

Lessons Lost: The Complicated Filtering of History Curricula

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Recommended Citation

Burchnell, Kate () "Lessons Lost: The Complicated Filtering of History Curricula," *Quest*. Vol. 8, Article 1. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.collin.edu/quest/vol8/iss1/1>

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Argument and Proposal Essay

Research in progress for ENGL 1302: Composition II

Faculty Mentors: Lisa Kirby, PhD and Kyle Wilkison, PhD

Introduction from Dr. Lisa Kirby

It was my pleasure to work with Kate Burchnell on her paper, “Lessons Lost: The Complicated Filtering of History Curricula.” Kate’s project began as an assignment in my Fall 2021 Composition II course. This assignment allowed students to choose a topic they were passionate about, write a persuasive essay about the issue, and propose a solution to the problem. Students were encouraged to pick topics in their future professions or fields of study. As an aspiring History major, Kate knew exactly what she wanted to write about. The assignment she produced for class was insightful, skillfully researched, and expertly written. When Kate approached Dr. Wilkison and me about revising the manuscript for publication in *Quest*, I was thrilled to work with her. What was already a superb paper has been strengthened even more throughout the revision process. Kate included additional sources, developed her argument more fully, and updated the manuscript by including more recent examples and anecdotes. Throughout the process, Kate demonstrated persistence, grace, and passion. It was an honor to collaborate with her on this important and timely project.

Introduction from Dr. Kyle Wilkison

Laura “Kate” Burchnell, a senior History major at the University of North Texas, began this project as a freshman English student at Collin College. Herein Burchnell takes on one of the chief controversies roiling the waters of History education. That is, what role ought parents to play in the History education of their children? This skillfully written think piece attempts to bring cool analysis to a debate characterized by more heat than light. Unafraid to state her own position, Burchnell’s thoughtful article will help readers clarify their own thinking on this important topic. Her mentors expect that the world of ideas and scholarship will see more from Kate Burchnell.

Kate Burchnell

Dr. Lisa Kirby

ENGL 1302

15 March 2023

Lessons Lost: The Complicated Filtering of History Curricula

Parents often attempt to encourage their children by telling them that they can change the world. However, it is increasingly apparent that children do not understand why the world needs to be changed. A direct correlation between a child's education and their perception of the world is undeniable. History classes are significant in their ability to provide children with the tools necessary to understand their purpose through the telling of the universal human experience, as well as highlighting the differences that make each individual unique. Perhaps because of this, history classes have become the target of intense scrutiny stemming from contemporary cultural debates and their influence on the curriculum at every level of K-12 education. Stakeholders with varying agendas try to ensure that children learn a filtered version of both their American heritage and important international events. The selective information distributed to them through their lessons could cause students to move through life without understanding how or why societies change and develop. Does it really help the child to omit or rely on ambiguity when teaching challenging or difficult topics? In reality, attempting to "protect" children in this manner hurts more than a history lesson ever could. However, the seeming lack of preference for this view among today's concerned parents necessitates a respectful and transparent plan of action. Serious concerns

about content must be met head-on: involving both parents and educators on *equal* footing will help avoid the undercutting of any decisions reached by either party as a casualty of the opposition's ignorance.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

The American political climate fosters friction on virtually every issue, and education continues to be a popular arena for sparring. The past few years have seen the temperature increase even further by heat generated from the debates over Critical Race Theory (CRT) in public K-12 education. While the public devotes much of its interest and attention to the current debate over CRT, that debate is not the focus of this essay. The ramifications of the eventual outcome of that debate, however, necessitate a brief discussion of the topic within the larger issue of the history curriculum.

Unfortunately, the level of emotion that drives the argument often results in advocates and critics employing playground tactics. The Grapevine-Colleyville school district in Texas perfectly captures this all-too-common, childish response to differences of opinion. In August 2022, a vote on policy regarding CRT, pronoun usage, and accessibility of LGBT reading materials took place, and villainization of the opposition was in no short supply. Supporters of CRT were ridiculed by a board member for pushing "a socialist agenda," while critics of CRT were condemned by a member of the community for advocating "a white nationalist, fascist agenda" (Campbell). This, of course, is but one example of the ever-widening chasm that will continue to grow until the parties bring civility back to the frontlines of the battle. Swapping insults of "fascist"

and “socialist” does nothing but highlight how the issue of CRT is in its infancy. Only when the participants reduce the boil to a simmer can the real work begin. Socially responsible, rational discourse with the calm exchange of facts and ideas, a true intellectual debate, will be the sign that help is on the way.

