



Subject: Don't share graphic videos of police brutality.
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April 18, 2022

Don't share graphic videos of police brutality.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Happy Monday and welcome back! There was some confusion about the upcoming Banned Books virtual Zoom chat. It is indeed at 7p EST, not 7p CST, on May 2nd. [Here's the link](#) to RSVP!

Today we're amplifying efforts to demand justice for Patrick Lyoya, and emphasizing the importance of engaging with videos of police brutality with care.

Thank you so much to everyone that donates to make this newsletter possible. Together, we're creating educational resources and mobilizing people to take action, one day at a time. If you can, give **one-time or monthly** on our [website](#), [PayPal](#) or [Patreon](#). Your support ensures our resources are accessible and free for all.



Nicole

TAKE ACTION

- The family of Patrick Lyoya is calling for the police department to release the name of the officer who shot and killed him, in addition for them to be fired and prosecuted. Share this graphic, created by Black Lives Matter Michigan in partnership with the family, to advocate for accountability, using the hashtag #Justice4Patrick.
- Use the resources created by the Witness Media Lab when considering posting or sharing videos of police brutality.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- On April 4th, Patrick Lyoya, a 26-year-old Black man who emigrated from the Democratic Republic of Congo, was shot and killed by a police officer while restrained in Grand Rapids, MI.
- Bodycam footage and user-generated content of the incident is being shared broadly on social media.
- Sharing graphic videos of police brutality may raise awareness, but also cause harm – and obfuscate the real effort needed to create change.

GET EDUCATED

By Nicole Cardoza (she/her)

On April 4th, Patrick Lyoya, a 26-year-old Black man who emigrated from the Democratic Republic of Congo, was shot and killed by a police officer while restrained in Grand Rapids, MI. Bodycam footage and user-generated content

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depicts Lyoya exiting the car after being pulled over, prompting a struggle. After Lyoya agrees to comply, a Taser is drawn by an officer, which Lyoya grabs and tosses away. After a further struggle, the officer who had Lyoya pinned to the ground shot Lyoya in the head, killing him. [Read more details about the incident](#), and [statements from the family](#) and their legal representation.

Similar to other recorded instances of police brutality, footage of Lyoya's death has been shared broadly across social media, sparking outrage. Access to the footage is a good step in transparency; *bodycam footage, designed to hold police officers accountable while on the job, should never be withheld from a victim's family and community.*

But violence against Black people has also been used as a commodity, bartered and sold throughout time. I can't help but think about how, just decades ago, lynchings were treated as a public attraction. Crowds would gather to partake in festivities surrounding the unjust killing, posing for photographs and taking home pieces of the person's corpse as "souvenirs." Postcards would be created and distributed as lasting memories. *Learn more in a [previous newsletter](#).* Videos taken by police bodycams and shared widely have a similar feeling; digital souvenirs of violence protected by social and political norms.

User-generated videos, however, have a different intent. Although still difficult to watch, they're the recordings of what an everyday person was forced to bear witness to, individuals rendered helpless in the face of violence. Recording a conflict can be a form of bystander intervention when other options are limited. And social movements across time have been sparked by marginalized communities leveraging whatever channel they can to ensure their voices are heard. In this case, user-generated videos are journalism, a testament to the stories that define generations. In the case of Patrick Lyoya, a passenger in the car he was driving filmed the encounter on their cellphone. If the Michigan State Police hadn't complied, this footage – and that of a neighbor's home surveillance camera – may be the only documentation of what happened.

Author and professor Allissa Richardson, who advocates for citizen journalism and encourages everyone to consider their role in documenting the world around them, refers to it as "sousveillance". This is the opposite of surveillance, created by body

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cameras, security cameras, and other public, often state-sanctioned forms of recordings. Sousveillance is people capturing stories with their own devices (usually smartphones) that will likely counter or disprove the facts presented by those with more power and privilege ([Nieman Lab](#)).

Regardless of their intention, though, all videos of police brutality need to be shared with sensitivity, as they exacerbate the trauma that people of color experience regularly. A study found that 20% of Black people who watch a video are "significantly affected" by it, experiencing lasting effects, including stress, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorders, or vicarious PTSD ([Yahoo](#)). These only elevate the race-based trauma that people of color experience in their daily lives ([PBS](#)). In an article written by Arionne Nettles, Alfiere Breland-Noble, the founder and director of mental health organization [AAKOMA Project](#), notes how Black adolescents deal with vicarious trauma from watching the videos ([ZORA](#)).

"Instead, cellphone videos of vigilante violence and fatal police encounters should be viewed like lynching photographs — with solemn reserve and careful circulation."

