I learned about the banning of *Rethinking Columbus: The Next 500 Years* from Dr. Debbie Reese (Nambie Pueblo), who blogs at American Indians in Children’s Literature. She wrote on January 15 that in my interview with the book “is no longer available in Tucson high schools due to the shut down of Mexican [American] Studies courses. *Rethinking Columbus* was boxed up and taken out of the classroom.”

Co-editor Bill Bigelow posted on Rethinking Schools Blog that the publisher “learned today that for the first time in its more-than-20-year history, our book *Rethinking Columbus* was banned by a school district. … What’s to fear? *Rethinking Columbus* offers teaching strategies and readings that teachers can use to help students consider perspectives that are too often silenced in the traditional curriculum.”

But, wait! Could it be that the book wasn’t banned? That’s what Tucson Unified School District claimed in a January 17 release: “TUSD has not banned any books as has been widely and incorrectly reported.”

Where! So, no books are banned? Not exactly, as TUSD explained: “Seven books that were used as supporting materials for curriculum in Mexican American Studies classes have been moved to the district storage facility because the classes have been suspended as per the ruling by Arizona Superintendent for Public Instruction John Huppenthal that the classes were in violation of state law ARS 15-112.”

That law prohibits a school district or charter school in Arizona from including courses or classes that: “(1) Promote overthrowing the U.S. government; (2) Promote resentment towards a race or class of people; (3) Are designed primarily for pupils of a particular ethnic race; and (4) Advocate ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals.”

Without proving that MAS did any of those four things, Huppenthal ordered TUSD to bring MAS into compliance, warning, “Failure to do so will result in the withholding of 10 percent (or $14 million) of state funds.” An administrative law judge upheld his ruling on December 27, 2011, and TUSD jettisoned MAS and books.

TUSD says these seven books are “boxed and stored:” Critical Race Theory, 500 Years of Chicano History in Pictures, Message to AZTLAN, Chicano!, The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement, Occupied America: A History of Chicanos, Pedagogy of the Oppressed and Rethinking Columbus.

Dozens of other books listed in an audit are widely assumed to be banned. Not so, says TUSD: “Teachers may continue to use materials in their classrooms as appropriate for the course curriculum. The Tempest and other books approved for curriculum are still viable options for instructors.” The problem is that pesky word “approved.” Huppenthal found that the approving authority, TUSD’s board, hasn’t approved books: “No evidence was found to support [that the board has] reviewed any of the texts or supplemental materials used in many of the [MAS] courses.”

Huppenthal maintains that *The Tempest* (yes, as in Shakespeare’s) may be used, but teachers and materials can’t say that the “discovered” and enslaved Natives on the bard’s island are oppressed or that the foreign slavers are oppressors. Huppenthal is sensitive about words related to oppressor, which he oddly claims comes from The Communist Manifesto (oppressor is Middle English, deriving from Old French and Latin; in Karl Marx’s German, it’s *Unterdrücker*).

Because words are important, let’s just call all the stored books banned, until they’re back in the classroom and the teachers are free to use them again.

The banned book I know most about is *Rethinking Columbus*. First published in 1991, much of its content had been developed or shaped by The 1992 Alliance, which began in 1990 to promote Native voices for 1992, the Year of Indigenous Peoples and the Columbus Quincentenary. I was national coordinator of the Alliance and the historic gathering at Tacos Pueblo, Our Visions: The Next 500 Years.

The introduction to the 1998 banned version of *Rethinking Columbus* begins with my quote: “We have no reason to celebrate an invasion that caused the demise of so many of our people and is still causing destruction today.” Part of my interview in the book came from my 1991 column in Newsweek, “I Won’t Be Celebrating Columbus Day”—I don’t know if that’s now banned in Arizona.

I am honored to stand with the MAS teachers, students and writers. If Rethinking Columbus were not banned, I would have wanted to do what playwright/poet Bertolt Brecht’s banished writer did in “The burning of the books,” upon learning his books were not on the bonfire: “Burn me! he wrote with a flying pen, burn me! Haven’t my books Always reported the truth? And wanted to do what playwright/poet Bertolt Brecht’s banished writer did in “The burning of the books,” upon learning his books were not on the bonfire: “Burn me! he wrote with a flying pen, burn me! Haven’t my books Always reported the truth? And

Suzan Shown Harjo, Cheyenne/Hodulgee Muscogee, is an award-winning columnist, poet, writer, curator and policy advocate, who has helped Native peoples to protect sacred places and recover more than 1 million acres of land. President of the Morning Star Institute in Washington, D.C., she is a founding trustee of the National Museum of the American Indian, former executive director of the National Congress of American Indians and past news director of the American Indian Press Association.

A book’s total score is based on multiple factors, including the number of people who have voted for it and how highly those voters rank the book. To vote on existing books in the list, beside each book there is a link vote for this book clicking it will add that book to your votes. To vote on books not in the list or books you couldn’t find in the list, you can click on the tab add books to this list and then choose from your books, or simply search. Find this list. By Bill Bigelow. Imagine our surprise.
Our thanks to all the members of the advisory council who review article submissions: David Armstrong, Phil Bellfy, JoLee Blackbear, Bennis Blue, Stephen Brandon, Patricia Campbell, Ward Churchill, Tad Conner, Renne Ann Cramer, Shane Day, Erica Neegangwedgin, Larry French, Susan Grogan, Burke Hendrix, Sheree Hukill, Lillias Jarding, Ezra Rosser, Mickey Posluns, and Stefanie Wickstrom.

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Refbacks
- There are currently no refbacks.

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book’s total score is based on multiple factors, including the number of people who have voted for it and how highly those voters ranked the book. To vote on existing books from the list, beside each book there is a link vote for this book clicking it will add that book to your votes. To vote on books not in the list or books you couldn’t find in the list, you can click on the tab add books to this list and then choose from your books, or simply search. Flag this list. By Bill Bigelow. Imagine our surprise. Rethinking Schools learned today that for the first time in its more-than-20-year history, our book Rethinking Columbus was banned by a school district: Tucson, Arizona. According to journalist Jeff Biggers, officials with the Tucson Unified School District ordered that teachers pull the book from their classrooms, evidently as an outcome of the school board’s 4-1 vote this week to abolish the Mexican American Studies program. As I mentioned to Biggers when we spoke, the last time a book of mine was outlawed was during the state of emergency in apartheid Rethinking Columbus: The Next 500 Years by Bill Bigelow is composed of poems, essay and interviews of Native Americans who were oppressed. by the “European invasion of North America.” We need to listen to a wider range of voices. We need to hear from those whose lands and rights were taken away by those who “discovered” them. Their stories, too often suppressed, tell of 500 years of courageous struggle, and the lasting wisdom of native peoples. With all the controversy surrounding Tucson Unified School District's banning of certain book as it eliminates its Mexican Studies program, a new blog is asking for people to submit their […] Reply. VIDEO: @TheYoungTurks Report That TUSD Student Protesters Had to Clean School Toilets says Why rethink Christopher Columbus? Because the Columbus myth is a foundation of children’s beliefs about society. Columbus is often a child’s first lesson about encounters between different cultures and races. Since its first publication, Rethinking Columbus has been a valuable resource for librarians, teachers, and all those interested in using both of their ears to hear this complex story. The good news about the second edition is that it remains just as readable and interesting while adding much new material. This is truly a book that deserves (and needs) to be in every school library.” — Joseph Bruchac (Abenaki), editor of the Greenfield Review. A sampling of praise for the first edition of Rethinking Columbus