

Banning Books Won't Allow Us to Become our Better Selves

MARCH 2, 2022

By Ernie McCray

When I see various “banned books” lists
I can only sigh
a “My, my, my”
because
I see,
for one,
Toni Morrison’s “The Bluest Eye”
and I remember
the journey of Pecola, the mysterious protagonist
in this brilliantly crafted spin,
who suffers the deep stabbing pains of “less-than-ness”
due to the color of her skin.
Everyone should know that such as this
can exist
I see
Mark Twain’s “The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn”
and I’m taken back
to moments one day when I was a boy
sitting and reading of Huckleberry’s exploits
and the next thing I knew
me and him
and a free slave named Jim
were on a river raft
riding the
currents of the Mighty Mississippi.
To fantasize
is a human delight.

I see
Anne Frank's "The Diary of a Young Girl"
and I reflect on what I learned
about Nazism
through the prism
of her vision.
Some stories
are written with enlightening precision.

I see
Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mockingbird"
which let me in on how
one White woman envisioned
race relations
in her imagination.
Her book went against the inclinations
of a Jim Crow nation.

I see
James Baldwin's "Go Tell it on the Mountain"
which enriched my comprehension
of how relations
between a father and his son
can be twisted and damaged
in a mix of sexism and racism.
That read compelled me to
question myself and my "isms."

I see
Ralph Ellison's "The Invisible Man"
and Alice Walker's "The Color of Purple"
and Maya Angelou's "I know Why the Caged Bird
Sings"

and I'm reminded
of how their tales so vividly
illustrated
both the beauty and the tragedy
embedded
in struggles to survive
abuse and bigotry
and I think of how their works
and the exquisitely written narratives
by the others are about a people
seeking only to be seen
as human beings
in a racially divided society.
Nothing more.
Nothing less.
Oh, I would say,
these books
could help us
come to grips
with who we are
and where we've been
so that we can transcend who we've been
into somebody else.
But banning them?
That just won't
allow us
to become our better selves.
And we do want to be better as a species,
don't we?