

Submitter: Lois MacMillan
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure: SB1583

Without reservation, I enthusiastically support Senate Bill 1583. As an Oregon teacher of thirty-three years that teaches American government, American history, and World history in our great state of Oregon, history educators like me value thoughtful dialogue when learning of our diverse national story. As a master teacher that teaches teachers from across the nation every summer, textbooks and instructional materials should be grounded in interpretation and analysis based on fact.

We do not want to go back to the “good ole days” when textbooks and resources lacked diversity. Those textbooks dragged on and on about “how tall” a person was, or a vivid description of somebody’s stunning clothing, or spread myths as fact. Excellent history education is a required pathway to working towards solutions to a problem that comprises the deepest fibers of our nation’s genetic code: racism and how racial history is taught in our schools. This is about teaching facts, not hate. This is about acknowledging our nation’s faults alongside her greatness in a way that is not mutually exclusive.

History teachers teach through primary sources which moves towards an unfiltered lens of history. Whether they are the words of Ida B. Wells or Abraham Lincoln, the actions of Stokely Carmichael or Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the opinions of Justices Sonia Sotomayor, Sandra Day O’Connor, or Thurgood Marshall, the speeches of Harvey Milk or Shirley Chisholm, the activism of Yuri Kochiyama or LaDonna Allard, or the depictions by Bill Mauldin, Stanley Hayami, or Oliver Harrington, they offer unbridled access to the best story our nation has to offer: a diverse history.

America has faced crises many times and our textbooks and instructional materials must reflect that. Students often learn about the valor of those charging the beaches of Normandy and the heroic actions of soldiers at home, whether it is Gettysburg or Bunker Hill. They should. We boast with American pride at the development of the polio vaccine, the uplifting nature of the Berlin Airlift, or the spirit of togetherness after September 11th. But opponents to SB 1583 want the diverse, challenging stories of our celebrated nation either told sparingly or not at all. What is wrong with James Reese Europe’s contributions not taught alongside those of the American doughboys? What wrong with the narratives of Japanese-Americans who sacrificed their lives in combat during World War II, despite being previously imprisoned at incarceration camps, not taught with the stories of the Battle of the Bulge? Why not celebrate the Birmingham Children’s Crusade alongside a group of college boys who brought renewed pride to the nation one night in 1980 in Lake Placid, New York?

Students learning history rooted in bastardized standards from predominantly “what we learned in the ole’ days” creates a perpetual cycle. A cycle based on an inherited privilege that passively or aggressively replicates the system of dominance upon which our nation was founded. Teachers are not telling any student what to think, but they are providing them with the analysis skills that transcend a topic, unit, or course. The documents from diverse backgrounds, eras, and personalities, defend themselves. “I am not saying this, but [Jefferson is, Lincoln is, Douglass is, Adams is, etc.]

The passage of SB 1583 continues the compliance of ORS 659.85. Most telling is our students are demanding the “immediate preservation of the public peace, health and safety” of our nation’s stories. We have an obligation to them. We can and do love this country without loving all parts of its past. And SB 1583 continues the Oregon practice of loving our country.

Lois MacMillan

- Oregon’s History Teacher of the Year, 2006
- Oregon’s Civic Teaching Award, 2014
- Grammy Museum’s National Teacher of Year (non-music classroom), 2018
- Southern Oregon Teacher of Year, 2021
- James Madison Oregon Fellow, 2021
- Oregon DAR Teacher of Year, 2024