

"But you can't make people listen. They have to come around in their own time, wondering what happened and why the world blew up around them."—Ray Bradbury, from "Fahrenheit 451"

TALES FROM THE WASTELAND

Book Burning 101

People without a history are easy prey for sociopaths.

By Barry Perryman, Ph.D.

Throughout the course of human history, books and other vessels of information have been sensationally burned for a couple of reasons: to wipe away history so that history would begin with the new monarch; and to silence opposing views. Historians tell us that China's Emperor Shih Huang Ti (213 B.C.) attempted to burn all books in his empire, even executing chroniclers with a memory of past occurrences so that all history would begin with His Eminence. In the late 1940s, Joseph Stalin did the same with the Judaica library collection housed in Birobidzhan. People without a history are easier prey for sociopaths.

Emperor Charles V outlawed the writings of Martin Luther and had them burned. The Nalanda Library in India was burned by Muslim invaders in 1193. A few titles authored by supporters of communism were even burned by the U.S. Department of State during the McCarthy era of the 1950s. These burnings were meant to rid the world of ideas and concepts that may have served to undermine the ruling class. Anyone with an inkling of critical thinking skill can see the danger in attempting to destroy ideas.

Speaking about communism in his 1953 Dartmouth commencement speech, President Dwight D. Eisenhower stated: "Don't join the book burners. Don't think you are going to conceal faults by concealing evidence that they ever existed. Don't be afraid to go in your library and read every book, as long as that document does not offend our own ideas of decency. That should be the only censorship...and we have got to fight it [communism] with something better, not try to conceal the thinking of our own people. They are part of America. And even if they think ideas that are contrary to ours, their right to say them, their right to record them, and their right to have them at places where they are accessible to others is unquestioned, or it isn't America."

Book burning is all around us today: Social media posts censored by internal fact checkers, hard news edited toward a political view, religious censorship, a sitting president permanently banned from a social media platform, destruction or removal of statues,



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Harry Potter, the Quran, the Bible...and now Dr. Seuss.

Revolution is essentially a transfer of power among social classes. In our Revolutionary War, power was transferred from the British aristocracy to a Colonial social class. Like ours, the French and later Bolshevik revolutions were violent transfers between social classes. Mostly nonviolent transfers include the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, Gandhi's Indian Nationalist movement, and Nelson Mandela's anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. All of them were revolutionary transfers of power between social classes.

It isn't much of a stretch to define what has

been going on in our country the last 10 years as revolutionary in nature, a power struggle between classes. The current ruling class (the new bourgeoisie) has attempted to impose its worldview on the working class. The rubber band is being pulled against the stationary constitutionalist anchor.

At the heart of it is the battle for control of information. A personal favorite quote from George Orwell's "1984" reads: "Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past." If folks can't be certain of what is true and what is false, they can no longer determine what is "normal." If you can't discern what normal life is like, the information guild can feed you anything it wants without hesitation. Everything becomes normal, even the most outrageous realities.

A great struggle constantly rages within our form of government, the tenacious balance among social classes. How do you simultaneously govern several social classes without it devolving into a totalitarian government? The Bill of Rights is in our Constitution for just that reason. However, if the ruling class consistently controls the flow of information, it can eventually convince the other classes that the Bill of Rights doesn't really mean what it says.

So what are you and I to do? We tell the truth and we tell it when it isn't popular. We tell it to our children and our grandchildren. We instill a foundation of honor and ethics in them. We teach them the joy of work. We teach them generosity, compassion, and gratitude. We teach them to be humble and to think for themselves. And we teach them this, another Orwellian idea, "During times of universal deceit, telling the truth becomes a revolutionary act."

Another seer of dystopian worlds, Ray Bradbury gave us this quote: "But you can't make people listen. They have to come around in their own time, wondering what happened and why the world blew up around them." As an eternal optimist I believe liberty and justice for all individuals *can* be achieved. I just hope the world doesn't blow up around us before we get there. ■

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