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HUMANIST

Monthly

A Publication of the Capital District Humanist Society
Connecting the Secular Humanist Community of Upstate New York, Western Massachusetts, and Southern Vermont

Sunday, July 12th, 2026

In Person at 12:30 PM and Online at 1:00 PM

Bastille Day: Revolution, Reflection, and the Language of Freedom

Bastille Day—known in France simply as *le 14 juillet*—is often associated with celebration: fireworks, music, and national pride. Its origins, however, lie in a pivotal moment of transformation in French history.

In this presentation, we will explore the historical significance of the storming of the Bastille and the broader context of the French Revolution. From there, we will consider the enduring ideas it represents—freedom, collective voice, and the human drive for dignity and participation in society.

Drawing connections between history, culture, and language, this talk invites reflection on how the language of the Revolution reflects its ideas—and how language and culture shape meaning across time.

Participants will gain insight not only into a defining historical moment but also into the ways ideas are expressed, shared, and carried forward through language.

For those interested in continuing their exploration of language and culture, additional resources and information will be available.

Nancy Scarselletta is the Founder and Director of The Language Learning Institute, where she has guided students of all ages toward confident communication in French and Spanish. A New York State certified teacher with over 30 years of experience, she has taught in both public and private settings, as well as through her own institute. Nancy holds a Master of Arts in French from Middlebury College and completed immersive study in Paris, where she explored language through culture, history, and daily life—experiences that continue to shape her work.

Over the course of her career, she has developed a distinctive approach to language learning that emphasizes meaning, connection, and the ability to engage in real conversation from the earliest stages. Through her teaching and presentations, Nancy brings together language, culture, and human experience, helping audiences see how communication shapes not only what we say, but how we understand one another and the world around us.

The program will take place both in person (at 12:30 PM) and online (at 1:00 PM) via Zoom. Nancy will present live and in person at Pinnacle Living at 45 Forts Ferry Road in Latham, NY. It is free and open to the public. Light refreshments will be available at the in-person meeting before the speaker's presentation, but **PLEASE BRING YOUR OWN BEVERAGE**. Current paid CDHS members will automatically receive an invitation to the online meeting via email. If you are not a current paid CDHS member, please see the paragraph below to request an email invitation to attend.

ANYONE WHO IS NOT A CURRENT PAID MEMBER of CDHS can attend. Send an email request to:

CDHS.Albany@gmail.com. Please send the request several days prior to the meeting.



Nancy Scarselletta

The Capital District Humanist Society provides a supportive community for exchanging ideas, heightening our knowledge of the world and ourselves, fostering moral and ethical growth, and promoting the principles of secular humanism. CDHS is a member organization for people with humanist values. Our values include commitment to free inquiry, rational thought, lifelong education, democracy, social concern, and fellowship.

Capital District Humanist Society, Inc.

Established 1986

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CDHS is affiliated with:

The American Humanist Association (AHA)

Center for Inquiry (CSI)

Humanists International (HI)

The Secular Coalition for America (SCA)

On Sunday, August 2nd, 2026, 12:30 PM (In Person) and 1:00 PM (Online)
The Capital District Humanist Society
Presents:

Uncovering Vladimir Putin's Inner Man



**Andrew Goodman
and Vladimir Putin**

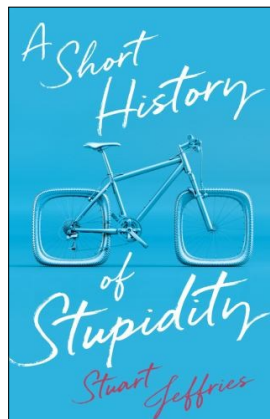
Long before he became President of Russia, over a period of almost 18 months in the early 1990s, Vladimir Putin opened up to Andrew Goodman in extensive, private conversations about politics, economics and Russia's place in the world. Unlike Putin's numerous biographies – which have uncovered loads of facts about Putin, but very little about what he thinks – Goodman's direct personal encounters with Putin help reveal what makes Putin tick. This presentation addresses how Putin came to power in St. Petersburg, and later in Moscow, and how he wields power.

