



May 23, 2018

## Teaching African American History

According to state law 105 ILCS 5/27-20.4, (from Ch. 122, par. 27-20.4), Illinois requires that every public elementary and high school shall include in its curriculum a unit of instruction studying the events of Black History, including the history of the African slave trade, slavery in America, and the vestiges of slavery in this country. These events shall include not only the contributions made by individual African-Americans in government and in the arts, humanities and sciences to the economic, cultural and political development of the United States and Africa, but also the socio-economic struggle which African-Americans experienced collectively in striving to achieve fair and equal treatment under the laws of this nation. The studying of this material shall constitute an affirmation by students of their commitment to respect the dignity of all races and peoples and to forever eschew every form of discrimination in their lives and careers.

However, since this became state law in 2005, schools across Illinois still are not teaching Black History to their students.

I introduced House Resolution 1098 which would create the Black History Curriculum Task Force to conduct an audit of every Illinois school district's history curriculum from K-12 to review the following: (1) Does the district's curricular material, no matter the format, contain a current unit on African American History, (2) At what grade school level does the district begin teaching African American History, (3) At what level does the district stop teaching African American History, (4) Does standardized testing include material on African American History, and if so, at what levels, and (5) What is Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE)'s position on teaching African American History, what are their protocols, and what are their penalties if their instructions are not being followed?

Moving forward, I will be working with ISBE to conduct an audit of all 852 school districts in Illinois to measure the success of their African American History curriculum. We will do everything we can to find best practices throughout the state to assist school districts to comply with the state law to teach African American History in all public schools in Illinois.

Black History, which focuses on the contributions that African Americans made in the past and continue to make, must be taught in schools. When the children learn these lessons at school, they go home and share what they learn with their parents. This benefits society as a whole, because it means that the issue of race will be talked about in more homes across the United States. Conversations about race are important because things cannot change and improve without conversations. There is much more to know about African Americans than the negative stories and stereotypes seen on television, movies and the news.

There are still places in Illinois where students can go their entire educational careers without ever interacting with African Americans. In many places in Illinois, there are neighborhoods, schools and towns that are heavily segregated. Teaching Black History in schools help students who have little or no interaction with African Americans to develop an accurate understanding of African Americans in the United States. When students are taught Black History in school, they gain an understanding of many different types of people. In many cases, they will see similarities between African Americans and people of other races.

The Black History Curriculum Task Force will announce its plans on June 3, before a viewing party of the movie "The Birth of a Nation" and a discussion following the movie on the impact of slavery in America. Here is a flier of the event:

<http://www.lashawnkford.com/download/Ford%20Birth%20of%20a%20Nation%20Slavery%20Discussion.pdf>

We cannot let the lack of knowledge about slavery continue in America. We have to teach the real history so that we can end the misunderstanding around slavery, as recently expressed by rapper Kayne West. We must make it possible for Black people and all of America to heal from those dark days of slavery.

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