

October 18, 2021

Statement Supporting Dr. Ashley Hope Pérez, Author of *Out Of Darkness*

The Ohio State chapter of the AAUP stands in solidarity with our colleague and AAUP member Dr. Ashley Hope Pérez, author of the young adult novel *Out Of Darkness* (2015). In recent weeks and months, *Out of Darkness* has [suddenly come under attack](#) by parents and school boards who, cynically misreading the novel as harmful to students, have banned the book from schools – along with a slew of other books.

We condemn, in strongest possible terms, this abrogation of the freedom of young adults to explore and learn from challenging materials. We oppose the backlash against our colleague. And we understand that this attack on *Out of Darkness* and other recently banned texts is part of a larger backlash in our society against the impact of social movements that are transforming our landscape, including Black Lives Matter and #MeToo, the greater visibility of marginalized groups like trans communities and indigenous peoples, and the general awareness about national mental health.

In interviews, Dr. Pérez has remarked on the fact that the prize-winning *Out of Darkness* is, in fact, a challenging book. Addressing themes of racism, segregation, and violence while exploring the deadly 1937 school gas explosion in New London, Texas, *Out of Darkness* challenges readers to grapple with the realities of racist and sexual violence, and the deep trauma of its characters. Readers and parents may find it difficult to grapple with such themes: indeed, the passage that a Texas parent in a viral video decried as “promoting anal sex” was in fact exposing the graphic and violent ways in which girls and women have been objectified in our society. Charges of “pornography” are not only inaccurate but avoid – deliberately – the kinds of conversations that could create self-reflection and debates about how to reduce such violence.

It is crucial to understand the contexts in which these book bans are emerging. When *Out of Darkness* was first published in 2015, the initial phase of the Black Lives Matter movement was on the rise, and addressing challenging questions of racial violence seemed possible. By 2021, while many continue to be quite open to rethinking social divisions in the United States, a hardened right-wing opposition has emerged that has chosen K-12 and university education as its terrain of struggle.

The attack on *Out of Darkness* can be seen, then, as part of the general attack on “Critical Race Theory” – not the actual theory but the bogeyman created by right-wing media and organizations. The draconian bills being discussed in the Ohio legislature, HB 322 and Sub HB 327, that define and ban the teaching of “divisive concepts,” are likewise part of this movement to stifle honest and challenging education and learning.

Banning books is another plank of this movement. Not surprisingly, many of the recently banned books, [according to the advocacy group PEN America](#), were written by women and people of color and address questions of racism, LGBTQ+ themes, mental health, and sexual violence. If any group of people has been most impacted by the new movements and perspectives, it is youth, and the Ban the Books Brigade seems to think that suppressing such material will make it disappear.

School boards in Texas that have banned *Out of Darkness* and other texts should rescind the bans and allow students, educators, and librarians to make choices about which books they will teach and read. In fact, we encourage the OSU community to pick up a copy of *Out of Darkness* and to interrogate the concepts presented in the book for themselves.

Authors like Dr. Pérez should be supported, not attacked, for asking us to challenge ourselves. We urge all who support academic freedom to stand up against the book bans, the “anti-CRT” bills and other expressions of the backlash against social justice that pervade this country at the current moment.

Sincerely,
Executive Board, AAUP-Ohio State