

It is not just the triumphs but also the struggles that shape us, guiding our paths to becoming who we are meant to be. “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings” is a testament to the human spirit’s capacity for resilience, for transformation, and for triumph over adversity, making it a timeless and essential piece of literature. Every child in this Nation should have the opportunity to read it if they are truly to understand the history of the United States.

In her writing, Maya Angelou offers:

Without willing it, I had gone from being ignorant of being ignorant to being aware of being aware. And the worst part of my awareness was that I didn’t know what I was aware of. I knew very little, but I was certain that the things I had yet to learn wouldn’t be taught to me at George Washington High School. I began to cut classes, to walk in Golden Gate Park or wander along the shiny counter of the Emporium Department Store. When Mother discovered that I was playing truant, she told me that if I didn’t want to go to school one day, if there were no tests being held, and if my school work was up to standard, all I had to do was tell her and I could stay home. She said that she didn’t want some white woman calling her up to tell her something about her child that she didn’t know. And she didn’t want to be put in the position of lying to a white woman because I wasn’t woman enough to speak up. That put an end to my truancy, but nothing appeared to lighten the long gloomy day that going to school became. To be left alone on the tightrope of youthful unknowing is to experience the excruciating beauty of full freedom and the threat of eternal indecision.

Few, if any, survive their teens. Most surrender to the vague but murderous pressure of adult conformity. It becomes easier to die and avoid conflicts than to maintain a constant battle with the superior forces of maturity. Until recently each generation found it more expedient to plead guilty to the charge of being young and ignorant, easier to take the punishment meted out by the older generation (which had itself confessed to the same crime short years before).

The command to grow up at once was more bearable than the faceless horror of wavering purpose, which was youth. The bright hours when the young rebelled against the descending sun had to give way to twenty-four-hour periods called “days” that were named as well as numbered. The Black female is assaulted in her tender years by all those common forces of nature at the same time that she is caught in the tripartite crossfire of masculine prejudice, white illogical hate and Black lack of power. The fact that the adult American Negro female emerges a formidable character is often met with amazement, distaste, and even belligerence. It is seldom accepted as an inevitable outcome of the struggle won by survivors and deserves respect if not enthusiastic acceptance.

To those advancing the banning of books, I ask you to pause and reflect on a moment when a book truly spoke to you. Let that memory guide you to understand the power of literature, not just as a mirror of society but as a builder of empathy and understanding across diverse experiences. Consider the richness these narratives bring to our collective understanding and the importance of keeping that diversity accessible for all.

Literature, like rivers carving landscape, shapes the minds and lives of

our youth, guiding them toward self-discovery and empowering them to embrace their identities.

Maya Angelou’s work exemplifies the resilience and strength of marginalized communities—of the community of Black women—offering profound insights into the human experience.

I urge my colleagues to reflect on the transformative power of literature and to join me on the Senate floor to read an excerpt from a banned book that changed their lives but has since been banned from the lives of others.

May we continue to strive for a future where every voice is heard and every story is valued. May America read freely.

Now I turn to my colleague, Senator SMITH from Minnesota.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Ms. SMITH. Mr. President, I rise today to speak out about the absurd book bannings that are happening in schools across our country. I want to thank Senator BUTLER for inviting me to speak today about this issue.

You know, I was reflecting, as I was listening to Senator BUTLER speak in the beginning, about what reading meant to me when I was a young person and when I was first understanding what it felt like to be immersed in a book that I loved—that feeling of learning, of being able to imagine myself living different lives, being able to think about what different experiences would be like, and understanding that my life was not everybody’s life, that there is such diversity of life in this world, and being exposed to that through reading was so exciting to me.

Also, as I was seeing how I was not like everybody else, I was also able to see myself in the people whom I read about—both my own struggles as well as triumphs in the stories that I read—and that is the gift of reading. So to think about the absurdity of trying to block that gift from people because of one’s own views about what is OK and what is not OK is, I think, what is at issue here.

So I appreciate very much having the opportunity to read into the RECORD incredible authors whose works have been unfairly banned.

To my colleagues, I think it is interesting that, just last week, the American Library Association released new data documenting how prevalent this is. They are documenting book challenges that are happening throughout the United States, and they found a huge surge in these challenges—a 65-percent increase in challenges to books just in 2023. It is the highest level the ALA has ever recorded.

Among the books that were banned last year is a book called “And Tango Makes Three.” This is a book by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell. It is a demonstration of the absurdity of banning books—this book in particular. It is based on the real story of two penguins in the Central Park Zoo who create a family and raise a chick together.

