

“Current Events” with Frank Damon



Doelger Senior Center has been most fortunate to have Frank Damon leading both our Current Events and History discussion groups for the last 5 years. During this current time of physical distancing due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Frank is sharing his current events discussion topics online. He will begin offering discussion groups using ZOOM in the very near future. Stay tuned for updates!

Frank received his BA degree from the University of San Francisco (USF) with a dual major in Political Science and American History. He also earned his MA in Political Science and teaching credentials at USF. Over the course of his career, Frank taught in the San Mateo Union High School District and at Marin Catholic High School, Terra Nova High School, Golden Gate University, College of San Mateo, Skyline College and Canada College.

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Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in these articles and discussion topics are those of the authors and group participants and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any agency of the City of Daly City.

A Note: Today's class will go over the 12 State propositions. You do not have to vote on everything because some of these propositions probably should not be on the ballot. The state legislature should pass them in the form of a bill. Also, I know many of you have already voted so I should have gone over this guide earlier.

Prop 14

Authorizes bonds continuing stem cell research

Stem cells are used to find treatments for many kinds of diseases. In 2004, California voters approved \$3 billion in bonds to pay for research and medical studies using stem cells. Prop 14 would allow the states to sell 5.5 billion dollars in new bonds to pay for more stem cell research and medical treatments. One and a half billion dollars from the bonds would go to research and treatment for brain diseases, such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's.

Arguments in favor:

- 1: Stem cell bonds have led to new medical treatments and important research that should be continued.
- 2: Prop 14 provides money that will help fight many serious diseases, including cancer, diabetes and heart disease.

Arguments against:

- 1: We should not be spending billions of dollars when so many people are out of work.
- 2: The federal government and private groups are already helping pay for important stem cell research.

Prop 15

Increases funding sources for public school, community colleges, and local government services by changing tax assessment of commercial and industrial property.

Many homeowners voted for prop 13 back in 1978 because it cut their property tax in half. Many did not realize that the same tax cut was a commercial property like big corporations. Now they get more than half of the property tax because they don't move the way homeowners do. If prop 15 passes only the property tax of commercial property would be reassessed and go up every three years. It would not affect the property tax cut of owner occupied homes.

Arguments In favor:

- 1: Wealthy companies and business property owners should pay property taxes based on what they're holdings are really worth.
- 2: Taxes from property will help pay for supporting services, such as schools and fire departments. Local governments would get between six and a half billion dollars and 11 and a half billion dollars more in property taxes each year starting in 2025.

Arguments against:

1: Increasing taxes will increase the cost of everything that people buy, including food, gas, and health care.

2: Small businesses that owe more than \$3 million are struggling during the current pandemic. Many many of them could go out of business.

Prop 16

Allows diversity as a factor in public employment, education, and contracting decisions.

In 1996, California voters passed the law that prevents public programs from using “affirmative action” when making decisions about public education and public employment. When deciding who gets into college or who to hire, public schools and agencies are usually not allowed to consider a person's race, Ethnicity sex, color, or the country they come from. Prop 16 would bring back affirmative action as it was before 1996

Arguments In favor:

1: Prop 16 will help women and people of color, while fighting long-standing patterns of discrimination.

2: All of us deserve equal opportunities and quality education.

Arguments against:

1: The state should treat everyone equally. The best qualified people regardless of sex, or color should be hired for jobs or admitted to college experience it should be based on ability. We should not favor one racial of ethnic group over another; this is not “equal opportunity”.

Prop 17

Restores the rights to vote after completion of a prison term.

Currently people spend time “on parole” when they complete their prison sentences. People on parole must follow certain rules, such as meeting regularly with the parole officer. Parole usually lasts 3 years. Around 50,000 people are on parole in California. People on parole were not currently allowed to vote. If proposition 17 passes, this would allow people on parole to register to vote in the vote in elections.

Arguments in favor:

1: People on parole pay taxes they should be allowed to vote as well

2: Parole is a time for people to rebuild their lives; voting helps people on parole feel more connected to their communities and increases public safety.

Arguments against:

- 1: Parole is a time for serious and violent criminals to prove they have changed.
- 2: When people get out of prison, they should complete parole before being allowed to vote.

Prop 18

Permits 17-year-olds to vote in primary and special elections if they will turn 18 by the next general election.

Arguments in favor:

- 1: It will help to increase voter participation
- 2: if someone will be 18 years old by the general election, they should be allowed to help choose candidates on the November ballot.

Arguments against:

- 1: 17-year-olds are not legally adults; they are not mature enough to make important decisions.
- 2: High School teachers and counselors will be able to influence the way that 17-year-olds vote.

