

AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION
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In Louisiana, workers on a sugar plantation are being held in virtual slavery -- not a hundred years ago, but today in the 1970's.

In Mobile, Alabama, a half dozen local police officers recently took part in a mock lynching of two black men.

In a suburb of Cleveland, Ohio, the local school board banned Kurt Vonnegut's "Cat's Cradle" and Joseph Heller's "Catch 22" from school shelves. In schools across the country this censorship has reached epidemic proportions.

In legal abortion clinics across the country, anti-abortion fanatics have vandalized and firebombed the clinics and engaged in severe tactics to intimidate and harass those who enter and leave the clinics.

Chicago police have been conducting strip searches and vaginal examinations of thousands of women arrested for minor traffic violations, with male police officers observing these searches through video camera equipment.

The Ku Klux Klan is gaining new strength in a number of states in the South and elsewhere. At a recent Klan rally in Mississippi, several KKK demonstrators removed their hoods to reveal that they were local police officers -- who were armed.

Dear Friend,

There's a mean spirit emerging in our country. It's a pattern we have seen before.

These incidents didn't happen by accident. Nor are they isolated cases. There is a growing, organized movement across the states, a movement to oppress a large part of the American

people by depriving them of fundamental birthrights guaranteed to them by the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

The people of this nation have experienced extremist "right-wing" ideological trends before. The last significant one was headed by Joe McCarthy in the 1950's. None, I regret to say, has been more frightening than what we see developing today.

The names and faces of the overzealous participants may be different, but the oppressive ideologies are the same. These are not traditional conservatives. They are people who would trade away civil liberties for civil "order," who seek to gain great strength during times when our nation's citizens become less vigilant in guarding their individual liberties.

Granted, every free society always has been and always will be plagued by its share of extremists. That's part of what being a free society is all about. But when the point is reached where those extremists undermine the very foundation of that free society -- and that is what is happening today -- then it's time for every citizen concerned about civil liberties to speak out and to act.

Leading the efforts to impede the oppressive acts of these extremist groups is the American Civil Liberties Union. Before you learn about what some of these efforts are -- and how you can help -- I think it is important that you have a better understanding of who and what these groups are.

In the past half dozen years or so, a great many radical "right wing" groups have emerged in America. This new breed of extremists is better organized, better financed and far more sophisticated than any of their predecessors. Their moneyed backers are pouring millions upon millions into efforts to bring into their fold hordes of new converts, playing upon the current discontented mood of some Americans and trying to parley that mood into a powerful movement.

If enough people sit around and do nothing to counter their efforts, they will succeed.

Theirs is the politics of oppressiveness, threat and vengeance. When they realize they cannot achieve their goals by lawful means, they resort to intimidation and harassment.

Like firebombing abortion clinics.

And staging mock lynchings.

Right now, confronted with the mounting and powerful efforts of this movement, the American Civil Liberties Union has more than its usual share of work cut out for it. But the ACLU is responding, and responding strongly, to the growing challenges to civil liberties.

The Alabama ACLU, for example, filed a suit charging that the recent mock lynching in Mobile was only one outrageous incident of racial discrimination and police brutality by a special all-white unit called the "Six Hundred Squad." The suit is aimed at ending the squad's terrorizing, assaulting and falsely incriminating the black citizens of Mobile.

The ACLU fought the book banning case in Ohio, too. There, the court ruled that the school board does not have the right to remove the books from the library. Right now, our New York affiliate is suing a Long Island school board to prevent their banning from the school library nine titles, including "The Best Short Stories of Negro Writers" and Bernard Malamud's "The Fixer."

The ACLU won an injunction in Virginia against anti-abortion trespassers in that state. This was hailed as an important victory for women who want to exercise their Constitutional right to choose abortion. The decision in this case is expected to discourage anti-abortion groups in other parts of the country from practicing their illegal harassment tactics.

The ACLU is filing suit to stop the outrage of the strip searches in Chicago and to secure damages for those women who were victimized.

The ACLU is helping the workers on the sugar cane plantation in Louisiana who are being held in slavery. The ACLU is also defending the right of farmworkers in other states to organize and make contracts. We are also defending the civil liberties of seasonal farm workers, and acting to improve the living and working conditions of migrant workers.

In these and in so many more of our cases (more than 6,000 cases a year!), the ACLU is in head-to-head battle with extremist organizations who seek to oppress the rights of one group of citizens or another. We don't always win. But our battling

average is a good one. And if we should lose a case, we go right back into battle.

In addition to fighting in the courts, the ACLU is engaged in nationwide efforts to alert the public to the growing threat from extremist groups and the power they seek. It is only with an alerted citizenry that this threat to our liberties can be quashed.

As you are probably aware, the American Civil Liberties Union is a non-profit, public-supported organization. It is thanks to people like you that we have been able to achieve as much as we have.

The need for your support to help the ACLU carry on its efforts against those who would rob us of our fundamental rights may be greater today than it has ever been. Enclosed with this letter is your ACLU Membership Form. I urge you to return it today with your membership check. Basic membership is only \$20 a year. Many choose to support our efforts by joining in higher membership categories.

Because it is important that you keep up with issues that the ACLU is involved in, you will, when you become a member, receive copies of Civil Liberties, the newspaper of the ACLU. It is a highly respected, widely read publication that puts you in touch with the people and events that are shaping the future of civil liberties in this nation.

Also, when you join, you automatically become a member of your state ACLU affiliate, and are advised about civil liberties developments in your own area.

Writer James Baldwin once cautioned, "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced." I ask you to face what is happening in this country today, and to do your share to see that this new anti-civil liberties movement is stopped in its tracks.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ira Glasser". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent horizontal stroke at the beginning.

Ira Glasser
Executive Director