

Dear Mrs. Williams,

I'm 11-years-old and in 6th grade. One of my favorite things to do is write stories and create fictional worlds.

My mom says there is a saying that truth is stranger than fiction. Did they have that saying when you were a kid, too? I think that saying applies to everywhere, especially our country now.

In a way, America has progressed greatly. We elected our first black president, Barack Obama in 2009. Right now, the Vice President of the United States is Kamala Harris. Vice President Harris is the first woman to serve in that role. Unfortunately, we still have never had a female President.

There are now many minorities who are celebrities, actors, lawyers, doctors, and artists. My favorite singer is Leslie Odum Jr. Although black, he played the role of a white Aaron Burr in a musical called Hamilton. Now, in show business they have something called colorblind casting, which is when anyone can play a character regardless of the color of their skin. I know that those opportunities wouldn't have been available in your time, so you would think we've made a lot of progress.

While those good things did happen, black men in America are still afraid to be stopped by the police because they might be killed for no reason other than their skin color. Police can suffocate them in broad daylight. They can get shot for jogging through a white neighborhood. When minorities and the black community try to point out the hate crimes and police brutality, white America says that there are no problems because America is no longer segregated. The problems still exist, they're just better hidden.

One of the changes in the past century that affects me personally is the Loving case which allowed interracial marriage. My mother is a Lao-American and my father is white. My life would be drastically different if my parents couldn't be married.

That sounds like a lot of progress, doesn't it? But recently, hate crimes have been more frequent against Asian Americans. In New York, Asian Americans are being pushed in front of subway trains. In Texas, an Asian family was attacked with a knife for no reason. Some people are afraid to be in public because they could be assaulted because of their race, gender, or sexuality. I wish I was making all of this up.

It's hard to decide how to feel. I can be sad about all the hate or happy about how many more rights we have.

One of the main things going on now that makes me upset is that some books are being banned from public libraries and schools. My family's response to that is to do the opposite and read the books that are on the banned lists. In the past few months, I've read *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Things Fall Apart*, *The Bluest Eye*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, *Animal Farm*, *Fahrenheit 451*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, and *The Scarlet Letter*. These were all great stories, but because they talk about things people don't want to hear, they were banned in some places.

I believe that taking books away from children because they are 'inappropriate' or wanting to keep us innocent prevents us from learning about the world which will be given to us and that we must live in. While partially valid that kids don't need to see all the horrors adults have created, banning and hiding these things leaves us ignorant and unprotected when we grow up.

If you don't like a book, don't read it. You can explain your point of view, but let others form their own opinions. In America, we should be free to read and say what we want. This is Freedom of Speech. The government should not be telling us what we can and cannot read.

Things in America are much further than they were 100 years ago, but we still need to work to protect our rights like Freedom of Speech from being torn away. In the story of Animal Farm, the pigs controlled everything and got rid of anything they didn't like. In the story of Fahrenheit 451, books were forbidden. Those things are happening here now.

The more I read about fictional dystopian societies the more I realize how dystopian it is today.

Sincerely,

Victoria Foster