

February 9, 2024

I am writing in support of **Oregon Senate Bill 1583**. I am an Indigenous person, a member of the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma. I grew up in Silverton Oregon in the 60's and 70's. My sister and I were the only children of color in our schools. It was evident from the beginning of elementary school that we were different from the other students. I was aware that I did not look like the other students, the textbooks like "Dick and Jane" did not reflect who I was. The main characters were white, blue eyed, from a 2-parent household.

My experience as an indigenous child was one of discrimination and ignorance from the teachers who assumed that I was less than the other students, lacking in intelligence and unable to learn at the same level as the other "white" children. I learned to be invisible and not draw attention to myself. My mother faced a wall of stereotypes and discriminatory comments regarding our future educational goals. The ignorance of educators that I experienced due to the lack of materials that accurately reflected American history of colonization and destruction of indigenous populations created a deep sense of shame in who I was.

I carried this sense of shame throughout my life until I was in college. At the University of Portland, I was fortunate to have a history professor who taught accurate history of indigenous populations and colonization. This began a journey of self-discovery, pride in my tribe and a new appreciation in who I was as an indigenous person and shed the veil of shame that I had carried all my life.

The impact of my discriminatory early education has had a life altering experience for me. I always felt less than, not good enough because I was not white. That was the message that I received from the textbooks that were used in public schools. The textbooks/materials that were part of the curriculum praised the "white" colonial population and any other race was inferior. I was taught in school that the "white" colonial population tried to help the indigenous tribal members by stripping them of their language, culture, religion/spirituality, and land. To convert them to Christianity, to save the "Savages" from themselves.

This bill prevents another indigenous child from experiencing the discrimination, shame of who they are due to race. It creates a sense of self-confidence, pride in their heritage and an affirmation of their value. As a librarian I am proud to be an indigenous person that helps facilitate the truth and accuracy of all BIPOC history. It is important that all BIPOC populations are represented in school materials and all students are taught the true history of BIPOC. This bill is a step back in time to the dangerous Jim Crow era where white privilege ruled the country. We are not "protecting" our children by censoring materials used in our schools, just the opposite we are setting the groundwork for hate, dissention, and ignorance.