Allissa Richardson, [assistant professor at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communications and Journalism](#), [2021 fellow at the Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University](#), and author of [Bearing Witness While Black: African Americans, Smartphones, and the New Protest Journalism](#), for [Nieman Labs](#).

Leon Ford, who was shot and paralyzed by a police officer during a traffic stop in 2012, also urges us to consider the individuals and families of the victims. "These people have children. These people have cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents, who can't live a normal life...even though I don't watch those videos, I can feel that energy. When I see somebody posting, I scroll past it. It still sticks to me" ([Yahoo](#)). Some will argue that it's necessary to share because we will never be able to fight for justice without them. But what does it say about us that justice can only be pursued for the most atrocious cases, and only if they were captured on video and circulated broadly enough to create public outcry? Why is justice only justified when the crime is warranted worthy of national attention? Most urgently, when will we take action not to share, but change the social conditions to ensure that these instances never happen again?



That will take us changing our behavior. We must channel immediate outrage into a persistent commitment to long-term change. Media platforms are taking note; more have chosen not to post the videos on their social media feeds and create multiple news articles highlighting the event – one including the video footage, one without. And as individuals, we can do the same. Instead of sharing to elicit strong emotions like shock or disgust, consider sharing the information sans video. More importantly, we recommend sharing proactive ways your community can address policing and public safety issues, like upcoming city council meetings or alternatives to calling the police. It's action – not awareness – that will prevent these videos in the future.

Quiz Time

Why is "sousveillance" necessary in addressing police brutality?

- a) It counters or disproves false and misleading narratives deployed by those with more power and privilege.
 - b) It causes public outrage.
 - c) It is another needed form of state-sanctioned surveillance.
 - d) It's free.
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A White Author's Book About Black Feminism Was Pulled After a Social Media Outcry

The book "Bad and Boujee" centers on Black women's experience, but critics said it was written by a white professor and was flawed in its execution.

By Alexandra Alter and Elizabeth A. Harris

April 15, 2022

The blurb for the book "Bad and Boujee: Toward a Trap Feminist Theology" says that it "engages with the overlap of Black experience, hip-hop music, ethics and feminism to focus on a subsection known as 'trap feminism.'"

But the book, written by Jennifer M. Buck, a white academic at a Christian university, was criticized by some authors and theologians as academically flawed, with deeply problematic passages, including repeated references to the ghetto. The project was also widely condemned on social media as poorly executed and as an example of cultural appropriation.

In response to the criticism, the book's publisher, Wipf and Stock Publishers, decided on Wednesday that it would pull the title from circulation.

The incident touched on a larger debate in the world of publishing over when, how, and even whether, it is appropriate for authors to write about subjects outside their own culture.

Wipf and Stock's decision to pull "Bad and Boujee" was reported on Thursday by Sojourners, the website of a Christian publication. Buck did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Friday.

The theologian Candice Marie Benbow, author of "Red Lip Theology," was "livid" to learn that a white academic had published a book about the theology of trap feminism — an emerging philosophy that examines the intersection of feminist ideals, trap music and the Black southern hip-hop culture that gave rise to it.

"It matters that you have an academic text that would situate Black women's lived experiences and Black women's spirituality, and it's not written by a Black woman," she said.

Sesali Bowen, a pioneer of the concept of trap feminism and the author of "Bad Fat Black Girl: Notes From a Trap Feminist," also took issue with the author's failure to properly credit or engage with the Black women who have been leading experts in the field.

"Even if another Black woman did this, the issues around citation would still exist," she said. "The fact that this is also a white woman, who has no business writing about this because nothing about the trap or Black feminism is her lived experience, is adding another layer to this."

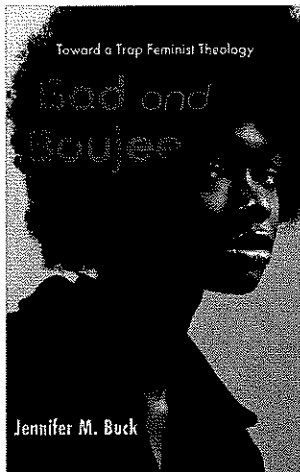
In a statement, Wipf and Stock Publishers said that its critics had "serious and valid" objections.

"We humbly acknowledge that we failed Black women in particular, and we take full responsibility for the numerous failures of judgment that led to this moment," Wipf and Stock said. "Our critics are right."

Among the objections raised, the publisher said, were the book's cover, which features a young Black woman with natural hair, and which Benbow called intentionally misleading and "profoundly racist," and the lack of endorsement by Black experts. The book's only endorsement came from another white academic at Azusa Pacific University, where the author, Buck, is an associate professor in the department of practical theology.

