



Fear of Knowledge...Love of Books

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“My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge.” – Hosea 4:6a NRSV

My seventh-grade teacher had a conversation with my mother because she was concerned about a book that she found me reading. She did not object to the book itself but thought it was not age appropriate. My mother relayed this conversation to me and my father and noted that she responded that, “Cheryl knows that she can’t do the things happening in that book.” I remember feeling both pride and responsibility from my parents’ trust.

A couple of years later, my high school English class read *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In addition to unpacking the themes, characters, and plot of the work, we discussed the history of its inclusion on a banned book list. During my high school years, there was a wave of attempts to ban books that apparently has regained momentum in recent months.

The dejected and pessimistic writer of *Ecclesiastes* would remind us that nothing is ever fully new. Every challenge serves as a new iteration of a previous struggle. I, however, am optimistic. If the works of previous generations remained in common circulation without the permanent record of the internet, then today’s attempt to stifle debate, literature, and history seems particularly futile. If we can uncover the letters of enslaved persons who taught themselves to read and write, then all the books that have been targeted by political panderers will continue to be read, discussed, and remembered. In fact, evidence shows that the impact of proposed bans has only amplified and promoted these works and their authors. Good.

The greater concern is the fear that drives such attempts. The prophet Hosea reminds us of the awesome power of knowledge and detrimental effects of avoiding it. Young children aren’t harmed by the truth of their history. But generations of young people from marginalized communities have been harmed by the suppression of their history. In my formative years, most education I received about my ancestors and members of other marginalized groups came through the intentional effort of my parents and a few teachers to tell those stories.

Those stories belong to all of us. I claim the truth of the genocide of Indigenous peoples, the internment of Japanese Americans, and the targeting of Asian America as much as the 1619 Project, Jim Crow, and racial profiling. I refuse to perpetuate the tremendous harms of the past by ignoring them in the present or erasing them for the future.

Lies render destruction. Myths create impossible expectations and lead to disillusionment and cynicism. Truth liberates. Knowledge opens doors for a new future as much as new understanding. I choose to participate in restoration and reconciliation that begins by confronting the truth of our yesterdays and the possibilities of our tomorrows.

I've never stopped reading. I've never lost the joy of discovery found in another's words, reality, and truth. I've never relinquished the responsibility of discerning my response to knowledge gained, imagination engaged, or truth revealed. I've never stopped loving books.



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