as a teacher and then guidance counselor, she became assistant principal at CCHS in 1991, the school year that the controversy began. She recalls the controversy first coming to her attention when Mr. Humphrey, the major complaining parent, spoke with her at the school:

He proceeded to tell me that this book was not fit for the students to be studying in the high school... the principal came into my office and Mr. Humphrey repeated again and pointed out he had all the passages marked that he was opposed to. He was somewhat concerned about the language but he was particularly concerned about a sex act that occurs towards the end of the book.<sup>78</sup>

Harold Golding quickly brought the Humphreys complaint to McBride, who had become aware of Lineberry's weekly broadcasts.<sup>79</sup> As soon as the controversy reached the newspapers, McBride tried to articulate the proper procedure for the book to be reviewed. He informed *The Carroll News* that "the normal procedure for having books or other reading material removed from the classroom is to have parents file a complaint with the school's principal."<sup>80</sup> This was

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<sup>77</sup> Shelby Puckett, interviewed by Ryan Wesdock, October 11, 2018, transcript, pg. 1.

<sup>78</sup> Shelby Puckett, interviewed by Ryan Wesdock, October 11, 2018, transcript, pg. 1.

<sup>79</sup> Dr. Oliver McBride, interviewed by Ryan Wesdock, October 18, 2018, transcript, pg. 2.

<sup>80</sup> "Opposition Voiced about Novel's Use at CCHS," *The Carroll News*, March 18, 1992.

important because, for McBride, “It was not the responsibility of the school board to be selecting supplemental materials that a teacher might use in the classroom. I respected Ms. Goldwasser in this particular situation for her privilege and responsibility and what gladly we offered them to do was to select the materials they used.”<sup>81</sup> Only if the matter remained unresolved at the level, would the book then go to the textbook review committee under the auspices of the school board. This, for him, was largely undesirable. McBride would stand behind this as the proper procedure throughout the controversy. Principal Golding agreed with this. According to him, “a review of the material was done, which is standard procedure when there is a complaint, and it was decided that the book would not be used in the system again...the situation was settled.”<sup>82</sup> The problem, however, was that because of Lineberry “it was in some measure beyond the process.”<sup>83</sup>

The policy basis for arguments over procedure had their roots in an earlier censorship controversy. Arguments over the *Responding* textbook series in the 1970s took place throughout Southwest Virginia, particularly Washington and Carroll counties. Paul Dellinger, the reporter for the *Roanoke Times* who covered the *Floatplane* controversy, explained that a member of the Washington County Board of Supervisors in the 1970s led the charge against a textbook used in English classes called *Responding*.<sup>84</sup> After successfully removing it from classroom, this representative removed additional books from both the school and the public libraries that he found offensive. In 1974, the textbook series became controversial in Carroll County as well. Goldwasser recalls that parents raised complaints against the book’s portrayal of certain groups

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<sup>81</sup> Dr. Oliver McBride, interviewed by Ryan Wesdock, October 18, 2018, pg. 2.

<sup>82</sup> Sharon Snow, “Carroll Group Seeks Dismissal of Teacher,” *The Galax Gazette*, March 23-24, 1992.

<sup>83</sup> Dr. Oliver McBride, interviewed by Ryan Wesdock, October 18, 2018, pg. 2.

<sup>84</sup> Paul Dellinger, interviewed by Ryan Wesdock.

of people, particularly the police. Language, however, factored more prominently. After describing its controversial use in West Virginia, Goldwasser said:

When it got to this county what they did was they counted all the words that they thought were offensive words. 32 mentions of damn. Which I think is just an incredibly stupid way to analyze a book. And I even had a mother call me up and say I don't want my daughter reading this book for AP English, unless she goes through, she needs to mark all the bad words. Really? That sounds like a good solution. She's reading them anyway!<sup>85</sup>

Puckett concurred:

I think the biggest thing with the *Responding* series, and see that goes all the way back to '74, was language. And again I just remember somebody coming along with the book and the markings and everything was taken out of context. There was no context to anything it was just like we're going to mark every dirty word we can find.<sup>86</sup>

Tensions flared over the book, to the point where, as Puckett describes it, “we actually got to the point with that one where the school board threatened to burn books.”<sup>87</sup> The school board was not content to just remove the textbook from the classroom. As with Washington County, more books became targets:

Actually the school board hired a lady to work as an assistant in the library in the afternoons. She was seen — and the people who would back this up are probably gone so I'm going to call no names — but she was seen at various times going through books and

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<sup>85</sup> Marion Goldwasser, interviewed by Ryan Wesdock, September 3, 2018, transcript, pg. 6.

<sup>86</sup> Shelby Puckett, interviewed by Ryan Wesdock, October 11, 2018, transcript, pg. 3.

<sup>87</sup> Shelby Puckett, interviewed by Ryan Wesdock, October 11, 2018, transcript, pg. 2.

looking for things and then it got to be not just the *Responding* series itself but a hunt for witchcraft because we were teaching witchcraft in the school.<sup>88</sup>

As president of the CEA at the time, she and others convinced them to sell the book, averting the conflagration. This earlier controversy not only mimicked, in some ways, the later dispute over the *Floatplane Notebooks*, it set much of the course of the event. According to Puckett, the controversy was so intensive that the school board established a whole new policy on censorship.

It is not entirely clear what that policy was. McBride insisted that the school had to decide whether or not to use the book. Goldwasser insisted instead that the book should have gotten a hearing at the Textbook Screening Committee from the beginning, something that McBride ruled out.<sup>89</sup> Further disagreement included the nature of the complaint. Golding pulled the book because of a verbal complaint, but Goldwasser insisted that the complaint had to be put in writing.<sup>90</sup> I could find no record in the school board archive containing the policy. Indeed, according to Puckett, the only reason it was not followed was that it had been forgotten after almost two decades of never being used.<sup>91</sup> It is possible that the confusion around the policy stemmed from an unforeseen ambiguity. The policy, by allowing parents to pull any book from any classroom if they complained, did not foresee a situation where someone, teachers or other parents, wanted to *keep* a book in the classroom. It assumed that a resolution to the complaint would always be the removal of the book. Thus, when Goldwasser insisted that the book be reviewed, she was stating that the matter had not been resolved in a way that the policy had not considered. Nonetheless, rather than being based on a national legal principle or court case, the

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<sup>88</sup> Shelby Puckett, interviewed by Ryan Wesdock, October 11, 2018, transcript, pg. 3.

<sup>89</sup> Paul Dellinger, "Book Protest Off, But Dispute Isn't," *The Roanoke Times*, March 26, 1992.

<sup>90</sup> Goldwasser, "Censorship in Southwest Virginia," 37. The Humphreys did eventually submit a formal, written complaint but only after the book was pulled.

<sup>91</sup> Shelby Puckett, interviewed by Ryan Wesdock, October 11, 2018.

procedural path of the controversy followed the local experiences, if belatedly, of the county and its surrounding areas.

Administrators were not the only ones concerned with procedure, however. Some groups and individuals raised procedural concerns even as they primarily argued either to allow or ban the book. Before the April School Board meeting, a group of 67 faculty members at Carroll County High School petitioned the School Board to reconsider the book through textbook screening committee.<sup>92</sup> As with the anti-censorship group, they warned that banning the book would “set a precedent for ‘future censorship’ by small groups.”<sup>93</sup> Yet, their petition did not ask the book to be used in the school, only for a better procedure to be followed. The editorial board of *The Galax Gazette* argued: “The issue, however, is not about people, but about the selection and approval process of books to be used in Carroll County classrooms.”<sup>94</sup> These groups, while not necessarily supportive of the decisions by the school board or school administrators, nonetheless felt that the procedure by which the book was reviewed mattered most.

It is also worth noting that the school board, while constantly engaged in this controversy, was not only engaged in it. In the previous year, the school board considered a number of changes under McBride’s leadership. First, they implemented curriculum specialists. Ironically, Marion Goldwasser was selected as the specialist for English. “That was his idea to have four supervisors, English, History, Math, and Science, and meet with the teachers and sort of see where we wanted to go,” she told me. “He had a lot of good ideas.”<sup>95</sup> McBride, for instance, was

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<sup>92</sup> Paul Dellinger, “Faculty Appeals Book Ban,” *The Roanoke Times*, April 10, 1992.

<sup>93</sup> Paul Dellinger, “Faculty Appeals Book Ban,” *The Roanoke Times*, April 10, 1992.

<sup>94</sup> “Book Issue Should be Resolved Once and For All,” *The Galax Gazette*, May 11-12, 1992.

<sup>95</sup> Marion Goldwasser, interviewed by Ryan Wesdock, September 3, 2018, transcript, pg. 10.

very interested in working with superintendents across the state to address inequity in educational funding, another major concern of the VDOE at this time.

Critics from both of the other two camps were unhappy with the way that McBride and Golding, in particular, handled the controversy. The comments were strongly worded and focused on the perceived weakness of administrators to stand up, either to Lineberry or to Goldwasser. “Lineberry has simply developed his own flag-burning method and, not surprisingly, the heat is too intense for administrators to stand near Goldwasser. Better that she be their contribution to the flame,” one author wrote.<sup>96</sup> Another wrote, “It is a sad day for the children in Carroll County schools when an uneducated sixth-grade dropout can dictate what they read or may not read. It is a sadder day to find these officials that are responsible for the education of our children have spaghetti for guts.”<sup>97</sup> Yet a third wrote, “I cannot understand what administrators were thinking when they responded in this manner...[McBride] is trying to justify that outspoken [*sic*] few have dictated what can and cannot be read by students.”<sup>98</sup> In a scathing editorial, *The Roanoke Times & World News* denounced “spineless” administrators for refusing to stand up to censorship.<sup>99</sup> “As long as such men of ‘principle and integrity’ administer our public schools...,” they argued, “we can be sure that the rot will spread.” Alice Collier, a Wythe County teacher, “was also concerned that the administration’s quick ban of the book might cause other parents to think they can object and get their way.”<sup>100</sup> Students also shunned administrators. As a new hardback edition of the book had launched, students were able to buy old paperback

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<sup>96</sup> Gregory O’ Bryan, “Book Issue: Administrators Shun the Heat,” *The Roanoke Times*, March 29, 1992.

<sup>97</sup> Joseph H. Early Jr., M.D., “A Sad Day in Carroll,” *The Galax Gazette*, March 30-31, 1992. The same editorial appeared in *The Carroll News* on April 1st.

<sup>98</sup> Billie B. Robinette, “Side Show Going on in Carroll,” *The Carroll News*, April 1, 1992.