The biggest point of disagreement surrounding CRT seems to be what the theory itself actually entails. CRT is a subgroup of Critical Legal Studies (CLS), “a theory which states that the law is necessarily intertwined with social issues, particularly stating that the law has inherent social biases” (“Critical Legal Theory”). CRT, which “examines the role of race in the law” specifically, emerged in the 1970s, but its origins extend decades before (“Critical Legal Theory”). The American Bar Association (ABA) further explains that CRT “acknowledges that the legacy of slavery, segregation, and the imposition of second-class citizenship on Black Americans and other people of color continue [*sic*] to permeate the social fabric of this nation” (George). A statement as straightforward as this one is difficult to challenge. The ABA asserts that the horrors of slavery and segregation do not, and should not, exist within the confines of memory and text alone. The ripple effects of the iniquitous actions committed against African Americans throughout the nation’s history, they argue, continue to influence social outcomes in the present moment (George). Teaching about the existence of slavery, segregation, and their resulting consequences pulls the dark history of America into the light. In this light, the deep wounds these choices left on the lives of millions over the course of generations are painfully obvious. Making mistakes visible is a necessity if there is to be any hope of treating the wounds they have left behind.

While the assertions of the ABA make for a compelling argument in support of teaching CRT, conservative parents remain hesitant. Instead, they fear, it will simply be an unrelenting catalogue of cruelty and exploitation (“Critical Race”). It is worth noting that proponents of CRT, as well as skeptics, are quick to point out that it is not a subject taught to K-12 students, but to civil rights lawyers and “progressive legal scholars” (George). The ever-expanding disconnect between CRT’s proponents and anti-CRT activists has driven the argument to the edge of a metaphorical cliff. When the parties disagree on the definition of CRT, or whether it is even being taught at the K-12 level, finding a resolution that works for everyone becomes increasingly unlikely, but not impossible. Honest contemplation, civility in presentation, and the awareness and acknowledgement that the topic can be used as a political weapon allows for responsible choices based in facts rather than emotion. Unless debaters use these three elements concurrently, positions taken cannot be considered to have been made in good faith.

A Historical Parallel

Somewhat ironically, history provides a perfect example of how these tactics of sowing dissension among the general population are nothing new. In 1925, Tennessee officials charged John T. Scopes with violating state law when he taught his class about Darwinism (Burrows et al. 100). The resulting “Scopes Monkey Trial” is where similarities to CRT are most evident. Tom Arnold-Forster’s article, “Rethinking the Scopes Monkey Trial: Cultural Conflict, Media Spectacle, and Circus Politics,” perfectly

highlights the way in which a disagreement over education and curriculum can be used as a distraction from the real issue. Arnold-Forster explains how “many prominent commentators in the mid- and late 1920s saw the Scopes trial not as a contest between science and religion, nor as a struggle over individual rights and liberties, but rather as a broader debate about the political relationship between cultural conflict and media spectacle in the United States” (145). Much akin to the climate of the Scopes trial, the CRT debate conceals a more complex battle than most are able to discern. The argument is not as simple as parent vs. parent, or black vs. white. The fight within the fight consists of parental concern vs. political exploitation. Arnold-Forster builds on this point further when he says:

The trial amplified and escalated the conflicts it staged without ever actually resolving them. Cultural conflicts have long shaped American politics and they can be perceived and negotiated more or less well. But they are not a war that anyone can win. And when they become all-consuming spectacles, the political consequences range from hypocrisy and resentment to cynicism and condescension, with the ultimate result of the *[sic]* drastically reducing the scope for democratic action. (166)

In allowing the political saturation of the CRT debate to be the most popular way of viewing the problem, the public, perhaps unknowingly, relinquishes its authority on the matter to those who have no plans to fix it. The CRT debate is much more politically profitable when it has no solution. This fact echoes Arnold-Forster’s concerns about these issues devolving into unwinnable wars (166). The threat of this issue continuing to

permeate American society for decades should inspire citizens to strive for a better tomorrow. Politicians do not fix issues that benefit them more, so it is up to the citizenry to remedy the problem. While it will be a difficult task to find an answer that fits the needs of every individual, it is rational to argue that any solution will be better than having the American citizenry permanently at odds over it.