Andrew Goodman is a retired U.S. Senior Foreign Service officer who spent over 30 years specializing in Soviet/Russian affairs. As Deputy Principal Officer at the U.S. Consulate in St. Petersburg (1992–1995), his counterpart in the city government was Vladimir Putin, giving him a unique opportunity to get to know Putin personally. He has published a number of articles about Putin and has taught at Columbia University, the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and Mary Washington University.

This program begins at 1:00 PM. The presentation will be live and in person at Pinnacle Living at 45 Forts Ferry Road in Latham, NY. It is free and open to the public. Light refreshments will be available at the in-person meeting before the speaker's presentation. **Please bring your own beverage.** Current paid CDHS members will automatically receive an invitation to the on-line meeting via email. If you are not a current paid CDHS member, request an email invitation to attend no later than Friday, August 7th, to CDHS.Albany@gmail.com.

Reminder: September Meeting — Sunday, September 13, 2026

CDHS Book Group is reading *A Short History of Stupidity* by Stuart Jeffries. The group meets on the 2nd and 4th Thursdays.



Contact Frank Robinson if you would like to join the spirited and informative discussion.

CDHS Executive Council

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Appointed Positions

Hospitality	Sue Parry
Room Arrangements	Frank Robinson
Caring Network	Rosina Ansaldo

RECAP OF OUR JUNE SPEAKER'S TALK

(by Don Porterfield)

Tyina Steptoe, who hails from Houston, Texas, holds a Ph.D. in History and an M.A. in Afro-American Studies from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Currently, she is an associate professor of history at the University of Arizona in Tucson. In her presentation *Juneteenth: Celebrating Freedom in Texas and Beyond* she detailed the origin of the Juneteenth holiday and how its celebration has evolved since.

Juneteenth commemorates the announcement of freedom for enslaved people in Texas on June 19, 1865, when Union General Gordon Granger read an order in Galveston that all slaves in Texas were free in accordance with President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. Dr. Steptoe noted that the Emancipation Proclamation only applied to Confederate states in active rebellion and did not immediately end slavery in Union states. It was not until the ratification of the 13th Amendment in late 1865 that slavery was ended in all of the United States.

Tyina detailed how Black ministers Sandy Parker and Elias Dibble led the first Juneteenth celebration in Houston in 1866 and the subsequent establishment of Emancipation Park in 1871 as the permanent site for Juneteenth celebrations. She noted that the name "Juneteenth" likely originated from shortening "June 19th." Juneteenth celebrations continued in Texas throughout the reconstruction and the Jim Crow eras. She explained the significance of Jewish business owners advertising in Black newspapers in Texas during the Jim Crow era despite Klan opposition.

Dr. Steptoe noted that Juneteenth celebrations spread to other parts of the country during the Great Migration of Blacks from southern states to the Northeast, Midwest, and West Coast during the first half of the 20th century. Juneteenth became known as "Texas Day" on the West Coast. She concluded by noting that Texas was the first state to recognize Juneteenth at the state level, followed by federal recognition in 2021.

A recording of this presentation can be found on the CDHS YouTube channel: <https://youtu.be/Qt7ZVWu0ycw>.

ANNUAL INDEPENDENCE DAY SOCIAL—SATURDAY, JULY 4, 2026

We will have our usual 4th of July picnic this year at the home of Heather Drinkwater on Saturday, the 4th of July beginning at noon.

CDHS will provide the main course, which will be food from Dinosaur BBQ. Everyone is asked to bring a side dish to share, your own beverage, and a lawn chair.

Maybe Roland can serenade us and Frank Robinson can read to us his rendition of the Declaration of Independence. It's always a fun time.

This year we can enjoy Heather's pool and hot tub, weather permitting. So bring your suit and a towel.

Please RSVP to Dee Fuller at candacelf13@gmail.com by Wednesday, July 1st so we can put our food order into the restaurant, and Dee will provide you with Heather's address.

Photos From June Social at Skidmore



We had a great time at the Mostly Modern Festival concert at Skidmore on June 13th. The music was lively and fun, and the view (seen in the background) is spectacular. Carol and Paul Quantock were in attendance, but weren't able to get into the group shot due to so many people in the aisles during intermission. It was a lovely evening!