<sup>99</sup> “On Preachers, Teachers, and Other Creatures,” *The Roanoke Times*, March 28, 1992.

<sup>100</sup> Sharon Snow, “Goldwasser Needs More Support, Group Tells Board,” *The Galax Gazette*, May 18-19, 1992.

editions very cheaply, rather than requiring the school board to purchase them.<sup>101</sup> Yet, when given the choice of returning their books for a refund, the students almost unanimously refused, resisting the efforts by the school administration to put the controversy to rest.

It is important to note the absence of legal considerations in this debate, particularly as it relates to those who saw the controversy as process. Legal scholars and historians often emphasize the role that the Supreme Court has played in shaping the limits of speech and censorship, particularly since the *Schenck v. United States* case following World War I. In *Banned in the U.S.A.: A Reference Guide to Book Censorship in Schools and Public Libraries*, Herbert Foerstel explored major censorship cases involving banned books in schools and public libraries from the Kanawha County incident in 1973 to the *Island Trees School District v. Pico* case in 1982 and beyond.<sup>102</sup> Lewis Wasserman and John Connolly argue that free speech protections for public employees eroded between the *Pickering v. Board of Education* case in 1968 and *Garcetti v. Ceballos*.<sup>103</sup> Marjorie Heins, in *Priests of Our Democracy*, proposes that restrictions on academic freedom in New York prompted teachers and students to protest.<sup>104</sup> These protests in turn led to the 1967 *Keyishian v. Board of Regents* case that outlawed loyalty oaths as a condition for public employment. For these scholars, *de jure* protections are highly significant for the *de facto* existence of free speech.

However, no one in any of the three camps considered these cases in regards to the *Floatplane* controversy. This is particularly significant for considering the thought of the

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<sup>101</sup> Marion Goldwasser, interviewed by Ryan Wesdock, September 3, 2018, transcript, pgs. 2-3.

<sup>102</sup> Herbert Foerstel, *Banned in the U.S.A.: A Reference Guide to Book Censorship in Schools and Public Libraries* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994).

<sup>103</sup> Lewis Wasserman and John P. Connolly, "The Garcetti Effect and the Erosion of Free Speech Rights of K-12 Public Education Employees: Trends and Implications," *Teachers College Record* 119, no. 6 (2017): 1-28.

<sup>104</sup> Marjorie Heins, *Priests of Our Democracy: The Supreme Court, Academic Freedom, and the Anti-Communist Purge* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

procedural group because they — mostly public school administrators — would have been the most directly impacted by a Supreme Court ruling on the use of books in the classroom. In 1992, a number of court cases had *de jure* sway over the the banning of books across the United States. However, in the most directly relevant case, *Pico*, the Supreme Court had deadlocked, failing to create a precedent for the circumstances under which school boards could ban books from classroom use. The case did not address issues surrounding the use of textbooks in the classroom but rather the availability of books in a school library. Parents involved in a conservative group who had students in the Island Trees Union Free School District Legal in New York demanded that the schools pull books they did not like from the school library.<sup>105</sup> The students sued, arguing that this was an infringement of their First Amendment rights. In 1982, the Supreme Court gave a verdict on the case but no majority opinion prevailed, preventing the establishment of precedence. In particular for this controversy, the ruling distinguished between book use in the classroom and library books which were given additional First Amendment protections. Despite the lack of a clear ruling, lower courts have used *Pico* in cases regarding censorship in schools.<sup>106</sup> Scholars have noted repeatedly that this case created an unclear precedent that has remained unresolved.<sup>107</sup> Thus, the school board could effectively ignore any legal questions throughout the controversy.

According to Goldwasser, the board never considered any judicial precedent in its deliberations. None of the records of minutes from the school board meeting during that spring

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<sup>105</sup> Katherine Fiore, “*ACLU v. Miami-Dade County School Board: Reading Pico Imprecisely, Writing Undue Restrictions on Public School Library Books, and Adding to the Collection of Students’ First Amendment Right Violations*,” *Villanova Law Review* no. 56 (2011), 103-107.

<sup>106</sup> Fiore, “*ACLU v. Miami-Dade*,” 105-107. Fiore explains this by distinguishing between “binding precedent” and “persuasive authority.”

<sup>107</sup> Richard J. Peltz, “Pieces of *Pico*: Saving Intellectual Freedom in the Public School Library,” *Brigham Young University Education and Law Journal* 2005, no. 2 (2005): 103-158.



and summer record any mention of such deliberations by board members or the public. There were no attempts at litigation reported by the local or national press. McBride said he never made any legal considerations, only local ones focused on the specific policies of the Carroll County School Board. In this particular instance, legal considerations were simply not relevant.

McBride, Puckett, Golding, and the school board made their decisions in the context of increasing school decentralization throughout the globe.<sup>108</sup> This wave of decentralization, which lasted from the 1980s through at least the 2000s was merely the latest in a series of back-and-forths between decentralization and centralization that had begun in the 1960s. Initially, decentralization was focused on equity and community-level decision-making, however by the 1980s decentralization became synonymous with market-based reforms and neoliberalism. Paradoxically, though this period witnessed increased skepticism towards federal government involvement in local schools, it also saw the beginnings of federal, standardized testing. McBride was not asserting something new when he said that individual schools, rather than the school board, should make decisions regarding classroom content first.<sup>109</sup> Nor was he alone among Superintendents in Southwestern Virginia. Among those who opted to comment on the controversy, Jim Vaught in Wythe County noted that “anyone who objected would go through the school principal and ‘we would take it from there.’”<sup>110</sup> Roanoke County Superintendent Bayes Wilson concurred: “if parents have a problem with a certain book, they

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<sup>108</sup> D. Brent Edwards Jr., and David E. DeMatthews, “Historical Trends in Educational Decentralization in the United States and Developing Countries A Periodization and Comparison in the Post-WWII Context,” *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 22, no. 40 (2014): 7-9. This article primarily focuses on urban education in a global context, and therefore some of the historical context it presents is no doubt invalid for a rural district like Carroll County. Nonetheless, given the school district’s involvement in other national phenomena, such as disputes over educational equity, it seems likely that the broad narrative and timeframe of decentralization derived from urban school districts applies here as well.

<sup>109</sup> “Opposition Voiced About Novel’s Use at CCHS,” *The Carroll News*, March 18, 1992.

<sup>110</sup> Paul Dellinger, “Book Ban a Sticky Situation, School Chiefs Say,” *The Roanoke Times*, March 28, 1992.

can handle it quietly through the teacher or school principal.”<sup>111</sup> The local school board held a similar position. At the April School Board meeting, School Board Chairman Roger Burnett echoed arguments made by McBride. It was up to teachers to decide what materials would be used in their classroom, he noted, before “expressing ‘utmost confidence’ in the teachers that exercise that responsibility.”<sup>112</sup>

These long-term historical disputes over the role of various levels of government in determining educational policy may also explain the absence of another major player: the state of Virginia Department of Education (VDOE). In exploring the archives in Richmond, I could find no documents related to this controversy in the files of the VDOE. Only one instance was recorded by any participant in which the VDOE got involved — a response letter to Lineberry which will be discussed later. Instead, the VDOE was engaged in debating how best to standardize education and over educational equity. Virginia, under the leadership of Superintendent of Public Instruction Joseph A. Spagnolo, Jr., was one of 17 states in 1992 that had signed on to the nationwide New Standards Project.<sup>113</sup> The Project’s goal was to shift the state away from multiple-choice standardized testing towards performance-based assessments. Furthermore, the VDOE had to address a suit against the state by the Coalition for Equity in Educational Funding that felt the Virginia public school system violated the Virginia Constitutional guarantee to equitable public education. However, the VDOE could not entirely ignore disputes over school materials. In April of 1992, the NCTE provided Superintendent Spagnolo with a series of documents, including several on censorship and a student’s “right to

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<sup>111</sup> Paul Dellinger, “Book Ban a Sticky Situation, School Chiefs Say,” *The Roanoke Times*, March 28, 1992.

<sup>112</sup> Paul Dellinger, “Board: Let Teachers Pick,” *Roanoke Times*, April 10, 1992.

<sup>113</sup> Superintendent’s Memo January 22, 1992.

read.”<sup>114</sup> The office also received letters that reflected similar arguments to those made by Lineberry. One woman, Patricia Dunn, demanded, “Let’s get God back in the schools. Don’t let one Atheist rule over us anymore. Majority votes win, so should this issue.”<sup>115</sup>

In sum, the arguments made by the proceduralist camp show that the predominant nature of the controversy was local and could ignore broader legal and educational actors. Yet, this is not to totally discount its relationship to national trends. As Chapter III discusses, many of the arguments made by Lineberry were arguments familiar to the Religious Right throughout the country. The controversy took place in a series of hundreds of censorship disputes in the surrounding years, something that commentators noticed.<sup>116</sup> As previously mentioned, the National Coalition Against Censorship included it in a single op-ed in the *New York Times*.<sup>117</sup> Amusingly, the Socialist Party candidate in 1992, J. Quinn Brisben, commented on the controversy as he was passing through the area. He argued that the book should not be banned.<sup>118</sup> Yet, despite this, the foremost consideration by all the participants were local considerations, procedure or otherwise.

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<sup>114</sup> Marlene Birkman, memo to Superintendent Spagnolo, April 21, 1992.

<sup>115</sup> Patricia Dunn, letter to Superintendent Spagnolo, January 8, 1992.

<sup>116</sup> Alan Sorensen, “Respect for Education: A Sinking Proposition in Carroll?” *The Roanoke Times*, April 19, 1992.

<sup>117</sup> Leanne Katz, “How Censorship Efforts by Religious Right Disrupt Education,” *New York Times*, Dec. 2, 1992.

<sup>118</sup> A. W. Hauslohner, “Socialist Presidential Candidate Brings Campaign to Galax,” *The Galax Gazette*, April 27-28, 1992.

### **Chapter III: Protection: The Controversy as Religion**

For Lineberry and the Humphreys, the controversy was about protecting Christian morality and the youth of Carroll County. For them, *The Floatplane Notebooks* was an immoral book whose sexual content was damaging to children, regardless of the context in which it was read. Its use of four-letter words was also unacceptable. The teachers and administrators involved in using and approving the book were merely complicit hypocrites. In the camp's strongest sentiments, expressed by Lineberry, this meant that they should be fired. The Humphreys agreed with Lineberry's moral claims, but pulled back from calling for anyone to be fired. Heavily criticized for their views, Lineberry and his family fought back by denouncing the elitist sentiments and poor religious interpretation of others in the county. The arguments they made both reflected Religious Right arguments made elsewhere in the South and brought them into local contexts. This controversy was not, then, a mere rehashing of right-wing censorship attempts elsewhere.