While CRT's influence on contemporary culture is undeniable, it is important to note that an argument in support of, or in opposition to, its teachings does not serve as the main focus of this paper. In a century's time, when the red-hot passions of the current moment have long ago smoldered and died, the underlying issues driving the argument will remain. The balancing act of an educator's expertise, a parent's prerogative, and a student's right to learn will exist long after future generations forget today's popular political taglines. Instead, this paper aims to explore the growing necessity of offering a more balanced approach to historical instruction in K-12 education, while also acknowledging the role of CRT and the surrounding political energy in creating a more intense, and complex, social dilemma. Ignorance often serves as the main impediment to progress. So, while gaps have long existed in the history curriculum, the general population is largely unaware of how potentially detrimental they are until specific examples become the objects of closer scrutiny. Making oneself aware of these gaps, then, serves as the catalyst for adding more well-informed participants to the discussion.

Textbook Filtration

Due to current polarized journalism, it can be difficult for an objective party to discern what the concerns of conservative parents genuinely are regarding the CRT debate.

The obvious aim is to protect their children, but from what? The primary concern can differ vastly depending on the individual. One parent may have concerns about graphic details, another about hateful rhetoric, and another about the fear of brainwashing techniques that teach their child to hate America. Whatever the reasoning, the filtering of historically relevant facts to meet the standards of political correctness does nothing to protect children. While not every instance of omission or error is purposeful, the number of occurrences makes the nonexistence of conscious decisions to alter content mathematically improbable. The frequency with which these issues occur should also cause concern among those who care deeply about history and encourage swift action to prevent further incursions on the delivery of truth. This issue's prevalence is obvious and, due to its importance for so many people, deserves an apolitical examination and response.

Demands to filter history through ideology, or even omit facts, most directly impacts history textbooks. In his article "We Are Not Enemies," Mark Percy highlights holes he found in the explanation for the start of the Civil War in ten popular American history textbooks (609). Percy's most important discovery shows that these textbooks did not "detail to any degree the conciliatory efforts that did occur or were proposed (such as the Crittenden Compromise), and they generally do not address efforts that might have led to an outbreak of hostilities prior to Fort Sumter (such as the failed

mission of the *Star of the West*)” (609). While this omission may seem small in relation to understanding the Civil War as a whole, the fact that it was left out entirely from the text is an act of either inexcusable filtration or gross negligence. Percy argues that this is more impactful than many people realize by illustrating that “textbooks, by eliding attempts at conciliation and by framing the decisions by leaders on both sides as political maneuvers, help promote a singular view of the beginning of the Civil War—that the South acted at best rashly, at worst criminally, in the attack on Fort Sumter” (611). While Percy’s point can easily be taken out of context and misconstrued as an endorsement of the confederacy and its motives for the war, that would largely miss the overall meaning behind his argument.

By ignoring conciliatory efforts, Percy insists, the element of responsibility is removed, as “wars don’t start; *humans* start wars” (609-10). This quote will stand the test of time, as it can be readily applied to any historical instance of violence, war, or genocide. Those six words are able to humanize brutality, and while that may frighten people, this humanization is a necessary evil if society wishes to prevent recurrences of atrocity. Percy further elaborates on this point by explaining how “teaching wars as outside human control, unaffected by human choice or decision, we encourage our students to passively accept our national story and the events that form it” (610). Interestingly, the ABA closely mirrors Percy’s argument by explaining that racism “is usually the unintended (but often foreseeable) consequence of choices” (George). In other words, acts of racism lose their meaning when individuals consider them to be momentary acts of irrationality rather than addressing the need for culpability. Therein

lies the root of the anti-filtering argument: in omitting or filtering history lessons, society simultaneously misses an opportunity to teach the value and necessity of accountability to children and allows the villains of the past to escape accountability for the horrors they committed.

Sam Wineburg, Stanford's Margaret Jacks Professor of Education and History, argues that "history textbooks are less a reflection of the current state of historical knowledge than a collection of stories adults think will do children good, the educational equivalent of making the kids eat their peas" (9). Wineburg also points out that the cleansing of history is often achieved through what he refers to as "the silence of the ellipses" (8). Those with power and influence choose to exclude beneficial facts from the curriculum that could help propel children to a deeper understanding of the world around them. The pattern that adults have fallen into is a dangerous one. They expect children to learn to function as adults without all the information. Eventually, these children will figure out what happened if they are curious enough. What the public should find more worrisome is if these children lose interest in their heritage. A lack of interest in their own story, as well as the stories of others, will inhibit their understanding, and, therefore, limit the impact they can have on the future.