Join the bunch for lunch! We'll be returning to DinerTime, 813 Loudon Road, Latham, NY 12110 (<https://dinertimeny.com/latham-dinertime-food-menu/>) on July 16th at 12:00 Noon. In August, we'll meet on Thursday the 20th. Please let Rosina Ansaldo know by Wednesday evening if you'll be joining them.

NOTE: If you know of a great local eatery, please don't be shy; recommend it! We'd like to give our local restaurants a chance by rotating them every few months and returning to the ones that get enthusiastic thumbs up. Please send ideas to Rosina Ansaldo. Thanks!

MAIL-IN VOTING IS UNDER ATTACK. HERE'S WHAT YOU CAN DO

(Reprinted from Democracy Docket by Marc Elias, June 24, 2026)

One of the gravest threats facing free and fair elections is the Republican Party's persistent attacks on voting by mail. It is one of the first topics I wrote about when I founded Democracy Docket in 2020. As a lawyer, beating back suppression laws aimed at mail-in voting has felt like its own full-time job.

Over the years, this has taken many forms — from state laws shortening the period to apply for and return mail-in ballots to banning ballot drop boxes. Currently, I am awaiting a decision from the U.S. Supreme Court in *Watson v. RNC* — a case in which I am defending a Mississippi law that allows ballots postmarked by Election Day to count even if they arrive at election offices a few days afterward.

If Republicans win that case, it will jeopardize similar laws in 19 states and disenfranchise hundreds of thousands of voters. If we win, it will protect a vital method of voting.

Since 2020, Donald Trump has targeted mail-in voting with lies and misinformation. Since regaining the presidency, he has targeted it with unilateral executive action.

Last year, Trump issued his first anti-voting executive order aimed at mail-in voting. On behalf of the Democratic Party, I sued — and won.

But that has not stopped him.

Earlier this year, he issued a new, more aggressive executive order that seeks to limit whose ballots the U.S. Postal Service will transmit. Once again, the Democratic Party is fighting back in court — as are a group of Democratic state attorneys general and nonprofit organizations.

I am confident that these lawsuits will prevail and once again protect mail-in voting from Trump's voter suppression efforts. In the meantime, however, the USPS is proposing a rule that would require states to share information about voters who request mail-in or absentee ballots for federal elections.

Not only could this disrupt mail voting and hand the Trump administration private voter information — from names to birthdays to Social Security numbers — it is also an alarming step for the USPS to take on its own.

The agency is also in the process of creating a new records system to track mail-in ballots, making it easier for the Trump administration to monitor how people are voting. This is a dangerous development as the administration assembles its national voter list.

The Postal Service is supposed to be independent. It should simply ignore Trump's unconstitutional power grab — or, at a minimum, wait to see what the courts rule. Instead, it is rushing ahead to carry out Trump's wishes.

Over the last few weeks, I have received a flood of questions and messages expressing concern about what the USPS is doing — and, most importantly, asking what you can do.

Usually, I urge you to make sure you are registered to vote and have a plan to do so this November. Sometimes I suggest contacting your elected representatives or volunteering for a campaign. I almost always ask you to speak out and share pro-democracy information with others.

This time, however, there is one more tool available to you. Every time a government agency proposes a rule change, it is required to notify the public and accept feedback. The comment period for the USPS rule change is now open, providing you with a direct way to bring your concerns straight to the agency.

The comment period closes on July 2, 2026, so now is the time to act. You can submit comments online at https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2026/06/02/2026-10968/ballot-mail-for-federal-elections?utm_campaign=13199957-Premium%2520Content%2520Emails&utm_medium=email&hsenc=p2ANqtz-8h3UpgrJE6agl6BBJRodd9RHquUcQB7tzAIGLVwmq1v9gkz-wb7Dys8w0EenDZ5qoMXNZzxEIkPIOTg4Kp5kxqd12FA&hsmi=425582933&utm_content=425582933&utm_source=hs_email or mail them to: Director, Product Classification, U.S. Postal Service, 475 L'Enfant Plaza SW, Room 4446, Washington, DC 20260-5015.