Lineberry was effectively the catalyst for the controversy. When he circumvented the normal school process and taking his moral objections directly to the public, school administrators could not tamp down the dispute. His initial radio broadcast on March 13th made his moral commitments clear, denouncing the book as leading to corrupt morality. When the local papers began to pick up the controversy, he took out an op-ed. He decried the use of four-letter words in the book, saying "If your children were caught with a book or letter like this of their own at school, home or on the bus, they would be punished."<sup>119</sup> He went on to call out

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<sup>119</sup> J.B. Lineberry, "Book Used at CCHS Opposed by Writer," *The Carroll News*, March 18, 1992.

the crux of his concern. “If our children are taught from a book such as this,” he warned, “we will end up in a society with no moral standards.”

Lineberry had heard about the book from Wade Humphrey, a local parent whose son was in Goldwasser’s class. On March 7th, Humphrey had overheard his son talking about the book, which Humphrey then read himself.<sup>120</sup> Appalled at the content he read, Humphrey and his wife met with Harold Golding, CCHS Principal, and Shelby Puckett, the Vice-Principal, on March 9th. At the meeting he demanded that the book no longer be used in the classroom, a demand which Golding assured him would be met. Puckett recalled that the meeting was unusual in her time in education, but that as she had only been vice-principal for a year at that point that she did not have much precedent to go on. Humphrey was particularly upset with her as she had been the one to approve the book for use in the classroom. Golding later called Goldwasser into his office and chewed her out for having used the book in the first place. On March 12th, just a day before Lineberry’s sermon, Goldwasser called Humphrey and apologized for using the book. She wrote a letter to the administration apologizing for her action as well. Lineberry did not allow the controversy to end there, however. He took out an op-ed in *The Carroll News* on March 18th in which he lambasted Goldwasser, Puckett, Golding, and Superintendent Oliver McBride for allowing the book to have been used in the first place. This signaled the beginning of four months of news coverage.

Lineberry was not content to hash out his concerns over corruption and hypocrisy in the press and over the airwaves. Principal Golding had announced on March 18th that the book was no longer being used in the classroom, allowing Lineberry to focus on getting those responsible

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<sup>120</sup> Mr. and Mrs. Wade Humphrey, “Parents Give Account of Events Transpiring in Book Controversy,” *The Carroll News*, March 25, 1992.

for its use fired.<sup>121</sup> However, Goldwasser had the students complete one final assignment with the book due the following week, contradicting to Golding's initial claims.<sup>122</sup> To express his displeasure at this turn of events, Lineberry planned two protests — one at the post office in Woodlawn on the 25th and one in front of Carroll County High School on the 27th. Though only the first one occurred, the threat of protest was somewhat successful. Coinciding with the Woodlawn protest, McBride released a statement saying that the school system would be more responsive to community standards. Lineberry was dissatisfied that no one had been fired, and the statement ambiguously said the “school system failed to take misgivings by some parents...all the way through the existing review process.”<sup>123</sup> Yet the implication here was that the school should have been more responsive to the complainants and thus more censorious.

The passages that raised the most objection were towards the end of the book and contained sexual content. “Parents,” Lineberry implored in the article that brought the controversy to public attention, “take time for your children’s sake to read pages 210, 211, 212, 218, 248, and 249.”<sup>124</sup> These pages are all from the perspective of the character Meredith. In the first four, he is in a hospital in Da Nang in Vietnam. Having lost both his arms and legs from a tank mine in conflict, Meredith struggles to cope with the reality of his loss. “I do grip things with my left hand,” he says, “-the one that’s gone. I grip. I look down there, like I’ll look down there right now. I look down there and see where the bandages end. And beyond that in the air I grip with my hand.”<sup>125</sup> As part of this realization, Meredith remarks that, “what I wish is there

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<sup>121</sup> Paul Dellinger, “Book Fight Heats Up In Carroll County,” *The Roanoke Times*, March 21, 1992.

<sup>122</sup> Mr. and Mrs. Wade Humphrey, “Parents Give Account of Events Transpiring in Book Controversy,” *The Carroll News*, March 25, 1992.

<sup>123</sup> Paul Dellinger, “Book Protest Off, But Dispute Isn’t,” *The Roanoke Times*, March 26, 1992.

<sup>124</sup> J.B. Lineberry, “Book use at CCHS Opposed by Writer,” *The Carroll News*, March 18, 1992.

<sup>125</sup> Clyde Edgerton, *The Floatplane Notebooks*, (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 1988), 211.

was some way I could grab my dick, which thank God is all there.”<sup>126</sup> The next page is more explicit. “I get a hard on in the night and want to jack off, but I can’t. Rhonda [his wife] ain’t going to be happy just jacking me off. And she ain’t going to stand for me just sitting around, shitting in a pan.”<sup>127</sup> Meredith’s concern over his sexual performance continues on 218, when he thinks to himself, “The problem with screwing Rhonda is that Rhonda will have to screw *me* and how the hell are you supposed to hold onto somebody with a nub and a paralyzed hand?”<sup>128</sup> The final pages that concerned Lineberry are yet more scandalous. In a bed at his brother’s guest house, Meredith is masturbated by his sister-in-law, Bliss. After unclothing him, Bliss “came back in, closed the door, locked it. She took off her coat...She massaged my chest, then my stomach, then the back of my head...She got her other hand under my waist and found me with both her hands at the same time and began to move them first very, very slowly...It was like heaven.”<sup>129</sup> Certainly, Lineberry and his supporters felt, these passages were unsuitable for children.

As the anti-censorship camp often argued that these passages were taken out of context, it is worth considering that context here. Meredith’s concern over his sexual performance is not surprising for a man in 1970 who adheres to American gender roles. They are not, however, his only concern. In the same paragraph in which he worries about how Rhonda and he will have sex, he also states that “I’m worried about when Rhonda’s going to leave, before or after the baby’s born, and I’m worried about how I’m going to look like I’m supporting a family...and one of the things that galls me and scares me is holding the baby...What kind of daddy am I going to

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<sup>126</sup> Edgerton, *Floatplane*, 211.

<sup>127</sup> Edgerton, *Floatplane*, 212.

<sup>128</sup> Edgerton, *Floatplane*, 218.

<sup>129</sup> Edgerton, *Floatplane*, 248-249.

be?”<sup>130</sup> As Meredith is paralyzed, he is unable to speak and thus we are encountering these expressions as his thoughts, his intimate thoughts. He is also proven to be correct. Rhonda does leave him after giving birth and he is left alone and unable to take care of himself. Humiliated, alone, and entirely dependent on the care of others, Meredith is suffering from Depression and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). When he meets up with Thatcher, his brother, and Bliss, he says to himself, “She didn’t know I was just getting lower and lower. I felt like I was at the bottom of the barrel, end of my rope, end of the line. I didn’t even have the energy to hold my mouth closed.”<sup>131</sup> She masturbates him not out of lust, but out of care for the position he finds himself in. As Goldwasser put it, “And even that scene, I guess it depends how you feel about sex, but it seemed to me a very sweet thing that she did that – that she cared enough about him that she would do something that relieved him, made him feel better, made him feel cared about.”<sup>132</sup>

Indeed, the title of the book itself is directly connected to Meredith’s experiences here. As the book ends, he gets to the fly in the eponymous floatplane — the floatplane he and his father and his brothers had been repairing for two decades — the one he had come to when he had needed solace before. As it flies for the first time with Meredith aboard, he remarks, “and I wish I could say or even think what it was like to fly in the floatplane for the first time...There wasn’t a thing over my head but the sky.”<sup>133</sup> His family loved him and he achieved a sort of peace with the world as a result of his experience in that love’s physical embodiment in the

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<sup>130</sup> Edgerton, *Floatplane*, 218

<sup>131</sup> Edgerton, *Floatplane*, 248.

<sup>132</sup> Marion Goldwasser, interviewed by Ryan Wesdock, September 3, 2018, transcript, pg. 4.

<sup>133</sup> Edgerton, *Floatplane*, 265.



floatplane. Rather than as mere sexual thoughts and encounters, these passages are steps on Meredith's journey to this ultimate end of peace and self-acceptance.

Lineberry and his followers did not read these passages in this way, however, and their primary objection remained their sexual content. When Humphrey went to the principal with his complaint about the book, he was "particularly concerned about a sex act that occurs towards the end of the book."<sup>134</sup> Lineberry's initial broadcast accused Goldwasser of teaching students to be "sex maniacs." Op-ed writers concurred. Robert Copenhaver, writing in *The Roanoke Times*, declared: "A...threat is the pervasiveness of sex in our society, and the effect it has on our youth. The ideas expressed in certain books may be detrimental to the child's well-being (even though the book itself may be well-written)."<sup>135</sup> The "certain" book which prompted his editorial was *Floatplane Notebooks*. Two parents, Mr. and Mrs. Young, argued that if the book were to be made into a movie then it would be X-rated, and therefore clearly inappropriate for high schoolers.<sup>136</sup>

The moralizing camp also objected to strong language throughout the book. Charlene Bolt, one of Lineberry's daughters, contrasted the book and Goldwasser with the local elementary school's newsletter: "I really appreciate what Mr. Joe Bunn, the principal of Hillsville Elementary, did a few weeks ago. He sent a newsletter saying how abusive language would not be tolerated...can't we fight and get abusive language, filthy books and teachers like Goldwasser out?"<sup>137</sup> Jenny Dalton agreed with this sentiment. "I read some of the controversial

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<sup>134</sup> Shelby Puckett, interviewed by Ryan Wesdock, October 11, 2018, transcript, pg. 1.

<sup>135</sup> Robert Copenhaver, "The News Media, Not Protective Parents, are the Real 'Censors,'" *Roanoke Times & World News*, April 20, 1992.

<sup>136</sup> Mr. and Mrs. James L. Young, "If Book was a Movie, It Would be X-Rated," *The Carroll News*, March 25, 1992.

<sup>137</sup> Charlene Bolt, "Abusive Language Not Tolerated at HES," *The Carroll News*, March 25, 1992.

parts in ‘The Floatplane Notebooks,’” she wrote, “and although students are subject to this kind of dirty dialect in the real world, they should not have to read it in school.”<sup>138</sup>

However, not every dirty word received equal attention. No one from any part of the controversy called attention to the racist language in the book. Edgerton, in my interview, told me that he intended to describe the life of a rural North Carolinian family as they truly lived in the 1950s through the 1970s. Avoiding racist language in his book would not accurately depict this life, at least as Edgerton himself experienced it growing up. Yet, neither racist language nor racism in general appear in any of the editorials that those who opposed the book’s use wrote. In fact, it was barely mentioned at all. The remaining four-letter words in the book primarily focused on sexual content. Thus, it seems like the concerns the protection camp had over language were mostly an outgrowth over concerns regarding sexual content.

