



August 4, 2020

Abolish Teaching History – Until We Get It Right

We should stop teaching history in our schools. The way history is now being taught leads to a racist society, perpetuates white privilege, and overlooks the contributions of women and minorities. I ask the Illinois State Board of Education and school districts to immediately remove history curricula, books, and materials that unfairly communicate history until suitable alternatives are developed.

We are building on the 1991 Black History mandate, HB 2859, a law introduced and enacted by the late Illinois State Senator William Shaw. In 2018 I introduced and passed Illinois House Resolution 1098 which created the Black History Curriculum Task Force. We have already started the process to collect data about every Illinois school district's Black history curriculum to be able to improve the curriculum, but we can no longer ignore the contributions and struggles of all minorities.

Enslaved people built our young nation and made possible an economy that would throw off the control of the most powerful country then on earth, Great Britain. But, oh at what a price. According to Bennett Minton in [The Washington Post](#), some schools across the country intend to teach slavery by way of “The 1619 Project,” the essays published in the New York Times last year that won the Pulitzer Prize. Sen. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.) is so against its version of history that he has introduced a bill barring the use of federal funds to teach it. “As the Founding Fathers said,” Cotton told an interviewer in defending his stance, slavery “was the necessary evil upon which the union was built.”

This action is not an effort to erase history. But, the dominant majority culture has to realize the effect that the current telling of history has on a people, especially Black people. Important parts of our history have not been told or taught because it hasn't been believed it actually happened. Until they saw it on their TV screens, the dominant White culture didn't believe that Blacks could be treated like John Lewis was treated, getting knocked unconscious with a cracked skull just because he was nonviolently protesting for the simple right to vote. Many did not believe that so many Blacks are victimized by police until they saw the last 8 minutes and 46 seconds of George Floyd's life under the knee of a policeman, recorded on video.

I taught social studies to 6th, 7th and 8th graders in the Chicago Public Schools for 6 years. I have received many letters of support from history teachers supporting this move. I have heard that teachers don't have enough resources and have had to buy their own more appropriate instructional materials. One Illinois 8th grade social studies teacher wrote me to say, “How can educators teach students an accurate history in which the contributions of Black and African-Americans, Latinx Americans, women, religious minorities, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and other historically marginalized groups are included when none of their training and education has prepared them to do so? If there is to be widespread change, there must be adequate funding, guidance, collaboration with both K-12 teachers and those in higher education to address gaps in educator preparation courses, and measures of accountability that not only include teachers but curriculum directors,

instructional coaches, and administrators.” When it comes to teaching history in Illinois, we need to end the miseducation of Illinoisans.

And, by also receiving vitriolic and hate-strewn letters, it shows that we are on to something – that challenging a certain telling of history is a threat to the dominant culture’s view of the world – but it a challenge we must take up.

Until a suitable alternative is developed, we should instead devote greater attention toward civics and ensuring students understand our democratic processes and how they can be involved. Students need education about voting, how a bill becomes a law, and how citizens can influence government that affects their daily lives.

I proudly fly the American flag on my house every day of the year because I love the flag and the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. Our teaching of history in America has to be just and fair if we want a more perfect union.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Ford', with a stylized flourish at the end.

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District