If you need more information to inform your opinion and comments, several articles Democracy Docket has written on the subject are available [here](#). Premium members can also access what I have written [here](#).

There are many ways to help save our democracy, but commenting on proposed rules is a unique opportunity to communicate directly with the executive branch. As the midterm elections approach, stopping Trump's assault on mail-in voting couldn't be more important — and we all have a role to play.

America 250: Our Progress. Our Peril. Our Path Forward.

(Reprinted from *The Contrarian*, by Tim Dickinson, June 26, 2026)

I was born a couple of years shy of the nation's bicentennial, which is to admit I've lived through a fifth of the American experiment. And, as the nation teeters towards its 250th birthday, I am struck both by how much hard progress has been won in the last fifty years — and also why the reactionary MAGA movement remains so eager to stage a "second American Revolution" (as Heritage Foundation president Kevin Roberts put it) to turn back the clock.

The American idea I grew up with is powerful because it is expansive. It captures a collective striving of people who were born here and of those who recently arrived. If we all lean in, or so the story goes, the nation's catalytic reaction continues. America becomes bigger. We are bettered. And that forward progress lifts the hope that we can transcend the sins of our founding — of slavery and Native displacement — and more fully embody the ideals of equality found in our Declaration of Independence.

The path of the last five decades has been uneven and cannot be sugar-coated. The Reagan era of my childhood was reactionary in its own way — blunting the progress of the Civil Rights era, and reimposing America's global dominance following the humiliation of Vietnam. Growing up, I saw our hugely powerful government treat vulnerable domestic populations as disposable: Americans with HIV were left to waste, alone, by bigoted leaders who weren't unhappy to see gay men dying *en masse*. And Republicans, in league with many "tough on crime" Democrats, sent Richard Nixon's racist War on Drugs into hyperdrive — fueling an era of mass-incarceration that destroyed countless families of color, and swelled our prison population to nearly 2 million souls.

And yet — at least until Trump arrived on the national stage — the long arc of America's moral universe still seemed to bend toward justice. Into my adulthood, an expanding role for minorities in public life appeared to have irreversible momentum, even among conservatives. Those George W. Bush years, after all, saw the rise of figures like Condoleezza Rice, Colin Powell, and Alberto Gonzales, who — hate or love their politics — embodied what seemed to be a genuine embrace of diversity on the right.

Then, in 2008, something wildly implausible happened, which offered proof of the power of that expansive idea of America. The election of Barack Obama as president validated a narrative of national progress, and exorcised (at least a few) racist demons. This Harvard-educated, half-Kenyan senator with roots in Hawaii and a simple message of "Hope and Change" turned Ohio, Florida, and even Indiana — Indiana! — blue. Simultaneously, a civic and political progress for American women gained velocity. When I was born, women had just won the right to secure a credit card without a husband's approval. Since those sexist 1970s, women's participation in the labor force had surged, the wage gap had shrunk, and women had overtaken men as a proportion of college graduates. Towering figures like Speaker Nancy Pelosi proved that a woman's place is running the House of Representatives — like an absolute boss.

Perhaps most remarkably, thanks to countless individual acts of bravery, my lifetime has also witnessed the integration of gay, lesbian, and bisexual Americans into the fabric of American life. I've never felt a greater patriotism than I did standing outside the Supreme Court on the 2015 morning when the Obergefell decision — establishing same-sex marriage rights nationwide — came down, and I listened as a gay men's chorus broke into song on the court's steps.

Of course, these simultaneous forward-leaps for women, Black Americans, and sexual minorities represented a setback for a white, male patriarchy unaccustomed to ceding power or control. And the browning of America — the nation was about 5 percent foreign-born in the 1970s, compared to nearly 15 percent today — stirred a panic among white nationalists. The pendulum of progress was primed for a reversal.

The 2016 nomination of a woman to the presidency seemed to break something deep in the American psyche. When push came to shove — when decency faced off with misogyny — the ugly face of misogyny won. And the mask slipped off the rest of it. For the American right, a generation of pretending to care about inclusion, diversity, and "compassionate conservatism" collapsed into a black hole of nativism and resentment.

