

COMMENTARY / CULTURE

Banning Barr – A Modest Proposal!



Governor: Because of its content, I plan to ban the teaching of Toni Morrison’s book “Be-loved.”
Me: Well, have you read it?
Governor: No, I have not.
Me: Really?

Okay, so now they want to ban “To kill a Mockingbird,” The Catcher in the Rye,” “Of Mice and Men,” “Ruby Bridges Goes to School,” and even – now get this – former First Lady Michelle Obama’s best-selling “Becoming” because her book is – Lord help us – “reverse racism,” so sayeth a Texas parent.

Wow, with so many more important things to be concerned about these days (pandemic, Russian aggression, inflation), why on earth are we amid a book banning frenzy?

Well, we’re told by people who probably never opened any of these that the content of these classics makes little Suzie “uncomfortable.”

Now nary a day goes by with more news about governors and school districts banning books, including the award-winning; ones, that create discomfort on the part of young people.

Which takes me to a columnist and column that I wisely decided to hold on to; first because it was so well written and, second, because it struck a chord with me as I think about this book banning madness we find ourselves in the throes of.

The columnist I’m referring to here is Frank Bruni. The column is the one he published last year, the gist of which was his takedown of people who write “tell all” books after they leave an administration. The subject of his ire was former White House press secretary Stephanie Grisham who wrote a scathing memoir

but only after she left the administration and inked a book deal.

Well, she is not the only one. For starters there’s a long list of tell-all books by people who served in or were unceremoniously canned and ridiculed by the Trump administration, among them national security advisor John Bolton, political aide Omarosa Manigault, FBI Director James Comey, and lawyer Michael Cohen. Who else have I missed?

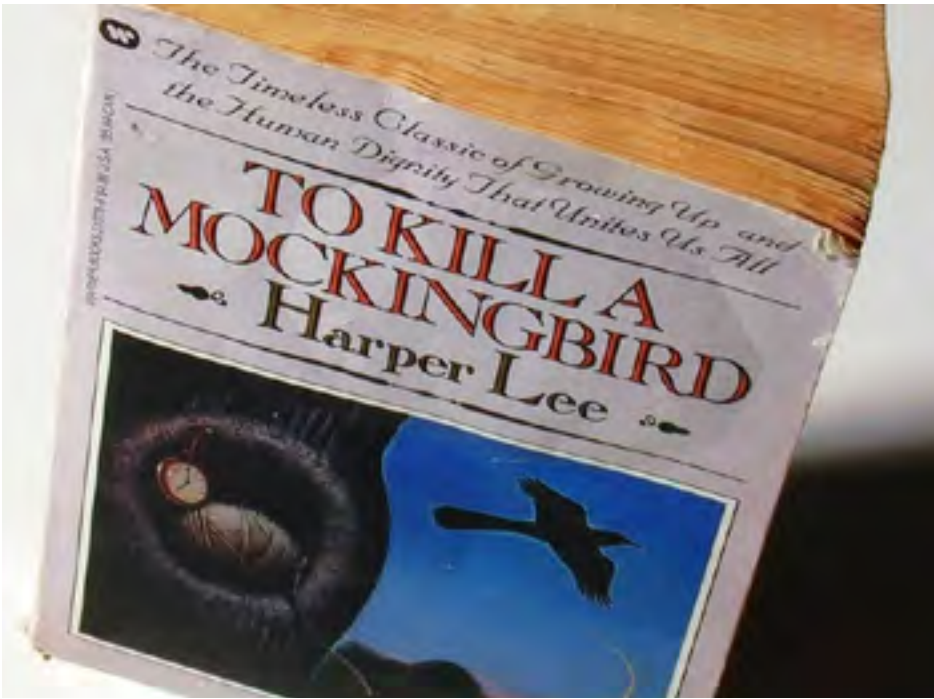
However, on the positive side, Sarah Huckabee Sanders has written one and advisor Kelly Ann “alternative facts” Conway has a forthcoming memoir, both of which lavish praise on the former administration.