Prop 19

Changes certain property tax rules

Prop 19 expands the property tax rules for people in special groups. This includes people over 55, people who are disabled and people affected by natural disasters. These homeowners could keep their lower property taxes, when moving to a new home anywhere in the state. They could also get a tax discount when moving to a more expensive home.

Arguments in favor:

- 1: People should not have to pay higher property taxes on a new home if they lose their home in a disaster.
- 2: Prop 19 protects older homeowners and creates new opportunities for renters.

Arguments against:

- 1: Prop 19 is a tax increase that was rejected by voters in 2018.
- 2: Prop 19 could hurt families who cannot afford to pay taxes on an inherited family home.

Prop 20

Restrict parole for certain offenses currently considered to be nonviolent. Authorizes felony sentences for certain offenses currently treated only as misdemeanors.

Prop 20 would undo parts of the crime laws passed by lawmakers and voters over the past 10 years. Some "petty crimes" could be punished as felonies. People convicted of stealing items worth \$250 to \$950 could be sent to county jail for up to three years, and prop 20 would also change the factors that can be considered for early release from prison and limit early release for people convicted of some felonies.

Arguments for:

1: It collects DNA from people convicted of drug possession or shoplifting and that will help solve more serious crimes, such as rape

Arguments against:

- 1: California already has some of the toughest laws against serious and violent crime
- 2: Prop 20 wastes millions of dollars on prisons that could be spent on education, health care, or affordable housing.

Prop 21

Prop 21 extends local government authority to enact rent control on residential property

Several California cities have "rent control" laws that limit how much landlords can increase rents each year. State law prevents rent control on single-family homes and housing built after February 1st 1995. Landlords can charge any amount they want when a new renter moves in. Landlords must also be allowed to increase rents on current renters enough to make a profit. A new state law limits rent increases to 5-10% each year, depending on inflation period. This law applies to housing that is more than 15 years old and will be in effect till 2030.

Arguments for:

1: Cities and counties could pass rent control laws for housing that is more than 15 years old. Communities can limit how much a landlord can increase rent with new renter moves in period landlords could raise rent for up to 15% over 3 years or new renters, plus any increase allowed by local law.

2: Prop 21 is fair, is guarantees and landlords can still earn a profit

Arguments against:

- 1: Rent control laws will call them cause landlords to evict renters
- 2: Prop 21 will make housing less available and less affordable at a time when people are struggling to get back to work.

Prop 22

Exempts App based transportation and delivery companies from providing employee benefits to certain drivers.

An independent contractor can choose when and how much to work. An employee has their schedule and works set by their employer. Employees get benefits and protections that independent contracts do not. These include minimum wage, overtime pay and paid time off if they are sick. Rideshare and delivery apps include companies such as Uber, Lyft and DoorDash. These companies currently hire drivers as independent contractors. A 2010 state law requires rideshare and delivery companies to hire drivers as employees instead of as independent contractors. The state Attorney General and three cities are suing Uber and Lyft for refusing to follow the state's new law.

Arguments in favor:

- 1: Rideshare and delivery drivers want to work as independent contractors, not employees.
- 2: Forcing companies to hire drivers as employees would get rid of hundreds of thousands of jobs.

Arguments against:

- 1: Rideshare and delivery companies don't want to pay drivers basic benefits .
- 2: Treating drivers as employees will make sure they get paid sick leave and unemployment benefits.

Prop 23

Increases requirements for kidney dialysis clinics.

Requires on-site medical professionals. If a person's kidneys stop working they may need a special treatment called dialysis. In California, dialysis is usually provided by license dialysis clinics. A patient's personal doctor must visit them at least once a month during treatment at a dialysis clinic. Dialysis treatment is paid for by medicare, Medi-Cal - and private insurance. Private insurance pays more money for treatment than Medicare or MediCal. If prop 23 passes it would require dialysis clinics to have a doctor present during all treatment hours. Clinics would have to report any dialysis related infections to the state every 3 months. Clinics would need permission from the state before closing and reducing services. Clinics could not discriminate against clients based on their insurance or how they are paying for their treatment.

Arguments in favor:

- 1: Dialysis is a dangerous procedure; clinics should always have a doctor available to help.
- 2: Prop 23 prevents discrimination and protects patients in rural communities

Arguments against:

- 1: Prop 23 would take thousands of doctors away from hospitals and emergency rooms, making California's doctors shortage worse.
- 2: Some dialysis clinics in the state might close due to increased costs.

Prop 24

Prop 24 amends consumer privacy laws on consumer data privacy.

Many tech and other companies use consumer data to sell for profits or improve their services.