Donald Trump built his movement by licensing his followers to embrace bigotries that had been repressed, not reformed. For the MAGA crowd, America is less an idea than an exclusionary identity — reserved for people who embrace the old hierarchies that privilege white men, and protect them from the competition of more talented people who don't look like them.

In the decade since Trump's first election, I've struggled with my own sense of patriotism. The America I believed in — deeply imperfect, but striving toward high ideals — is now run by degenerate demagogues who thumb their noses at this idealism. Trump's followers have shown themselves willing to tolerate unfathomable corruption and ruinous mismanagement — to lay waste to Reagan's vision of a shining "city on the hill," and even to defile the Capitol itself — to hold tight to their politics of exclusion.

Americans saw the absolute worst of Trump on Jan. 6, 2021, and through the felony convictions that followed. Yet they still re-elected him four years later, seemingly because the idea of installing a woman of color into the presidency troubled them even more than the prospect of an unmasked tyrant pursuing the reactionary agenda of Roberts, the Heritage Foundation, and Project 2025.

This MAGA "second revolution" looks like the squandering of alliances and of our standing around the globe. It accepts the brutal overreach of armed federal agents in exchange for an end to anything that smacks of diversity, reproductive freedom, or transgender expression. MAGA followers are willing to pay ruinous tariffs so long as they get a sanitized history in which America has never been a villain. And they seem willing to accept international humiliations, like the recent quagmire in Iran, if it leaves white men, no matter how mediocre, in charge of trillion-dollar institutions like the recast "Department of War."

Perhaps the most cynical part of Trump's MAGA project is the rejection of the notion of shared progress. He and his followers envision a zero-sum game where their gain is predicated on your loss.

The fix for this dark cynicism is not just reviving optimism about an abstract American idea, but redeeming what truly has been lost over the last five decades: A tide that lifts all boats.

To be clear, the economic tide never stopped rising. America is the richest it has ever been — and the richest nation in the history of the world. Yet American wealth inequality has widened to levels unseen even in the Gilded Age, epitomized by the recent minting of the globe's first trillionaire: Elon Musk.

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Book Bans Aren't About Books. They're About Panic.

(by Glenn Sonnenberg, from Katie Couric Media, May 25, 2026)

There are so many matters of concern these days. It's difficult to rank order the challenges we face - as a society and as a world community. There are existential threats all around us: the arms race throughout the world, wars, hunger, the effect of a warming climate, the rise of authoritarianism, and the threat of pandemic. And while all of these carry with them great risk, none of them is really an "either/or" problem of our own making. There are, however, problems that we create out of fear and intolerance, issues that we can resolve through reasonable resolution. My candidate for an issue that encapsulates the ignorance, fear, intolerance, and social engineering of our time, is the banning of books. One need not look very far to find a better example of the dumbing-down of America, the impact of over-parenting, and the attack on the free flow of information and education than stripping library shelves of literature and ideas.

The sordid history of book banning

It was Heinrich Heine, the prescient German poet who wrote in 1820: "...where they burn books, they will ultimately burn people as well."

In 1933, Heine's words took on a ghoulish meaning when many Germans, including students from one of Germany's most distinguished universities, gathered to burn over 20,000 books in what is now Bebelplatz. The fact that this happened in front of Humboldt University, one of Germany's most distinguished institutions of higher learning, imbues the event with even greater meaning. What happened in the decade to come is no secret, as Germany, a center of art, literature, culture, and liberal democracy in Europe, descended into the Nazi killing machine. And, just as Heine predicted, the burning of books later culminated in the burning of people.

I'm not suggesting that the spate of book banning happening in America is leading us toward anything like the Holocaust. But the motivations that led to the book burning and later inhumanities in what once was among the most educated and open societies at the time have their echoes in the parent groups and school boards acting with determination and resolve to spare our youth from reading books deemed too provocative, too profane, too tolerant, or simply too politically objectionable. Those seeking restrictions on what is available in the marketplace of ideas apparently must feel that their intellectual arguments are not enough to prevail. Instead, they will do the next best thing. They will ensure that words and ideas of those with whom they disagree, whom they often label as pursuing an "agenda" to pollute the minds of children (and even adults), must be purged from schools and libraries. The advocates for banning books don't even trust educators to curate the experience for students, as they are also working to ensure that books whose subject matter is deemed objectionable can no longer be assigned reading in classrooms.