Lineberry’s concerns and demands had a strong precedent in the history of American education, even in the particular history of education in southern Appalachia. The censoring of sexual materials has a long history in the United States. Perhaps the most well-known example is the Comstock Law established in 1873.<sup>139</sup> The law empowered its namesake Anthony Comstock, as a special agent of the Post Office, to censor works he considered obscene. The works he banned were usually sexual in nature, though interestingly he avoided going after most classical works. In the early 20th century, films that depicted sexual topics which ranged from abortion to divorce were banned or modified by The National Board of Censorship.<sup>140</sup> While not a formal government agency, the board nonetheless wielded sufficient clout in Hollywood to ban or

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<sup>138</sup> Jenny Dalton, “Keep Dirty Books Out of School,” *The Galax Gazette*, April 13-14, 1992.

<sup>139</sup> David M. Rabban, *Free Speech in Its Forgotten Years* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 30.

<sup>140</sup> Frank Couvares, “The Good Censor: Race, Sex, and Censorship and the Early Cinema,” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 7, no. 2 (1994): 233-236.

modify movies of a sexual or racial nature. By the 1990s, multiple Supreme Court cases had overturned most of the ban on the reading and publishing of sexual material. Nonetheless, Religious Right proponents continued to fight against it.

Banning controversial materials had a long history in the country and in the region in particular. Perhaps the most famous controversy over the use of textbooks was the 1974 dispute in Kanawha County in West Virginia. Throughout the Summer of 1974, the school board sought textbooks that would meet new federal guidelines for the inclusion of minority and underrepresented viewpoints.<sup>141</sup> School board member Alice Moore ignited a controversy over the books that the board had selected when she accused them of being anti-Christian. The ensuing controversy over the books eventually resulted in some being pulled, while others were retained. It gained notoriety, however, for the means by which the controversy was carried out. Opponents of the books bombed several schools, and were joined by the KKK and neo-nazi groups who opposed the inclusion of black voices. Miners went on strike to protest the books, at least in part, while the controversy made national and then international news. University of Dayton professor Joseph Watras argues that this controversy stemmed from “mutual stubbornness.” Participants were simply unwilling to hear what the other side had to say, in this view, and thus missed an opportunity to “think about the nature of a good education.” Thus, southern Appalachia had had experience with textbook controversies well before 1992.

Historians have discussed disputes such as this through the lens of the culture wars. In the 1980s and 1990s, Americans were engaged in a heated debate which occurred in public

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<sup>141</sup> Joseph Watras, “Landscapes of Learning, West Virginia’s Textbook Controversy, and the Culture Wars,” *American Educational History Journal* 41, no. 1 (2014): 185. As this controversy took place the same year as the *Responding* series dispute, and on similar argumentative lines, no doubt there was some awareness in Carroll County of the more well-known controversy.

education, academia, legislative assemblies, editorials, television, and radio. The debate centered around different views of representing the past and future of the country, as well as the role of women, minorities, and dissidents in the nation's history. On one side, progressive and liberal commentators generally sought increased representation for women and minorities. Postmodern academics debated a variety of opinions that challenged realism in morality, epistemology, and ontology. Conservatives, meanwhile, argued against growing "political correctness" or a perceived tendency towards controlling dialogue and debate. Instead, they sought to replace multicultural democracy with evangelical Christian theology.

Public education was a key battlefield in the culture wars. Religious Right groups censored materials that they found offensive, succeeded in acquiring control of local school boards, and fought to make schools in the image of right-wing evangelical Christianity. Religious Right leaders like Pat Robertson argued that schools were decadent and led to a decay in public morality and virtue. According to Robertson, "The Supreme Court of the supposedly Christian United States guaranteed the moral collapse of this nation when it forbade children in the public schools to pray to the God of Jacob."<sup>142</sup> Educator and professor June Edwards wrote strongly against the rise of the Religious Right's influence in education based on her own experiences in Southwest Virginia in the 1970s. "Sometimes, however, the attacks on schools and books cross the line of democratic debate and become all-out battles to restrict the rights of other people's children and make schools fit a narrow ideology."<sup>143</sup> She identifies five major

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<sup>142</sup> Pat Robertson, *New World Order* quoted in June Edwards, *Opposing Censorship in the Public Schools: Religion, Morality, and Literature* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1998), 9. As Edwards notes, however, this was not the finding of the Supreme Court in any case. The Court has ruled that prayer cannot be mandated but has made ample exception for personal religious prayer as well as for the academic study of religious texts.

<sup>143</sup> June Edwards, *Opposing Censorship in the Public Schools: Religion, Morality, and Literature* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1998), xxi.

debates that absorbed the Religious Right and teachers: Government and religion, Humanism and Democracy, the purpose of teaching literature, Biblical interpretation, and morality in literature. The *Floatplane* Controversy, however, does not fit neatly into these other disputes and controversies. Lineberry did object to the book for its supposed anti-Christian message, and Goldwasser did articulate a strong belief in having students think for themselves. Both of these positions were similar to those made by adherents to both sides in Washington and Kanawha counties. Yet, unlike in Kanawha, Lineberry did not enjoy popular support. Unlike in Washington County, no books were burnt and the controversy resulted in a compromise. Thus, while the arguments made in the *Floatplane* controversy and elsewhere were similar, their impact was vastly different. For this reason, one cannot merely see this controversy as exemplary of other culture war disputes and has to instead look for local factors that may have differentiated it from them.

Hypocrisy was a recurring theme for the moralizers. The school, the administration, and Goldwasser herself were all hypocrites in one way or another. Charlene Bolt declared that the school was hypocritical for allowing the use of a book with such foul language.<sup>144</sup> Other students, she pointed out, had been reprimanded for the use of the same four-letter words in the hallway. If the school refused to allow students to use these words, then why did it think it was appropriate to have students read them? A submission to the Reader's Hot Line declared *The Galax Gazette* hypocritical for not publishing the controversial portions of the book.<sup>145</sup> The writer believed that the paper was clearly on the side of the book's use. If that was the case, then the paper should not object to publishing the passages in question. Charlene Bolt, reiterating her earlier op-ed, called

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<sup>144</sup> Charlene Bolt, "Abusive Language Not Tolerated at HES," *The Carroll News*, March 25, 1992.

<sup>145</sup> "Reader's Hot Line," *The Galax Gazette*, April 13-14, 1992.

out the double hypocrisy of the school board, both for feigning religiosity and for allowing language in the book that students were not permitted to use. At the April School Board meeting, she castigated them, saying, “It shocked me you started this meeting with prayer when you used a book that used the Lord’s name in vain...if books are used containing language that the school handbook prohibits students from using...then I will not allow and do not expect any of my children to be punished for breaking school rules.”<sup>146</sup> Lineberry took greater issue with the hypocrisy of the school administration. In the initial newspaper article, Golding, Goldwasser, and McBride all claimed that the book was no longer being taught in the classroom, despite Goldwasser having one more assignment to complete with it.<sup>147</sup> When Lineberry found out about this, he was unhappy. He wrote, “I would like all concerned citizens to know that the book with all the filthy language being used at CCHS, *The Floatplane Notebooks*, was used again,” characterizing the previous statements by Golding, Goldwasser, and McBride as lies.

Lineberry also disliked the personal attacks against him. He and his family wrote many rebuttals to the defamation of his character, calling out immoral editorialists for their prejudice against those with little formal education. One of his daughters, Karen, defended him in *The Gazette*, writing to him directly, “Thanks, Dad, for standing up against such offensive material. You are more than qualified.”<sup>148</sup> She went on to condemn those with elitist notions of education. “Some of you,” she said, “may not have completed school either, but it does not make you a lesser person.” Another daughter, Marissa Lineberry Shockley wrote:

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<sup>146</sup> Paul Dellinger, “Board: Let Teachers Pick,” *The Roanoke Times*, April 10, 1992.

<sup>147</sup> “Opposition Voiced About Novel’s Use at CCHS,” *The Carroll News*, March 18, 1992. Golding and McBride stated that the book would not be used “again” while Goldwasser said that the book will be “used no more.” It appears that McBride and Golding meant that the book, which they intended to pull from the class, was not going to be used as of March 18th, while Goldwasser, aware she had another assignment to complete, meant that the book would not be used in following years. Lineberry read these quotes as all saying the same thing.

<sup>148</sup> Karen Lineberry Goad, “Book Controversy Bad for County,” *The Galax Gazette*, April 13-14, 1992.

The issue isn't about what kind of education J.B. Lineberry has. It's about what kind of education our children are going to have...as for those who have been judging J.B. for being a sixth grade dropout: Sometimes things happen in people's lives that we have no control over...J.B.'s father was murdered and he went to work to help his widowed mother.<sup>149</sup>

The first school board meeting after the controversy began took place on April 9th at the Driver Education Building, the normal school board meeting place.<sup>150</sup> It primarily featured speakers who supported Lineberry's position. Several had requested in advance that the board allow them to make comments regarding the controversy during the citizens' comments period, while several others spoke extemporaneously. J.B. Lineberry himself spoke against the book, as did Charlene Bolt, Robert Mabe, Lonnie Malcomb, and Wade Humphrey.

Even after the textbook screening committee had decided to compromise and ban the book for only eleventh graders, the religious crowd did not back down from their calls to ban the book completely. At the final school board meeting in June, the Humphreys presented a letter to McBride expressing their displeasure that the book would be used at all. McBride registered their complaints but moved ahead with the school board's vote. Lonnie Malcomb announced the formation of the Twin County American Family Association which opposed the book. Despite this, the school board adopted the recommendation of the textbook screening committee, 3-2.

Though the controversy was effectively finished, Lineberry did not give up. Goldwasser addressed the Wytheville Branch of the American Association of University Women in September of 1992, reiterating her belief in the positive value of the book.<sup>151</sup> Upon hearing this,

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<sup>149</sup> Marissa Lineberry Shockley, "Main Issue in Book Fuss is Missed," *The Galax Gazette*, April 13-14, 1992.

<sup>150</sup> Carroll County School Board Minutes, Volume March 10, 1992 - January 10, 1995, April 9, 1992, page 2221.

<sup>151</sup> Paul Dellinger, "Book Flap Flares Up Again," *The Roanoke Times*, Sept. 21, 1992.

