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Last Updated: 05/23/2023



National Book Week, 1988

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

"Books," Thoreau once wrote, "are the treasured wealth of the world, the inheritance of generations and nations." In the love of books and the accumulated learning they represent lie the heritage and the hope of mankind. For us in America, that love by tradition and experience has been a decisive force in our existence and development as a free people. We proclaimed it so for all eternity in the First Amendment to our Constitution, and we proved it so at the dawn of the American Revolution when we chose as our foremost weapon the printing press.

During National Book Week, we pause to recall all that books have had to do not only with the founding and building of this land, but also with the transmission of those ideas and practical achievements that form the basis of our culture. Published maps, journals, and accounts of explorers, adventurers, and missionaries inspired the early pioneers to follow them across new horizons of discovery in the Americas. Likewise, the writings of political philosophers and scholars from ancient times onward imparted wisdom and knowledge to the lovers of liberty who declared our country's independence. Another book, the Bible, gave them enduring inspiration and deep confidence in the transcendent value of their struggle.

Anyone who doubts the power or permanence of books need only look today at countries around the world where the mere composition, printing, binding, and distribution of a book is a prosecutable act of defiance against the state. Even the rulers of these regimes must secretly acknowledge the futility of their aims. For the printed word is an implacable enemy of tyranny, whether that tyranny comes in the form of official censorship by government or fashionable neglect by academia. In every society, the goals of education must include such a wide experience of the best books that intellectual independence and critical thinking become the natural assets of each citizen.

Our free society, then, must prize its libraries just as it values its liberties. We can all resolve during National Book Week to take stock of our own reading practices and our attentiveness to sharing books with others, especially the young. Technological change and specialized publications—electronic books, braille and large-print media for the visually impaired, recorded books and other forms—have greatly increased the accessibility of all kinds of literature. Promoting even broader dissemination of book learning, including efforts to achieve 100 percent literacy in our Nation, is the proper concern of all Americans. Truly we owe it to future generations to understand, preserve, and pass on the wisdom of the ages found only in books.

The Congress, by Senate Joint Resolution 342, has designated the period of November 28 through December 5, 1988, as "National Book Week" and authorized and requested the President to issue a proclamation in observance of this occasion.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RONALD REAGAN, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim November 28 through December 5, 1988, as National Book Week, and I urge all Americans to observe this week with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-third day of November, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-eight, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirteenth.

Ronald Reagan