While it might strike some as the government's duty to ensure that children are protected from ideas and narratives that differ from their parents', they ultimately may find that cloistering their children in bubbles of limited intellectual rigor will backfire on them. Indeed, they may be surprised to learn this already is happening, as their precious little ones, whose upbringing they wish to curate, are on their laptops, finding stories, information, images, and videos that are far more objectionable.

Although Heine's warning resulted in a denouement that even Heine likely did not anticipate, one can also look at his fear of the burning of people metaphorically. Each time a book is banned, there is, by definition, a further eroding of the First Amendment's guarantee of freedom of speech. What's playing out in school boards, library advisory councils, and municipal governments is but one front in the war to limit the availability of objectionable material in our broader community. Each time there's a restriction on a book, it is as if we are, bit by bit, burning the rights the Founders struggled so mightily to ensure for future generations.

Book bans in the modern age

Sometimes the banning of books takes on an almost humorous absurdity. A few years ago, an assistant principal at a Mississippi school was fired because he "showed a lack of professionalism and impaired judgment" when he read a book entitled *I Need a New Butt!* to second-grade students. The termination letter said, "The topics described in this book were inappropriate." The basic premise of the book is that the protagonist needed a new butt because his had a crack.

Needless to say, the students found this book quite hysterical, and who wouldn't at that age? Bodies and bodily functions play well in elementary school. In any case, the assistant principal pointed out the obvious, incredulous at his firing: "It's a silly book. I'm a firm believer that...if kids see that books can be funny and silly, they'll hang around long enough to see all the other cool things that books can be."

PEN America has identified nearly 6,870 instances of censorship covering nearly 4,000 books. They noted that the top banned books focus on themes of race, LGBTQ+ issues, and sexual content. Counted among the top banned books nationally are *A Clockwork Orange*, *Wicked*, the Judy Blume books, most of Stephen King's oeuvre, Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl*, George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, Aldous Huxley, Kurt Vonnegut, the Harry Potter books, R.L. Stine's Goosebumps books, Isabel Allende, Faulkner, Steinbeck, Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* - the list goes on and on.

Many of the book bans described above come predominantly from the right, particularly on religious and political grounds. But the left isn't without its own culpability in limiting speech. One such example is the banning of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, by Mark Twain, considered by many to be the greatest American novel ever penned. No less a writer than Ernest Hemingway noted that "All modern American literature comes from...Huckleberry Finn." He described it as "the best book we've had." Another book on the chopping block is *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the iconic story adapted for the screen in the famous Gregory Peck film.

Objections to both of these books include criticism that Black characters are not fully realized and that the books romanticize the idea of a "white savior." There are concerns about use of the "N-word" (used derogatorily in the South in which both stories take place), and that the portrayal of Black characters causes harm to students of color. It would seem that children already understand the offensiveness of this word, should understand the impact of slavery and Jim Crow, and need not be reminded each and every time words or historical racism are invoked. To deny children of these two classics is to deny them meaningful expositions on America and what it means to be an American.

I keep coming back to the question, "What are people so afraid of?" People of varying ideologies seem hell-bent on limiting what it is that we can read. Either they contain subjects deemed too sensitive for children, are too critical of our society, show a darker side of history, or use words that might offend (even if uttered in historical context). Some material is banned simply because it is written by people with impermissible flaws in their character.

Parent groups and school boards spend inordinate amounts of time poring over titles (I seriously doubt how many of these books actually are read by the authorities imposing restrictions), leaving more important tasks unaddressed. School boards should be focused on the necessity of producing a literate, math-proficient, critical-thinking, employable generation of scholars and citizens. They should not be concerned about what these well-educated children are reading or what lessons they may be learning from prior generations, and how they dealt with their challenges. Books can help students determine who they are, inform them about where they come from, and perhaps stimulate their minds to imagine what they can be.