Lineberry once again called for the school board to fire her. He called attention both to the petition he had distributed and which had garnered over 1,000 signatures, as well as the letter he received from state Secretary of Education James Dyke. However, with the book no longer being used, and with a new school year in motion, there was little support behind his renewed attacks. The controversy was finally over.

Many of the arguments made by the moralizing crowd reflected arguments made elsewhere by the Religious Right. The moral nature of *The Floatplane Notebooks*, was at the core of the controversy, due to both its sexual content and its language. Opponents of the book did raise complaints regarding what they termed variously “humanism” or “secular humanism.” This was a complaint which had begun in the Kanawha County controversy that argued that secular forces were forcing students to join a “secular religion.” As resident Jim Young put it, “I moved out of that area [Pennsylvania] to come into a better place, and this is a better place but that humanistic philosophy has started already and it’s got to be put a stop to.”<sup>152</sup> Edwards notes as well that the Religious Right argued that the only “reason for teaching literature in school is to reinforce the values that are taught in the home.”<sup>153</sup> The Humphreys certainly made this point in no uncertain terms. “My wife and I have taught and tried to instill in our children the highest level of morality, decency and respect for authority. My wife and I thought that when we sent our children to school that all the teachers were instilling these same qualities in our children.”<sup>154</sup>

However, despite these similarities the unique attributes of this controversy cannot be overlooked. Part of the motivation for the moralizing crowd stemmed from their unique

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<sup>152</sup> Paul Dellinger, “Book’s Foes Call for Rally,” *The Roanoke Times*, March 24, 1992.

<sup>153</sup> Edwards, *Opposing Censorship*, 26.

<sup>154</sup> Mr. and Mrs. Wade Humphrey, “Parents Give Account of Events Transpiring in Book Controversy,” *The Carroll News*, March 25, 1992.



experiences in education. Lineberry was a middle school drop-out who had experienced book censorship firsthand. “I’ve had many a comic book torn up,” he told Paul Dellinger of *The Roanoke Times*.<sup>155</sup> His opponents felt that this experience may have been a formative one for Lineberry. In an op-ed, John Newman determined that the reasons Lineberry started the controversy were two-fold. “1. To get back at teachers and school in general. 2. To get your name in the public eye.”<sup>156</sup> Further, the arguments that Lineberry and his followers made were not merely repetitions of arguments made elsewhere. They attacked specific hypocrisies by the Carroll County school board and school administrators much more than they mentioned general national trends towards secularism. They were forced to respond to the particular conditions of the controversy, such as Goldwasser’s teaching experience, the constant editorial coverage, a lack of popular support for his position. The *Floatplane* Controversy was not the Kanawha County controversy, nor was it the *Responding* dispute, though it shared similarities with both.

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<sup>155</sup> Paul Dellinger, “Preacher Recalls Confiscated Comics,” *Roanoke Times & World News*, March 29, 1992.

<sup>156</sup> John Newman, “Lineberry Questioned about Motivation,” *The Galax Gazette*, April 13-14, 1992.

#### **Chapter IV: State, Publicity, and Power in Censorship Discourse**

Censorship controversies are intractable. They have occurred in the United States for well over a hundred years from much the same positions, only with an occasional change of terms. In a very detailed study, legal scholar Heidi Kitrosser explored the debate over free speech and political correctness in academia from the 1990s to 2016.<sup>157</sup> Using dozens of newspaper articles and news reports, she found that nearly nothing had changed in the way the debate was conducted. Kitrosser argues that this is because of the vagueness with which opposing sides make their arguments. This vagueness is in turn due to differing perceptions of “soft facts” or interpretations of what is germane to discuss as free speech, censorship, or political correctness. Finally, this difference in interpretation, for Kitrosser, stems from the variety of experiences which students bring to college — their identities. To resolve the intractability of these debates, she proposes emphasizing concrete examples of proposed censorship, and moving away from abstractions. This works best when participants hold a position because of the way it makes them feel, for example, the supporter of political correctness, generally, who believes they have to hold that view to be supportive of social justice and diversity.

In other instances, however, censorship debates are intractable on more substantive matters and specificity does not resolve them. As this controversy demonstrates, debates over

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<sup>157</sup> Heidi Kitrosser, "Free Speech, Higher Education, and the PC Narrative," *Minnesota Law Review* 101, no. 5 (2017): 1987-2064. I use intractable to refer to censorship disputes both in the short-term and the long-term. In the short-term, there is no movement from one side of a censorship dispute to another. In that sense, short-term disputes are intractable. Over the long-term, evidence suggests that there is broader public support for free speech today than a hundred years ago. Yet, despite this shift in public opinion, the issue remains strongly polarized in public discussion. Thus, in the long-term, censorship disputes have been intractable in the sense that they remain stuck in the same patterns of discourse despite shifts in public opinion. In this way, censorship and free speech are at odds with other culture war disputes. Abortion, for instance, has remained highly controversial over the long-term. One would expect the discussion to remain intractable over abortion because public opinion has remained divided. When culture war issues have become less controversial, for instance gay marriage over the last five years, the discussions around them have changed. Free speech has grown increasingly noncontroversial, yet stuck in the same conversational rut.

ensorship can also be debated over whether or not something *is* censorship in the first place. Understanding the underlying substantive reasons for the intractability of censorship disputes is essential for historians seeking to engage the public on censorship and for teachers in public education on the frontlines of these disputes.<sup>158</sup> The works of John Stuart Mill, Jurgen Habermas, and Michel Foucault all offer insights on this question. This larger dispute consists of a moral disagreement over the bounds of state power, a disagreement over the public/private nature of public education, and a disagreement over who has the power to set narratives around censorship.

John Stuart Mill set much of the contemporary discussion over censorship and free speech with his seminal work *On Liberty*. While short, the book lays out quintessential arguments that advocates of free speech have continued to use, from the fallibility of public office holders to the positive value of free discussion. The essence of the book is that censorship is wrong when the government has no compelling reason to censor; that the burden of proof of this is on the censor, not the controversial speaker. According to Mill, “The subject of this Essay is...the nature and limits of the power which can be legitimately exercised by society over the individual.”<sup>159</sup> In setting these limits, Mill famously articulates that, “If all mankind minus one, were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, than he, if had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind.”<sup>160</sup> Mill then goes on to consider objections to free speech, laying out more of

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<sup>158</sup> Legal scholars and theorists dispute both the question of what constitutes censorship and what its appropriate boundaries are. I am interested, however, not in how academics explore these questions but how the public does. It is the public’s underlying substantive reasons that this chapter is interested in investigating. This is not to say the two are totally separate, but neither are they identical.

<sup>159</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 73.

<sup>160</sup> Mill, *On Liberty*, 87.

an argument against censorship than a positive argument for the value of free speech. After debating the limits of government intervention into free speech, Mill continues by broadening his discourse to individual autonomy in general. “With regard to the merely contingent, or, as it may be called, constructive injury which a person causes to society,” Mill argues, “by conduct which neither violates any specific duty to the public...the inconvenience is one which society can afford to bear, for the sake of the greater good of human freedom.”<sup>161</sup> In short, he lays out an ethics of proper government action. However, as Jean Bethke Elshtain points out in an accompanying essay, “[Mill’s] ‘very simple principle’ of liberty holds that no one’s liberty can be restricted unless his actions harm, or threaten to harm, the interests of others. That this is by no means a simple claim is clear as Mill proceeds....Mill offers at least nine definitions of a self-regarding act and what counts as a violation of the principle.”<sup>162</sup> Though Mill seems to have made a simple case for individual liberty, in reality, he has not made his case as simple as it seems. This ambiguity leaves a wide range of interpretations for what constitutes a violation. Does someone violate his argument by establishing laws requiring people to get vaccinations, an act which reduces harm to others through herd immunity? What about laws requiring individuals to wear seatbelts while driving?

Much of the *Floatplane* controversy arguments centered around this ambiguity.

Lineberry and his followers felt that the government did have a compelling moral interest in pulling the book, the protection of the minds of children. Karl A. Sense of Galax, for instance, argued that, “The people of Carroll County have a responsibility to ensure that their children get a good and decent education. If the students are exposed to material which exceeds the bounds of

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<sup>161</sup> Mill, *On Liberty*, 145.

<sup>162</sup> Mill, *On Liberty*, 209.

common decency, corrective action must be taken immediately.”<sup>163</sup> Goldwasser and her supporters, meanwhile, reiterated arguments that Mill himself likely would agree with — that free and open discourse is a necessary component of both critical thinking and proper education. In her extended write-up of the event, Goldwasser noted the differences in philosophy between the two camps. “I believed that students needed to be exposed to many and varied ideas, learn to analyze, synthesize and formulate their own opinions,” she wrote. Intervention to remove these “many and varied ideas” would be a disservice to students. Patricia Frost of Woodlawn concurred with Goldwasser, writing, “I don’t see Mr. Lineberry as having the right to continually disrupt other people’s lives and to force his personal values on other [sic].”<sup>164</sup> Here, as in so many debates over censorship and free speech, the boundaries of appropriate state action are disputed.

Media and communication scholars have used Habermas’s concept of a “public sphere” to investigate contemporary phenomenon. Their method sometimes takes the form of using the institutions of an ideal public sphere to investigate the extent of communication or censorship. Jenny Power of Lund University, for example, has used the public sphere and its constituent institutions to analyze the extent of censorship in China.<sup>165</sup> However, many scholars have greatly criticized Habermas’s concept as both too ideal and too elite. Instead, they have sought to expand, complicate, and update his model to fit contemporary contexts. For instance, Axel Bruns and Tim Highfield explored the concept of multiple, overlapping public spheres created by social

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<sup>163</sup> Karl A. Sense, “Coverage Questioned,” *The Galax Gazette*, March 30-31, 1992.

<sup>164</sup> Patricia Frost, “Publicity Causes Pain,” *The Galax Gazette*, March 30-31, 1992.

<sup>165</sup> Jenny Power, “Social Media Censorship and the Public Sphere: Testing Habermas’ Ideas on the Public Sphere on Social Media in China” (Student Paper, Lund University, Lund, Sweden, 2016).

media use, particularly Twitter.<sup>166</sup> It would be impossible, here, to reconstruct the entirety of the public sphere and its institutions as it may have existed in America in 1992. However, a singular institution, the public school, and its public nature, is significant here.