This altering, and sometimes downright omitting, of historical facts and data is evident in each step of a child's K-12 education. In his article titled "Selective Memory: California Mission History and the Problem of Historical Violence in Elementary School Textbooks," Harper Keenan, an assistant professor at the University of British Columbia, explains how violent details are not only omitted in California's fourth-grade

history textbooks, but are misconstrued completely. Keenan writes that “when violence is discussed, it is largely in the context of California Indian resistance and revolt. There is only very limited coverage of the many forms of Spanish violence perpetrated against California Indian peoples and their ancestral land” (19). In addition to this, Keenan discovers an even bigger bombshell: “despite their general underrepresentation in the texts, California Indian people were overrepresented as the perpetrators of violence” (13). Rather than directing children away from a violent historical fact, which is wrong in itself, this particular textbook goes as far as to retain the violent themes in an inaccurate manner. No one will benefit from a lie of this magnitude. It will become increasingly difficult for children to feel as if they can trust the adults in their lives if deceptions like these keep occurring.

Middle-school students seem to be affected the most by a lack of historical education. Karen Spector and Stephanie Jones conducted a study in an eighth-grade English class that revealed how little students knew about the life and death of Anne Frank. They published their study titled “Studying Anne Frank: Critical Literacy and the Holocaust in Eighth-Grade English.” The authors found that “many students in the study had sketchy understandings of how they came to know Anne Frank; some ‘just heard about’ or ‘just knew about her’” (40). This discovery is of special interest, as the Anne Frank House recommends a minimum age of ten for children visiting the museum, while, of course, allowing parents the final say with regard to a given child’s maturity level (“Practical Information”). As eighth graders are a few years beyond this benchmark, the questions of quality and thoroughness concerning the general state of

America's history curriculum loom like large storm clouds. Spector and Jones go on to say that "even when students were explicitly told of her cruel death, they still tended to imagine her in hopeful ways" (40). While this lack of knowledge was not surveyed in a history classroom specifically, it does an excellent job in highlighting gaps that exist in the history curriculum. The optimism that the children in this study applied to Anne Frank's death, for instance, may serve as an example of the possible misunderstanding or misinterpretation of events when instruction is poor or misleading.

It is, however, even more concerning that these students were receiving their first introduction to Anne Frank in an English class when they should have received a more in-depth lesson on her short life and struggle for survival in a history classroom. This, although disappointing, is not surprising. The national test scores alone are enough to prove that students are not receiving a firm foundation in historical knowledge. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, 8th-grade students dropped at least four points in every category between 2014 and 2018 on the U.S. history assessment ("NAEP Report Card"). The systems that are currently in place are failing students. While history plays a role in everyone's identity, the education establishment is choosing to downplay its most crucial lessons, thus creating more problems instead of minimizing those that already exist.

As far as high school students are concerned, there is no logical reason for parents or teachers to alter their learning materials in any way. Students drive, go out with friends, and have largely unrestricted access to the Internet. Their parents expect them to take the SAT and apply to college all on their own. Why should they learn

watered-down accounts of the Holocaust or the Civil Rights Movement? If adults expect high school students to act like the rising adults that they are in their personal time, the same thing should be expected academically. Research performed by John Wills, an associate professor in the Graduate School of Education at the University of California, Riverside, shows that an 11th-grade history curriculum in California did not properly teach students about the Civil Rights Movement. Wills explains how “race eventually became decoupled from representations of racism, and racism was ultimately forgotten in accounts of the civil rights movement as teachers, following the formal curriculum, shifted attention away from racism in remembering civil rights events” (3) What is most concerning about this is that adults think they are somehow protecting young people by hiding the violence and hurtful rhetoric of the past. That simply is not true. According to a study conducted in the U.K., therapists who have dealt with vulnerable children reported that 78% of the 11- to 15-year-olds they treated were exposed to inappropriate content while on the Internet (Glenncross). The fact of the matter is there is an excellent possibility that these students have chosen to participate in activities that are far worse than what they learn in history class. Violent video games, movies with blood and gore, explicit reading materials, and more have likely already impacted the minds of young people worldwide, all without their parents ever knowing about it.