Buck, in her introduction to "Bad and Boujee," briefly addresses "identity politics" and acknowledges that as "a straight, privileged, white woman" she has "not lived the embodied experiences of a trap queen," but was drawn to the subject because of her love of hip-hop.

Critics also took issue with the book's cover, which portrayed a Black woman, calling it misleading.



The wider debate about cultural appropriation, and how the stories of marginalized people are told, exploded in the book world after the 2020 publication of “American Dirt,” by Jeanine Cummins. That novel, which sold to its publisher for seven figures and debuted on The New York Times Best Seller list, follows a Mexican mother who flees for the United States border with her son after a drug cartel kills their family.

Cummins, who identifies as white and Latina, was criticized by some for writing a book of “trauma porn.” At a dinner promoting the book, fake barbed wire was wrapped around floral centerpieces.

The dystopian novel “American Heart,” by Laura Moriarty, was attacked even before its release in 2018 for what readers called its “white savior narrative,” in which Muslims are put in internment camps in an America of the future. And the author Amélie Wen Zhao canceled her own debut, a young adult fantasy novel, after an outcry over its depiction of slavery, and released it later after revising it.

Many authors, publishers and free speech advocates are concerned about how far such restrictions might go. Fiction is an act of imagination, they argue, and great books could be lost if authors are discouraged from writing outside their own experience.

In the fields of nonfiction and academia, the issue of cultural appropriation has been less of a lightning rod, in part because it’s common for journalists and academics to report and do research on communities of which they are not a part.

While publishers have pulled nonfiction books over controversies involving plagiarism or fabrication, or in some cases consequential factual inaccuracies, it’s unusual for a publisher to withdraw a book over objections about how an author approached the subject, or the author’s background.

Clarisse Rosaz Shariyf, the senior director of Literary Programs for PEN America, called the decision to pull Buck’s book “misguided and regrettable.”

“There must be no hard and fast rules about who is entitled to tell certain stories or engage particular topics,” Rosaz Shariyf said in an email. “Such redlines constrain creative and intellectual freedom and impair the role of literature and scholarship as catalysts to understanding across differences.”

Some of the criticism directed at “Bad and Boujee,” which takes its title from a song by Migos, featuring Lil Uzi Vert, was aimed at the author’s approach to the subject.

Bowen said she was stunned when she read a passage from the first chapter of Buck’s book, which opens, “A trap queen is a woman who is down for the cause. She was born in the ghetto, raised in the ghetto, but she ain’t that ghetto.”

She found Buck’s use of Black vernacular “weird and cringey,” and felt that Buck’s emphasis on “trap queen,” a term that is often connected to women engaged in a criminal enterprise, like a kingpin or drug lord, suggested a superficial understanding of trap culture and the women who grew up in it.

“That is not what Black women from the hood call themselves,” Bowen said. “The fact that she has latched onto that specific terminology is weird, and it speaks to a surface-level relationship that she has with this particular community.”

Bowen said she was also unsatisfied by Buck’s responses to her critics. After Bowen sent Buck a message over social media asking how she had come to write “Bad and Boujee,” Buck replied that she had credited Bowen’s work in a footnote after her research assistant discovered it.

“She only thought that it was worth a footnote and not even any critical engagement,” she said.



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A White Author's Book About Black Feminism Was Pulled After a Social Media Outcry - The New York Times

Some who took issue with “Bad and Boujee” said that the problems with the book revealed a larger and more entrenched issue — the lack of diversity in the publishing industry.

Benbow, the theologian and essayist, argued that the publisher of “Bad and Boujee” should go beyond simply pulling the book and use this moment to extend more opportunities to Black women.

“Just pulling the book doesn’t go far enough, you have to do more when you’ve done this harm,” she said. “And part of that is creating opportunities where these women can publish, can be given research opportunities and funding opportunities.”

GUEST ESSAY

I'm a High School Junior. Let's Talk About 'Huckleberry Finn' and 'Mockingbird.'

April 18, 2022

By Sungjoo Yoon

Mr. Yoon is a junior at Burbank High School and the chairman of the Burbank Youth City Council.

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BURBANK, Calif. — In late 2020, when the Burbank Unified School District removed five classic novels from mandatory reading lists in my city's classrooms, I started a petition to protest the decision. The petition, which is still open, has more than 5,000 signatures.

I was a sophomore at Burbank High School at the time and had read four of the five books in school — “Adventures of Huckleberry Finn” by Mark Twain, “Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry” by Mildred D. Taylor, “To Kill a Mockingbird” by Harper Lee and “The Cay” by Theodore Taylor. The fifth, “Of Mice and Men” by John Steinbeck, I read on my own a few years earlier.