Goldwasser and Lineberry had different conceptions of the public nature of public education. For Goldwasser, public education was an entirely public phenomenon. She believed, “Teachers helped students adapt to a changing world and gave them the tools to be effective thinkers and learners.”<sup>167</sup> This, combined with her belief in exposing students to “many and varied ideas” makes an implicit argument that schools are public institutions designed to expose students to a diverse world. Paid for by public monies and with the public purpose of preparing students for a critical citizenship, public education had to go beyond parental demands. By contrast, Lineberry, his family, and his supporters viewed the school as an extension of the private. “I’m not a fanatical person but I think every bad thing that I can keep my children from I will,” wrote Charlene Bolt, “to teach my children abusive language is bad, and I’m not going to read it to them or have them to read it [*sic*].”<sup>168</sup> The school was merely a guardian *in loco parentis* for students and therefore should reflect the education that students would receive in the putatively Christian, conservative households in the county. The school for them was private-in-public, an alternative resolution of the tension between public and private that Habermas uncovered. Therefore, one of the intractable problems in censorship controversies in

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<sup>166</sup> Axel Bruns and Tim Highfield, “Is Habermas on Twitter?: Social Media and the Public Sphere,” in *The Routledge Companion to Social Media and Politics*, eds. Axel Bruns, Gunn Enli, Eli Skogerbø, Anders Olof Larsson, and Christian Christensen, 56-73, New York: Routledge Press, 2015.

<sup>167</sup> Goldwasser, “Censorship in Southwest Virginia,” 41.

<sup>168</sup> Charlene Bolt, “Lineberry Sets A Good Example to Follow,” *The Galax Gazette*, April 13-14, 1992.

modern America is the public/private nature of the institution in question — whether a public school or a public university.<sup>169</sup>

As an application of Foucault's thinking, communications scholar Sue Curry Jansen wrote *Censorship: A Knot That Binds Power and Knowledge*. She argues that contrary to the claims of Western liberals and conservatives that the Enlightenment did not sever the connections between knowledge and power by merely removing widespread state censorship. Indeed, this regulative censorship, as she calls it, merely gave way to a different form of constitutive censorship — censorship that is inevitable as a function of the way that society is organized. This form of censorship takes different forms in different societies and in modern Western liberal democracies is often expressed through *market censorship*. This form of censorship is the broad restriction on the consideration of ideas by the public because of the predominant economic forms of commodity production. Though people living in a liberal democracy may feel free to discuss any ideas that they choose, in reality the contours of legitimate and serious debate are often selected by corporate media who only allow ideas that support their own profits to be expressed. Jansen sees market censorship as broader than just corporate media, though, arguing that “market censors...*decide what cultural products are likely to ensure a healthy profit margin* [emphasis in original].”<sup>170</sup> For Jansen, the way out of this dilemma is not to eliminate censorship, which is impossible, but to promote *reflexive power-talk*. For her, this is a means of challenging official narratives with ridicule, folk wisdom, and alternative ideas in order to acknowledge the constructed nature of the knowledge that official

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<sup>169</sup> In different times and places, this analysis suggests, different questions would become the dominant intractable questions. This raises questions on the applicability of censorship disputes over, for example, Galileo, to present day America.

<sup>170</sup> Sue Curry Jansen, *Censorship: The Knot that Binds Power and Knowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 16.

narratives represent. These official narratives gain their credibility from the powerful's ability to name, to decide what matters and what can be said about what matters. Thus, for Jansen, power produces knowledge, knowledge implies power, this power is expressed through naming, and the powerless can respond by unnamings.

This dynamic was at play in the *Floatplane* controversy. As we saw, the camp that saw the controversy primarily about censorship refused to accept the official narratives coming from the school board. They challenged the idea that the question of Goldwasser's use of the book was a "personnel problem," as Harold Gloding had initially called it. After criticizing Golding for pulling the book from the class, a *Roanoke Times* editorial mocked his use of the phrase. "Pending a plausible explanation and a belated reunion between Golding, McBride, and their respective spines, Carroll County residents must assume a personnel problem indeed exists — in the administrative offices."<sup>171</sup>

Further, they critiqued the narrative framing of the controversy. Goldwasser expressed dissatisfaction with the media story, stating:

The other thing I think happens in newspaper, television, whatever the media, is once they've established certain facts, whether they're right or wrong, and once they've established the characters and the parameters of the story, nobody can change it. Once it's out there, no matter what facts come in, that's the story.<sup>172</sup>

For her, the media was too quick to set up a narrative that established her as the outsider, expert, progressive teacher against the insider, common, reactionary preacher. Both caricatures had some truth, but neither reflected the complexity of the situation. Goldwasser had been in the

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<sup>171</sup> "Ms. Goldwasser, Personnel Problem," *Roanoke Times*, March 25, 1992.

<sup>172</sup> Marion Goldwasser, interviewed by Ryan Wesdock, September 3, 2018, transcript, pg. 7.



county for decades, while Lineberry did not necessarily reflect a “traditional” view held by his fellow residents. Many of her supporters had grown up in Carroll County, while some who opposed her like Jim Young had been in the county only six years when the controversy started.

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Goldwasser was not entirely critical of the media, however, and others in her camp went so far as to praise them for their consistent coverage. “Many thanks for your continued courageous reporting on controversial issues in our community,”<sup>174</sup> one author wrote in the *Galax Gazette*. “I am very serious in the use of the word ‘courageous’ as I am aware of the cost of making public the many sides of emotional issues as well as the hidden cost of burying controversy.” Indeed, most of those from the anti-censorship camp agreed with these sentiments, rather than Goldwassers’. The official narrative vindicated their point-of-view, whereas Goldwasser, at the center of the controversy, had to balance that vindication with the media’s misleading framing.

Goldwasser not only challenged the ways in which the media used their power to frame the event, she also defended the knowledge she had gained as a teacher granting her the power to decide what happened in the classroom. As she told me:

Everybody thinks, I’ve been to school I can tell everybody what to do in the classroom and there’s not the sense that the teacher is a professional. That was sort of my main reason for wanting to fight for it. It wasn’t that this book was God, you know, the best book in the whole world. If a teacher is going to be professional, they should act as one which means they should have a very good reason for the materials that they use and how

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<sup>173</sup> Paul Dellinger, “Book’s Foes Call for Rally,” *The Roanoke Times*, March 24, 1992.

<sup>174</sup> Marietta Carmichael, “Reporting Controversial Issues Takes Courage,” *The Galax Gazette*, May 18-19, 1992.

they teach them. But also laymen shouldn't be able to come in and decide what's going to be taught and what isn't going to be taught.<sup>175</sup>

Teachers had the knowledge and therefore the power in classroom settings.

The moralizing camp used reflexive power-talk as well to refute the narrative of the media and from the school board. They called the media the true censors for refusing to report on the controversy as a matter of morality and for their hypocrisy in not publishing the supposedly inoffensive pages from the book. They recast the narrative framing that the *Roanoke Times*, *Carroll News*, and other papers set up. Karl Sense wrote in *The Galax Gazette*, “Unfortunately, [*The Roanoke Times* is] the only daily paper in the area, and we citizens are therefore constantly subject to its vicious editorials and slanted reporting without relief from its left-wing extremist lunatic diatribes.”<sup>176</sup> Robert Copenhaver more explicitly attacked the media narrative on the controversy in a lengthy editorial to *The Roanoke Times* entitled “The News Media, Not the Parents, are the real ‘censors.’”<sup>177</sup> “This is done,” Copenhaver argues, “through the decisions editors make about what stories to run and how they should be presented. The only problem is, ideology determines what is printed.” In short, both the censorship and moralizing camp saw censorship as part of the controversy, though in different ways, and used reflexive power-talk to call it out. The controversy was difficult to resolve in part because the various sides disputed who had the power to name, and rename, censorship, as well the extent to which knowledge conveyed this power. Goldwasser felt that her credentials gave her the authority to decide what to do in the class; Lineberry disagreed.

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<sup>175</sup> Marion Goldwasser, interviewed by Ryan Wesdock, September 3, 2018, transcript, pg. 11.

<sup>176</sup> Karl A. Sense, “Coverage Questioned,” *The Galax Gazette*, March 30-31, 1992.

<sup>177</sup> Robert Copenhaver, “The News Media, Not the Parents, Are the Real ‘Censors,’” *The Roanoke Times*, April 20, 1992.

Reflexive power-talk is, of course, non-ideological. It can be used by any group who disagrees with an official narrative regardless of the actual position they take towards it. In a different circumstance, those using this technique might very well be those opposed to censorship. When two official narratives collide, as in this case between the school board and the local newspapers, it is possible for sides to be taken defending or attacking the opposing official narrative. It is even possible, as Goldwasser demonstrates, that those in support or opposition to a particular position can have a range of views on the official narrative(s). Reflexive power-talk will not tell an onlooker which side is which. It does, however, constitute a primary form and cause of debate — official versus unofficial narrative. Finally, as the protection camp shows, censorship is often a loose word that people apply to a multitude of phenomena. The media can censor by using a framing that implicitly argues against a particular point of view, as much as the government can censor by pulling a text from a classroom. Thus, when historians talk about censorship, they should be clear about what precise form of censorship they are referring to, for instance, state censorship or market censorship. This greater flexibility of definition will allow historians to discuss more aspects of censorship, understand more completely how it has functioned in American history, and consider more fully differing, perhaps less mainstream, views on censorship and free speech.

It is worth verifying the extent to which these three underlying problems actually matter in the development of other controversies. English and Gender Studies Professor Carol Mason took the media to task in her analysis of the Kanawha County controversy: “Even the most sophisticated scholars and knowledgeable journalists succumbed to the tendency either to idealize the protesters as righteous resisters against modern corruptions or to demonize them as

anti modern reactionaries.”<sup>178</sup> They created simplistic narratives of class warfare, liberals versus conservatives, and violent Appalachian hillbillies. She argues, moreover, that protestors were animated by a feeling of being under attack by changing curriculum practices or “a legitimate concern over the power of education and textbooks to create sense of community, a production of ethnicity,” which seems to reflect underlying intellectual concerns about the relation between power and knowledge as well as the public goals of education.<sup>179</sup> Gloria Pipkin and ReLeah Cossett Lent, the former chair of NCTE’s Standing Committee Against Censorship, had a censorship controversy of their own in 1987 when they were secondary teachers in Florida.<sup>180</sup> Their controversy centered around two books, *I Am the Cheese* by Robert Cormier and *About David* by Susan Beth Pfeffer. Similarly to the *Floatplane* controversy, they witnessed a flood of local support in the local papers after the Superintendent decided to ban the books. A single parent started the controversy, but ultimately teacher and public resistance to the decision led the ban to be overturned. Many of the same positions were taken as in the *Floatplane* controversy. The *Washington Post* ran an intensive exposé highlighting the positions taken as, “In Panama City, too, fundamentalists see the censorship controversy as a battle between Christian morality and humanism. Pipkin and her colleagues see it as a struggle between people who want to teach children *what* to think and those who want to teach them *how* to think.” [Emphasis in the

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<sup>178</sup> Carol Mason, *Reading Appalachia From Left To Right: Conservatives and the 1974 Kanawha County Textbook Controversy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009): 30.