There is a significant difference between violence in history and violence that young people are engaging with for personal entertainment. Slasher movies offer little to the mind beyond enjoyment. History, however, provides us with the opportunity to find our place in the world and understand how both groups and individuals arrived at this

point. It is hard for a child to understand their purpose if they do not understand the past. Pointing out the recreational consumption of entertainment containing violent themes by young people does not aim to serve as a convenient excuse for introducing violence to students through their lessons merely for the sake of introducing violence. It simply serves as an observation of hypocrisy, perhaps unrealized in parents. If adults could protect children from violence or hate in all aspects of life, it would be one thing, but this is not possible.

Foundation for Change

When the issue of textbook filtering and omissions is viewed through the lens of the current cultural debate and the overarching political climate, it is difficult to know whether or not this is a problem that will ever truly be solved. It serves as a powerful rallying point that candidates can use to strengthen their base and promote turnout at the ballot boxes. Americans must realize that no matter how much sentiment they may feel for either side of the CRT debate, the argument itself is still a tool that is being utilized to sow the seeds of strife. Politicians are well aware of what a useful instrument CRT has become in feeding their professional aspirations. In fact, it has become such a sore spot for parents that “banning CRT in schools was a core part of Glenn Youngkin’s gubernatorial campaign in Virginia” during the 2021 election cycle “and may have helped him win” (“Critical Race”). In separating the passions from the premise within the argument itself, it is easily discernable who has the most to gain from the issue’s continuation.

Passion, of course, is not something that politicians can inspire entirely on their own. Involvement by special interest groups, such as Parents Defending Education and The African American Policy Forum (AAPF), also serves as an important catalyst for political action (*Parents Defending Education, The African American Policy Forum*). This is not to say that issues with the history curriculum did not exist before now, but the United States is witnessing its weaponization with a kind of fervor not yet seen. In this fight in favor of illustrating how racism is interwoven with American society, or the fight against the brainwashing of children to hate America, stems another argument: where the rights of the parents to protect their children end, and the authority of the education system to act according to its own expertise begins. While there will be no singular answer to this superiority tug-of-war that perfectly fits the needs of every individual, there are still steps Americans can take to make things better. The relationship between parents and educators has become one of distrust that fosters anxiety on both sides, and the way to begin repairing it is to involve both parties in the exercise of reforming the practices that were the cause of its fracture.

At a school board meeting in 2022, one North Carolina father gave an impassioned speech in which he asserted that “CRT – it’s a big fat lie” that “parents don’t want” (Richard). This father further argues that no one had the right to claim that he, or his children, were in any way “oppressed” as a consequence of skin color (Richard). This notion of “oppressors” and “oppressed” is echoed in general conservative thoughts on the theory. Parents Defending Education, the aforementioned conservative special interest group, also utilizes this phrasing on their website.

“Couched in vague slogans about ‘social justice,’” they write, “the new curriculum divides our children into ‘oppressor’ and ‘oppressed’ groups. To one, it teaches guilt and shame. To the other, grievance and resentment” (*Parents Defending Education*).

Children should not feel as if their melanin content defines the kind of person they will be. Just as children are generally taught that they must earn the things they want, so too should they be taught that they do not deserve an unearned social label for hateful and violent acts of racism that they did not commit, just as previous generations of minority children did not deserve to be oppressed.

Making the CRT debate one that is strictly “parents” vs. “educators” is an oversimplification. The role of one’s political affiliation is not something that can be taken lightly when evaluating the CRT debate, its actors, and their motivations. The aforementioned Black father believes that CRT is a lie (Richard). In interviews published by *The Washington Post*, contrastingly, one Black parent refers to the claims that teaching CRT fosters division and hate as “a dog whistle and a lie.” A different interviewee, who also works as a high school teacher, argues that “we don’t teach it in K-12.” A final differing view is offered by a Black mother who “wants to be the one to control how those lessons” on race and racism “are taught and worries that schools address them too early and without consulting parents,” as Leslie Gray Streeter writes in *The Post*. The CRT issue, then, is not one that concerns the social factors of race or professional title, but political affiliation. The debate over CRT’s relationship with the public-school curriculum is not so much an argument over race between its debaters, as attention-grabbing headlines often categorize it through generalities; instead, debaters

more frequently find themselves arguing with their polar *political* opposites.

