

The New York Times

# Banned Books, Parisian Spaghetti Dinners and Other Letters to the Editor



Credit...Trevor Davis

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## Recommended Reading

To the Editor:

[Andrew Solomon's essay](#) "America's Book-Banning Spree" (Dec. 19), about Texas' blacklisting of his book "Far From the Tree," shows the costs of a cultural climate that demands lockstep political conformity. The book, a brilliant exploration of raising children who are different from their parents, is really about caring for children who are not us, period.

As an administrative judge hearing cases about the education of disabled children, I often recommend Solomon's book to parents appearing before me, but it should be on the shelf of every teacher in the United States, and especially those in Texas. At its most basic, the book honors the truth of positive family values far removed from the corrosive empty rhetoric of extremists seeking only to divide.

Nancy Lederman  
New York

## A Writer's Roots

To the Editor:

Regarding [Michael Patrick Hearn's Dec. 19 essay](#) in remembrance of Alex Haley: In the mid-60s, Haley often came to the novelist James Jones's home in Paris for Sunday night spaghetti dinners. I was living in Paris with my film director husband, and we attended every week.

Each time I saw Haley, he would go on and on, telling the story of Kunta Kinte, the main character of a book he was writing. Haley never stopped telling the story, and all of us (including many famous writers who came each Sunday) agreed that Haley wouldn't write the story because he was talking himself out of it.

How wrong we were! "Roots" became a huge best seller.

Margie Goldsmith  
New York



To the Editor:

Aside from his notable contributions in spreading an awareness of Black American history, Alex Haley's dedication as an instructor impressed me immeasurably when I read Michael Patrick Hearn's recollection of Haley's enormous, inspiring faith in students while he was a writer in residence at Hamilton College in upstate New York.

The profound effect Haley had on the author of this revealing essay leads me to follow the Hamilton tradition of showing my approval to both men not by applauding but by snapping my fingers, in keeping with the thunderous snaps Haley's lectures received.

John Esposito  
New Providence, N.J.

## Flawed Human

To the Editor:

[Peter Baker, reviewing Geoffrey Wheatcroft's book "Churchill's Shadow" \(Dec. 12\)](#), rightly contrasts Wheatcroft's assault on Winston Churchill with Andrew Roberts's laudatory biography, but refrains from taking sides.

I suggest borrowing from Isaiah Berlin to say Churchill did and said many foolish things but, in the manner of the hedgehog, mastered one or two great things — the grandest, his leadership of a lonely Britain against the far more powerful Nazis. For the second, I cite his discernment of totalitarians from afar, which made him a natural to replace Neville Chamberlain. Later, an out-of-office Churchill sounded the alarm against Soviet tyranny in his 1946 "Iron Curtain" speech.

I don't dismiss the harm to India and others from his prejudices, but forcing Hitler to abandon the Battle of Britain to invade Russia was a World War II turning point. Churchill's place in history's purgatory is analogous to that of Jefferson, a flawed human who made the world better.

Frank McNeil  
Boca Raton, Fla.

# A Robot Is a Robot Is a Robot

To the Editor:

Kevin Roose informs us that when he tried to use an A.I. writing program to help him compose [his review](#) of Henry A. Kissinger, Eric Schmidt and Daniel Huttenlocher’s “The Age of AI” (Dec. 12), the initial results were decidedly unpromising. The software produced the following: “The book which you are reading at the moment is a book on a nook, which is a book on a book, which is a book on a subject, which is a subject on a subject, which is a subject on a subject.”

This certainly won’t do as an instance of book reviewing, but surely the A.I. program deserves some credit for having independently come up with the avant-garde prose style of Gertrude Stein!

Benjamin George Friedman  
New York

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