If Prop 24 passes people would have some increased power over their personal data Consumers could contact companies to prevent them from sharing or using “sensitive personal information”. This includes location data, health information or private communications.

Arguments in favor:

- 1: We need to stop tech companies from tracking everything we do online.
- 2: Prop 24 would protect kids by giving a state more power to go after companies that break children's privacy laws

Arguments against:

- 1: Prop 24 still gives too much power to tech companies to use our data.
- 2: Consumers should not have to fill out paperwork and send forms to every tech company to have their data protected.

Prop 25

A referendum on law that replaced money bail with a system based on public safety and flight risk

Prop 25 asks voters to decide if the state should get rid of bail. When a person is charged with a crime, they may have to stay in jail while waiting for a trial period. One way that people are released from jail is by paying bail. Bail is money used to guarantee that a person will return to

court. The state passed a law 2018 that would replace bail with the new system. This has not yet gone into effect. Under the new system, people charged with less serious crimes would be released without having to pay bail. Courts would determine if people charged with more serious crimes should be released. If prop 25 passes it would get rid of the bail system and allow the state's new law to go into effect.

Arguments in favor:

- 1: The current bail system is unfair; if you cannot afford the bill, you must stay in jail
- 2: Prop 25 means a decision will be based on public safety not a person's ability to pay.

Arguments against:

- 1: The state's new system could discriminate against African-Americans, Latinos, and people who live in low-income neighborhoods
- 2: Releasing people from jail will make our communities less safe.



