

What Happened At the CAC

(*This is a more complete version of what appears on the FAQ.)

After there was no resolution of this issue at Davidson last spring ('06), according to district procedure, it was referred to the "San Rafael District Curriculum Council" in the fall. "The Bronze Bow" was discussed at 2 meetings of this group in September and October.

Unfortunately we now feel this process failed to encourage serious discussion of the issues by never allowing real dialogue between us and the CAC members. Constrictive procedural rules used by the district limited public participation only to an initial period at the beginning of each meeting. After that the Council discussed things only among themselves.

After being allowed to make a presentation at the first meeting, our group which had thought long and hard about every aspect of this issue was virtually excluded from subsequent dialogue. Our point of view had no representation and we watched issues go by that cried out for deeper clarification but we could say nothing.

We do not blame the members of the CAC who did not set the rules and no doubt had the best of intentions. We believe the process itself was badly flawed and the resulting discussion did not serve the issues, the district, nor even the members of the CAC itself who deserved better.

9/06 - First CAC meeting:

After submitting a great deal of written material we had 16 minutes at the first meeting to present our case. We asked the CAC to revisit the 1996 CAC approval of the book in light of its numerous violations of State Education Guidelines as well as its evident religious bias. After us Doug Huneke, a prominent local Christian minister eloquently described the way anti-Jewish bias permeates the entire book calling it "insidious".

After two teachers talked briefly, Ed Colucci, the Davidson principal spoke very forcefully in defense of the book. He compared us to Nazi Holocaust deniers who might demand the removal of The Diary of Anne Frank and insisted we were "book banners." Neither the teachers nor the Mr. Colucci responded to any of our specific criticisms. Rules prevented our answering the Principal (though we found his comparisons extremely disturbing) and there was very little discussion by the CAC members at this meeting.

In the hall afterwards, the Superintendent said she expected the CAC was going to rule against us because they would be very reluctant to oppose other teachers. This proved prescient.

10/06 - Second CAC meeting:

We did not present anything new at the beginning of this meeting but expected to be involved in some kind of question and answer session. However when no questions were initially asked, the rules imposed prevented us from any involvement in the subsequent discussion.

The first council member to speak said she was very uncomfortable telling a teacher what they could use in a classroom and this set the tone for the entire meeting.

At no time in the discussion that followed did anyone question whether the book violated State guidelines or law, whether it was historically accurate*, whether it promoted one religion or denigrated another (except by implication) - in short none of our objections were discussed in any detail and the book itself was never re-examined. All discussion centered around how it might be used, not whether it should be. We found this surprising and very disappointing.

Despite this however, oddly the discussion did seem to implicitly accept some of our arguments. Thus the CAC did consider whether the books “insidious” problems could be dealt with by special curriculum in class (as with Huckleberry Finn). A Davidson assistant principal said that this has been “eye-opening” and the “book will never be taught the same way again” but provided no details. Yet this seemed to conflict completely with the remarks of the Principal and our previous discussions with teachers. After the meeting the Superintendent said they would develop new curriculum for classroom use but the subject of how or even why this would be done, and whether it was possible or actually mandated, never came up at all. The implicit assumption seemed to be that the book would be “optional” in the future, but no one really discussed what that meant or how it would work either.

We found this confusing. If there was something wrong with the book then why wasn't that addressed. If there wasn't, why come up with special curriculum for it. How many books in 7th grade require this kind of treatment?

The CAC passed this resolution: “Considering that The Bronze Bow is a supplemental historical novel and students may choose to opt-out of reading it, [we] move that The Bronze Bow remain in the curriculum.” Since all novels are “supplementary” material and anyone in the district has always been able to “opt-out” of anything, this resolution changed nothing.

The CAC sent this recommendation on to the school board, which makes all final decisions. The Bronze Bow is expected to be an information item at the December school board meeting, at Coleman School, on December 11th, at 6:30 p.m.

* There was a brief side exchange between one member of the CAC and our group about historical issues, but that never got directly back to the book, and was considered out of order.