Clarifications or corrections in this capacity, however, are few and far between. One of the *only* elements of certainty regarding the issue of CRT is its guaranteed utilization within the modern American political landscape. The issue of CRT relies solely on political interaction for survival, and the added element of confusion regarding what this debate is really about only serves to make it a more potent political tool.

Voices of educators serve as valuable tools that, when utilized, aid in presenting a more well-rounded analysis of the situation when attempting to formulate a solution that will withstand future challenges. A survey published by the Association of American Educators in 2021 illustrated widespread concerns about media sensationalism surrounding the CRT debate. By a margin of nearly three to one, respondents “believe the media is paying too much attention to CRT, with an even higher percentage of survey participants (78%) agreeing outside factors, including sensationalized headlines are interfering with a productive and necessary discussion regarding race in America.” In addition, teachers also asserted their views on CRT requirements, with only 11% responding in support of mandating its inclusion in the curriculum. There was, however, widespread consensus that “curriculums should include the stories, experiences, and narratives of a diverse group of cultures,” as 81% of respondents agreed with this proclamation (“AAE Releases Survey”). What 81% of teachers support including in the classroom is the same assertion that few would dare to oppose openly and outright. The difficulty of the CRT debate rests on the fact that both sides believe they have the right approach to ensuring that a child’s education includes a wide range of experiences and

opinions. One side believes this diversity of narrative to be precisely what CRT teaches. The other side, in contrast, believes it only impedes the ability of children to fully understand a diverse worldview because it blatantly labels “oppressors” and “oppressed.” There is little hope for progress until both camps are willing to rectify this disconnect.

As evidenced in the preceding paragraphs, stakeholders’ viewpoints are as varied as each individual’s lived experiences. Holding one factor constant, such as the role of “teacher” or “parent,” does little to move the needle. Shifting the focus, then, away from factional group identities and toward the one label that every debate participant shares, “American,” does more to bring these issues closer to a concise and coherent resolution. A survey published by Northwestern’s Institute for Policy Research in 2022 makes it abundantly clear that Americans, in general, are simultaneously concerned and confused regarding CRT. This survey “shows that the majority of Americans, or 73%, across all demographics are concerned with how American history is taught in public schools.” The results also illustrated that “7 out of 10 respondents said they were not at all or not very familiar with the concept” of CRT (Druckman). The beginnings of a solution to this polarized and sensationalized issue lie not in blindly picking sides that will align with one’s existing political affiliations, but in investing time and energy into the education of the theory’s content among the general population. Only after this education is complete can stakeholders come together to begin the sober and solemn task of building a curriculum that honestly and accurately addresses the needs of all involved.

Presenting facts alone, without the presence of preferred virtues, values, or morals, is a task that requires great effort and determination to undertake. Journalists of the current age struggle to achieve the feat, even as it appears to be the one thing the general population craves, regardless of one's political leanings. A political tinge is only something that becomes a point of contention if it contradicts the consumer's personal views or beliefs. One of education's most outstanding sources of friction is the overwhelming feeling of contradiction between a parent's most valued morals and virtues and the lessons included in their child's curriculum. The political aspect then further exacerbates the discontent. One-sided reporting presents even more challenges in discerning fact from political fiction, especially concerning the CRT debate, as both sides are focusing more on vilifying or writing off the concerns of the other instead of getting to the bottom of the issue.

Those who have the power to turn this debate in a positive direction show little appetite for calmly educating in a manner devoid of political saturation. If the inverse were a reality, the effects of such a pursuit would already be evident. To demand a more "factual" curriculum, or a less politically driven report on what the current curriculum entails, then, is perhaps the wrong approach. Working towards a more cohesive presentation, one that focuses on the delivery of facts steeped in shared moral values and virtues that will aid the next generation in shaping a better society, has the potential to garner more apolitical support.

