

Banned Book Report, All Boys Aren't Blue a Memoir-Manifesto, George M. Johnson

Summary: Over all I am struck at how un-controversial the book is, or should be. It is a story of a boy growing up in a very normal family. It does have three sections describing sexual encounters, including an assault, and another unpleasant experience. Sex is a part of growing up and the author's description is straightforward and expected as part of a life story. And perhaps that is the objection, i.e. that a gay/queer individual is 'normal' or perhaps that sex is discussed at all. As with other books of this genre one of the themes is one of self-definition. "...As a young boy I was effeminate and figured that I was supposed to be a girl—because I liked girl things and had girl mannerisms.... because I didn't have a full vocabulary for gender and sexuality." The lack of terminology is something that reoccurs in other LGBTQ+ works. Consistent with other memoirs of this type the authors know at a very early age (as young as 5) that they are different. In this work there is also an intersection of black and queer. The writing style is simple and not difficult to read.

Successful black family: One of the things that stands out is the description of the author's family as being very functional. The father was a police officer and his mother a secretary at the police department. Again, very normal, typical, and something that most of us can relate to even if we are not black or LGBTQ+.

Black fraternity culture: We also get a glimpse of what it is like to be in a HBCU (historically black college/university) and a unique fraternity culture (that I am somewhat envious of).

The story is as much about family, school and relationships as it is about LGBT+ issues, though those are certainly a significant part of the work.

Thoughts:

Right Wing politicians see anti LGBTQ+ issues as motivating to voters. Republicans have passed literally hundreds of anti LGBTQ+ laws and banned hundreds if not thousands of books.

Republicans, as part of a deliberate strategy, prey on and stoke parent's fears. There is a lot of hyperbole or simply lies being told, i.e. describing books as being pornographic or obscene or implying that the books will somehow jump off the shelves and convert their children into gay or, even worse, transgender. This work does nothing to promote homosexuality, indeed it describes how difficult it is to grow up as a gay boy.

There is an underlying, and unfortunately broad, reservoir of animus toward sexually different groups. Some of it may be religious (though I'm not sure it is that clear cut, at least in the Christian bible). I continue to be confused as to why such animosity exists. Possibly it is simply an example of hatred of the 'other'. And some is, perhaps, understandable, parents can be uncomfortable with their daughters or granddaughters sharing a locker room with transgender individuals or see competing with transgender individuals in sports as being unfair. We need to be sensitive to some of their concerns. The issues around transgender individuals sharing locker rooms or playing sports are complex and policy solutions can be difficult but need to be worked through.

Mitigation/actions: Be comfortable in pushing back against allegations that the books being banned are obscene or pornographic or that they will change sexual orientation. We are on the right side of this issue. But we also need to be careful not to see everyone questioning locker room and sports access by

queer individuals as being bigots. Those can be legitimate concerns and open to good faith discussions around policy. We should also be willing to object to policies and rhetoric from LGBTQ+ advocates that goes too far e.g. transgender men taking off their tops at a White House function a few years ago. Sometimes members of our political coalition get carried away and damage their and our cause. We need to speak up, even it is uncomfortable.

Ray Cole

Social Justice Committee

Marsh Creek Democratic Club