A fear of free-thinking children?

But here's the thing: The banning of books isn't just fear of the books, the ideas they present, or the uncomfortable situations they might present. The banning of the books necessarily includes the fear of one's own children. We live in a world where parents increasingly are insinuating themselves into the lives of their children, curating activities and friends, drafting their kids' college essays, and limiting play they consider too hazardous. In addition to this "helicopter parenting," these people live in fear that the children can't process the information or the circumstances presented in the books or that they might be "brainwashed" during their formative years. Apparently, parents believe children cannot distinguish right from wrong. Or do they fear their children may be more welcoming to the stranger, or that they might feel empathy for different people in different times and circumstances? But in banning books, parents are also preventing their children from learning one of the most important skills for being better consumers of information and better citizens - the ability to think critically.

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The top one percent have now hoovered up nearly a third of America's national wealth, while the poorest 50 percent of the nation fights over just 2.5 percent of it. In my lifetime, Republicans have embraced tax cuts for the wealthiest that supercharged this phenomenon. Democrats have succeeded, at times, in blunting the edges of American hyper-capitalism, but have more often focused on notions of justice rooted in social inclusion rather than shared economic thriving.

Workers are doing their part. There have been massive increases in American labor productivity in recent decades — but these gains have not been matched by surging wages. Since 1979, worker productivity has jumped 92 percent, but hourly pay is up only a third, with the balance captured by corporations and their shareholders.

This “productivity–pay gap,” monitored by the Economic Policy Institute, is at the heart of American nostalgia for a bygone era of shared opportunity. But other datapoints drive home what has been fumbled. If the minimum wage had held steady since 1976, it would be about \$13 an hour — more than double what Congress has currently guaranteed. That bicentennial standard of living also included an annual cost of public college of about \$3,000 in today's money, and a median home price of roughly \$250,000.

Our political system likes to pretend that the economic struggles of the masses are too difficult or too complicated to ameliorate. But I have seen enough in these 50 years to know that's not true. For a brief moment — during the financial upheaval of the Covid era — a simple tax credit lifted nearly 3 million children out of poverty and cut America's child poverty rate in half, before being cruelly allowed to expire.

As we hit America's 250th birthday, the real answer to Kevin Roberts' notion of a second revolution just might be found in a document introduced in 1944: Franklin Delano Roosevelt's “second bill of rights.”

FDR proposed that Americans should be guaranteed useful employment, a living wage, decent housing, adequate medical care, and protection from the abuses of monopolists. Substitute “billionaires,” and that New Deal agenda seems well-tailored for the challenges of our modern age. At 250, it may be time to re-embrace what FDR called for 80 years ago: Equality not just in the eyes of society or the law, but “equality in the pursuit of happiness” as well.

Tim Dickinson is the Senior Political writer for The Contrarian

REFUGEES

They have no need of our help
So do not tell me
These haggard faces could belong to you or me
Should life have dealt a different hand
We need to see them for who they really are
Chancers and scroungers
Layabouts and loungers
With bombs up their sleeves
Cut-throats and thieves
They are not
Welcome here
We should make them
Go back where they came from
They cannot
Share our food
Share our homes
Share our countries
Instead let us
Build a wall to keep them out
It is not okay to say
These people are just like us
A place should only belong to those who are born here
Do not be so stupid to think that
The world can be looked at another way

(now read from bottom to top)

Brian Bilston

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E-mail us at cdhs.albany@gmail.com

Visit us on the web at humanistsociety.net

The Capital District Humanist Society (CDHS) is an independent, non-profit (and non-prophet), non-partisan and strictly non-religious educational and social organization for those who share humanist values: commitment to education, rational and free inquiry, democracy, social concerns and fellowship. CDHS is affiliated with the four major humanist organizations - the American Humanist Association (AHA), the Council for Secular Humanism (CSH), the Secular Coalition for America (SCA) and the Humanists International (HI).

