

(Not) Meeting Our Needs — Dancing With Delusion

Beverly Pestel, *Columnist*

“America has a way of dancing with its own delusion,” is a line in the poem “Greenwood” by Jasmine Mans included in *The 1619 Project* created by Nikole Hannah-Jones.

I did a lot of research while I was writing the series “Our Fragile Democracy.” One of my objectives for that series was to recount the American march toward “liberty and justice for all” especially as it related to voting rights. The rhetoric surrounding proposed election fraud in the 2020 election and the rush to codify new voting regulations prior to the 2022 election made me curious about our history of voting rights, of which I only had a vague knowledge.

What I described in those columns was for the most part the good part, the progress made toward inclusion and equality for all. It was among the part of our history most easily found and, honestly, the most easy to read.

Like many of you, however, the recent rush by some to ban books has encouraged me to read and/or reread some of those banned books to try to determine why some among us believe they should not be read. While in that pursuit, the above quote hit me like a ton of banned books, “America has a way of dancing with its own delusion.”

The 1619 Project is one of the books that has been banned in many communities. It

is only one of the books I have read in the last year that has been hard to read. These books were hard to read because they highlighted many of the dishonorable and horrible things that are a documented but often hidden part of our history.

There are two sides to every story. Throughout our history there have been those who have been determined to bring us to a more culturally inclusive and equal future, just as there have been those who have fought tooth and nail to stop it. Until we have thoroughly investigated both sides, however, we don’t have the whole story, and if we don’t have the whole story we risk living in delusion.

The hard to read side of history is one many of us have been spared because it wasn’t in our high school or college textbooks. Many of the banned books have to do with that missing history. Banning the reading or discussion of this history because it might make you feel bad is one of the most insane things I can think of. To ban a book on the pretense that the actions of ancestors will necessarily impart guilt to the current generation is absurd. For the current generation to pretend that hurtful actions carried out by their ancestors need to be struck from history in order to ensure a conflict-free future is equally absurd. There is a two-sided escape from reason embedded in these positions. We need to

read these books, absorb them, then act to make sure some of what we learn there never happens again – that is what ensures our future.

Other books that have been banned focus on developing an awareness and acceptance of the growing openness and the rich diversity of cultures and lifestyles that have always existed but have also been hidden. Some seem to think that accepting this diversity is a danger to the culture that has always had the privilege of existing in the open. That is erroneous zero-sum thinking; elevating awareness and acceptance of one culture need not diminish another. Zero-sum thinking can never take us to a better place any more than accepting a one-sided and rosy picture of our American history can.

I came across a meme on Facebook recently that expresses why acknowledging the full facts of our history and the need to reserve judgment on varying lifestyles is so important:

“There is a reason some don’t want students to read tough literature: stepping into someone else’s shoes and seeing the world through oppressed or marginalized eyes changes your life. It creates empathy and better understanding and often...solidarity.”

There is also a quote by Charles Scribner Jr. that I posted on my wall several years

ago. “Reading is a means of thinking with another person’s mind; it forces you to stretch your own.”



Beverly Pestel

Some days I think my mind has stretched beyond its ability to cope, and I have to put the book down for a while and head out to the woods with the chainsaw. Three hours with the chainsaw leaves me ready to put it down and pick the book up again; there are all kinds of pain.

Toward solidarity, see you at the bookstore.

Beverly is a retired professor. She lives in a remodeled farmhouse and tends 40 acres of woodland in Richland County. When not in the woods she spends her time reading, writing and enjoying the beauty of the Driftless Area.

Driftless Grace — A common thread

Grace Vosen, *Columnist*

While I wish I could sit in an empty room and write beautiful prose on my laptop for eight hours straight, such a thing has never happened. What’s more likely is that I’ll finish work some afternoon and find myself thinking of a few paragraphs I could get down. (Then I’ll edit that section to within an inch of its life, but that’s another story.) At the moment, anyway, writing is something I tinker away at rather than the center around which my day revolves.

This is informed by – and in direct competition with – another activity. I recently bought my first-ever embroidery kit. My walls are decorated with finished embroidery, but until last month I had

never taken part in what seems like a mysterious (if not magical) craft. After finishing the kit, I am, in a word, hooked.

I was hoping I wouldn’t like embroidery. Hobbies can be expensive, and I might regret not spending those hours on other projects. But I’m afraid that I really enjoyed my first attempt. I liked the predictability of how the thread behaved and the excitement of slowly seeing a design take shape. The process added some color to a gray January.

It also brought up some thorny questions. Was I still being creative if the pattern was pre-printed on the fabric? Would it be better to do the whole kit in one day, learning a new skill without seeming to

take too much time? The answers I reached were *yes* and *no* respectively. There might



Grace Vosen

not be a lot of room for creativity, but I was

still finding out what talents I could bring to an age-old craft. And tinkering away at the kit, a few stitches at a time, became the highlight of my midwinter evenings.

Like embroidery, writing takes a long time to be fully realized. I might like the stitches or words I add one day but then find out the next day that I need to remove them. I’m just grateful that I have a choice: there’s no deadline, no hurry. I can take comfort in doing a little bit at a time.

Grace Vosen is a writer and conservation educator living in Spring Green. She blogs about both the human and nonhuman communities of our region at DriftlessGrace.com.

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vestment in our local communities by increasing shared revenue. The budget would allocate 20% of the state’s sales tax revenue to send back to our local communities. As long as I have represented the people of the 81st Assembly District, I have heard from

local leaders about how the lack of shared revenue has impacted our communities. Shared revenue can be invested in many ways including EMS funding, local road improvements, and district attorney recruitment and retention. The funding levels that municipalities have received in past years

are not sustainable. We must fulfill our obligations to municipalities so that they can meet community needs.

There are so many investments to be excited about in the proposed 2023-25 biennial budget.

Whether you are excited or not, please

share your thoughts on the budget either in the JFC listening sessions or my listening sessions. The dates for these listening sessions will be released soon. I believe this budget would move our state forward so that our state can prosper for many years to come.

Contact us

PO Box 144
Spring Green, Wisconsin 53588 USA
(608) 588-6694
editor@valleysentinelnews.com
valleysentinelnews.com

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