Look, those tell-all books are tough to put down, so I admit to purchasing the Manigault and Cohen books and was flabbergasted by the alleged sordid details of what took place in the White House. These books and others left me rolling over in laughter as I read about levels of incompetence and baboonery of an administration that would make the Keystone Cops blush.

This takes me to the latest on the list of tell-all books, this time by the attorney general under former President Trump, William “Bill” Barr, and his soon-to-be-released memoir, “One Damn Thing After Another: Memoirs of an Attorney General.” In it he makes critical comments about the ex-president and warns that “Trump is not fit to be a leader and has shown that he has neither the temperament nor persuasive powers to serve as president again.”

Oh, wait! If memory serves me right, this is the same Bill Barr who vigorously defended the former president at every turn and who said glowing things about him while tending his resignation. One wishes that Barr had the courage to express his true feelings much sooner while on the White House payroll. But he did not. And neither did others.

But back to Bruni and the compel-



ling point he makes.

“I did not and will not crack open the cover of Stephanie Grisham’s White House memoir. I refuse to plug it, and no matter how keen your curiosity, you should refuse to buy it. It shouldn’t be rewarded. You can responsibly turn a blind eye and deaf ear to what Grisham has to say.”

“Look, I harbor no issue with those who want to make a few bucks selling books. That’s the way of the world we live in,” said Frank Bruni. “I just find it a bit disingenuous when they write score-settling memoirs when they could have spoken up before they left.”

Like “a deer caught in a headlight,” Grisham, John Bolton, and others masterfully tap-danced when asked during interviews why they remained silent before exiting the White House.

Here’s my modest proposal. With all this talk about banning books on race, sexual orientation, and other books, let us ban books by those who seek to profit by publishing books with shady stuff they knew about at the time yet said nothing.

Short of that, the hope here is that would be publishers would at least require authors to provide evidence that they brought shenanigans and wrong doings to the attention of the administration before heading out the door on the way to the nearest publisher.

Okay, wishful thinking on my part. Book publishers understand that controversy, scandal, and buffoonery boost profits. I get that.

As for yours truly, oh well, I guess I’ll have to find something else to read and laugh about while waiting for my wife to get through the checkout line at Walmart.

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This Week in African American History

America’s Forgotten Black Cowboys



By dopper0189, Black Kos, Managing Editor (this article was first published in Daily Kos)

After the ends of both the Civil War and Reconstruction, Americans turned their attention to settling (stealing) lands of the Great Plains and Western range. This period was the time of rugged westerners who would later become known as cowboys.

But if you perform a cursory internet search of the term “American cowboy” a predictable set of images will appear. Husky men with weathered expressions galloping on horseback. These rugged men are dressed in denim or plaid, six shooters holstered at their wastes. They’ll have a lasso on their hips and a bandanna tied around their necks. Of course, there will always be their signature cowboy hats perched on their heads.

But most notably, in all these popular cultural images, all the men will be white.

The images of white men as cowboys, in the eyes of the American public, was mostly a result of film and television. But the originally genesis for this image was in the Western pulp novels that were sold for nickels and dimes throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Before the advent of crime and detective stories, Western tales were the dominant form of pulp literature.

The original Western novels were not about historical material; they were written at the height of the Wild West period and detailed what were back then contemporary events. Writers back East would eagerly gather news and rumors reported from the West and fill in the rest with their imaginations. At the same time, aspiring heroes and outlaws would devour the pulps in anticipation of their own adventures.

Despite what you might have seen on TV and at the movies, the American West was settled by a large population of freed slaves. In the 1870s and 1880s, as many as 25 percent of the 35,000 cowboys in the Old West were black cowboys. Cowboys of color have had a substantial presence on the Western frontier since the 1500s. In fact, the word “cowboy” is believed by some to have emerged as a derogatory term used to describe Black cowhands. As the word “cowboy” grew in popularity, the Black cowboys the term described have been stricken from the record with what can only be described as extreme prejudice.