There are five types of CDHS member support: Individual, \$50/yr.; Family, \$80/yr.; Sustaining, \$100/yr.; Patron, \$150/yr.; and Lifetime Member, one contribution of \$1000 or more.

Members receive our publication, *The Humanist Monthly*, and vote each September on the make-up of the governing Executive Council. Members are eligible for election to the Executive Council and may also serve as appointed officials. Members are welcome to attend Executive Council meetings.

The IRS recognizes CDHS as a tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Therefore, all donations, both cash and materials with established “fair market value”, qualify as charitable contributions for income tax purposes.

Donations are gratefully accepted to help speed our growth. CDHS is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization under the IRS Code. Financial disclosure information and our annual report are available upon request.

If you know of someone who may be interested in CDHS, please pass this newsletter along or give us the name; we will send a sample copy or two with no obligation.

We value your input. In the best humanist tradition, CDHS has no rigid picture of itself. We ask you to join us, not follow us. What activities and services would you like CDHS to provide its members? Send us your suggestions, questions, and comments.

Someday, these kids - unequipped with the diversity of ideas, insights into people different from themselves, and lacking critical judgment - may find the fundamental truths they have been restricted from hearing, heretofore unchallenged or tested, proven false. The ultimate irony is that this very restriction of exposure to that which is different may drive them away from their parents in the end. If they are exposed later in life to new ideas and great books, they may find themselves resenting the restrictions placed upon them by their parents and perhaps rebel more than their parents thought possible. Or worse...they may grow up to be just like their parents and seek validation only from those most similar to them. And these children may react with fear of that which is different, perpetuating a climate of denial of that which is different. Some of them, no doubt, will replicate their parents' closed-mindedness, resisting complexity and nuance. If they can't journey to uncomfortable places and meet people different from themselves in books, they might become closed to new ideas and find themselves victims of confirmation bias in the media and on their bookshelves. My father, who was a pediatrician, used to say that if you wanted children to start behaving like adults, you start treating them like adults. If you want adults to behave like children, treat them like children. I always thought his admonition was a warning and a prescription - not a prediction of the future.

The latest legal challenge

Buried in the morass of troubling news stories is a case recently decided by the Fifth Circuit that should send chills down the spine of any enlightened democrat (small "d"). And it applies not only to children, but to everyone. In the case of *Little v. Llanos County*, the plaintiff challenged the county's removal of 17 books from the public library. They were viewed as "obscene" and "pornographic." Among the books are those that talk about "butts and farts" and books by Maurice Sendak and Isabel Wilkerson. The library board, charged with such matters, was disbanded.

The court found that a government entity that removes books from a library based on content does not violate the First Amendment. Choosing books or removing them, for ideological reasons or otherwise, was held to be government expression and not public speech (and, therefore, not protected by the First Amendment). Because the Supreme Court declined a hearing of an appeal, the ruling stands in the Fifth Circuit.

This is what the American Library Association said when the Supreme Court declined to hear the case: "By declining to review the Fifth Circuit's decision, the Supreme Court has empowered state and local governments to limit what materials people can access in their libraries. As a result, millions of library users now face a diminished right to read and explore information free from government interference. The ruling threatens to transform government libraries into centers for indoctrination instead of protecting them as hubs of open inquiry.

"The Fifth Circuit's decision disregards the ethical principles of librarianship, which require that library collections be curated without favoring any political party, ideology, or viewpoint. Public libraries have historically served as inclusive institutions committed to offering a broad range of ideas and perspectives. Efforts to remove books based on ideological objections erode these principles and violate the constitutional rights of all community members."

If the First Amendment doesn't apply to government speech, like the choosing of books for libraries, doesn't this render unto each local government the ability to shape all that our children and we can read? Or what we can read? Of what value is the First Amendment if the government is granted the privilege of determining what information is to be made available to the people?

The last word goes to the Sage of Monticello himself: "I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves: and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their controul [sic] with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education."

Jefferson nails it: It is incumbent upon us to be educated and our children to be educated. In a world filled with challenges, the sooner one confronts concepts in the magical world of books, the better prepared one will be for the ideas and challenges we face every day. They are children today; they will be our leaders tomorrow.



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