The books were being removed from the core curriculum, according to Matt Hill, the superintendent of the Burbank Unified district, after complaints from students and parents that the depictions of racism and language in these works — particularly the use of the N-word — caused harm to Black students.

My position was this: I acknowledged that Black students were being marginalized in our classrooms (I was sympathetic, too; I am all too familiar with the demeaning nature of racism) — but did not think that it was the fault of these books or their content. I believed, and still believe, that the solution was not to remove the books but to add books written by people of color and to better train teachers to teach these books sensitively to students.

As the petition attracted signatures, I spoke at several school board meetings on the issue. I recall one meeting in particular. I had prepared to talk about how these novels helped shape me both as a student and as a human being. I spoke briefly about how reading the story of a Black family in the Deep South in “Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry,” under the guidance of a caring teacher, had moved me to tears and to a commitment to learn more about the resilience and resistance of the people upon whose backs this country was built. I explained how these class experiences helped move me and some fellow students from complacent private citizens to people who today are deeply involved in the fight for social justice.

There was more I could have said: How Atticus Finch's defense of Tom Robinson in “To Kill a Mockingbird” taught me the danger of complacency; how the unlikely friendships of Huckleberry Finn and Jim in “Adventures of Huckleberry Finn” or Phillip Enright and Timothy in “The Cay” taught me that love transcends any and all differences.

But standing on the boardroom floor as comments from others in the meeting began, I witnessed the public forum — made up mostly of parents, administrators and educators — devolve into tribalist dissension. The meeting quickly became a two-sided shouting match pitting supposed “freedoms” against purported “justice.” There was plenty of arguing but little or no meaningful discussion on why those novels were in question or what students would lose or gain by a ban against them.

At that moment, I had a long-overdue realization: How we as Americans approach restrictions on literature curriculums is not only flawed but also wholly reactionary. My experience at that meeting and others convinced me that the problem is not *that* we disagree but *how*. We need to shift focus away from reflexive outrage about restrictions and bans and toward actual discussions of the merits and drawbacks of the individual books.

Nearly a year and a half later, the Burbank book restriction is still in place, and more have been approved in schools and school districts across the country. A report from PEN America this month found that 86 school districts in the United States have banned 1,586 books in the past year. From the Tennessee school board that decided “Maus,” Art Spiegelman's graphic novel about the Holocaust, could no longer be taught, to the Oklahoma State Legislature's proposed law giving a parent of any student the power to enforce bans on books “of a sexual nature,” to the sweeping removal of 130 books with sexual themes from school shelves at the request of a Texas superintendent, one element unites all the conflicts around these bans — a political and ideological partisanship that buys more into contemporary culture wars than into our students' education.

One fact often overlooked in these disputes is that both conservatives and liberals engage in book banning and removal when it suits their political goals. Burbank is a liberal stronghold where the majority of voters in the last five presidential elections cast ballots for Democrats; Granbury, the district in Texas that removed the 130 books this year for “pervasively vulgar” content or “pornography” — in what many believe is code speak to conceal prejudice against those who identify as L.G.B.T.Q. — is a conservative stronghold that voted Republican in those same five elections.

Americans, conditioned to resist violations of our “freedom” at every turn, tend to reflexively reject any literary censorship. But we often forget that these types of book bans aren’t instituting a nationalized book burning or punishments for reading the books; rather, they are often decisions about whether certain groups of children are emotionally or developmentally ready for certain books. The truth is that all schools have curriculums and that deciding what is included and what is not is a crucial responsibility that involves subjective decisions about what is best for students. And I do want to give this notion some deference.

When I was 10, I found myself voraciously reading all things related to World War II; along that path, I picked up a copy of Iris Chang’s 1997 book, “The Rape of Nanking.” Two chapters in, as the executions of innocent children my age were described in detail, I learned that the contents of the historical account were just about as discomfiting as the title itself. Terrified and upset, I put the book down and stored it deep in my closet.

Did my aversion to that book negate the severity of the war crimes that occurred on the Sino-Japanese front? Absolutely not. But did it show that I was probably too young to read it? Yes. Both principles can be simultaneously true: Certain books can be important to society while being upsetting or harmful to a child. We can and ought to reject the false binary being sold to us today, because there is some value in restricting curriculum to children when those decisions are informed by a knowledge of the books and the capacities of the students.

I hope that the adults who make the decisions about our schools and our educations and those who fuel the public arguments over them can put an end to their hyperpartisanship and help us to begin rigorous conversations about the content and value of the books themselves.

Because at that meeting I never did get to say my piece about what those other books had done for me.

Sungjoo Yoon is a junior at Burbank High School and the chairman of the Burbank Youth City Council, the citywide student government body.

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