



February 1, 2017

Galvanizing the Resistance via Literature: Third Annual Bay Area Book Festival, June 3-4, 2017

The Bay Area Book Festival in Berkeley is sharpening its mission to focus on literary activism in response to the injustices sweeping our country. At the weekend event this June 3-4, 2017, the Festival will turn its considerable resources toward presenting and amplifying the literary voice of resistance. The event will serve as a prominent gathering place for writers and readers who are committed to tolerance, sanctuary, justice, equality, environmental sustainability, diversity and inclusion—our bedrock values.

At only three years old, the Bay Area Book Festival has become one of the country's leading literary events, bringing together tens of thousands of readers with hundreds of the world's most respected writers for in-person literary exploration and celebration. We have always emphasized writers and books concerned with social justice, diversity and the environment. We now are raising our sign higher in the public square.

There is no better place than Berkeley, renowned for its intellectual activism, for an event that highlights literature as a vehicle for social change. The Festival offers a unique and powerful opportunity. We have an existing infrastructure, well-known writers already slated to appear, venues and public outdoor spaces reserved for the weekend, and support from the City of Berkeley and other partners, including major media outlets. We call on writers, philanthropists, businesses, associations and other potential partners to join us.

Great literature is never didactic, but it is inherently activist. Autocrats are threatened not only by what great books say but by the literary form itself. Whether non-fiction, fiction, or poetry, literature allows remarkable access into the subtle lived experience and perspectives of other people and cultures. Literature is a tool for informing the most sought-after force there is: hearts and minds.

When hearts and minds are mobilized, watch out—as we saw with the public response to *The Jungle*, *Silent Spring*, *Hiroshima*, *The Feminine Mystique*, *The Invisible Man*, and thousands of other world-changing books. Legend has it that Lincoln said to Harriet Beecher Stowe upon meeting the diminutive author, “So you’re the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war.”

Great literature respects the intelligence and agency of its readers. It does not use its power for manipulation, which is cynical. Great literature is hopeful. By asking to be read, it assumes human potential. Picking up a book means opening oneself to change. Reading a book (and especially writing one) means believing in the possibility of this change. These changes may be explicit and social, or subtle and intensely private, but they are progressive—as it is defined politically—in being humanist.

Books authorize (literally) voices to be heard, which is why the Bay Area Book Festival places a high priority on writers who come from oppressed communities. That includes Arab and Muslim communities. We especially emphasize women writers. The Bay Area Book Festival was founded by a woman and is largely led by women.

Long-form writing, which is becoming scarce in today's attention-deficit culture, has many other benefits: countering ignorance, enhancing reasoning ability, and exploring issues in depth. Orwell noted decades ago how readily "the present political chaos is connected with the decay of language."

"One of the things I'm confident about," stated Reader-in-Chief Barack Obama to the *New York Times's* book critic Michiko Kakutani in a recent interview, "is that, out of this moment, there are a whole bunch of writers, a lot of them young, who are probably writing the book I need to read."

The Bay Area Book Festival will be a place to find these writers. If you're one of them, if you plan to become one, or if you want to meet them, we warmly invite you to help us create the Festival, a place where together we will learn and strategize, enjoy and celebrate, around the pleasure and power of books.

Please email founder and executive director Cherilyn Parsons at info@baybookfest.org with how you would like to take part.

The Bay Area Book Festival is the main project of the Foundation for the Future of Literature and Literacy, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded for the purpose of the Festival. We do not carry out advocacy but have an educational mission to present a public event that promotes literature and literacy.

www.baybookfest.org



JUNE
3 & 4
2017

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