Both of these penguins were male, and so a Florida school district banned the book because of their State’s “don’t say gay” law. Now I am going to read a bit of the text because I think it shows so much. Here we go.

[C]hildren and their parents aren’t the only families at the zoo. The animals make families of their own. There are red panda bear families, with mothers and fathers and furry red panda bear cubs. There are monkey dads and monkey moms raising noisy monkey babies. There are toad families, and toucan families, and cotton-top tamarin families too.

And in the penguin house there are penguin families. Every year at the very same time, the girl penguins start noticing the boy penguins. And the boy penguins start noticing the girls. When the right girl and the right boy find each other, they become a couple.

Two penguins in the penguin house were a little bit different. One was named Roy, the other was named Silo. Roy and Silo were both boys. But they did everything together.

They bowed to each other. And they walked together. They sang to each other. And [they] swam together.

They didn’t spend much time with the girl penguins, and the girl penguins didn’t spend much time with them. Instead, Roy and Silo wound their necks around each other. Their keeper Mr. Gramzay noticed the two penguins and thought to himself, “They must be in love.”

Now, I have four grandchildren, and I think that reading a story like this to them—reading this story to them—is exactly what should be happening as children and people of all ages really think about what it means to love one another, what it means to be a family, and how we can come together in that idea rather than being driven apart.

I hope and will do everything I can to make sure that my four grandchildren live in a future where books that affirm that families can come in all different forms and in all different shapes and sizes aren’t considered worth banning.

I thank Senator BUTLER for organizing this discussion.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Indiana.

Mr. YOUNG. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to use a prop during my remarks.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNIZING THE INDIANS OF MILAN HIGH 1954 BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

Mr. YOUNG. Mr. President, you might be surprised by the guest book of a museum in a small town in Indiana. Inside it are names of visitors from all 50 States and from much farther away—other countries, other continents, places like Italy, France, Japan, and New Zealand.

They have made their way to Milan—Milan, IN. And they have done so because here is where the heart of Hoosier Hysteria lives. It is the greatest basketball story ever that has taken place. It happened there 70 years ago this week, March 20, 1954, at the Fieldhouse on the campus of Butler University in Indianapolis: the finals of the

Indiana High School Basketball Tournament, the Indians of Milan High, enrollment 161, versus the Bearcats of Muncie Central, enrollment 1,660. Fifteen thousand fans are in the bleachers, with thousands more Hoosiers listening over the radio. It is the fourth quarter. The game is tied at 30; 18 seconds on the clock. Milan inbounds. Senior Bobby Plump gets the ball. He fakes left, dribbles right, pulls up, knocks down a 14-foot jump shot just as the clock expires. The nets come down. The celebration starts.

The next morning, the new State companions headed home. They are in a fleet of Cadillacs along Indiana's county roads. There was no interstate or highway connecting Indianapolis to Cincinnati, the closest city to Milan.

Hoosiers were awaiting along the way in Greensburg, in Shelbyville. They were holding signs. They were waving. State Road 101, which led back home, was lined with cars and cheering fans for 13 miles. And 40,000 people were waiting in little Milan, IN, even though at the time, the town had only 1,100 residents. This is Hoosier Hysteria. This is what the people of Indiana are so excited about every March.

That year, in 1954, as the players from Milan rolled into town, two members of the team, Ray Craft and Kenny Wendelman, hopped on the roof of their Cadillac with the championship trophy between them. The procession ended near Milan High. That is where that trophy remains today.

The next morning, the crowd was gone. The small town, its quiet had gradually returned. In the days that followed, members of the team graduated. They went off to college, pursued careers. They drifted apart. Coach Marvin Wood took a job up in New Castle.

The passage of time brought other changes—not all of them welcome, of course. Little Milan, like so many towns across the country—it is facing challenges. And the single class basketball tournament system that gave small town teams like Milan a shot at the title is no more.

Some of the schools that played in the 1954 tournament are gone. Milan, it hasn't won another championship. Though, it must be said they made it to the semi-State back in 1973.

Despite this—or possibly because of it—the Milan Miracle is as inspiring as ever. Yes, it is the tale of the little guy, the underdog, David versus Goliath, the smallest school to ever win the single class tournament. Literally, in fact, Muncie Central's average height was 6-foot-4. Milan was 5-foot-11.

This story is so much bigger than that, so much bigger than basketball or even Indiana, for that matter.

