

Committee on Education

I write to urge you to support passage of SB 683. I do so for two principal reasons.

The first is that there is nothing in the following list of ideas which a high school graduate should not know:

- that while this country has grand ideals, people have historically and consistently been marginalized, persecuted and oppressed in conflict with those ideals;
- that patterns of racist behavior and action reoccur in different contexts, but can be analyzed;
- that they can identify racist policies and actions, enabling them to formulate anti-racist policies and acts;
- that they can identify specific policies and actions that have occurred throughout this country's history;
- that they know and understand the history of discriminatory practices against Black Americans in Oregon;
- that they can see a direct link between the uninterrupted succession of racist acts and policies and the ongoing disparity of wealth and social status between white and Black households;
- that the principles and mechanisms of transitional and restorative justice are a means to seek true equality in the aftermath of racist history.

These are the principal goals outlined for a curriculum on racist history in SB 683. Personally, I would prefer to see them applied to all marginalized people who have been subjected to prejudice, bigotry, and injustice, but this is a great start. I particularly like the bit about recommending free or inexpensive curricula materials.

The second reason I support this legislation is a little less direct. I hold advanced degrees in U.S., Latin American, Chinese and Russian history and for close to thirty years taught various historical content to students ranging from 4th to 8th grade. I was drawn to the field of history because I am naturally curious and observant, and I noticed as early as junior high (that's how old I am) that things I saw or read about did not match what I was being told in history class. I came of age during the Civil Rights Era, but was young and innocent enough to recognize the gross inequities and overt hypocrisy with the clear eyes of a child, unclouded by the veil of learned racism. Evers, Chaney, Goodman, Schwerner, Dahmer (Vernon), Daniels, Malcolm, Fred Hampton ... it was a numbing experience and STILL is only taught as an aside in American history.

It is well past time to right this wrong. Racism is fed by ignorance, and ignorance is perpetuated through indifference and discomfort with doing things differently. It is time to approach the teaching of racism in this country in a less passive manner. Everyone does NOT know what it is, what it is like, or how it affects those who are its victims. Let's change this. Vote "yes" on SB 683.

Respectfully submitted
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