

## BANNED BOOK PRESERVATION INITIATIVE

### My thoughts on *ROOTS: A Historical Truth*

*Theotis Robinson*

History plays a crucial role in shaping our understanding of events that have defined us as a Nation. The courageous crossing of the icy Delaware River by General George Washington on Christmas night was pivotal in saving the American Revolution from defeat at the hands of King George's forces. Yet, we must also confront the darker aspects of our past, such as the Father of the Nation's relentless pursuit of Ona Judge, a runaway slave belonging to Martha Washington. Embracing the full truth of our history, both its triumphs and its failures, is essential for our growth as a society.



The recent debate over the "appropriateness" of *Roots* in high school libraries underscores this necessity. Although some may find its content uncomfortable, Alex Haley's work is a vital part of the American narrative. As we celebrate the 250th birthday of our Nation, it's alarming how few Americans recognize that the Iroquois inspired the foundational democratic principles of the United States.

Federalism, Balance of Power, and Participatory Decision-making —these core concepts are embedded in our Constitution and were derived from the wisdom of the Iroquois.

American history is not a mere fairy tale; it encompasses grim realities. Slavery was the antithesis of freedom. By allowing revisionist history and imposing book bans, we rob our youth of the clarity needed to understand our identity as Americans. It is worth noting

that the only individuals who thrived on Southern plantations were the enslavers, who lived in a constant state of fear. Embracing the complexity of our history is essential for an informed and honest understanding of who we are as a nation.

Alex Haley's dedication to uncovering his roots in his Pulitzer Prize-winning novel is a testament to the power of personal history and cultural heritage. His journey began on a college campus in New York, but it was during a poignant crossing of the Atlantic Ocean—in the cargo hold of a ship—where he truly immersed himself in the harrowing experiences of the Middle Passage. This commitment is beautifully reflected in the focus on his African ancestor, Kunta Kinte, who was born in Juffure, The Gambia.

One of my most cherished memories is meeting the eldest member of the Kinte family outside the village mosque in Juffure; it was a powerful reminder of how deeply interconnected our stories are. Haley's research did not stop there. He further explored Kunta Kinte's lineage while residing in the Haley family home in Henning, Tennessee, the very place where he first discovered the incredible story of his ancestor.

Moreover, his work in Knoxville, including that unforgettable early book signing at the Ballroom of the Knoxville Civic Auditorium and Coliseum, is a pivotal moment that showcases how his story resonated within our community. The University of Tennessee Knoxville Libraries holds a treasure trove of Haley's research and drafts, serving both as a resource for future generations and as a reminder of the importance of understanding our past.

Let us celebrate and support ongoing explorations of our roots, for they are the foundation of who we are today.

### **About the Campaign:**

Indivisible Knoxville has organized this campaign to preserve Roots as a historic text for American History that has direct connections to our town. We want to celebrate its importance and make sure that its message is not lost in the politics of our present moment. We recognize that the text contains mature content that is not appropriate for all age groups. We recognize that access to a physical book is not a guarantee that a text will be read we hope that the story, and the meaning of the text will be preserved through curiosity generated by this campaign either through these books or through audiobooks to audiences as they reach the maturity to handle the weight of difficult texts and subject matters. We also recognize that Black History is a part of American History and by extension Knoxville's History.

We encourage you to write and call your state representatives to amend the "Age-Appropriate Materials Act" TN Code § 49-6-3803 (b) (1) to make it easier to protect those books of merit which are often targeted for bans. We are not advocating for sexual material in elementary schools, we are advocating for mature students and adults to have access to books of merit to encourage critical thinking and analysis.

### **State Senate**

#### **[Candidates for these seats in August and November 2026]**

District 5 – Randy McNally (R)	[David Miller (D),	Jimmy Matlock (R)]
District 6 – Becky Massey (R)	-	
District 7 – Richard Briggs (R)	[Bryan Langan (D),	Kent Morrell (R)]

### **State Reps**

14 – Jason Zachary (R)	[Lindsay Honaker (D),	Shivam Zaveri (D)]
15 – Sam McKenzie (D)	-	
16 – Michele Carringer (R)	[Eliza Boles (D)]n	
18 – Elaine Davis (R)	[Brent Jones (R),	Elliot Schuchardt(R), Bryan Goldberg(D)]
19 – Dave Wright (R)	[Jenny Fowler (D)]	
89 – Justin Lafferty (R)	[Randy Debord(D)]	
90 – Gloria Johnson (D)	-	