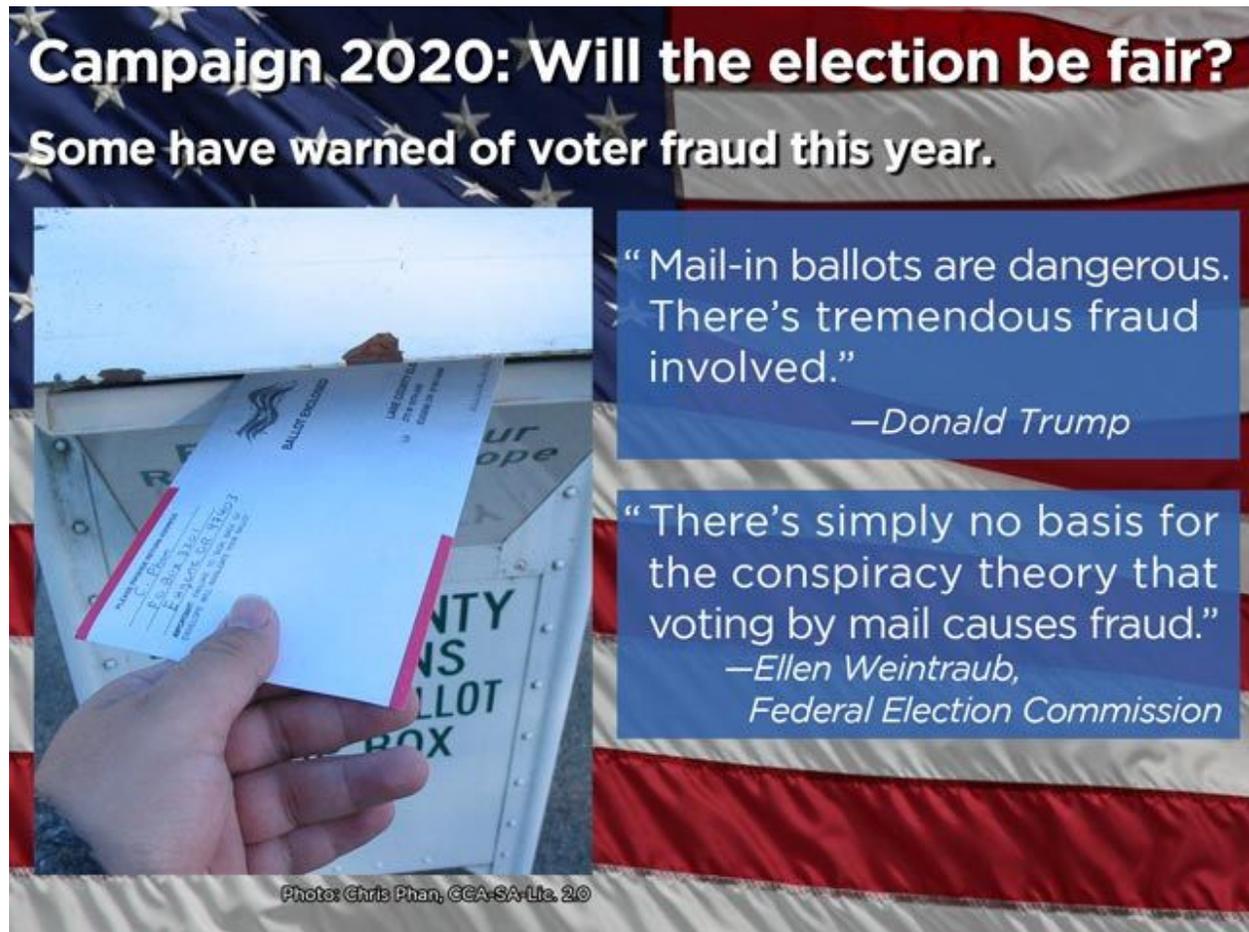
Woman in the News

As a teenager in Hamilton, New Zealand, she joined the liberal Labour Party. After graduating from college, she worked for party leaders. She began serving in Parliament at the age of 28. In 2017, She took over the leadership of Labour, becoming New Zealand's prime minister later that year at the age of 37. This made her the youngest female head of government in the world. She has become popular at home and abroad for her environmental advocacy, and respect for indigenous people. She has been called the most powerful woman in the Southern Hemisphere. On October 17th, Labour won a landslide victory in New Zealand's elections. Not only was she returned to office, but Labour now controls a majority of seats in Parliament. She credited my landslide win to my successful handling of the coronavirus epidemic. New Zealand has had fewer than 2,000 cases of the virus since March. Who is she? (Jacinda Ardern.)



Campaign 2020: Will the Election be Fair

As a candidate in 2016, Donald Trump warned that there would be widespread voter fraud during the election. The president has brought up the issue of voter fraud on this year's campaign trail as well. Trump says he doesn't trust mail in ballots. Yet, voting by mail is already hitting record numbers this year. Many people do not want to vote in person during the COVID-19 pandemic. Trump has suggested that Democrats will unfairly cast illegal votes for candidate Joe Biden. Many people have wondered why Trump doesn't trust mail-in voting. After all, he has voted that way himself for years. In fact, it is extremely rare for anyone to try to cheat in an election. The second quote here comes from a spokesperson for the Federal Election Commission. For the last 20 years, scientists at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, or MIT, have been studying voter fraud in the U.S. They have found that this only happens in 0.00006 percent of all voting cases. And even if someone were to try to cheat in a mail-in election, these ballots would not be counted anyway. All voters have to register in order for their votes to count. Election officials do not count votes from non-registered voters. Voter fraud is a crime that comes with penalties, including a fine and time in prison.



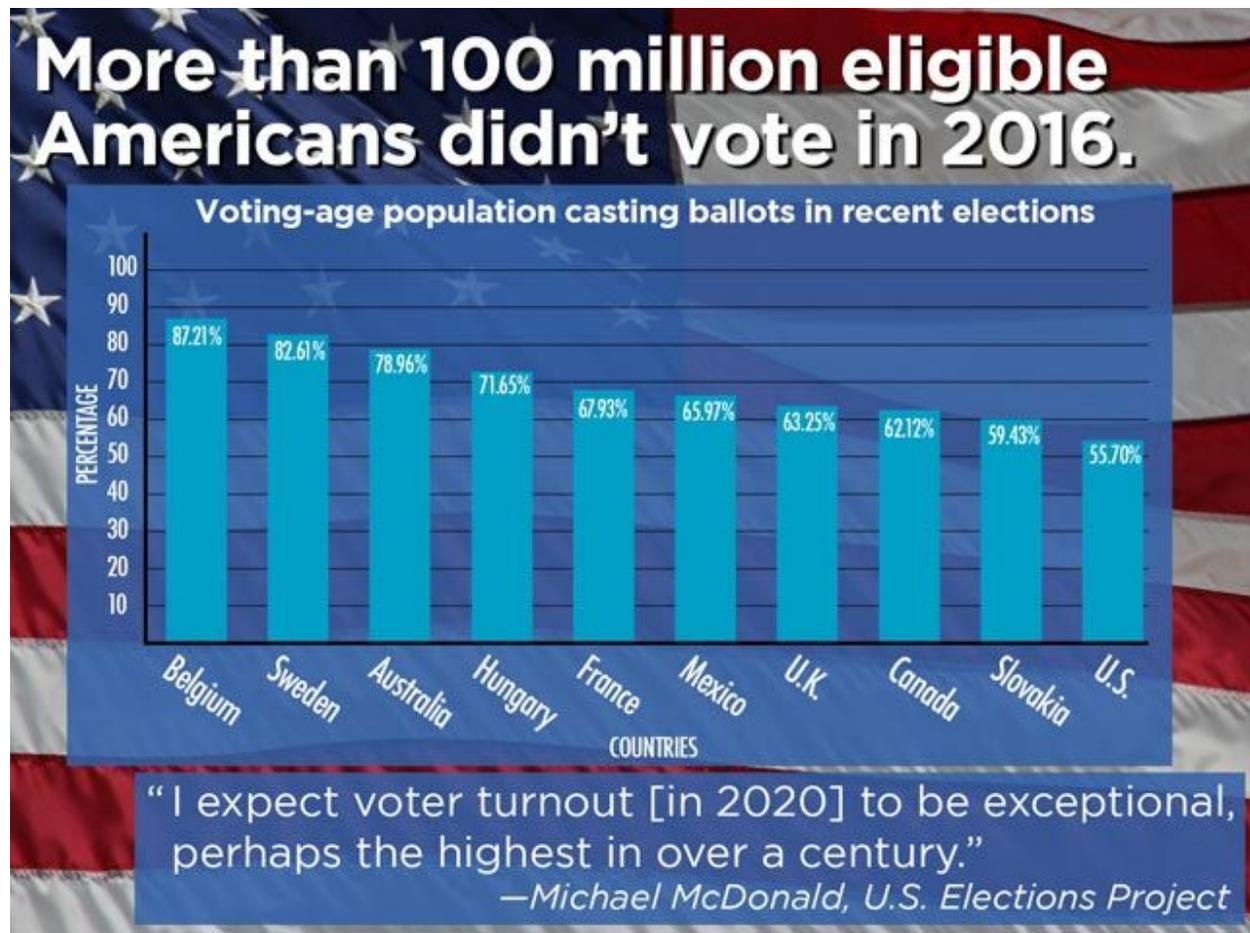
According to most experts, voter suppression, not voter fraud, is the biggest threat to this year's elections. “Voter suppression” is an effort to stop people from voting. There have been complaints about this in many states this year. For example, Florida's legislature — controlled