<sup>179</sup> Mason, *Reading Appalachia From Left To Right*, 8. Of course, unlike the *Floatplane* controversy, much of this community construction, as Mason notes, revolves around not merely racial categories but “a process that reified protestors’ authority as white Christians without acknowledging that race was a factor.” While race may have been a broad factor in the *Floatplane* controversy, it never had the resonance it did in Kanawha county where neo-nazis and the KKK marched against the textbooks.

<sup>180</sup> ReLeah Cossett Lent and Gloria Pipkin, *Keep Them Reading: An Anti-Censorship Handbook for Educators* (New York: Teachers University Press, 2013).

original]<sup>181</sup> These arguments could have been taken verbatim from those made by Lineberry and Goldwasser.

The intractable nature of these questions helps explain why debates over censorship are often characterized by “mutual stubbornness.” Participants do not have to be stubborn, or even fail to understand the opposing side, for a controversy to develop and to proceed. A strong, if implicit, position on state power, publicity, and knowledge-power, mediated through identity, is sufficient to provoke consistent, emotional debate. It also explains why arguments over censorship are not resolved by appeals to common ground - there is no fundamental agreement on what censorship is in the first place, even if all parties agree that censorship is wrong. Finally, it shows why the arguments in this case were not persuasive. Proponents of each camp talked past one another regarding both the surface question on what to do with the book and the underlying intellectual questions raised here.

Certainly, these are not the only underlying intellectual disagreements that the public has which directly impact censorship controversies, yet, these are not random or arbitrary debates. Indeed, they are often the very disputes which educators themselves identify as relevant to their experiences with censorship. Teachers ReLeah Cossett Lent and Gloria Pipkin write that censorship has “shades of meaning...One person sees censorship as a violation of our most fundamental rights; to another it is simply a selection of one book over another, and to still

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<sup>181</sup> Peter Carlson, “A Chilling Case of Censorship,” *The Washington Post*, January 4, 1987, page 10. The similarities between the cases are remarkable in ways beyond the arguments made. The teachers had received awards for their English department the previous year, just like Goldwasser did. Both sets of teachers received threatening phone calls. In our interview, Goldwasser told me, “I worried about my daughters because one was in Kindergarten one was still at the babysitter's, but I had some women call me up (did I put that in there?) ‘We're gonna get you and get you good!’ And I thought, boy, what if they did something to Sarah? I just, I don't know. People are nuts.” [Interview page 5] The Florida controversy, however, diverges in intensity from the *Floatplane* controversy. The Florida teachers began to receive bomb threats in their mail, for instance, while nothing comparable occurred in Carroll County.

another it is a way of protecting children from perceived evil ideas.”<sup>182</sup> These distinctions match the three camps that viewed the *Floatplane* controversy as about censorship, procedure, and protection.

A significant caveat is due on these remarks. It does not logically follow from my interpretation of the underlying nature of censorship controversies that all censorship controversies are fundamentally about state power, publicity, and the construction of power-knowledge. Prior to the development of widespread public education, censorship did not mean the same thing it does presently. Other cultural contexts may argue about censorship in different terms. The specific instantiations of debates over power, publicity, and power-knowledge vary with the peculiarities of each controversy. Yet, in addition, whether these debates are truly the underlying debates is not a suprahistorical, supra cultural reality. Censorship would need to be studied more rigorously in a cross-cultural and comparative historical context to determine anything regarding a “core” of censorship controversy, should it exist. Thus, these remarks should not be construed to imply anything beyond the bounds of American censorship controversies over the last century. Though, I do think their implications apply to nearly every censorship controversy within that limit, including those not related directly to education.

The broad political debate over censorship has not been resolved in the last century, indeed the arguments made from opposing sides remain remarkably similar to those made as far back as the Comstock era. These debates are intractable because opponents have differing

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<sup>182</sup> ReLeah Cossett Lent and Gloria Pipkin, *Keep Them Reading: An Anti-Censorship Handbook for Educators* (New York: Teachers University Press, 2013), 20. It should be noted though that *intellectual* disagreements are not always identified as the sole, or even primary causes of censorship controversies. Lent and Pipkin argue, for instance, that emotions, particularly fear, play a significant role in the inception and development of censorship controversies. As this thesis focuses on intellectual arguments, an exploration of the emotional aspects of the controversy is not provided. Nonetheless, emotional histories of censorship controversies are not doubt essential in understanding them in general.

underlying views on ethics, publicity, and the connection between power and knowledge. These differences manifest as disputes over whether something *is* censorship, or something else entirely. They exist because of the identity, constructed through personal experience, of each arguer. As a result, censorship controversies are not likely to go away anytime soon.

## Conclusion

The *Floatplane* controversy, and the intellectual underpinnings of the arguments made during it, carries significance beyond the boundaries of Carroll County. It suggests, first, that historians would benefit from the creation of a multidisciplinary field of censorship history. Developing such a field would better enable historians to play a role in the development of First Amendment jurisprudence. Historians can directly improve the quality of education by adding stories such as this to handbooks written for teachers and school administrators on handling censorship disputes. The *Floatplane* controversy suggests that persuasion is not likely in these kinds of disputes, but that opponents of censorship should nonetheless take the arguments that censors make seriously. Finally, historians can use the insights in this controversy to expand their efforts to engage the public on the issues of censorship. Primarily, this can be done by broadening the public's understanding of how censorship functions.

There is no coherent field of censorship history, but historians would be right to make one. Historians tend to study censorship as an historiographical contribution to diverse fields - media studies<sup>183</sup>, histories of empires<sup>184</sup>, educational history<sup>185</sup>, and race and gender studies. Topically, these studies tend to tread on similar ground, such as the Comstock Laws, the Kanawha County controversy, the Inquisition, and the like. Moreover, they do not generally reference one another, that is, work on the *Index librorum prohibitorum* does not look at disputes over the censorship of *Birth of a Nation* or vice versa. Censorship history, when written as such, is almost exclusively a legal history, and only occasionally are these histories written by

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<sup>183</sup> Couvares, "The Good Censor"; Academics in media and journalism studies also focus on censorship in this way, sometimes with an historical lense. See: Giovanna Dell'Orto, "Extreme Danger, Censorship, Patriotism: The Heroism and Failings of Wartime Reporting," *Reviews in American History* 47, no. 1 (2019): 91-96.

<sup>184</sup> Nesvig, *Ideology and Inquisition*.

<sup>185</sup> Joseph Watras, "Landscapes of Learning."



historians. Recent works in the legal history of free speech have yielded new insights, but they remain focused on the development of first amendment jurisprudence.<sup>186</sup> Yet, a history of censorship *qua* censorship that goes beyond legal lenses is likely to be very beneficial. First, it will allow a conceptualization of censorship that is broader than that traditionally understood to be censorship by academics and the public. Generally, the assumption has been the censorship is something done by governments to enforce their own power over a population. The reality is more complicated. Censorship is often a demand of the public to which governments are responsive. People also view censorship as meaning more than just government action. The book censors in this controversy, for instance, felt censored by the media. Rather than dismissing these as mere complaints, if scholars take these arguments seriously they could begin to look at censorship from a wider vantage point, one in which a centralized authority like the government or the Pope is not the sole force. Second, a discussion between different topics on censorship would benefit the historiography of each. Nesvig's point that the Spanish Inquisition was not a monolithic entity is meaningful in contexts of school controversies as well. If the Carroll County school board can ignore legal precedent when it comes to banning a book, it is very possible other school districts have ignored legal precedent when it comes to allowing a book. Supreme Court cases do not produce monolithic effects on the free speech and intellectual freedom of students, teachers, librarians, or school administrators. It would be wise as well to consider the history of censorship as a political tool of the oppressed in regards to school book controversies. The NAACP, initially, supported banning *Birth of a Nation*, but that position became more complicated as the very boards they established to review it instead granted it legitimacy. What

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<sup>186</sup> David M. Rabban, "Challenging the 'Worthy' Tradition: Revisionist Interpretations of Free Speech in American History," *Reviews in American History* 45, no. 2 (2017): 281-287; and R. B. Bernstein, "Telling Stories of Freedom of the Press," *Reviews in American History* 45, no. 4 (2017): 565-569.

implications does this have for textbook controversies in which liberal activists and parents try to remove books, such as *Huckleberry Finn*, for supposedly racist content?

Quite recently, some historians have spoken about censorship and free speech in broader terms than just government bans and this trend has already made interesting insights. Reviewing books on racial justice in the 20th century, Jonathan Hagel from the University of Kansas notes that they argue, “the prospects of antiracist reform have been closely tied to the working of the marketplace of ideas.”<sup>187</sup> Understanding the acceptance and development of ideas about race and racial justice is essential for understanding how politics around race work, and this raises questions about how ideas in general are produced, spread, and legitimized. Conversely, general assumptions about the spread of ideas, such as “marketplace of ideas” might be a useful historical framework to understand how specific ideas are produced and accepted.<sup>188</sup> In the fall of 2018, the University of Chicago History Department put on a series of panel discussions entitled Censorship and Information Control during Information Revolutions.<sup>189</sup> These panel discussions sought to discover broad trends about censorship and free speech in history and to apply these trends to contemporary issues of government and corporate censorship. Connecting the dots between events ranging from protests on college campuses to the Inquisition proved interesting and a continuation and expansion of such discussions seems likely to lead to innovative scholarship.

This sort of history would also allow historians to engage First Amendment jurisprudence. The Supreme Court has still not clarified the extent to which the classroom is a

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<sup>187</sup> Jonathan C. Hagel, “Racial Justice in the Marketplace of Ideas,” *Reviews in American History* 45, no. 2 (2017): 312.

<sup>188</sup> An investigation of the “marketplace of ideas” as an historical hypothesis is well overdue.