Deciding on what these shared moral values are and when the appropriate time to introduce them would be is, of course, an entirely separate issue, and its answer lies

beyond the scope of this paper. The bottom line, at present, is that parents want to have more influence over what their children are learning. Parents' political views are not strictly irrelevant, but it is not the most critical aspect of the situation and should not be the only point that garners attention. What is important is that parents have concerns about the materials involved in shaping their children. This concern is not new; what is new is the near demonization for raising such concerns, which is unjustified regardless of a person's political affiliation. What must happen now is a prioritization of humility and respect over petty partisan politics; disquietude does not deserve a write-off, nor should apprehensions have their legitimacy questioned simply due to differing political ideologies. When systems, as well as individuals, operate as they should, their practices and ideals will withstand challenges. To dismiss parental concerns without attempting to acknowledge how or why the assertion is unfounded only illuminates the inability of the system to function properly.

The path forward for parents and educators lies in a method of reviewing materials that involves both parties contributing equal levels of representation and transparency. The "equal levels" element is what appears to be missing from efforts at present. One way to rectify this could be to create an advisory panel consisting of both elected professional educators and elected parents in order to deal with questions and concerns regarding course materials and teachings. Qualified members of the community, that is, residents who fit into either category as a parent of a school-aged child in attendance within the district or as a professional educator within the district, would be the only individuals permitted to vote in said elections. This screening process

would aid in preventing panel selections from being affected by societal pressures or outside actors and politicians who have no direct connections to children affected by curriculum concerns or changes. Conversing openly and honestly with one another must become a priority for parents and educators. While this may seem like an obvious, and perhaps even “surface-level,” answer to such a crucial issue, open conversations do not appear to play much of a role in working towards solutions. In the Fall 2022 American School District Survey, 84 district leaders provided written responses to questions surrounding solutions to CRT issues. From the 84 responses, only “37% reported using public or one-on-one engagements with parents and community members to manage political controversies” (Jochim et al.). Talking openly seems like a drastically simple solution for such a complex problem, but that simultaneously makes it the perfect place to begin.

Advisory panels created using the guidelines for member selection mentioned above would review any reports concerning material submitted by parents. The process for filing a report regarding course materials or topics must methodically walk the line of ease and rigor in order to ensure the validity of the complaint without deterring parents from raising future concerns. One way of achieving this could be establishing an online portal that contains a comprehension quiz where parents would be required to prove that they had made themselves familiar with the materials before they proceeded with filing a complaint. After completing this comprehension quiz, the portal would then prompt the parent to provide a set number of examples that demonstrate what they found to be concerning within the material. By requiring more than one example, the

legitimacy of the complaint, while impossible to completely guarantee, would be at least slightly more reliable. This process would also protect the legitimacy of the topic or material, as it would not be presented to the panel for review if it contained only one or two examples of troubling content.

If a complaint survives beyond these provisions, it would then be the job of the parent to present the complaint before the panel at an open meeting. After this presentation, additional comments or concerns would be welcomed from attendees with the understanding that comments only be put forward by those who were in attendance for the entirety of the presentation. The inclusion of this rule would be to ensure the prevention of comments made by individuals who are ignorant of the issue in its totality. The panel, again consisting of both professional educators and elected parents, would then debate and vote on whether to make a substitution in the curriculum, revise the material, or leave it as it was before. While this proposal is by no means an all-encompassing solution, it is a strong foundation that can be built upon to fit the needs of a particular community. A multitude of gray areas exists, but that should not deter those who truly care about the problem from looking for possible answers.

Conclusion

The rising political temperature is causing the attention to shift from what will most benefit the children to what will score the most political points. Learning discomforting facts—the discovery and rediscovery of some of humanity’s base or unsavory characteristics—serves to both enlighten and humble. It is a duty and a privilege to seek

to understand past generations' sublime achievements and triumphs, as well as their faults and mistakes. It acknowledges those who were the targets of mistreatment, malice, and malevolence, while also holding the transgressors responsible for their actions. In so doing, it also provides lessons regarding responsibility and caution to those who open themselves up to learn from it. To see what specific actions, events, and individuals have shaped the world, whether positively or negatively, serves as the key to building a healthy society. The young must humbly judge the past in order to protect the future, just as their teachers must model humility in the practice of history. One can argue that historical events parents deem dangerous or inappropriate will be waiting for these children when they get older. However, who is to say that these children will have the wherewithal to pursue this well of knowledge once they leave their high school days behind them? Adults need to capitalize on the curiosity of these children while it still exists. An education that lacks a factually rich history curriculum, no matter how politically incorrect it may be, dooms children to a future that both lacks an understanding of the world around them and that limits the effect that they can have on the world.

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