by the Republican Party —passed a law saying that former felons could only vote if all their fines and court costs had been paid. And this is not just a problem in Florida. In 2016, more than 6 million Americans were kept from voting due to felony convictions. Republican officials in Ohio and Texas were recently accused of voter suppression when they limited the number of ballot drop boxes to just one per county. Voters in both states complained that this made it more difficult for voters in large cities, who are more likely to support Democrats, to cast ballots. The sidebar here shows other modern methods of voter suppression. Some states now require voters to show an ID card. Which is most likely to affect Elderly, young, and low-income people. Other states have purged thousands of names from voting rolls without notifying the voters. In Wisconsin and Pennsylvania, both important swing states, legislatures acted to limit the amount of time for early voting, only to find opposition in the courts.



Some experts say that the biggest factor affecting election results has nothing to do with any state or national laws. The chart below shows the percent of eligible voters who actually voted in recent elections in other countries around the world. Belgium is at the top of the list, with a voting rate of more than 87 percent. The U.S. does not have the lowest voting rate in the world, but it does come in last on this chart. The total voter turnout in 2016 was 55.7 percent. What do you think accounts for such a low voting rate among Americans? Some people have proposed ideas to improve voter turnout. One of these is to make Election Day a holiday, on the theory that

people would be more likely to vote if they have a day off from work. Others have suggested that people feel turned off by modern politics. Many experts say that schools need to improve civics education, so that people will understand the election process and how important the right to vote is.



New CA law helps prisoners become firefighters

During World War Two, the state of California started using prisoners to fight wildfires. This was necessary as many firefighters were soldiers in the war. This practice has continued to this day. California's Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation currently operates many Conservation Camps to help train inmates in this difficult — and often dangerous — work. Inmate firefighters have become increasingly important to the state as wildfires have gotten larger and more destructive in the last two decades. California has seen 14 of its largest 15 blazes since 2003. Its largest fire ever, the August Complex, has been raging this year. It has destroyed more than 1 million acres, and was still burning as of October 19th, 2020. But after being released, many of these firefighting inmates have not been able to use their training and skills to get jobs as firefighters. That's because a hiring requirement of being a firefighter is Emergency Medical Technician certification; but former inmates are not allowed to get EMT licenses. Early this year, California State Rep. Eloise Reyes introduced AB 2147, a bill to help end this problem. Former Conservation Camp inmates can apply to have their records expunged so they can pursue firefighting jobs after their release.

New California law helps prisoners become firefighters

Gov. Newsom signs AB 2147

Photo: Mike McMillan, U.S. Forest Services

Inmate firefighter

"We must get serious about providing pathways for those that show the determination to turn their lives around."
—Rep. Eloise Reyes, sponsor of new law

Every year, about 2,000 California prisoners help fight the state's severe wildfires on a voluntary basis. They do this for just \$2 to \$5 per day, plus \$1 per hour when they are on the front lines.