Milan's players always note that their championship run in 1954 wasn't a lightning strike. It wasn't even a stroke of good luck. No, the Indians made it to the final four the previous year. Most of the players had known and practiced with each other since

grade school. They played tough. They were coached well. Perhaps most importantly, they had faith—faith in their teammates, faith in one another, faith in that community that they represented, faith that merit and hard work would be rewarded, faith that, just maybe, their dreams would be satisfied.

Bobby Plump's last shot is still talked about around the country, really, but certainly, back home in Indiana. That is the moment we remember. But it was the culmination of a lot of hard work, dedication, and teamwork. And it happened because of the support of families, friends, and neighbors.

Milan was a place where, when a student needed a winter coat, locals—they took up a collection at the drugstore. They bought that coat. It is the place where the kids who didn't have a lot of money could eat for free at Rosie's. The ones from nearby Pierceville who often had to walk to school, they could count on rides from friends.

In a different era, when the world seemed so much smaller, the local basketball team was, at least for the month of March, the world—the world—every one of these teams, the celebration of your togetherness, your community, your opportunity to show your stuff.

Even a water shortage in the spring of 1954 didn't dampen Milan's or Ripley County's excitement for the Indians. In fact, as an area newspaper reported: "water or no water, Ripleyians want Milan to bring home the crown."

Apart from what happened on the hardwood at Hinkle Fieldhouse, the memory of Milan lasts because—because their team and town symbolizes what keeps all of our communities together, what lifts our hopes and fuels our dreams, even when it feels like hopes and dreams are all we have.

That trophy that I mentioned, that trophy in the newly refurbished lobby of Milan High's gymnasium, today is a symbol of more than just a State championship. Oh, it is so much more.

You see, it is proof of how much we all can achieve when we work together towards a common goal and resolve to hold our own, no matter the odds, no matter how insignificant others might say we are or think we are. It is an inspiration still across small towns and struggling places waiting on their own miracle, where the basketball team brings people together and makes them feel proud of the places they call home. This—this is why we still celebrate little Milan beating mighty Muncie Central 70 years on. It is why we will, I believe, for the next 70 years too.

Of course, for those who haven't already figured it out, this is the story that inspired "Hoosiers," a beloved movie written and directed by a pair of Hoosiers.

You see, visitors regularly come to Indiana in search of the movie's fictional Hickory, hoping to find the small town epicenter of Hoosier Hysteria. But what they are really

searching for is right there in Ripley County. It is an actual town with a real history and a tradition to be proud of and, dare I say, replicated.

They will recognize it by the basketball goals in driveways, the backboards on barns, the black water tower with white lettering, prominently reading: "STATE CHAMPS 1954"—it is still there. I have seen it many times, the historical marker commemorating the Milan miracle and that museum that celebrates it right there in the center of town.

As a newspaper declared back in 1954: In basketball, Little Milan is the new capital of Indiana.

I think that is about right. Well, 70 years later, it is still the capital, and the Indians will always be champions.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

Mr. TILLIS. Mr. President, I want to compliment my colleague from Indiana on those wonderful remarks and reflection on history.

I will reflect, in the present day, North Carolina has three teams in March Madness.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 3237

Mr. President, I am here for, actually, a serious subject. At the end of my comments, I am going to ask unanimous consent.

I want to talk about a bill that my office sponsored—actually, something I thought of several months ago. It is S. 3237, the Patriot Bill of Rights.

My office was very much involved in the PACT Act drafting. By that, I mean that we were primarily responsible for leading the language that led to the Camp Lejeune toxic act. There was also a TEAM Act in there, but I am here to talk Camp Lejeune toxics.

In full disclosure, when that bill went to the floor, I voted against it, which was a very difficult decision for me to make. I was one of only about nine people who voted against it. It wasn't because I was opposed to the bill; it was because I was opposed to whether or not it was ready to come out of the oven; that there were things that we needed to work on. That has actually proven to be true.

We have got a lot of work to do, because I think we went just a little bit too soon. I know we did on the Camp Lejeune toxic act. There is probably not a person in the United States who has ever watched the TV or listened to radio who has not seen the advertisements right now for: If you worked or lived in and around Camp Lejeune for more than 30 days, call this hotline.

That hotline, in many cases, is not even a lawyer. It is an aggregator. It is somebody who is advertising, trying to convince a veteran to call this hotline so that they can help you get the benefits you deserve.

The fact of the matter is, the Senate voted to make sure that veterans got the benefit that they deserved if they were exposed to a toxic substance down in Camp Lejeune. It is in my State, down in the eastern part of the State.