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TITLE INFORMATION

AN INTENT TO COMMIT

Bernie Lambek
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BOOK REVIEW

The First Amendment remains front and center in this legal thriller.

Is a high school flagpole a public forum or an expression of the school's philosophy of inclusivity with respect to its diverse student body? That is the legal question at the heart of the controversy stirred up when Montpelier High School in Vermont elects to fly the Black Lives Matter flag on its grounds. There are protests by local gun rights group True Patriots. And then the school receives a notice that it is being sued by "Second Amendment, Inc.," a Virginia gun rights nonprofit funding the Patriots. Enter lawyer Tad Sorowski for the defense. Racist and antisemitic letters and emails are subsequently received by Tad and Sarah Jacobson, the story's main protagonist, who works for the Green Mountain Black Lives Matter organization. This clash leads to an additional, more intense, First Amendment lawsuit that propels the captivating narrative, with Tad and Sarah filing as the plaintiffs under the "intent to commit" statute. The tale's opening scene takes place in April 2019, near the story's conclusion, with the kidnapping of Sarah from a Vermont gas station. She and her boyfriend, Ricky Stillwell, had moved back home to Montpelier from Rhode Island in 2018, when Sarah landed the job working for the Green Mountain Black Lives Matter group. Readers of Lambek's first novel, *Uncivil Liberties*(2018), will remember Sarah and Ricky. She was the daughter of that book's lead attorney, Sam Jacobson, and Ricky was the lawyer's client. The author toggles between past and present, developing both characters, especially Sarah, and the events leading up to the abduction. These time jumps provide a sense of action in an otherwise more politics- and relationships-driven plotline. Armchair legal eagles will have plenty to chew on here—detailed case histories, precedents, and courtroom maneuvers. But there is also enough personal drama to keep less civically obsessed readers engaged. The cast is comprised of an eclectic group of complex characters with intriguing backstories. And Lambek, a Vermont attorney, is a meticulous writer who stages even relatively minor scenes with the same descriptive precision he uses in his legal arguments.

An engrossing, thoughtful, and disturbing drama that caters to fans of constitutional debates.

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