They also receive two days off their sentences for each day worked. It's estimated that inmate firefighters save the state \$100 million a year. Some people are upset about how little these firefighters are paid. But incarcerated laborers usually make much less than that — or, in some cases, nothing at all. Not only is this perfectly legal, it is even written into the U.S. Constitution's 13th Amendment, written and passed in 1865. This amendment was passed to put an end to slavery and all "involuntary servitude." However, this amendment had a giant loophole. The amendment includes the phrase "except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted."

Prison labor makes untold billions of dollars every year. But very little of this money ends up with the workers themselves. Some private companies are partnering with prisons and state correctional systems, using inmates as an inexpensive workforce. Some say this arrangement is virtually indistinguishable from slavery. Others say it helps pay back the state for the cost of housing and feeding prisoners.

Prison labor is an industry worth \$2 billion a year



Inmates clearing a fire line in California

“Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States....”

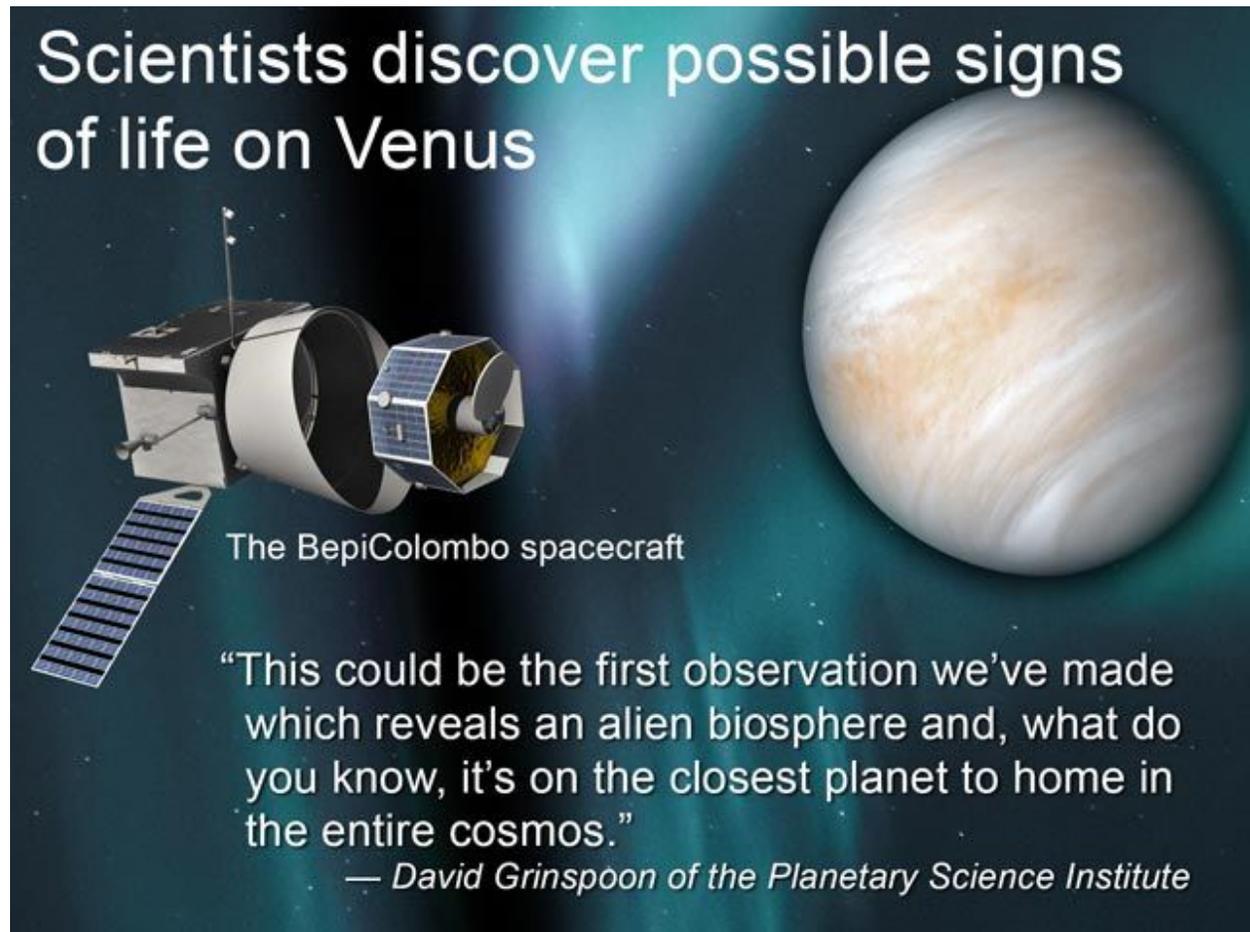
— 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution



Federal prisoners sewing military uniforms

Scientists discover possible signs of life on Venus

Recently, astronomers made an amazing discovery in Venus' atmosphere. Using high powered telescopes, astronomers discovered a gaseous chemical called phosphine in Venus' biosphere. A biosphere is the ecosystem in and around a planet that includes all living organisms that inhabit it. Scientists believe that the phosphine was likely created by microorganisms that live in the atmosphere surrounding Venus. Microorganisms are Living things too small to be seen by the unaided eye, including bacteria, types of fungi, and viruses. Conditions on Venus are so harsh that the planet likely can't sustain living things like plants and animals, but microorganisms are able to exist in extreme conditions. On Earth, phosphine is produced inside the bodies of some animals and deep-sea worms. While some astronomers believe the phosphine on Venus could have been caused by other natural processes, most agree that the discovery warrants more research. NASA has proposed several future missions that could investigate Venus. Currently, the BepiColombo spacecraft, launched by European and Japanese space exploration programs, is headed to Mercury. This spacecraft is shown here. On the way to Mercury, the spacecraft will have a chance to study Venus briefly to look for signs of life.



Scientists discover possible signs of life on Venus

The BepiColombo spacecraft

“This could be the first observation we’ve made which reveals an alien biosphere and, what do you know, it’s on the closest planet to home in the entire cosmos.”

— David Grinspoon of the Planetary Science Institute

Does anyone know what Venus is named after? (The Roman goddess of love and beauty.) Because the planet Venus can be viewed without a telescope, humans have known of its existence for thousands of years. One of the earliest astrological documents, a Babylonian text

from 1600 BC, features information about the planet's appearances. Galileo Galilei was the first person to view the planet through a telescope in 1610. Galileo is also known for being tried by the Catholic church for his support of heliocentrism, or the idea that the Sun is the center of the solar system. While Mercury is the nearest planet to the Sun, Venus actually has the hottest surface temperatures of any planet. The planet's thick atmosphere traps the Sun's heat. Temperatures on Venus can reach 864 degrees Fahrenheit. Due to the reflective sulfuric clouds covering the planet, its surface can't be seen from space. But astronomers have used radar signals and computer technology to get a glimpse of what the surface looks like. The image here shows the Maat Mons volcano, the highest volcano on the planet. The surface of Venus is covered in volcanoes, including 167 that are larger than the biggest volcano on Earth. Gravity on Venus is about 9 percent weaker on Venus than it is on Earth. This means if you weighed 100 pounds on Earth, you'd weigh 91 pounds on Venus. How much would you weigh on Venus? And while a day on Earth lasts just 24 hours, a day on Venus is equal to 243 days on Earth.

Venus is often called Earth's twin planet



Venus



Earth

- Venus and Earth are nearly the same size.
- Average surface temperature on Venus is 864 degrees Fahrenheit, versus 57 degrees on Earth.
- Gravity on Venus is about 9% weaker on Venus than on Earth.
- One day on Venus is equal to 243 Earth days.

The Maat Mons
volcanoes on Venus

Source: NASA

This Week in History

Orson Welles pulled off one of the greatest hoaxes in U.S. history. On the night before Halloween in 1938, millions of Americans settled down to listen to their radios. The program on CBS had already begun. Dance music was playing. Suddenly, an announcer cut in with these words: “Ladies and gentlemen, I have a grave announcement to make.” What followed next was one of the greatest hoaxes in radio history. Sunday evening was prime time in the golden age of radio. Most Americans were listening to ventriloquist Edgar Bergen on NBC and only turned to CBS at 8:12 P.M. after the comedy sketch ended. If people had turned on their radios at the proper time, they would have heard that the program was actually a radio play written and directed by Orson Welles. The play was based on H.G. Wells’ “The War of the Worlds.”

Welles made sure his play was extremely realistic. He used sound effects to make it sound like the radio program was really being interrupted by emergency broadcasts. His actors did an excellent job portraying horrified announcers and witnesses to the alien invasion, which was said to have started in a farmer’s field in Grover’s Mill, New Jersey. One announcer declared, “Good heavens, something’s wriggling out of the shadow like a gray snake. Now here’s another and another one and another one. They look like tentacles to me...” Other announcers talked about a poison gas that killed 7,000 National Guardsmen. Why was this kind of broadcast so scary to people back then? Only about half of the radio play was done in this style. About halfway through, Welles went on the radio and announced that it was only a play. According to some reports, this announcement came too late — terrified people were already running into the streets, some wearing towels over their heads to protect them from the Martians’ poison gas. Others even reported seeing Martians themselves. Do you think this could happen today? Some people assumed that Germany or Japan had attacked the U.S. But these were isolated incidents.