As America farmers began looking for new lands to cultivate in what would become the Western states, a demand for people skilled in herding and ranching

grew. The unsettled (by non-Native people’s) West attracted ambitious people of all colors seeking a better life than they had in the East. For enslaved Blacks the West offered freedom and refuge from the bonds of slavery. It also gave African Americans a chance at better earnings. From pioneers to cowboys to prospectors, African Americans have contributed immensely to the most legendary chapter of American History.... The Wild West.

Employed by Europeans all over the Americas, people of African decent regularly served as white’s go-between with Native Americans. Adept at exploring, communicating, hunting and herding, Blacks were some of the most proficient pioneers and explorers.

On a related historical note domesticated horses were brought to the Americas by Spanish conquistadors during the 1500s. Spanish explorers combined breeds of Arabian steeds, African Barbs and Andalusian horses eventually moved north from Mexico, and bred with Spanish strays to create the famous western American breed that became known as mustangs.

By the end of the Civil War, about 5 million cattle and wild horses were roaming free after being left to fend for themselves. Freed slaves headed west to find their fortunes among cattle ranches and rows of crops. As slaves, blacks were in charge of crops and took care of cows for their white owners, and the availability of land presented a new opportunity for many to escape the South.

It has only been in the past few decades that a strong effort has been made to reclaim the stories of men of color behind many pulp novels featuring white protagonists. For instance, the widely-panned 2013 film “The Lone Ranger,” starring two white men, had the unexpected effect of renewing public interest in Bass Reeves, an African-American United States Marshall whose adventures are believed to have been the inspiration for the white Lone Ranger. Unlike Reeves, and many forgotten African-American frontier figures.

In the real Old West, black cowboys were a common sight. “Black cowboys often had the job of breaking horses that hadn’t been ridden much,” says Mike Searles, a retired professor of history at Augusta State University. His students knew him as Cowboy Mike because he gave lectures dressed in spurs, chaps and a ten-gallon hat.

“Black cowboys were also chuck wagon cooks, and they were known for being songsters – helping the cattle stay

calm,” he says. Searles says his research, which included poring over interviews with ex-slaves in the 1930s, suggested black cowboys benefited from what he calls “range equality.”

“As a cowboy you had to have a degree of independence,” he says. “You could not have an overseer, they had to go on horseback and they may be gone for days.”

Life was, nevertheless, harder for black cowboys than for their white counterparts.

In 2013 Vincent Jacobs then 80, a former rodeo rider who lived near Houston, Texas, recalled the racism he faced when he was starting out. “There would be separate rodeos for blacks and whites,” he says. “It was hard, real hard – they would only let me perform after all the white people had been led out of the arena.”

There are no comprehensive records of who cowboys were. Cowboys were by definition transient and often used assumed names. Bust modern historians estimate that most likely a quarter (up to just shy of a third) of all cowboys in the Old West were black. The first significant number of black cowboys was found in Texas prior to the Civil War. Most of them were slaves owned by white ranchers, but some were freemen. The famous western cattle trails were established in the 1860s, immediately after the Civil War, just as many former slaves were

looking to begin new lives. These trails led north from the ranches of Texas to the booming cattle markets of Kansas, Nebraska and the Dakotas. It is no surprise that many black men who had been born in slavery, either in Texas or in other Southern states, found work as cowhands.

Not only did Hollywood ignore black cowboys, it plundered their real stories as material for some of its films. The Lone Ranger, for example, is believed to have been inspired by Bass Reeves, a black lawman who used dis-

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Top: Known as the “Dusky Demon”, Bill Pickett was the best-known African American rodeo performer of all time. He invented the rodeo sport of bulldogging, now known as steer wrestling, and entertained millions of people around the world with his riding and roping skills.

Bottom Left: Nat Love — Deadwood Dick | Nat Love was an American cowboy and former slave in the period following the American Civil War. His exploits have made him one of the most famous heroes of the Old West.

Bottom Right: Cattle drive 1870’s