

First they came for the gays

HOLD ON and fasten your seat belts – it's looking like it's going to be a bumpy ride for the next few years. In the spirit of the journey, this is the first in what promises to be a series of "Those Wacky Republicans" columns. This week's wacky Republican is Alabama State Legislature Representative Gerald Allen – a frequent White House guest of none other than George W. Bush. Allen, it seems, is a bit obsessed with gay characters in literature. So he wants to ban them. Or more specifically, he introduced a post-election bill to ban all books that "recognize or promote homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle" from public libraries and university classrooms.

The ban would encompass all materials that include gay characters which are not chastised for their sexual orientation, including, according to The Birmingham News, "college textbooks that suggest homosexuality is natural." The list of works Allen hopes to ban is mind boggling. In short, it's any book, play, poem or film with a gay character, with the allowable exception being portrayals of gay folks in the form of anti-gay hate speech.

The sheer quantity of banned literature is mind boggling, with the director of the Montgomery Library explaining that "half the books in the library could end up being banned." I guess we could still take on a cheery "the library's half full" sort of attitude. But

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don't mistake Gerald Allen for a book burner. Book burier is more like it. "I guess we dig a big hole and dump them in and bury them," he told to reporters.

Allen, according to The News, explained that his bill would also prohibit college instructors from distributing handouts that suggest homosexuality is "OK" or from bringing in speakers who suggest homosexuality is "OK." And it would prohibit state funded universities and colleges from producing plays with gay characters – unless presumably, they are being burned, beaten or lynched.

When asked at a press conference about Tennessee Williams' play, "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof," Allen responded that university theater groups would probably be forbidden to perform this classic southern cultural mainstay. Ditto on "A Chorus Line." Allen told The Guardian of London that the popular Broadway classic would also have to be banned. When The Guardian pressed him about Shakespeare's work, which also contains gay characters, Allen finally backtracked and speculated that maybe an exception could be made for "Shakespeare and Hammet [sic]." But even these venerable old texts, Allen explains, would need a bit of editing none the less to "tone it down" a bit.

Of course, even with the backing of the Alabama Legislature, Gerald Allen can't legally dictate what Alabamans can read, or how Shakespeare should be edited. The Library Journal rightly points out that lawmakers such as Allen "should read the constitution before introducing bills." Hopefully there are no gay characters in the constitution.

Gerald Allen is more than just an obscure homophobe plying his native Cottonwood, Alabama with hate speech. No. He's a bona fide distinguished invited guest of the President of the United States. He just completed his fifth White House visit. If George W. Bush wasn't offended by Allen during his first four visits, there's no reason to believe the president has any inclination to stop him from kecking up his verbal bile all over the White House carpets again. Hell, what's wrong with a little bit of fag-bashing in the oval office?

Allen, you see, is on a mission. He's here to "protect Alabamans." He explained to The Guardian, that he's also here to "save society from moral destruction." This "moral destruction" of course, doesn't come from institutionalized greed, murder or lying. It comes from gay folks living their lives peaceably. Or more specifically, it's the representations of gay folks living peaceful lives that's threatening the moral fiber of Alabama.

By honoring a dung beetle like Gerald Allen with five successive White House invites, George W. Bush has clearly once again lent his blessing to hate mongering as the G.O.P. looks toward Alabama's most demented politicians for moral cues. This week's lesson is that morality comes in the form of hate. It's not only moral to hate. It's immoral to be tolerant. Confused? Don't be. This is Alabama – the land of "family values" where it's illegal

for gay couples to wed, but where a heterosexual pedophile can legal marry his 14-year old bride.

Of course it's not fair to chastise wacky Republicans for banning books without balancing the story with news of other wacky Republicans adding books to libraries. Hence, we go to Cary, North Carolina, where students at one of the area's largest religious schools have been reading "Southern Slavery, As it Was." This pamphlet explains to students that slavery "was a relationship based upon mutual affection and confidence." The school's principle told the Raleigh Durham News Observer that they only wanted to expose their students to the other side of the slavery story. "You can have two different sides, a Northern perspective and a Southern perspective," he explained.

Of course before we Northerners get feeling all high and mighty about ourselves, we have to first look at our own wacky Republicans right here in Erie County, New York. Our good 'ol boys didn't want to ban half the books in the library. No. They went for the whole damned library system, buildings and all – threatening to shut it all down. They only relented upon successfully blackmailing their colleagues into supporting a sales tax disproportionately hitting the areas poorest people, to offset successive real estate tax cuts benefiting the area's wealthiest people. Way to go.

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