Most Americans knew and understood what was going on. They were used to this from Orson Welles, who was already one of the country’s rising stars — at only 23 years old! By then, Welles had already produced, directed, and performed in some of the most acclaimed stage works of his time. He also performed in many different radio shows, shuttling back and forth between New York recording studios in an old ambulance. Orson Welles became even more famous due to the “War of the Worlds” broadcast. After this great hoax, he went on to Hollywood. His first movie as a director has often been called the greatest film ever made “Citizen Kane.” Have you ever heard of this movie, or seen it? Welles was very talented and very independent. He hated the way film studios took control over his movies. Because of this, he never made another movie that had the kind of impact of “Citizen Kane” — or even “War of the Worlds.” But he did direct several classic films, including “The Lady from Shanghai,” “Touch of Evil,” and “F for Fake.”

THIS WEEK IN HISTORY

October 30, 1938:

The "War of the Worlds" broadcast

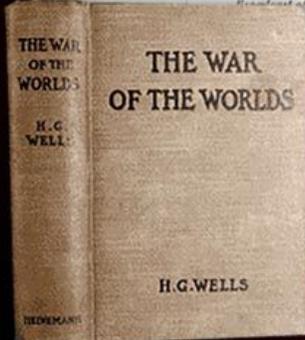
The New York Times.

NEW YORK, MONDAY, OCTOBER 31, 1938. P.P.

MEAD STANDS PAT AS A NEW DEALER IN BID FOR SENATE

Radio Listeners in Panic, Taking War Drama as Fact

OUSTED JEWS FIND REFUGE IN POLAND



Orson Welles

Remember When ... Hallowe'en

School Halloween party in the 1950s



Photo: Rich701, CCA-SA-Lic. 2.0



Remember When

Halloween was always one of our favorite holidays. Today, Halloween is our second biggest spending holiday, with only Christmas ahead of it. Last year, Americans spent \$8.8 billion on Halloween! Many industries have found a way to cash in on our spookiest holiday by selling candy, costumes, and yard decorations. What other kinds of businesses do you think profit from Halloween? This year will be very different, of course, due to COVID-19. But many people still plan to celebrate — from the safety of their homes. How will the pandemic affect trick-or-treating? Historians think this holiday goes back hundreds of years, to the pagan harvest rituals called Samhain in Ireland and Scotland. This was the one day of the year where the dead were supposed to return to Earth, so people would dress up in scary costumes to frighten them away. Later, with the growth of Christianity, this custom changed. Poor people started going to richer houses, offering to pray for their dead relatives in exchange for “soul cakes,” a kind of pastry. Why was Halloween spelled with an apostrophe when we were growing up? (It is a contraction from “All Hallows Evening.” The word “hallows” originally meant “saints,” who were supposed to come back from the dead on one night per year.) Do you think this might have been the origin of trick or-treating? Halloween was not always the commercialized holiday it is today. When we were growing up, Halloween was much less concerned with spending money on costumes and fancy decorations. You can see that many of the schoolkids in the picture here are wearing homemade outfits. In the 1950s, an old hat and some makeup, or an old sheet, were all we needed to transform into a witch or a ghost.

Groups of children would travel around together, whooping when they discovered the houses with the best treats. Here, you see some of the candy that was popular in the 1950s. But there was a lot more to Halloween than just getting a lot of candy. Here, you see two brothers engaged in a time honored tradition. What are they doing? (Carving a jack o’lantern.) There were a lot of steps to this process. We had to start with a good, round pumpkin. After carefully cutting off the top, the messy part began. Scooping out the stringy insides. Some of our mothers would insist that we save the seeds inside for roasting. Did your family do this? Only then could we start to carve our spooky faces into the pumpkin. When this process was complete, we would get a candle to put into the middle of the newly formed jack o’lantern. This way, it could grin at every child who came up to the house that night. Often, someone would be throwing a Halloween party somewhere. For adults, these parties were a great excuse to dress up in a fun costume. Some parties involved bonfires and warm cider (or other beverages). Others might include telling scary stories, or indulging in the strange ritual known as “bobbing for apples.” For most people this year, parties like this will have to wait until next year...and a lot of young people will just trick-or-treat at home. What were your favorite Halloween traditions when you were young or when your children were young? What other memories do you have of Halloween?