

The Issue

Oregon Sen. Wagner and Sen. Frederick are sponsoring Senate Bill 683, which “requires school districts to provide instruction on racist history of this country and state.”

The language in the bill seems to blindly copy the premises of the widely debunked New York Times 1619 Project.

If enacted, this bill would mandate the statewide adoption of a 1619 Project-type curriculum for all K-12 Oregon public school students.

This bill characterizes the overarching theme of Oregon and U.S. History as racist. It would require all history to be taught through an oppressed/oppressor racial lens. It would require a radical overhaul of the 5th Grade Oregon Trail Unit to characterize all pioneers as motivated chiefly by racism.

This bill describes racism and slavery as foundational to the state and country's law, economy, justice system, and government.

The Analysis

Proponents of the bill argue that “by knowing and understanding our past can we learn from our mistakes and build a better future.” Which is absolutely true and necessary!

However, learning from our past is impossible without context, perspective, and factual accuracy, all of which are MISSING from this bill and the curriculum that it copies from. James McPherson, past president of the American Historical Association, had this to say about the 1619 project: “I was disturbed by what seemed like a very unbalanced, one-sided account, which lacked context and perspective.”

What Does This Solve:

This bill seeks to fill a hole in our curriculum that frankly does not exist. We do not need additional legislation to ensure that slavery and racist history are taught in Oregon public schools. Current state standards adopted in 2018 include multiple learning targets on slavery, oppression, marginalized people, and civil rights.

The Oregon Department of Education’s most recent Social Science Newsletter highlights the plethora of resources available to teachers on these topics, including materials from the Southern Poverty Law Center.

In Oregon’s K-5 classrooms, social studies curriculum is primarily Native American history and Black history/civil rights. Slavery, oppression and activism are covered extensively in 8th grade and in high school U.S. History/American Studies classes, where maturity levels of the students are better equipped to process these horrors.

What Are the Implications:

According to the 1776 Commission, educating citizens requires that students be taught “the principles that unite, inspire, and enoble all Americans” which can “coexist with the elements of disappointment, criticism, dissent, opposition, and even shame.” “By studying America’s true heritage, students learn to embrace and preserve the triumphs of their forefathers while identifying and avoiding their mistakes.”

Senate Bill 683 runs counter to these goals, and in fact many of the goals found in Oregon’s state standards for civics instruction. This bill is divisive and rooted in critical theory. Its intent isn’t the teaching of history, but rather the teaching of grievance-mindedness and radicalization.

So what is the real goal of this legislation? 1619 Project author Nicole Hannah-Jones has said, “my ultimate goal is that there’ll be a reparations bill passed.” The co-sponsor of Senate Bill 683, Sen. Fredrick, has also sponsored an Oregon reparations bill this legislative session, Senate Bill 619.

As the mother of two Hawaiian/Asian/Caucasian school-aged children, I urge you to please vote NO on SB 619. Our children need us to do better by them and so does the future of the Democratic Republic we hope to sustain.

Sincerely,
Stephanie Sur