**Article #1 (Against Banning the Book)**

[Why Schools Shouldn’t Stop Teaching ‘To Kill A Mockingbird’ Because Of The N-Word](http://thefederalist.com/2017/10/24/schools-shouldnt-stop-teaching-kill-mockingbird-n-word/)

*A Mississippi school district is going after Harper Lee's classic work, contending that its difficult themes will make students too uncomfortable.*

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This summer, I re-read “To Kill a Mockingbird” for the fourth or fifth time. I rediscovered the beauty of Harper Lee’s understated prose and the humanity of the story she tells about a little girl growing up in the Jim Crow South, witnessing and gradually coming to grasp its attendant injustices. I recall thinking to myself that this wonderful book wasn’t likely to make it through our country’s ongoing culture wars. Unfortunately, I may have been right.

Last week, a school district in Mississippi announced that it was [pulling the Pulitzer Prize-winning classic from its 8th grade reading list](http://www.al.com/news/index.ssf/2017/10/mississippi_school_district_pu.html) because, according to the school board’s vice president Kenny Holloway, the language in the book “makes people uncomfortable.” He is referring, of course, to the use of the n-word found throughout the book.

According to the school’s website, there are plenty of other books that can teach the same lessons of “To Kill A Mockingbird” without the uncomfortable language. And this may be true. But can they do it with the same beauty and subtlety as Harper Lee? Certainly not.

We Need Books That Tell Hard Truths Well

So many books these days are focused more on identity politics or social justice than they are on describing the human condition, the highest calling of art—which Lee excelled at. What’s more, the rich depth of Lee’s prose ensures that her insights into the human condition, set in the context of mid-20th century American racism and prejudice, will stay with the reader long after putting her novel down.

Books aren’t significant just for the social lessons they teach. “To Kill a Mockingbird” has something monumental to say about society, race, compassion, and justice, as well as about the painful process of growing up. It is important, however, that Lee’s book raises these issues in a way that resonates in one’s mind and soul. Another book might espouse the same values or assert the same moral lessons as “To Kill a Mocking Bird,” but do so in a way that is hollow and two-dimensional, and thus wouldn’t leave a lasting impression on the reader.

The n-word is an uncomfortable word for anyone to read. Most people don’t relish thinking about its use and the historical denigration of blacks in America. But Lee’s book is not encouraging the use of that word. It’s simply describing its use. Indeed, it’s difficult to imagine anyone reading “To Kill A Mockingbird” and walking away thinking that the author is praising the use of such language. Instead the book is, in a sense, a historical document and a testament to the terrible mistreatment, injustice, and social segregation of blacks in the south prior to the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s.

Our Society’s Desire For Collective Amnesia

But that’s just it. People increasingly would rather not be reminded of history. History is ugly, upsetting, frightening, and at times disturbing. It recalls uncomfortable truths about human nature, with which most people would rather not be faced. We saw this play out over the summer in Memphis, Tenn., where the historic Orpheum Theater [decided to pull “Gone With the Wind](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2017/08/29/scourge-of-the-yankee-liberals-memphis-theater-pulls-gone-with-the-wind-sparking-outrage/?utm_term=.33a3ae4f1b3e)” from its annual summer film series because patrons complained that it was “racially insensitive.”

“Gone With the Wind” is not a racist film. It depicts life in the south before, during, and after the Civil War—at a time when blacks were slaves, or, in the scenes after the war had ended, not treated much better than slaves. That is an historic fact and the movie portrays it. How can it be racially insensitive to depict history? It’s uncomfortable, sure. But not racist.

The Jews have long called for their people and the world to “never forget” the horrors of the Holocaust. Elie Wiesel, who wrote heartbreakingly of his own experience in a World War II concentration camp, made memory the theme of his Nobel Prize lecture in 1986. He recalled all the Jews who tried to ensure that no one would ever forget what had happened: “To testify became an obsession,” he wrote. “They left us poems and letters, diaries and fragments of novels, some known throughout the world, others still unpublished.”

That drive to testify, to bear witness to what happened during the Holocaust, prompted survivors to write down their stories, to write novels, to build memorials and museums. I remember going to the Holocaust Memorial Center in Farmington Hills, Mich., with a large group of my older Jewish relatives during a family reunion when I was a girl. It was a painful visit for my grandmother and my great aunts and uncles, but it was important for them to be there, and to bring the younger generation with them.

We Need To Remember The Past’s Sins

Remembering can be hard and frightening, but it’s essential in order to grasp important truths about the past and to avoid repeating its mistakes and tragedies. In his speech, Wiesel went on to say, “Without memory, our existence would be barren and opaque, like a prison cell into which no light penetrates; like a tomb which rejects the living… if anything can, it is memory that will save humanity.”

“To Kill a Mockingbird” serves to remind us of the past, of the denigration and vilification of human beings because of the color of their sin, and of the injustices that permeated our justice system. It also reminds us of how the world and others can seem to a child not yet immersed in the social norms of society. Remembering the Jim Crow south or the Holocaust is crucial to pushing back against those parts of human nature that are always seeking to dehumanize the other, whoever that might be.

Some may argue that the incident with “To Kill a Mockingbird*”* is just one school district and that it’s silly to get all worked up about it—after all, it is still one of the [top-assigned novels in U.S. high schools](http://edex.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/publication/pdfs/20131023-Common-Core-in-the-Schools-a-First-Look-at-Reading-Assignments.pdf).

Maybe they’re right. Maybe this is just an isolated incident, it won’t pick up any steam, and no one else in the country will get the same idea. But the way that things have been going in our country the last few years—the increasing divisiveness between the left and the right, the ongoing political correctness crusade, the campus crackdowns on free speech, and the [movement to take down historic monuments](http://thefederalist.com/2017/10/19/iconoclasts-come-world-war-memorials/)—it seems that Lee’s masterpiece could be next up on the chopping block.

It Would Be A Sin To Kill Lee’s ‘Mockingbird’

The title of Lee’s book comes from a scene in which Atticus tells his son Jem that he doesn’t mind him shooting tin cans or even blue jays, but tells him that he should leave the mockingbirds alone. Scout, his sister and the protagonist, asks her neighbor, Miss Maudie, why and she responds, “Mockingbirds don’t do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don’t eat up people’s gardens, don’t nest in corncribs, they don’t do one thing but sing their hearts out for us. That’s why it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird.”

In a way, Lee’s masterpiece is like a mockingbird: innocent, harmless, providing us with the rich, sweet music of literature that carries the weight of truth. It would be a sin to kill it.