



Standing on the Shoulders of Giants

EFLA STUDY GUIDE

INTRO UNIT: The Politics of Education: Propaganda vs. Empowerment

CLASS 4: The Struggle Continues...The Ongoing Battle Against Racist Propaganda & Mis-education

OVERVIEW

"Black History cannot help but be politically oriented, for it tends towards the total redefinition of an experience which was highly political. Black History must be political, for it deals with the most political phenomenon of all, the struggle between the master and the slave, between the colonized and the colonizer, between the oppressed and the oppressor...all histories of peoples...are shaped by political and ideological views."

- Vincent Harding

Despite fighting for over a century to counter the racist propaganda in education and popular culture, African Americans and other minorities remain targets of educational whitewashing and historical propaganda. Students of all races are given a Eurocentric curriculum that excludes or minimizes the contributions of other peoples and cultures in the world. For example, in America, history begins with the Greeks and Romans, and Black history begins with the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Yet Africa is the acknowledged "cradle of civilization," and was the light of the world for over 3,000 years of recorded history before Greece and Rome were put on a map. In fact, Greece's top scholars and philosophers were educated in Egypt. However, all of this rich history is virtually ignored or distorted. This intentional **manipulation** of history provides a false justification for modern racism and false support for white supremacist ideology.

As a result, many students of color become disinterested and **alienated** from school, which often translates into low academic achievement, high dropout rates and disruptive behavior. Yet Black and minority resistance to biased school curricula is often misinterpreted as reckless disregard for education and proof of black/minority intellectual inferiority. However, it is often an unconscious rebellion against the downgrading of their history and culture, and the resultant demeaning of their self-worth.

To make it clear, beginning in 2010, conservatives and Republicans across the country led by states like Texas, Arizona and Colorado, began an aggressive campaign to rewrite American history books to reflect their political ideology. In 2010, a conservative Christian minister who helped lead this charge stated, "We're in an *all-out moral and spiritual civil war for the soul of America, and the record of American history is right at the heart of it.*" The results of their efforts have been largely successful.

Arizona has banned all “ethnic studies” courses that the state claims, “promote the overthrow of the U.S. government, promote resentment of a particular race or class of people, are designed primarily for students of a particular ethnic group or advocate ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals.” Yet the glaring fact that the current curriculum is designed for white Americans and promotes the supremacy of Europe and America goes arrogantly ignored.

In Colorado, Republicans attempted to ban or cease funding of the national AP History curriculum unless it modified the language to greater embrace conservative ideology. The teachers and students (virtually all white) staged a walkout in protest. Yet the National Board, the company that administers the AP History tests, [capitulated](#) to the conservative demands and revised its curriculum.

Even more troubling is the [blatant distortion](#) of American and world history in states like Texas. A recent Washington Post article (July 2015) reported:

Five million public school students in Texas will begin using new social studies textbooks this fall [2015] based on state academic standards that barely address racial segregation. The state’s guidelines for teaching American history also do not mention the Ku Klux Klan or Jim Crow laws.

And when it comes to the Civil War, children are supposed to learn that the conflict was caused by “[sectionalism](#), states’ rights and slavery” – written deliberately in that order to telegraph slavery’s secondary role in driving the conflict, according to some members of the state board of education.

Furthermore, an African-American 9th grader in Pearland, Texas, further exposed the extent of the propaganda that has recently been reincorporated into U.S. history books. He texted his mother a photo of a caption in his 2015 McGraw Hill history textbook that referred to the Africans enslaved during the Trans-Atlantic slave trade as “workers,” in a section on “Immigration Patterns.” When confronted, McGraw Hill claimed that it was a simple “mistake.” By distorting history, Texas tells its students a dishonest and damaging story about the United States that prevents children from understanding the country today. Also troubling, Texas’s standards will likely affect more than just Texans: The state is the second-largest in the nation, which means books designed for its students may find their way into schools elsewhere, too.

This class chronicles these and other conservative attempts since 2010 to whitewash American and world history, demonstrating why the struggle against racist propaganda must continue.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

- ✓ Identify modern forms of bias and propaganda in public education and the efforts to combat them.
- ✓ Recognize the role politics play in the development of public school curricula.
- ✓ Analyze and critique liberal and conservative views on what should be taught in an American history curriculum.

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

Read/View the following materials:

1. "Texas Conservatives Win Curriculum Changes" (7-10 min)
2. "Be wary of Texas' lessons on social studies" (5-7 min)
3. "Arizona's ethnic studies ban whitewashes history" (7-10 min)
4. Students and Teachers Battle Conservatives Over AP History Curriculum (7 min)
5. "Teacher Who Assigned Math Homework with Slavery Questions Resigns" (5 min)
6. Video & Lyrics: "You Must Learn" by KRS-One, Boogie Down Productions (7-10 min)
7. Poem: "His story," written and performed by Gil Scott-Heron (5-10 min)

Recommended Article: Washington Post: "Proposed Texas textbooks are inaccurate, biased and politicized, new report finds" (30-45 min)

Related Videos: There are three short videos on the sidebars of this class. They further expose the propaganda in education and should be watched with this class.

STUDY QUESTIONS

From "Texas Conservatives Win Curriculum Change"

1. Why did conservatives want to change the social studies curriculum?

From "Arizona's Ethnic Studies Ban Whitewashes History"

2. What is some of the reasoning conservative Republicans in Arizona used to support the ban on ethnic studies? Do you think this is true? Defend your answer.

"Lots of Confusion Over Teacher Firings at Howard University Middle School"

3. According to the social studies teachers at Howard University Middle School, why were they fired from their teaching positions?

From "Be wary of Texas' lessons on social studies"

4. What are some of the historical facts the new Texas social studies textbooks barely address? Why is this problematic?

From "Arizona's ethnic studies ban whitewashes history"

5. What does Arizona's new law prohibit? Why is this law problematic?

From Arizona school says hip-hop class featuring KRS-One violates ban on ethnic studies

6. Why was rapper KRS-One song "You Must Learn" banned from being taught in Arizona?
7. Do you feel hip-hop music like KRS One's "You Must Learn" should be taught in school? Why or why not?

From Students and Teachers Battle Conservatives Over AP History Curriculum

8. Why did conservatives propose banning the AP History curriculum in Colorado? What did Republican candidate for president, Ben Carson say about the AP History curriculum?
9. Do you feel that teaching about the negative aspects of American history is "unpatriotic?" Why or why not?

From "Teacher Who Assigned Math Homework with Slavery Questions Resigns"

10. Why were parents angered by the math homework questions about slavery?

11. Do you think these questions were deliberately written to degrade black people? Or do you think it was simply “poor judgment?” Explain your answer.
12. Do you think these questions were ok to ask? Why or why not?

From "Children Barred From Writing About Malcolm X in NYC School"

13. Do you think historical figures such as Malcolm X should be banned from study in public schools? Why or why not?
14. Who do you think should have the responsibility for developing public school curricula? Why?
15. How do you feel about your school's curriculum? Is it inclusive of all people or do you feel it is biased towards a certain group or ideology?