

National Coalition Against Censorship

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NCAC PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

Actors' Equity Association
American Association of
School Administrators
American Association of
University Professors
American Association of
University Women
American Booksellers
for Free Expression
American Civil Liberties Union
American Ethical Union
American Federation of Teachers
American Jewish Committee
American Library Association
American Literary Translators
Association
American Orthopsychiatric Association
American Society of Journalists
& Authors
Americans United for Separation of
Church & State
Association of American Publishers
Authors Guild
Catholics for Choice
Children's Literature Association
College Art Association
Comic Book Legal Defense Fund
The Creative Coalition
Directors Guild of America
Dramatists Guild of America
First Amendment Lawyers Association
International Reading Association
Lambda Legal
Modern Language Association
National Center for Science Education
National Communication Association
National Council for the Social Studies
National Council of Churches
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of Teachers of English
National Education Association
National Youth Rights Association
The Newspaper Guild/CWA
PEN American Center
People for the American Way
Planned Parenthood Federation
of America
Project Censored
SAG-AFTRA
Sexuality Information & Education
Council of the U.S.
Society of Children's Book Writers
& Illustrators
Student Press Law Center
Union for Reform Judaism
Union of Democratic Intellectuals
Unitarian Universalist Association
United Church of Christ
Office of Communication
United Methodist Church
United Methodist Communications
Women's American ORT
Woodhull Sexual Freedom Alliance
Writers Guild of America, East
Writers Guild of America, West

September 2016

Statement on the Boycott of Shakespeare Books & Antiques

As organizations dedicated to protecting freedom of expression, we write to comment on the Oregon Shakespeare Festival's (OSF) decision not to patronize Shakespeare Books & Antiques because of objections to a display about book censorship in the store window.

It is our understanding that OSF took this step after some of its employees complained that the inclusion of *Little Black Sambo* in the display was "hurtful and offensive." Of course, OSF has every right to express its views through a boycott, which is itself protected free speech activity. However, in pressuring the bookstore to censor the display by removing a book OSF considers offensive, it undermines a fundamental free speech principle - that the response to noxious ideas is more speech, not enforced silence.

The display of banned books contains scores of banned works, including *The Lorax*, *Harry Potter*, *1984*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Madame Bovary*, *Mein Kampf*, *Little Women*, *The Wizard of Oz*, and *Forever* - along with *Little Black Sambo*. The obvious purpose is to demonstrate the vast array of material that someone, somewhere considers objectionable, just as OSF's staff finds *Little Black Sambo* objectionable. This informative display was designed to prompt spontaneous discussions about censorship and its implications for a diverse democratic community through these many examples of censored books, and in this respect it succeeded.

This is a message that should have special relevance for OSF, as many of Shakespeare's plays have been attacked and censored by those who found them offensive: *The Merchant of Venice* (anti-Semitism), *Romeo and Juliet* (sex), *Twelfth Night* (sexual orientation), *Taming of the Shrew* (sexism), and *Othello* (race and violence), to name a few. A number of these might well be considered "hurtful and offensive" by some audience members.

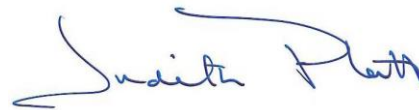
The bookstore owner has announced that she is closing the store as a result of declining sales and the emotional stress caused by the boycott. Its closure represents a serious and preventable loss to the intellectual and cultural life of the

community OSF serves. However, even if the store had remained open, we would object to a boycott whose purpose is to silence other views.

In our view, what was needed here, instead of a boycott, was a public discussion about the reasons for the display, the reactions it elicited, and the role freedom of speech has played in the fight for racial justice and social change. Unfortunately, that did not happen when it would have been most useful. We hope that OSF's planned community "talk back," which we understand is tentatively scheduled for October, will provide a belated opportunity to explore these important issues.



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