<sup>189</sup> Videos of these panels can be accessed here: <https://voices.uchicago.edu/censorship/1245-2/>

site of free speech and can be protected by the First Amendment. The right of teachers to select classroom materials remains as vulnerable today as it was in 1992, while students' right to free speech is even more precarious. Rulings such as *Garcetti v. Ceballos*, *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier*, *Bethel School District v. Fraser*, and *Morse v. Frederick* have slowly eroded the standards established in *Pickering v. Board of Education* and *Tinker* for the protection of free speech for public employees and students. There is a role for historians to play in future legal cases surrounding free speech and censorship in the classroom, in particular by filing *amici curiae* briefs in such cases. Since material facts are often the deciding force in legal cases of this nature, and since the effects of those facts can be deduced only from historical analysis, historical accounts of how censorship actually functions in the classroom are invaluable for such briefs. Timothy Zick noted this in his discussion over free speech opportunism and its potential problems for First Amendment jurisprudence. "Free Speech claims are not developed and advanced in a vacuum," he wrote. "They arise in factual, jurisprudential, historical, and political settings that presumably inform the question whether a particular claim constitutes an opportunistic misuse or misappropriation of the Free Speech Clause."<sup>190</sup>

Free speech scholars, librarians, teachers, and lawyers often contribute to handbooks that cover the jurisprudence of free speech and ways in which teachers can respond to it in their classroom. Historians, however, are conspicuously absent from these compendia. There is a great deal of overlap in the recommendations made by each of these books. Lent and Pipkin recommend, among many other things, proactive community engagement, censorship simulations with the community, working to establish a clear policy around censorship and book

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<sup>190</sup> Timothy Zick, "Restroom Use, Civil Rights, and Free Speech Opportunism," *Ohio State Law Journal* 78, no. 4 (2017): 974-5.

selection, as well as providing alternative books when assigning readings.<sup>191</sup> Edwards largely concurs, writing about the importance of clear rationales for book use, parental rights to alternative selections, clear guidelines on censorship, and trusting a parent's good intention, at least initially.<sup>192</sup> These measures are intentionally proactive rather than reactive. As Jean E. Brown, former chair of the Conference on English Education's Commission on Intellectual Freedom, noted, "If we are to meet the challenge of censorship, we must act rather than react."<sup>193</sup> Indeed, Goldwasser stated that she wished she had made it clearer that parents could request alternate books.<sup>194</sup> Proactive engagement should provide benefits to the teacher in any controversy, but working with parents can only occur when controversies develop slowly and when a single book is questioned. In Kanawha county, hundreds of textbooks were challenged simultaneously. In the *Floatplane* controversy, Lineberry's broadcast came only four days after Humphrey first met with Golding. There was no time, in either case, for deliberation with parents. The final recommendations of these guidebooks, in situations when all else fails, are useful here. Goldwasser used a number of these, including speaking with outside authorities and maintaining a professional disposition.

If this controversy suggests any additional recommendations, it is that censorship disputes are intractable and so efforts spent on persuasion are wasted. Underlying disputes on state power, publicity, and power-knowledge are not going to be resolved during a controversy, merely expressed. In contemporary America, this may be due to the connection between one's

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<sup>191</sup> ReLeah Cossett Lent and Gloria Pipkin, *Keep Them Reading: An Anti-Censorship Handbook for Educators* (New York: Teachers University Press, 2013).

<sup>192</sup> Edwards, *Opposing Censorship*, 129-133.

<sup>193</sup> Jean E. Brown, introduction, in *Preserving Intellectual Freedom: Fighting Censorship in Our Schools*, edited by Jean E. Brown, xv. (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1994).

<sup>194</sup> Marion Goldwasser, interviewed by Ryan Wesdock, September 3, 2018, transcript, pg. 11.

identity and one's posturing towards censorship, as Kitrosser notes, or this may be due to the defense and construction of community values and identities, as Mason notes. Regardless, censorship disputes are more akin to a zero-sum, political struggle than a well-intentioned, mutual compromise. Even where compromise does occur, as in the partial ban of *The Floatplane Notebooks*, the effect is to hand victory to one side, in this case the censors. One parental complaint, and a bit more outside political pressure, was all it took. Sadly, it seems that the very nature of the dispute tends to favor the would-be censor. Has a single teacher, two parents, and their respective families ever led a successful crusade, against the overwhelming preferences of their peers, to *allow* the use of a single book in any classroom?

However, teachers should still take the arguments made by censorship forces seriously. There is a tendency to dismiss arguments regarding protecting children, defending morality, and so on as nothing more than thinly-veiled excuses for the *real* reason behind censorship — control.<sup>195</sup> Teacher educator Philip Anderson summarized this view by saying, “Censorship is anti-intellectual in nature. Religious censors do not believe in reading more than their religion’s holy books. Moreover, censors from other perspectives wish to control and limit the way in which children, and adults for that matter, read the books they are allowed to read.”<sup>196</sup> No doubt,

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<sup>195</sup> Dr. Ada Palmer brought up a similar point in her discussion of censorship during information revolutions: “But we do have the tendency to differentiate and to think of the practitioners of censorship sitting there in fact, like O’Brien in Orwell’s 1984 sort of wah-ha-ha-ha-ha, we have conquered information and civilization and now we get to gloat with our iron boot on the throat of humanity forever. And if you imagine that as the conscious intention of an inquisitor or any of these other censoring people whether it’s censorship aboard and the parts of the world today that have severe censorship, if you presume that that’s the motive, you’re never gonna understand the actions of that person, because they [sic] actions that we see them take are never consonant with that motive.” My point here is consonant with this view, but I go further. We do, often, fail to understand what censors do on their own terms. However, I also adopt Jansen’s view that constitutive censorship is essentially inevitable. Certain ideas will always be privileged. The question, then, is how we go about privileging ideas. In this view, we are all censors, and failing to appreciate the motives of blatant censors often means we fail to understand our own motives as well.

<sup>196</sup> Philip Anderson, “In Defense of the Aesthetic: Technical Rationality and Cultural Censorship,” in *Preserving Intellectual Freedom: Fighting Censorship in Our Schools*, edited by Jean E. Brown (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1994), 3.

religious censors like Lineberry did wish to control what books were read in the classrooms of Carroll County and how they were read. Yet, what is missed here is that everyone else also wishes to do this.<sup>197</sup> Goldwasser did not just randomly select texts and have students read them without context. She chose books she believed to be relevant to her students' lives and structured the way students read them. Her students time and again noted that they did not emphasize the strong language in *The Floatplane Notebooks*, but rather focused on themes, characters, and perspectives. Indeed, teachers should be very intentional about the ways students read books, and about what books they select. Everyone wishes "to control and limit the way in which children...read the books they are allowed to read." The more important series of questions is *who* decides what students read and *how*. Is the process democratic or is it transparent? Does it involve students and teachers, as well as parents? Are students prevented from reading books because of the viewpoint they represent? Because of obscenity? Because of limited pedagogical value? The Humphreys prevented students, beyond their own child, from reading a book in a process that was certainly not democratic or transparent. The book was partially banned for supposed obscenity, not because it was not beneficial in the context of the classroom.

Goldwasser selected the book in a more democratic way by involving her students and defending using the book on pedagogical grounds. I do not view these two positions as having equal merit, but nonetheless they both involve controlling what goes on in the classroom. In this sense, the procedural camp was right in the wrong way. The process by which a book is used and the reasons by which it can be justified or pulled is at the center of censorship disputes. Yet, this process is much broader than the narrow question of what the school board or school

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<sup>197</sup> This is why distinctions between "selection" and "censorship" fall flat. Ultimately, one person's selection is another's censorship.

administrators ought to do. Rather, the process by which a book is approved should incorporate as many stakeholders as possible, including students, and it should be justified on pedagogical grounds with an eye towards diversity and inclusion. Having this discussion, though, requires taking opposing viewpoints in good faith.

This thesis, then, suggests that the public would benefit just as much as historians by broadening the scope of discussion around censorship beyond the traditional emphasis on legality and state power. Historians have engaged the public over censorship on a few occasions. Dawson Barrett has written a very accessible book for high school students.<sup>198</sup> The book explores how previous and current generations of students have fought for certain rights regarding education, including the ability to have a free student press and discuss censored ideas in the classroom. As students are directly affected by classroom censorship, such works are invaluable in helping them think more critically about issues that directly impact them.

Historians have also engaged the public on free speech through advocacy efforts. In 1974, James Loewen and Charles Sallis co-edited a textbook called *Mississippi: Conflict and Change*.<sup>199</sup> The book challenged the traditional historical narrative taught in schools in Mississippi by adding topics like violence and additional voices like women and African-Americans, who had been neglected by earlier textbooks. This was highly controversial in the state as it challenged the presumed dominance of whites. Eventually, Loewen succeeded in getting the book on the state's approved textbook list through a court case, *Loewen v. Turnipseed*. Both Dawson's book and Loewen's court cases were effective because they sought

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<sup>198</sup> Dawson Barrett, *Teenage Rebels: Successful High School Activists, from the Little Rock 9 to the Class of Tomorrow* (Portland, OR: Microcosm Publishing, 2015).

<sup>199</sup> Charles W. Eagles, *Civil Rights, Culture Wars: The Fight Over a Mississippi Textbook* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 1-9.

to improve the nature of discourse around issues of censorship by incorporating new voices. Contemporary issues ranging from racism and economic inequality to corporate consolidation and regulatory capture also impact the viewpoints that can be expressed or can be heard. Project Censored, for instance, has for decades looked at the stories that a supposedly free press have smeared, self-censored, or silenced because of their content. In the introduction for the latest edition, journalist Abby Martin writes, “Only a few narrow positions are heard, despite a wide range of opinions...the parameters of debate perpetuate hierarchies of oppression.”<sup>200</sup> This is effective censorship even though the federal government has passed no law requiring news outlets to articulate this narrow range. Expanding the public’s understanding of censorship is vital to addressing these issues.

Carroll County, Virginia is a small county with a population around 30,000 people.<sup>201</sup> For a brief moment in the Spring and Summer of 1992, it was absorbed in a dispute over a single book written by a local author. This controversy has never received historical attention, and made it into the national press only once, and then only obliquely. However, for the residents of Carroll County, those who lived through it and those who have moved there since, the controversy still resonates today. Indeed, members of the present school board with whom I spoke told me that they still thought about it. For the broader public, too, this history is worth remembering. The analysis of the intellectual position that each camp staked out is interesting in its own right, but moreover it presents an opportunity to use history to engage questions about censorship and free speech. In doing so, this thesis argues that the intractability of censorship disputes rests on key intellectual questions about ethics, publicity, and power. Finally, engaging

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<sup>200</sup> Project Censored, *Censored 2019: Fighting the Fake News Invasion*, ed. by Mickey Huff and Andy Lee Roth (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2018).

<sup>201</sup> <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/carrollcountyvirginia/PST045217>



these questions, this thesis proposes ways that historians can engage one another, and the broader public, on the topic. It is my earnest hope that historians will do so. Let's not censor ourselves.

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